

## The Power of Propaganda

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"The last essay I wrote for this semester is on the topic: "Are monuments propaganda". I felt that this essay was the most organized and the best out of all the essays that I wrote for this English course. I got to visit the Japanese American National Museum for this essay and by doing this I got the chance to see the perspective of the Japanese on World War II. After visiting the museum I realized that monuments are propaganda because of how they influence the audience according to the aspect of the monument. This paper was very difficult for me to write because at first I had a hard time understanding what propaganda was. But after researching, I realized that propaganda could be either taken positively or negatively. Although this paper was the most difficult for me to write, I enjoyed the experience."

### Essay Prompt: Is a monument propaganda?

To help you develop your paper, ask yourself the following:

- What is the definition of propaganda?
- What do you classify as a monument?
- Why do we create monuments to memorialize tragedies and/or atrocities?
- How does the method and medium influence the message?

(Nicole Warwick, Instructor)

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Last year when I was in Hawaii, I visited the *USS Arizona* Memorial that was above the actual ship that sunk during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This sacred place was dedicated to the eleven hundred crew members who were lost due to this attack on December 7, 1941 (Pearl Harbor 1). While walking through the *USS Arizona* Memorial, I saw oil on the surface of the water from the engine. Seeing this made me feel that the ship was still "alive." I was also extremely moved by seeing the sunken ship underneath me and seeing at the end of the memorial all of the names of those who were killed on the ship. When I went back on the ship that took us back to land, I remembered sitting there silently and everyone surrounded me was silent as well. Emotions were stirred, goose bumps were crawling up my arm, and I felt like crying for all the lives that were lost during that attack. Monuments and memorials are built to tell the story of a people during that time in history and to define a nation's meaning. They are symbols that are used for propaganda to manipulate our society's opinion on political beliefs and historical events. At any given point in history, our society chooses what to memorialize and what is less worthy of public commemoration. Thus, monuments are one-sided and because of that, monuments are propaganda.

The word "monument" comes from the Latin meaning "that which reminds" (Presnall 6). The *USS Arizona* Memorial was established to remind our society that on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet and military airfields in Pearl Harbor, Oahu. Eight American battleships and thirteen other naval vessels were sunk or badly damaged, almost two hundred American aircraft were destroyed, and approximately three thousand naval and military people were killed or wounded (Pearl Harbor 2). This attack denoted the entrance of Japan into World War II on the side of Germany and Italy, and it induced the United States to enter World War II on the allied side.

Many people all over the world make the pilgrimage to the *USS Arizona* Memorial. It is very symbolic of the nation's wartime involvement during World War II. The *USS Arizona* Memorial and the actual historic film that was seen while waiting for the ride to the memorial stimulated the viewer's emotions and evoked reflection. The names of all the lives that were lost and the actual footage of the surprise attack "remind" society of the "reality of war, the loss of life in war, and about

remembering those who served and those who died" (Lin 319). Although the memorial and the historic video gave the viewers an emotional tug, they also served as propaganda because they only conveyed the United States' perspective. Neither the memorial nor the video showed the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack and how the United States went against the constitution and placed all people of Japanese descent in America in imprisonment camps. By not showing this, the viewers are caught up in the moment and based their feelings on what is being shown to them, rather than including what is not being shown to them. Another important symbol of propaganda is the American flag on the pole of the USS *Arizona* Memorial. Not only does the flag symbolize our country, but it also conveys patriotism and our government. By having the flag, the memorial is not focusing on the lives that were lost, but on our government's power. Powerful emotional connections were made when I was standing on the sacred ground where the USS *Arizona* went down. While standing there, I was thinking of all the lives that were lost because of the Japanese attack on the U.S. Later on, I realized that I was too caught up in the moment to consider how badly our country treated the Japanese-Americans after the attack. Therefore, monuments evoke emotion either positive or negative depending on whose perspective it is, and emotions are being manipulated by using propaganda.

According to the Merriam Dictionary, propaganda is the "spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person." By using symbols such as flags, monuments, oratory, and publications, propaganda is able to influence our society's attitude on political beliefs (Propaganda 1). It was in World War I that our government first used propaganda art to get people to enlist. To manipulate society, propaganda draws on the common societal beliefs of the time. During World War I, more than three-quarters of Americans believed that they could trust the government of America to do what was right (Schneider 1). Therefore, the *I Want You for U.S. Army* poster was a success in recruiting people to join the army because Uncle Sam represents the government of America. In addition, the saying "I want you for U.S. Army" is very authoritative and because it is so authoritative, people are manipulated into doing what they are being told to do. An example of this authority is the way parents tell their children what to do and what not to do. Thus, this poster is spreading the idea of patriotism to induce people to enlist, which is the intent of this poster.

Similar to the *I Want You for U.S. Army* poster, the USS *Arizona* Memorial influenced the viewers by drawing on the core belief system of the average American. In this case, the flag is the symbol of America. Powerful emotional connections are made because of the relation of the American flag and the people. An example of this powerful symbol can be seen after the attack on the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup> and how many Americans have turned to the American flag for national unity. By having the American flag, the names of the lives that were lost, and the actual historical video, propagandists are able to influence individuals by making emotional appeals. Emotional agitation is a favorite technique of the propagandist, because "any emotion may be drained off into any activity by skillful manipulation" (World War I 2). A second common propaganda technique is demonization of the enemy and by showing the actual footage of the Japanese attack on the U.S., the USS *Arizona* Memorial manipulated the viewers to think on only the American side. Therefore, the USS *Arizona* Memorial is clearly propaganda although society may not perceive it as such.

In contrast to the USS *Arizona* Memorial, the Japanese-American National Museum shows the other perspective. The museum promotes the "understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by preserving, interpreting and sharing the experiences of Japanese-Americans" (Visitor's Guide 1). The Japanese-American National Museum contains many family stories, documents, and photographs on the Japanese-American experiences before, during, and after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Walking in an actual building of the concentration camps reminded me of the hostility that Americans had towards the Japanese-Americans during that time. Not only were

they harassed, but also their rights as American citizens were taken away from them because of their race. The museum also showed arts and crafts as an important outlet for the Japanese-Americans during World War II. These arts and crafts included poems, pins, wooden vases and figurines, furniture, needlework, as well as other fabric-based items such as textiles (Visitor's guide 2). Like the USS *Arizona* Memorial, the objects that the National Museum collected, especially the actual concentration camp, the poems, and photographs, can serve as propaganda; they are an emotional appeal to the viewers. Not only are they an emotional appeal, but they also spread the idea of the hostility that the Americans had towards the Japanese-Americans, thus cause the viewers to understand the Japanese-Americans' side.

At first I thought memorials and monuments are there for commemorating the lives that were lost and to tell the story of a people during that time in history. But after visiting both the USS *Arizona* Memorial and the Japanese-American National Museum, I realized that although they both gave me an emotional tug, they are also propaganda because each memorial is based on one perspective; thus, they influenced the viewers according to each monument and what is being shown to them. Propaganda is a very powerful tool because it is influencing viewers without them acknowledging it.

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