

“Brains Behind Broadcasted Behavior”: The Science of British WWII Homefront Propaganda

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Abstract:

From 1939-1943 Britain's prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, was set on persuading the British to continue fighting in WWII, so that Hitler would not be able to subjugate Great Britain, as he had already done with a great majority of Europe. Public support was needed, so the government embarked on a massive propaganda campaign aimed at persuading the British people to do everything necessary to support and aid the war effort. The propaganda took many forms: political rhetoric, music, posters, postcards, advertisements, and newspapers. Together these disparate media represent not just the basis of the British government's effort to influence public opinion regarding the war effort, but contributed to the establishment of a distinct material culture. The propagandistic material culture was designed and distributed tactically, with the behavioral effects of the people in mind.

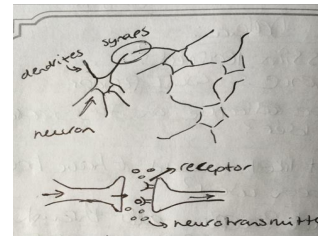
“We had to go. We had to defend ourselves. If it hadn't been for Churchill then, and the way people fought — it was very much in the balance at times — whether we were going to win, because Germany had been banking up on ammunition and planes and ships and things. We really were against it” (Interview, June 2016, Oxford — a young teen during WWII).

Materials & Methods:

- To gather material, I flew to England - both to London (Imperial War Museum, RAF Museum Hendon, Churchill War Rooms) and Oxford (Bodleian's Weston Library).
- Meetings were held with Dr. Dalena Van Heugten, a former neurophysiology researcher/tutor at the University of Oxford.
- Interviews were held with adults who were teens/children during WWII.
- Creighton University is where I have organized the material.
- Resources for tactical material culture evidence was found in material culture artifacts & books. Evidence was organized using Word and Powerpoint.



Valentine & Sons, Ltd., *The Spirit of Britain*, Dundee and London, 1942. “John Johnson Collection, Johnson Adds Postcards, John Fraser Collection 129”, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University.

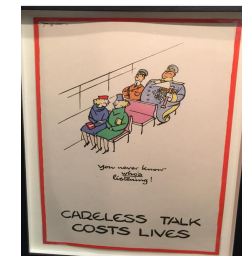


Dr. Dalena Van Heugten, *Drawing of Neuronal System*, Oxford University, June 2016.

Unifying Themes:

- Associations** must be made -- government = power, safety, leadership, victory, compassion
 - Common Leader and Common Enemy**
 - Repetition & Variety** -- creates more neuronal connections, which then make retrieving memories easier. Memories reinforce and empower emotional and thus, physical responses (Van Heugten, *Meeting*, June 2016, Oxford).
 - Emotional Valence** — when this is given to an object, the transition to becoming a memory and then an emotional response increases in speed and efficiency.
 - The brain's receptors transmit messages more directly with stronger emotions, for they produce more neurotransmitters, which are then received by neuronal receptors at higher quantities and at a quicker rate. Receptors then carry the message to the synaptic terminal, where the neurons with the messages are stored until being released at a later time (Van Heugten, *Meeting*, June 2016, Oxford).
- Successful propaganda** is massively obnoxious, for it must keep the attention of the audience.
- Attention** affects what the people intake, regarding information. This becomes one's reality - what he/she is experiencing neurologically, by retrieving stimuli through sight, sound, smell, touch, taste - **Attention controls reality**.
 - Sight** – Posters (“Careless Talk Costs Lives”, “Loose Lips Sink Ships”, etc.)
 - Sound** – Radio broadcasts (influential and powerful speakers like Churchill, King George VI) and catchy music (Big Band, “Run Rabbit”, “Run Adolph”)
 - Smell** – The inside of gasmasks, figment smells of gas from the propagandized warnings of enemy raids, factory smells, smoke from fire, airplane fuel and war materials, rationed food replacements, new smells of the country for those evacuated from the city
 - Touch** – Rationed cloth material (scarves, dresses, tea towels). A large amount of the material had propaganda messages as the patterns
 - Taste** – New food in response to food rationing

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References: Amber Blanco White, *The New Propaganda*, Purnell and Sons, LTD, London: 1939.; David A. Lieberman, *Human Learning & Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.; Harold Nicolson, *Why Britain Is At War*, London: Penguin Books, 1939.; James Taylor, *Careless Talk Costs Lives*, New York: Conway, 2011.; Johan J. Bolhuis, *Brain Perception Memory: Advances in Cognitive Neuroscience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.; Gill Corbishley, *Ration Book Cookery - Recipes & History*, ed. Emily Allison, English Heritage: Swindon, 1985.; Winston Churchill, *In a Solemn Hour, This Was Their Finest Hour*, May, June 1940, Spotify.com.



Cyril Kenneth Bird “Fugasse”, *Careless Talk Costs Lives*, Ministry of Information, London, 1940.

Conclusion:

The government's propaganda campaigns were largely successful, for the habits of songs and campaigns have continued to live through the WWII generation and their children and grandchildren. Even after the war, wartime memories were distributed, and the repercussions are proof that the manner in which the propaganda was dispersed was purposeful and powerful. Patterns of the propagandistic material culture of Britain display that the vulnerability and emotions of the people were attributes that were recognized and harnessed by the government. One pattern and reaction may have been a coincidence, but a series of reactions that share a repeated process show that there was a science to British World War II Home Front propaganda.