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## Introduction:

# Edward S. Herman and the Propaganda Model Today

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Edward S. Herman, the American media critic best known as the co-author with Noam Chomsky of *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (2002 [1988]), as well as the principal architect of the Propaganda Model (PM) first outlined in that book, died in November 2017 at the age of 92. To pay tribute to Herman's legacy, and to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Manufacturing Consent*, this special section presents contributions from a range of scholars to reflect on, and to critically engage with, the contribution that the PM has made to the critique of journalism and to media, communication and cultural theory more broadly.

The section includes essays from Victor Pickard & Todd Wolfson, Tom Mills, Khadijah Costley White, Paula Chakravartty, Alan Macleod, and Yuezhi Zhao; the republication of an interview with Herman himself; and several discussion pieces between the editors of the recently published collected volume, *The Propaganda Model Today* (Pedro-Carañana, Broudy and Klaehn, 2018), and other scholars (including Chomsky) on the theoretical and methodological lineage of the PM and its relation to other approaches to media critique within the traditions of media/communications and cultural studies in particular.

An explicitly political critique of the mainstream media's (MSM) monopoly on what is considered 'newsworthy', the PM identifies five filters through which reality is subjectively represented to create what we consume as 'the news': ownership (and

the profit-making motivations of privately-owned corporations), advertising (and the competition to attract advertisers as principal source of funding), sourcing (and the dependence of journalists upon a narrow range of elite sources of ‘trustworthy’ information), flak (the negative reactions to media coverage, such as the strategic management of public information by lobbyists and pressure groups), and ideology (anti-communism in its original articulation, though later updated to include free markets, militarism and the war on terror).

Although originally developed as a critique of US journalism’s treatment of international politics and US foreign policy, the PM has been revised and applied to a wide range of other case studies over the last three decades. It has also been more popular in some countries and disciplines than in others, criticised from a wide range of perspectives, and marginalised within academia more generally.

In **Jeff Klaehn**’s republished interview with Herman, and in Chomsky’s contribution to a discussion panel on ‘**Media Theory, Public Relevance and the Propaganda Model Today**’, Herman and Chomsky discuss the origins and ongoing development of their model, the influence on their work by economists such as Alfred Marshall, Edward S. Mason and Joe S. Bain, political theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, and critical work on the political economy and ideological functions of the media by Peter Golding and Stuart Hall, among others, and the way that the PM has been taken up (or not) over the years. **Victor Pickard and Todd Wolfson** also, in their essay, connect Herman’s intellectual background to the anti-fascist project within the political-economic tradition of communication research, emphasising the links between his academic output and his political activism in Philadelphia, while **Yuezhi Zhao** highlights the contradictory way in which *Manufacturing Consent* has been taken up in China, by those who use it to demystify the US media system, by those who dislocate the book from Herman and Chomsky’s broader critique of the political economy of global communication, and by those who use it as a “how to” guide to enhance the effectiveness of Chinese official communication. Throughout the rest of the first discussion piece, the contributors consider the various critiques that have been made against the PM – and in his essay, **Tom Mills** also considers the extent to which *Manufacturing Consent* overemphasises the homogeneity of media systems,

underdevelops the concept of ideology, and lacks empirical evidence on the operation of the five filters – and reflect on the model’s links with alternative critical approaches to media and communications, arguing in particular against what they see as a depoliticisation of cultural studies.

In a second discussion piece, ‘**The Propaganda Model and Black Boxes?**’, the participants debate various methodological, philosophical and practical issues to do with the application of the model, and the extent to which it requires revision or being supplemented by additional approaches or methods depending on context and the case under study. The relationship between the macro-level data typically generated by the identification of the five filters of the PM, and the kind of micro-level data that would demonstrate more how these filters actually operate, is debated at length in the discussion piece. Similarly, in his short article, **Alan MacLeod** uses the PM to assess Western media coverage of the Colombian (won by right-wing Ivan Duque) and Venezuelan (won by left-wing Nicolas Maduro) elections of 2018, comparing his analyses to Herman and Chomsky’s analyses of “paired examples” of elections in Guatemala in 1982 and Honduras in 1984-5 (US client states) with those in Nicaragua in 1984 (won by the enemy *sandinistas*). With updated examples and interviews with journalists, MacLeod demonstrates the validity and continued relevance of the PM, as well as how it can be supplemented and substantiated to also demonstrate the micro-processes of journalism.

In a final discussion, ‘**The Propaganda Model and Intersectionality: Integrating Separate Paradigms**’, the discussants turn their attention to questions of identity and intersectionality, and the accusation that proponents of the PM have tended to ignore issues of race, gender and sexuality. Here, discussion centres on whether the existing filters suffice, as they are capable of incorporating such questions, or whether new filters are needed to address issues that cannot be reducible to the underlying critique of capitalism that informs the PM. In the same vein, **Khadijah Costley White** points out in her essay that “Herman’s critiques of anti-blackness and racism in media, while scarce, remain poignant”, although she adds racism, anti-blackness, patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, militarism and elitism to the reigning ideologies that bolster those in power, stressing the importance of thinking through

race and racism in any political-economy analysis of media and policy. Likewise, **Paula Chakravartty** considers the decolonial significance of Herman's critiques of US empire and the "structuring logic of media actors and networks that justify the expropriation or killing of almost always *racialized* and *gendered* "unworthy victims".

Taken together, the essays, discussions and interview capture a wide range of potential future directions for the application of the PM, and of starting points for further debate on the relation between political-economy and cultural studies, between class and race/gender/sexuality, and between theory, critique and empiricism in media scholarship.

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## References

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