

Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945-1960

Christopher Simpson

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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945-1960:

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American people by their own government. Even some of the highly respected founders of communications were involved, including Harold Lasswell and Wilbur Schramm, and many of their influential studies did not have purely academic motives. Simpson compiles valuable insights into how communications and other social sciences have been co-opted by government for nefarious ends, and some fields may have never gotten off the ground were it not for wartime funding. The only problem with this book is that Simpson occasionally ruminates on the darker philosophical ramifications of these trends, but only rarely, so the deeper insights that can be gained by the reader are often held back by research minutiae and occasionally tiresome historical coverage. [~doomsday520~]

Science of Coercion provides the first thorough examination of the role of the CIA, the Pentagon, and other U.S. security agencies in the evolution of modern communication research, a field in the social sciences which crystallized into a distinct discipline in the early 1950s. Government-funded psychological warfare programs underwrote the academic triumph of preconceptions about communication that persist today in communication studies, advertising research, and in counterinsurgency operations. Christopher Simpson contends that it is unlikely that communication research could have emerged into its present form without regular transfusions of money from U.S. military, intelligence, and propaganda agencies during the Cold War. These agencies saw mass communication as an instrument for persuading or dominating targeted groups in the United States and abroad; as a tool for improving military operations; and perhaps most fundamentally, as a means to extend the U.S. influence more widely than ever before at a relatively modest cost. Communication research, in turn, became for a time the preferred method for testing and developing such techniques. Science of Coercion uses long-classified documents to probe the contributions made by prominent mass communication researchers such as Wilbur Schramm, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and others, then details the impact of psychological warfare projects on widely held preconceptions about social science and the nature of communication itself. A fascinating case study in the history of science and the sociology of knowledge, Science of Coercion offers valuable insights into the dynamics of ideology and the social psychology of communication.

"An intriguing picture of the relations between state power and the intellectual community...."--Noam Chomsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
"An original and important contribution...."--ScienceAbout the Author
About the Author: Christopher Simpson is Assistant Professor of Communications at American University. He is the winner of five national and international prizes for historical writing, literature and investigative reporting since 1987.