



On the Rationality of Propaganda II: Examples of Reasonable Propaganda Films

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Abstract

The term ‘propaganda’ is normally taken in the pejorative sense of deceitful messaging. Propaganda is considered dubious if it is produced by a government agency, especially if by a ministry of war or propaganda. In this article I apply the theory of propaganda I sketched in a prior piece in these pages, under which propaganda is simply messaging intended to persuade others to do something or to support something. Under this theory, propaganda is reasonable if but only if it is evidence-based, truthful, broadly logical, not coercive, targeted at mentally competent adults, and transparent—meaning that the audience should be aware that the message is intended to persuade them to do or support something. I then examine three WWII-era government propaganda films, one—A Defeated People (1946)—produced by the British military, and two—The Negro Soldier (1944) and Teamwork (1947)—produced by the American military. I explain first why I chose these particular films. I then analyze these films in some detail, and show that while they were not perfectly rational, they all effectively conveyed the persuasive message that the respective militaries wanted to convey. And they did this by meeting all of criteria for propaganda to be rational.

Keywords: Rhetoric; Propaganda; Marketing; Reasonable; Deceptive; British Military; American Military

Introduction

“Propaganda” is a contentious term, indeed. The term originated in 1622 when Pope Gregory XV set up the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith¹. The office was set up to spread—propagate—the Catholic religion by going to areas where Catholicism was not the dominant faith and converting non-believers by arguing for the religion. It was in this regard nothing new: religions have traditionally promulgated their doctrines to people not of their religious persuasion. The term thus originated with the neutral meaning of trying to persuade others to convert to one’s own

religion.

But in the 20th century especially, with the fascist and communist regimes setting up ministries of propaganda and engaging the most deceitful messaging imaginable, the term “propaganda” now normally has the pejorative meaning of lying to or otherwise misleading the target audience.

In an earlier essay in this journal, I set forth a theory of propaganda, under which propaganda can be reasonable or deceptive—or somewhere in between². In this essay, I will review briefly that theory. I will turn then to examine three

1 Ralph Casey, “Defining Propaganda,” American Historical Association (1944).

2 Gary James Jason, “On the Rationality of Propaganda,” Philosophy International Journal (2024).



short WWII documentaries that are clearly propaganda, and use my account of propaganda to determine the degree to which the movies are reasonable or deceitful.

Let's recap my theory. Under it, there are three basic ways a person (or group) to get others to comply with his (or their) wishes. First, he (or they) can use coercion, i.e., the use of force, threat of force, or theft. Second, he (or they) can use purchase, i.e., he (or they) can trade something of value to get the others to comply. Third, he (or they) can try to persuade the others. This third approach is **rhetoric**, i.e., the use of speech³ to persuade others to comply with one's wishes. Rhetoric, under this theory, is a specific use of language, distinct from speech meant to inform other (didactic speech) or amuse them (performance speech).

There are two main sorts of rhetoric, marketing and propaganda⁴. **Marketing** is rhetoric aimed at getting others to buy one's products. **Propaganda** is rhetoric intended to getting others to support an ideology, political party, or political figure. And we can judge the rationality or reasonableness of propaganda (and marketing as well) by seeing how well it meets six criteria.

First, the message should be evidence-based. This means that merely repeating a message without evidence for it makes the propaganda irrational. Goebbels said that the most effective propaganda is the simple repetition of a message using the same words every time—which in our view automatically classifies such propaganda as irrational.

Second, the evidence given in the message should be true. It is the violation of this rule that most people identify as constituting propaganda. For example, during WWI, Britain put out propaganda that Germany was committing atrocities. After the war, this propaganda was debunked. This made the British public skeptical about legitimate stories reporting Nazi atrocities in WWII, such as reports about Jews being sent to killing camps⁵.

Third, the message should be broadly logical. That is, the evidence given should not merely be truthful, but it should actually support the claim being made. For example, stories aimed at arousing popular opposition to immigration by showing immigrants who have committed crimes are deceitful propaganda. Why? Because while it is true that some

immigrants commit crimes, it is a hasty generalization to conclude that immigrants are disproportionately criminally inclined. The stories cite only a relatively few cases, so the sample is too small and obviously biased. In fact, the rate of criminality among immigrants is lower than that among native-born immigrants⁶.

Fourth, the message should be transparent. The target audience should be aware of the fact that someone or some group is trying to persuade them of something. Goebbels felt that the most effective propaganda is that which is disguised as entertainment. For example, Goebbels ordered the Nazi-controlled film industry to make more specifically anti-Semitic movies. In 1939, the movie *Robert and Bertram* was released⁷. It was a romantic musical comedy with a Laurel-and-Hardy comedy team as its key players. The movie entertained audiences at the time. But the film is filled with extremely vicious anti-Semitic tropes⁸. Under our view, this is deceitful propaganda.

Fifth, the message should be targeted at mentally competent adults. This criterion is in fact codified in our legal system: contracts with minors and the *non-compos mentis* are not enforceable. And certainly, one of the reasons we view the propaganda machines of the USSR and the Nazis as grossly deceptive is precisely because they deliberately targeted children at a young age.

Sixth, the message should not involve coercion. Holding a peaceful demonstration to advocate for your cause is not necessarily unreasonable propaganda. Engaging in a violent demonstration would be.

From the point of view of this theory, then, propaganda can be completely reasonable—if it meets all six criteria. It can be irrational or unreasonable in one or more of six different ways. And violating any of the criteria is a matter of degree. With this perspective, we have a much better tool for evaluating the rationality of actual propaganda. Let us turn to applying this tool to several cases.

The films I want to examine are all of WWII vintage. They are all government produced short documentaries. While one is British, two are American. I choose these films for two specific reasons. First, in both the US and Britain, WWII is to this day considered a morally justified war. This eliminates many issues of truthfulness of the message that would be

3 I include here any other form of symbolic messaging.

4 In my prior article, I noted that I do *not* hold that marketing and propaganda are the *only* forms of rhetoric. There is, for example, rhetoric aimed at convincing another person to do something for you—such as persuading someone to marry you, hire you for some job, or such like. You could call this “personal enhancement” rhetoric.

5 Jo Fox, “Atrocity Propaganda,” British Library (2014).

6 Michael Light, Jiaying He, and Jason Robey, “Comparing Crime Rates Between Undocumented Immigrants, Legal Immigrants, and Native-Born US Citizens in Texas,” PNAS 117 (51) 32340-32347 (2020).

7 Hans Zerlett, director, *Robert and Bertram* (Robert und Bertram) (1939).

8 For an analysis of the tropes, see Gary James Jason, “Selling Genocide I: The Earlier Films,” in *Reason Papers*, Vol. 38, No.1: 127-157 (2016).

there if we (say) chose examples regarding the current war in Ukraine, or the past war in Iraq. Second, precisely because of the history of governments in the 20th century using propaganda to justify imperialist or even genocidal policies, government-produced propaganda has become especially suspicious.

Let us start with a British government documentary from 1946. Upon its defeat, Germany was occupied by the four Allied powers—the U.S., U.K., the USSR, and France. The British, Americans, and the French continued their occupation of West Germany until 1955.

The British zone had the largest percentage of the German populace, and had initially over 2,000,000 German POWs. This was a costly and difficult task to handle, at a time when Britain was trying to rebuild its own economy and provide for its own people. The British had to have an occupying Army in their zone, which started at 800,000 troops—troops that required British taxpayers to feed, arm, and house. British citizens were taxed heavily, and the citizens of Britain had food rationing from the end of the war until mid-1954. During much of this period, petrol and clothes were also rationed.

However, the British government understood two things. First, if it just left the Germans to suffer, they might once again turn to fascism, or perhaps turn to communism. Moreover, because the Cold War was getting underway, the British government understood that it was prudent to help Germany rebuild its industry and resurrect its general economy, so it could join the opposition to Soviet expansionism.

So, the British government had a challenging task. It was clear that it needed to work with America to rebuild West Germany, so as to resist German revanchism and Soviet expansionism. But it was costly to do this, at a time when the British citizenry were themselves facing continuing privation. In 1946, the British government produced a short documentary called *A Defeated People*, aimed at increasing public approval for the continuing postwar support of Germany. Let's review the film, which is readily available on YouTube⁹.

The film opens with voices of British saying contradictory things about Germany:

"What's it like in Germany?"

"It must be terrible!"

"Well, they asked for it; they got it!"

"Yes, but we can't let them starve!"

"I don't know about that—I got a son out there, and as far as I can see, it would be a good thing if some of them did die!"

9 Humphrey Jennings, director, *A Defeated People*, (1946).

While these (presumably) ordinary Brits speak, there is dramatic music in the background, and a narrator (William Hartnell) intones. "Well, a lot of Germany is dead." We cut to pictures of smashed German infrastructure. The narrator continues, noting that "our" last bomber raids were directed at their communications, railroads, bridges, and so on. We smashed the towns and the links between them, the narrator adds.

As the film shows German refugees sitting on the street, the narrator says that we smashed the people and the links between them as well. We see Germans searching walls that contain notes written by people desperate to locate lost family members. We learn that there are 70 million people in Germany, and almost 30 million of them are lost or looking for someone.

But we are told that the "life-force" is beginning to stir again. And we can't just wash our hands of the Germans—we can't let the new life flow in any direction it wants. We watch masses of German civilians walking around. The narrator says that our military needs to push the Germans into putting their house in order for the selfish reason that we can't live next to a "disease-ridden neighbor." We must prevent starvation and epidemics, but we have to also prevent new brands of fascism from arising as well. And we have to persuade the Germans to do these themselves.

We then see Germans working away at clearing rubble and rebuilding infrastructures. However, the narrator asks where they are all going to live, as we view blasted out apartment buildings. It looks lifeless, but underneath the rubble people are living again, although many in the cities are living without coal, water, soap—they are living in the stench of corpses and sewage. Yet still they have the will to live (as we see when we look at mothers with their children).

The narrator then notes that all reconstruction will depend upon coal. We learn that the military government—that is, "your husbands and sons"—has reorganized the coal industry. The narrator notes that last summer the military returned 30,000 miners to work. But there is still difficulty in getting that coal to power plants and factories. (The ordinary citizens must forage for wood). The narrator adds that we face a host of problems: to distribute coal we need transportation, which requires the tracks and bridges to be repaired, which require steel—which requires coal.

We move to a scene of people in a newsroom. We learn that there are 17 newspapers in the British-administered zone, and all carry ads for missing persons. To facilitate family reunification, the military government set up a postal substation in Hamburg handling 50,000 inquiries a day. When the German citizens locate relatives and go to find

them, they use bridges built by the British. All this has to be supervised by our military police. We see a train pull into a station and crowds rush to board.

Then there is the need to safeguard the public from criminals. The military government has set up criminal courts, with British military judges. Any defendant has an interpreter, a German defense attorney, and a British prosecutor. We cut to a police academy—we see a new police force being trained to have the mindset that the policeman is “the servant of the public, not its master.

Most challenging of all is the education of the children—especially teaching them about democracy. This means that there are schools that must be rebuilt. “But we can’t let them stew in their own juice”—because they will become Nazis like their fathers.

We see the demobilization of German troops held as POWs. They are stripped of their insignia, deloused, numbered and logged. They have to be demobilized so they can get to work rebuilding their country. But the British have to watch out for unrepentant Nazis who might seek to enter office. We see a meek-looking man, who upon interrogation turns out to have been a member of the Luftwaffe. The British intelligence officers have to fingerprint and check the records of all the ex-troops. They check under the left arm of each man, looking for the tell-tale SS tattoo.

At night, the British Army enforces a curfew. Those without homes or rooms to go to stay in the air raid shelters. The narrator tells us that the air raid sirens signaling the curfew should remind the citizens that they lost a war of their own making, and that it is up to them to regain their self-respect as a nation, and to live peacefully with their neighbors. And, as we watch girls holding hands as the move in a circle, the narrator says that the British will remain until they can be sure that the Germans will remain a “sane and Christian people,” and will respect truth, tolerance, and justice.

We end with the sight of a new generation of German judges taking an oath to uphold the law impartially, and we cut back to the young girls moving in a circle. We end with the judges finishing their oaths.

The tone of the director, Humphrey Jennings, strikes is pitch-perfect: between a naïve forgiveness that would have alienated the target audience (the British citizens who just suffered through a war they neither wanted nor caused), and a punitive tone that would have defeated the very purpose of the film. It was a challenge he felt in doing the movie. As he wrote to his wife:

They [the Germans] certainly don’t behave guilty or beaten. They have their old fatalism to fall back on: ‘kaput’ says the housewife finding the street water pipe not working...‘kaput...alles ist kaput.’ Everything’s smashed...how right—but absolutely no suggestion that it might be their fault—her fault. ‘Why’ asks another woman fetching water ‘why do you not help us?’ ‘You’ being us. At the same time nothing is clearer straight away than that we cannot—must not—leave them to stew in their own juice...well anyway it’s a hell of a tangle¹⁰.

The balanced seems to have worked—the film was praised at the time by *The Sunday Dispatch*, *News Chronicle*, *The Star*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Worker*, and the *Glasgow Herald*¹¹.

But the question before us is whether this propaganda film is deceptive or irrational propaganda, and if so, why? Here I would argue that it is not. Start with being evidence-based. The message the movie was promulgating is something like this: although it is costly and arduous, Britain should help Germany recover and become a prosperous democracy. And it implicitly and explicitly gave reasons:

- The German people are suffering and need help;
- We can help them;
- If they are not helped, they will probably descend back into fascism;
- We need a free, prosperous and democratic Germany on our side in any future struggle with the USSR.

Was this evidence truthful? It surely was, in its central claims. That the Germans were suffering was amply documented in the footage. That the British were helping in the reconstruction of Germany was also documented. That if not helped, the Germans might re-adopt fascism, seems not to need much proof—as the film observes, many Germans in rural areas (that escaped the destruction visited by the Allied bombers) still remained faithful Nazis. And that a free (West) Germany would be a useful ally was also clear.

Is the message broadly logical? Again, yes, for the reasons given above.

Is the message transparent? I think it is made crystal clear in the opening dialogue: the film intends to explain why (i.e., to justify) the British benign reconstruction of Germany in the face of some obvious lack of sympathy from the British public.

Is the message rightfully targeted? Clearly the answer

¹⁰ Wikipedia, “A Defeated People,” p. 2.

¹¹ Wikipedia *ibid.* p. 3.

is yes. This short was released into general movie theaters, intended for the average British citizen.

Finally, was the message coercive? Hardly. This was a documentary short about the British occupation of Germany, why it was necessary and what it was doing. Nobody was compelled to see it. Let us turn now to the other two films.

In the final years of WWII and just after the war ended, the US War Department produced a number of short films honoring the contributions of Black military forces to the war effort. These included:

- *The Negro Soldier* (1944)—a film about the contributions of Blacks to America's defense¹²;
- *Wings for the Man* (1945)—a film about the Tuskegee Airmen¹³;
- *Rolling of the Rhine* (1945)—a film about the men of the Red Ball express, i.e., the (mainly Black) truck drivers supplying the troops who landed at Normandy¹⁴;
- *The Negro Sailor* (1946)—a film about the contributions of Black sailors to the US Navy¹⁵;
- *Teamwork* (1947)—a film about Black and white servicemen working together to win the war¹⁶.

Besides acknowledging the contribution of Black fighters, the films had two other major purposes.

First and most important while the war was still being fought, the War Department wanted to increase enlistments by Black Americans. We need to remember here that the US has fought only three "existential" wars, that is, wars in which the very existence of the US was at stake: the Revolutionary War; the Civil War; and WWII. America began WWII undermanned and under-planned. In 1941, the nation had a woefully insufficient 1.8 million military personnel. That number grew to 12.2 million by 1945. All eligible men were needed to support the war effort, and the War Department wanted as many Blacks to join as possible.

Second, it appears that the War Department was preparing the enlisted men and the public for what was coming: the desegregation of the Armed Forces. I will return to this topic anon. Let's just set the stage with a quick review.

The US Supreme Court itself had legalized segregation

by race in 1896 (*Plessy v. Ferguson*). The toxic doctrine of "separate but equal" was born, which allowed giving Blacks grossly inferior opportunities in education and employment. But in reality, the military had segregation long before that, starting in the Civil War and lasting through WWII. In 1943, the military leadership began to deal with the issue. While the US armed forces were generally segregated through the end of the war, the US Navy tried integration of Black sailors on 25 fleet auxiliary ships in 1944, and the experiment went well, so all the auxiliary ships were fully integrated in March 1945. In February 1946 the Navy ended all segregation in its ranks¹⁷. It was the first federal agency to do so. President Truman finally desegregated all of the other branches of the military in July, 1948. Thus, the US military was the first major American institution to desegregate. It is worth noting that this was not universally popular at the time. A poll taken in 1948 showed that only 21% of Americans favored it. Even white veterans were not in favor of it¹⁸.

The Supreme Court only embraced desegregation in 1954 (with *Brown v. Board of Education*).

Against this backdrop, let us examine two movies from the above list: *The Negro Soldier* (1944) and *Teamwork* (1947). Both films are in great measure the result of the efforts of one man, Carlton Moss (1909-1997), an African American actor, writer, and director. Moss wrote and played the central character in *The Negro Soldier*, and directed *Teamwork*. Moss was raised in North Carolina and later in New Jersey. He went to Morgan State University, where he put together an acting troupe called "Toward a Black Theater." In 1936, he was one of three Black theatre artists to lead the Negro Theatre Unit of the Federal Theater Project. He went on to write *The Negro Soldier* for Frank Capra. In 1944 Moss went to Europe to direct *Teamwork* (with Frank Capra's support in its production). Both films clearly bear Moss's mark.

Let's start with *The Negro Soldier*. The film starts with Black parishioners entering a gothic-style church. We look from the attendees' perspective to see the pastor (played by Carlton Moss) announce that he is putting aside the sermon for today to talk instead about something different, namely, Blacks in the military. Moss looks up at the church's "service flag"—which has a star for every congregant serving in the military. And he introduces the various congregants (including one young woman) who are in uniform. He then recounts visiting the USO, where he met Joe Louis—recent boxing champion, and now in the Army. Moss points out that Louis beat the German fighter Max Schmeling just a

12 Stuart Heisler, director, *The Negro Soldier*, (1944).

13 First Motion Picture Unit, US Army, *Wings for the Man*, (1945).

14 Army Pictorial Service, U.S. Army Signal Corps, *Rolling on the Rhine* (1945).

15 Henry Levin, director, *The Negro Sailor* (1946).

16 Carlton Moss, director, *Teamwork* (1947).

17 Sarah Sundin, "Port Chicago—Desegregation of the US Navy," (blog) (2019).

18 Steven White, "Most Americans Opposed Integrating the Military in 1948," *The Washington Post*, (2017).

few years earlier, and they are engaged in an even bigger fight now. Moss thus uses Louis and Schmeling as symbols for their respective countries¹⁹. The movie shows both men in military training. As Moss says the stakes in this new fight are immense, we first see the American flag, and then cut to the Nazi flag, and then to the “Nazi bible,” Hitler’s autobiography *Mein Kampf*. Moss reads two quotes from it: one where Hitler says pacifism is nonsense and Germans must simply take whatever territory they want, and the other where Hitler describes Blacks (to the shocked faces of some in the congregation) as “born half-ape.” He reads another Nazi writer who says that if Germans want an empire, they must “exterminate” whoever stands in their way, including whole races.

Moss then reviews America’s fight for its survival and freedom, and Blacks’ roles in it. He notes that Crispus Attucks was the first victim in the Boston Massacre, and he names the Blacks who died at Concord, Bunker Hill, and Valley Forge in the Revolutionary War. Moss also talks names Blacks who served in the War of 1812. All during this discussion, we see pictures of these Black heroes. He then talks about the Civil War briefly, and notes Black participation in the settling of the West. The film shows a picture of a Black man and a white man working side by side laying track on the Transcontinental Railroad. We then see a Black man telling his co-workers at an oil field that he was leaving to join the forces in the Spanish-American War. Moss notes that there were Black regiments in that war, and we see a Black man then say that after the war, Blacks helped build housing and factories—and the Panama Canal. We cut to scenes of Black troops in France in WWI with a rousing rendition of “Over There” in the background, and Moss lists the Black regiments and battalions that served there, and where they served. The 369th battalion “never had a man captured nor surrendered a foot of ground” and was the first American unit to be awarded the Croix de Guerre from France. And we see the headstones of those Black soldiers buried at Arlington, as well as the American and French memorials dedicated to Black soldiers erected at the end of the war. The film notes that the Nazi war machine destroyed the French monuments to the WWI Black soldiers when it took control of France in 1941.

Moss’s narration stresses the fact that Blacks have historically role in building this nation as well as fighting its

wars. Here he says homage to Blacks from educator Booker T. Washington, to scientist George Washington Carver, to all the contemporary Black professionals: a serving judge; an explorer; a surgeon; a musician/composer; a financier and publisher, a school principal, a museum curator, a sculptor, a singer, an orchestra conductor—contributors to all walks of life, many of them graduates of Black colleges (as was Moss himself).

Moss then shows highlights from the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, in which many medals went to Black Americans. Moss intones, “The tree of liberty has born these fruits.”

We shift to scenes of the destruction done by the enemies of liberty—the Nazis, the fascists of Italy, and the militarists of Japan. “There are those who will tell you that Japan is the savior of the colored races,” Moss says, but then we see scenes of Pearl Harbor, and watch a Black sailor die as he machine-guns attacking Japanese Zeroes.

The film now shows one of the congregants, an older Black lady, telling the rest of the gathered that her son Robert, in the infantry, has just been made an officer. She reads a letter from him, in which he describes how he learned to properly make his bed, met a young woman at a dance, and trained for fighting. We see her son going through training and other events he experienced. We see that the Blacks and the whites all go through the same training. After he is transferred, we see him go through more training. (However, we also notice that he is surrounded now by only Black troops).

We see the men listening to an Army representative who informs the men (all Black) that there are three times as many “colored” men in the Army now as there were in WWI. We cut to the scenes of men being trained as officers, including at West Point, and again the groups of men are integrated.

As the film finishes, Moss says that in every military base, men are getting their final work-outs. He notes that at Tuskegee, more and more Black airmen are earning their wings. “What a surprise the Nazis will get when Black, brown, yellow and white men, all Americans, land in the airfields of Berlin and Tokyo.” As Moss describes men training in the Northern US snow, as we see pictures of Black soldiers in trucks and jeeps in the snow. We learn that Blacks are now serving in all the positions of the modern battlefield—in tank crews, in artillery battalions, as combat civil engineers, as quartermasters, as signal corpsmen, as cavalrymen, in tank destroyer crews, in anti-aircraft units, and as infantrymen.

Moss notes that while the shadow of defeat hangs over the Axis powers, we need to accelerate the war effort with a deeper and faster deployment of forces. Again, we see pictures of Blacks and whites serving together, for example,

19 We ought to note something about Schmeling—something that obviously couldn’t be known at the time by the makers of the film. Schmeling, though he served in the German Army, hated the Nazi Party and never joined it. After the war, when their boxing careers were over, Schmeling and Louis became good friends. Schmeling, who after his career had become a successful businessman, gave Louis financial support in the 1950s, when Louis had fallen on hard times. Moreover, Schmeling helped pay for Louis’ funeral in 1981, and was one of the pall-bearers. Their friendship was the subject of a TV movie, *Joe and Max* (2002).

on building the Alcan (Alaska-Canada) highway. We see various scenes of intensive vicious fighting, with Blacks in the thick of it. We see pictures of Black men who have died in the war: “Men, who would defend—even unto death—the land of their birth.”

The film ends with Moss offering a prayer for the protection of Americans. We see the whole congregation stand up and sing “Onward, Christian Soldiers” and cut to see Black troops marching, headed for battle, as we hear the Black hymn “Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho” in the background.

How was *The Negro Soldier* received? It was held in high esteem²⁰. It had great production values, fine cinematography, and got good reviews. The film was shown to troops all over the country. Virtually all Black Army and Air Corps members saw the film, with many whites viewing the film during orientation programs. Capra and the other artists behind the film wanted it shown to non-military audiences in ordinary theaters. When it was, audiences were positive, but there were problems with its length—at nearly three-quarters of an hour, it is almost of feature film length. In other words, it wasn’t the traditional “short.”

How did the troops like it? The first audiences of Black soldiers who viewed the film felt that all Black soldiers should see it. And 80% of white troops thought it should be shown to all troops and civilians, both Black and white. The US Library of Congress selected the film for inclusion in the National Film Registry in December, 2011.

But again, the question before us is: was this film deceptive propaganda? Or was it basically reasonable?

Here again, I think that the correct answer is: essentially reasonable.

Let’s start with whether the message is evidence-based. The overall message being advanced by this film is something like this: although Blacks have often been badly treated in the US, Blacks should still support the war effort. In particular, young Black Americans should be willing to serve in the armed forces. And again, there are reasons given, implicitly and explicitly:

- Blacks, just like whites, enjoy the freedom of speech, religion, and movement that the US has always had;
- The Nazis clearly view Blacks as completely inferior, and races they consider inferior the Germans try to eliminate.
- Blacks have fought valiantly for their country in every war.

- The armed forces now offer Black enlistees a wide variety of positions—from pilots, to truck drivers, to medical aids, to civil engineering, to mechanical repair, and so on.

Next, do these reasons logically support the central message? It appears so. If Blacks have benefitted from the freedoms of America, that would be a reason they should support and fight for it. If the Nazis are a direct threat to Black folk, that would be a reason for Blacks to fight against them. The fact that Blacks have fought for the country in every prior war is some evidence that Blacks should support their country in this war, at least if we assume that this war is as much worth supporting as were the prior wars—which WWII clearly was. And the variety of training opportunities available to young Black men and women is a direct reason for them to join the military—as is would be for white youth as well.

As to the targeting the movie was primarily shows it both Black and white troops, but also to Black and white movie audiences—who were generally adults (as opposed to children). It was clearly rightfully targeted.

As to transparency, the film was obvious in its intention to convey a message. The title itself tips the viewer off that a message is going to be delivered.

As to coercion, the film was of course shown to soldiers as part of their training, so they had to be there. But the troops were not threatened in any way while watching the film. And in its limited popular release, of course, the audiences were there voluntarily and faced no coercion in the theaters.

There might be some argument about truthfulness, and if one views the film on YouTube and reads the comments, some question the veracity of the film. Certainly, one obvious falsehood in the movie was its implied message that Black athletes helped the US dominate the 1936 Olympic Games. But in fact, Germany dominated those games: it won 33 Gold medals compared to 24 for the US; 26 Silver medals compared to 20 for the US; and 30 Bronzes medals compared to only 12 for the US.

Some might suggest that this movie glorifies war and downplays the death and suffering during that war. But to the latter charge, the obvious reply is that the film had many scenes showing Black soldiers’ graves, along with scenes of brutal combat portrayed unflinchingly.

More defensible is the critique that the movie never mentions—much less discusses in depth—the fact that while Blacks served in the military in a wide variety of roles, they invariably were in segregated units. (In the Navy, while Black sailors weren’t segregated in units as such on the ships, they

20 Wiki, “The Negro Soldier.”

were restricted to being cooks and stewards.) If one watches this film on YouTube and reads the comments, this critique is made in more than a few of them.

This point has merit, and will be the focus of the commentary in the final film we will review. But one reply that can be made here is that *The Negro Soldier* shows quite clearly and repeatedly shows Blacks in segregated units. Moreover, we need to remember that the baleful system of segregation was declared legal in 1896—a full half-century before this film was made. The fact that Blacks in the military typically served in segregated units was well-known by both Black and white audiences.

Let's now review *Teamwork*. The film opens in post-war Berlin outside what used to be the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. The narrator tells us that prior to the Allied victory this building was an arsenal of words, "hurling messages as weapons against our troops." We then see various Nazi speakers utter repeatedly the phrase "Divide and conquer."

We next see a Nazi officer telling an audience of Nazi officers that the strategy of sowing division among one's adversaries the better to conquer them is a strategy the Nazis are using well. "In America, for example, we have a very fertile field. They are a mongrel nation. There we can play on many strains: protestant against Catholic; Gentile against Jew; Capital against Labor; white men against Black." The Nazi speaker then focuses on the last. He says Blacks are 10% of the Army and "...we are working constantly through our agents in America to divide these Blacks on frictions that already exist—and it is not difficult to build these up." The idea (this Nazi strategist continues with a sly look on his face) is to make Black men hate whites, and make whites think that Blacks are "stupid, irresponsible, and unfit to handle the weapons of modern war." He continues his speech (as we watch the audience of Nazi officers not approvingly), concluding that if this mongrel army tries to attack the sacred shores of fortress Europe it will be destroyed.

We cut to the D-Day invasion, where the mongrel army does exactly that: attack the sacred shores of fortress Europe. The narrator says that protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile, rich man and poor man, and Black man and white hit the beach together, as we see pairs of soldiers land on the beach together under withering fire. We see Black and white soldiers on the same bloody beach. And the narrator notes that when they are wounded, they felt the same pain and bled the same blood.

The narrator tells us that the Army did establish a beachhead and moved inland. For three rough days, weathering severe storms, the soldiers fought in the hedgerows. The storm destroyed two years' worth of

planning and construction on the shore. We see pictures of the temporary docks the Allies had constructed destroyed. The narrator observes that the army of half a million men, along with the accompanying tanks and other equipment, needed constant supplies—supplies now marooned in the offshore freighters. We shift to a group of Nazi generals standing around a table, and we learn that they feel confident because the Germans control all the ports.

But the US Army figured out a way. Amphibious trucks ferried supplies from the offshore ships to the shore, where those supplies were then reloaded on regular trucks which then delivered the supplies where needed: "Ammunition for Gen. Hodge's men, gasoline for Patton's tanks, food, clothes, vehicles..." The film shows Black and white soldiers working side by side. "It was a miracle, but we needed more miracles, because now we had a million men on the continent." We had to build roads, rail lines, harbors, rest phone lines. And we see Black and white soldiers working together. The narrator repeats what the Nazi propagandist said about Black soldiers—that they wouldn't stay on the battlefield, that they were shiftless, irresponsible..." as we see Black soldiers stringing telephone lines and using mine detectors to find German mines. As we see mainly Black soldiers using construction equipment to build a landing strip, we are told that the construction engineers built it in record time. We see Black and white troops laying down railroad track and fuel pipes... "Men who hate Germans, not each other." The troops together laid pipeline from the Channel to the Rhine. When the Allies took over the port of Cherbourg, the construction battalions were able to have it reopened and taking in freight in less than a week by working night and day—and Blacks and whites worked side by side to do it.

By now the US Army was on the move—moving so quickly that it was outrunning its supply lines. It was here that the legendary "Red Ball Express" was formed: 8,000 trucks, almost all of them driven by Blacks, hauled supplies from the harbor at Cherbourg to the soldiers on the front lines. The combat truck-drivers drove these supply trucks 24 hours a day. And the going was tough: we see the Black truck drivers driving as they are strafed, bombed, and as they run into mines. The narrator mocks the Nazi propagandist: "The Germans said that these soldiers were only good for... toting boxes. Well, if this is toting boxes, nice totin', soldier!" The Black combat truck-drivers worked alongside the white combat truck-drivers as well.

We shift to seeing Gen. Hughes conveying to these men Gen. Eisenhower's commendation: "The success of our recent operations depended upon the Red Ball highway for the delivery of vital supplies. When those supplies were desperately needed, the Red Ball drivers delivered the goods." Eisenhower commended the unit for "a tough job well done."

We move now to the skies over Germany itself. “You couldn’t sell prejudice to the 15th Air Force, Mr. Hitler.” The fighter escort for the bombers was the famed 332nd Fighter Group—the Tuskegee Airmen. We watch Black fighter pilots down German Messerschmitts. The narrator adds sarcastically: “This is the man who couldn’t master the tools of modern war, remember?” as another Black pilot downs another plane²¹.

We move back to the ground fighting. The narrator notes that here again, Black and whites were working together. When in 1944 the 101st infantry launched an attack, they were supported by the Black 769th field artillery battalion. Later that year, when the 370th infantry launched an attack in the Po Valley, they were supported by the Black 695th field artillery battalion. In spring of 1945, the 409th infantry broke open the Siegfried Line, and “running interference for then was the 761st tank battalion”—again, a Black unit. This tank unit landed at Normandy and fought their way across several countries, and supported three different armies. The unit was awarded a unit commendation for “conspicuous courage and success.”

The narrator adds that these Black and white soldiers couldn’t have worked together so well if they didn’t have faith in each other and in their nation. We see a scene where the Germans shoot an artillery shell filled with propaganda leaflets that are aimed at Black soldiers—telling them that they are fighting for nothing good at home, and if they surrender, the Germans will take care of them well. A white soldier reads this, and looks over at a Black soldier reading the leaflet as well. The Black soldier simply crumples it up as the attack whistle sounds and we see both pick up their rifles and join the attack. We later see a wounded tent with Blacks and whites in it.

The film closes with scenes of the Nazi army signing the surrender document, and the blowing up of stone Nazi swastikas. We see white men, Black men, white women, and Black women marching in victory. The narrator comments, “These are the Americans who did the job. They didn’t think that America was perfect—they knew it wasn’t. They didn’t believe that prejudice doesn’t exist—because it does. But they all agreed with Sergeant Joe Louis when he said, “There is nothing wrong with America that Hitler can fix.” The narrator ends the film with, “There is nothing wrong with America that Americans can’t fix,” as we see scenes of troops with “Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho” in the background.

Once again, we raise the question, was this film deceptive

propaganda? Again, it seems not. First, it was evidence-based. What was the message being promulgated—nay, urged—in this film? It isn’t a recruitment film urging Blacks to join the military—at this point, the war was over, and at the end of it nearly 1 million Black Americans were in uniform. No, I think the message was clear: we need to end prejudice in the military in general and must integrate the ranks in particular. And it offers (implicitly or explicitly) reasons:

- Blacks served honorably and well in WWII;
- Blacks showed that they could thoroughly master all the complex ideas in the military from hauling freight in extremely hazardous environments to piloting fighter aircraft;
- If we keep Black segregated, it divides our forces and increased the chances of the enemy undermining unity;
- Blacks servicemen have shown clearly that they and white servicemen can work well together even on the most stressful and difficult of situations;
- Blacks served in the military in numbers in accordance with their percentage of the general population.

Second, is this evidence truthful? Yes, clearly, across the board.

Is the message broadly logical? It seems again clearly so. If Blacks served honorably and well in the war, in numbers in proportion to their percentage in the population, it would be manifestly unjust to discriminate against them. If Blacks can master all the tasks whites can, why would you segregate them? (It would if we assume that being discriminated against and segregated for no good reason would make a group of people resentful—and that seems clearly true.) Finally, if Black units can work well with white units, why would we not just simplify things and let the individuals work together?

Finally, the idea that this propaganda was coercive in any way, or targeted at children or the mentally impaired, is absurd. And the film is nothing if not transparent, from its title to its structure. Americans are a special nation in that we welcomed people from many nations.

In fact, although in early 1946 the Navy issued a desegregation order for its own ranks, and in 1948 President Truman signed a desegregation order for all the Armed forces, the actual desegregation process took some time. It was only in 1954 that the last segregated unit was integrated. And it took a variety of tactics for this integration to be finally achieved. But I would argue that these propaganda films, which saw fairly widespread distribution in both the military and the civilian population, played a role.

And these films did it in a fairly reasonable and non-deceptive way.

21 The 332nd fighter group and one of its squadrons won two Presidential Unit Citations. Tuskegee graduated over 1,000 Black pilots between 1941 and 1946.

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