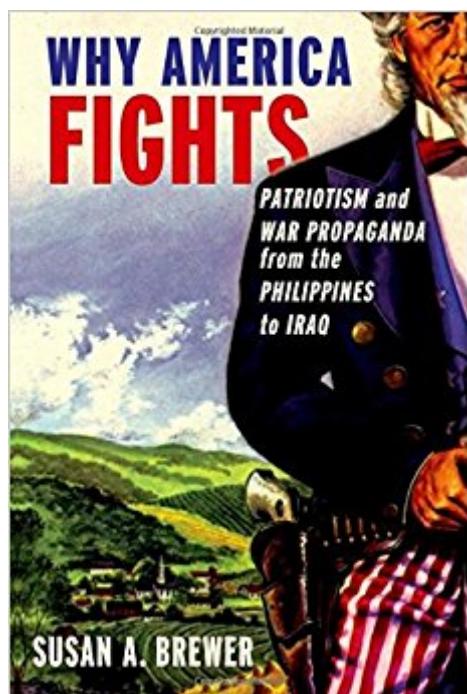


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Why America Fights: Patriotism And War Propaganda From The Philippines To Iraq



Synopsis

On the evening of September 11, 2002, with the Statue of Liberty shimmering in the background, television cameras captured President George W. Bush as he advocated the charge for war against Iraq. This carefully staged performance, writes Susan Brewer, was the culmination of a long tradition of sophisticated wartime propaganda in America. In *Why America Fights*, Brewer offers a fascinating history of how successive presidents have conducted what Donald Rumsfeld calls "perception management," from McKinley's war in the Philippines to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her intriguing account ranges from analyses of wartime messages to descriptions of the actual operations, from the dissemination of patriotic ads and posters to the management of newspaper, radio, and TV media. When Woodrow Wilson carried the nation into World War I, he created the Committee on Public Information, led by George Creel, who called his job "the world's greatest adventure in advertising." In World War II, Roosevelt's Office of War Information avowed a "strategy of truth," though government propaganda still depicted Japanese soldiers as buck-toothed savages. After examining the ultimately failed struggle to cast the Vietnam War in a favorable light, Brewer shows how the Bush White House drew explicit lessons from that history as it engaged in an unprecedented effort to sell a preemptive war in Iraq. Yet the thrust of its message was not much different from McKinley's pronouncements about America's civilizing mission. Impressively researched and argued, filled with surprising details, *Why America Fights* shows how presidents have consistently drummed up support for foreign wars by appealing to what Americans want to believe about themselves.

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Customer Reviews

"Susan Brewer's meticulously researched and engagingly written book is a strong addition to the burgeoning literature on U.S. propaganda...Why America Fights masterfully distills a huge body of work into a narrative that is approachable and thoughtprovoking. In addition to providing a persuasive analysis of U.S. propaganda, it is a marvelous introduction to key events in the history of U.S. foreign relations."--Journal of Cold War Studies

"A well-researched, provocative, and convincing work that makes an important contribution to our understanding of how the government constructs and disseminates rationales for initiating and sustaining armed conflict."--H-Net Reviews

"This is a stunning book which blows away all the myths about why America goes to war. American fights, the author demonstrates, to remake the world in its own image, for power and for markets. Its propaganda, 'as American as apple pie,' has historically sought to disguise this."--Phillip Knightley, author of *The First Casualty*

"Marshalling compelling evidence, Susan Brewer documents the rhetorical strategies by which the U.S. government, often with the complicity of the media and key opinion-molding groups, has mobilized popular support for every major U.S. conflict from the Spanish-American war to the invasion of Iraq. Well written and deeply researched, this timely work should be read by all those concerned with issues of war and peace and with how propaganda can coarsen and debase civic discourse on vital public issues."--Paul Boyer, editor of *The Oxford Companion to United States History*

"Susan Brewer's lively account of wartime propaganda from 1898 to the war in Iraq, *Why America Fights*, could well be sub-titled, *Why America Is Still Fighting*. May its account of the mobilization of patriotism for dubious purposes serve as a prophylactic for the future."--Marilyn Young, New York University

"Susan Brewer writes that U.S. war propaganda since the dawn of the twentieth century has been both necessary and misleading. Judiciously argued and well researched, this engaging narrative examines the claims that policymakers advanced in their speeches, newspapers, radio programs, and films to sell America's wars. Brewer's provocative book deserves a wide readership from Americans who so often wonder how their lofty goals in war can end in disillusionment."--Emily S. Rosenberg, author of *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory*

"In understated prose and meticulous detail...Brewer ably argues that the strategies of presidential persuasion for starting or remaining in wars are little more than watery stews of lies, bluffs and exaggerations or the perfuming of facts to scent the air with what Donald Rumsfeld called 'perception management.'"--Washington Post

"[T]his is an important book. It sheds light on an aspect of U.S. political history that American citizens in general, and members of the

press in particular, ought to examine more closely before being taken in again by bellicose state propaganda."--The American Conservative"A breezy, student-friendly synthesis...a highly readable account of what administrations have done during recent wars." --Presidential Studies Quarterly"A marvelous work of synthesis and analysis. ...Clearly written, the book is peppered with unforgettable quotations and illuminating anecdotes that are often amusing, ironic, and damning. Very well suited for classroom use." --Diplomatic History"Brewer skillfully reveals how administrations have flooded the American public with facts, exaggerations, misinformation, and patriotic appeals in attempts to drum up the support for foreign wars...Never has this been any more relevant as it is now, as we approach a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan." -- ForeWord "In this ambitious book Brewer not only details how propaganda messages have evolved she also offers an interpretation of American foreign policy."--Clayton R. Koppes, Journal of American History"A vitally important book for our times...Concise and insightful...Brewer's study is ideally suited for educated lay readers and university courses."--Gerd Horten, American Historical Review "An absorbing history of efforts by the American president and his senior staff to gird the nation for war. Combining primary sources from presidential archives and policy memoirs with a thorough review of the secondary literature on wartime media and citizenship, historian Susan Brewer assembled a detailed indictment against overweening executive power."--Damon Coletta, American Review of Politics"Susan A. Brewer's brilliant and important study of patriotism and war propaganda...reminds us that war is a construct of ideologies, doctrines, beliefs, lies, truths and delusions."--Australian Book Review

Susan A. Brewer is Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. She is the author of *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II*.

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This book was a very interesting look at the use of propaganda in the USA to sell wars. The chapter on the colony in the Philippines was very interesting for me, as the only thing I had read on that war previously was by Noam Chomsky. Chomsky provides good information, but his writing style is turgid, and people will complain about the perspective he takes. This book, however, was readable and seemed to go to considerable effort to report the facts without a surfeit of opinion. Conclusions were drawn, of course - but this was a historian drawing conclusions, and not a political commentator. I was left with a feeling of having been honestly informed, and not told what to

believe. This book was informed, academic and focussed. Whilst there is plenty of information about the wars of the last century and this one, the focus of the book is the propaganda used to manufacture consent. The author shows that the extent to which this has been resented, it seems, ends up being in proportion to the extent the war is later considered, by a majority of the public, to be unjust.

Brewer's book tells how presidents have consistently drummed up support for foreign wars by appealing to what Americans want to believe about themselves. Six wars - the Philippine War, WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq War, are examined. The chief message has been that Americans must defeat the enemy to create a safer, more prosperous war in which freedom and democracy thrive. Leaders have declared that Americans had a duty as the world's morally superior nation to extend democracy and capitalism to others - unfortunately, a mission without end. Brewer also tells us that over time, official strategies of persuasion have favored a public of misinformed spectators over informed citizens. From WWI to the Iraq War, Americans have been told they must fight "over there" so they would not have to "fight them here." Although denying we sought more territory, we steadily acquired more bases - now 700+ in 132 countries. A second priority was the maintenance of governments, democratic or not, that allowed American economic and strategic access to their countries. To arouse anger, our leaders cited enemy atrocities - some true and some false. The oppressed and backwards, the public was told, welcomed American leadership. However, after Americans arrived, the Filipinos, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Iraqis failed to behave as predicted - looking at the Americans more like invaders than rescuers. Bottom Line: Brewer says that as long as U.S. propaganda assumes that people cannot handle the truth, it leaves Americans to wonder why we fight. Personal experience during Vietnam, and observation of mostly subsequent actions (the mythical 'missile gap' during the Kennedy-Nixon campaign, Grenada, Panama, Iraq I, Iraq II) long ago convinced me not to believe anything from the Pentagon. "Why America Fights" adds nothing to those observations.

Reminds me of something H. L. Mencken once wrote: "The great masses of people still follow theologians as they follow politicians, and seem doomed to be bamboozled and squeezed by both for many long ages to come." We're once again seeing this as the corporate press and our incomparably venal politicians start beating the drum for yet another costly unnecessary war - this time with Iran. This whole cycle will end when the money runs out - which by the look of our economy may not be very far off.

As I read this book, I keep wondering, 'Why didn't I learn this stuff in school?' In order to understand the history of our country, I think it's important that we have a realistic view of the good and the bad of it. This book has helped to clarify my understanding of our involvement in past events that were previously murky for me: U.S. war with Spain, the Phillipines, Cuba, World War I. How I wish that this book had been part of my high school history curriculum. I might have become a history major in college. This is a terrific book - well researched, well-written. While it makes a point about some themes of U.S. foreign policy, it is both scholarly and accessible.

In a brief but fairly extensive survey of the conduct of six American wars Brewer shows how the government's manipulation of war propaganda enabled the US to engage in imperialist wars under the guise of "defense" against "anti-democratic" enemies.

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