

## **Revisiting the Origins of Communication Research: Walter Lippmann's World War II Adventure in Propaganda and Psychological Warfare**

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Based on a close study of Walter Lippmann's correspondence and publications, this article aims to critically reconsider his legacy in the field of communication. To this end, I focus on Lippmann's involvement in propaganda and psychological warfare activities during the Second World War. Following a succinct overview of the history of the psychological warfare and propaganda agencies, I successively explore three different aspects of Lippmann's involvement. First, this article examines Lippmann's contribution to the activities of the Committee for National Morale. Second, the article focuses on the relationship between Lippmann and William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the director of the Office of the Coordinator of Information and the Office of Strategic Services. Third, the article turns to the relationship between Lippmann and Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, and explores Lippmann's role in the War Department's Psychological Warfare Branch.

*Keywords: communication research history, propaganda, psychological warfare, Second World War*

Ex-Soviet agent Alexander Vassiliev, who was temporarily granted access to the KGB archives in the mid-1990s, recently revealed some interesting details about Soviet espionage activities in the United States during the Second World War. According to Vassiliev, Walter Lippmann, the famous columnist and communication research pioneer, was an important target for Soviet spies. They recruited his own secretary, Mary Price, as an agent (Haynes, Klehr, & Vassiliev, 2009). In November 1941, Price reported to her Soviet handlers that Lippmann was cutting short his newspaper articles and giving more of his time to secret meetings with government officials. Based on Price's reports, which emphasized Lippmann's collaboration with Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan (who was then chief of the Office of the Coordinator of Information), the Soviets were convinced that Lippmann was working on top secret propaganda and psychological warfare projects. The Soviet intelligence New York station, sending to Moscow a copy of a stolen letter Lippmann wrote to Donovan, wired the following message:

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[Lippmann] has spent a lot of time on correspondence, phone conversations and personal discussions with certain political figures, obviously putting his main emphasis on participation in the behind-the-scenes activities of various Amer. circles. In addition, he is studying issues involving the presentation of other propaganda broadcasts on the radio. . . . He was allocated a special short-wave radio for listening to foreign propaganda broadcasts. Obviously, one of the areas of his cooperation with Donovan is precisely this type of activity. (as cited in Haynes, Klehr, & Vassiliev, 2009, p. 174)

The House Committee on Un-American Activities revealed in 1948 that Price might have been a Soviet agent. However, Vassiliev's revelations are particularly interesting because they highlight why the Soviets were spying on Lippmann and disclose an aspect of his activities that has been neglected by scholars who have studied him.

Based on a study of his wartime correspondence and publications, this article aims to further document Lippmann's involvement in the Second World War's propaganda and psychological warfare network.<sup>2</sup> During the war, propaganda and psychological warfare operations were organized through a network of loosely connected civil and military governmental agencies, civil society groups, and university-based research institutes. My research shows that Lippmann played a pivotal role in this network. He was not only involved, at the highest levels, in the planning of the network's main organizations, but also he was one of the key nodes connecting its different parts. Lippmann's newspaper column in that period reflected this involvement on several occasions, as he seized the opportunity to promote and articulate part of the network's agenda. In this sense, Lippmann's role was also to present propaganda and psychological warfare to the public. As he once put it, "in order to put over a conception that is new to the public, it should first of all be presented in its full detailed form to a limited number of high-grade journalists—and then let them simplify and popularize" (cited in Bridge, 2008, pp. 176–177).

Lippmann's role in this network reflects and expands his position as a central figure of American social sciences in the interwar years. Mapping this interwar network, Bottom (2009) ranks Lippmann 20th for his "centrality," behind figures such as Charles Merriam (6th) and Isaiah Bowman (9th). As Bottom rightly notes, Lippmann's centrality can be traced back to his First World War record:

Lippmann occupied a unique bridging position. As advisor to Wilson, he had advocated creation of the CPI, later serving as propaganda agent in London. Before taking that assignment, he was administrator and recruiter for "the Inquiry" . . . he forged lifelong friendships with international delegates such as Keynes at the peace conference. . . . His

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<sup>2</sup> The expression "propaganda and psychological warfare network" derives from Pooley's (2008) similar characterization of a "propaganda and psychological warfare bureaucracy." The term *network* emphasizes the contribution of nonadministrative workers, including academics, and the complex organizational context of propaganda and psychological research and operations. In this article, I used the terms *psychological warfare* and *propaganda* in a similar sense, although psychological warfare suggests a wider range of military operations designed for their expected psychological effects, including propaganda.

ambitious social theory . . . sought to explain both the CPI's propaganda success and the negotiating mistakes made in Paris. (p. 265)

Consequently, with his prominent role in American social sciences during the interwar years, Lippmann is widely regarded as a pioneer of communication research. For example, James Carey asserts that *Public Opinion* (Lippmann, 1922), which Lippmann largely based on his experience in propaganda and military intelligence in World War I, is "the originating book in the modern history of communication research" (Carey, 1987, p. 22). Similarly, John Durham Peters (1989) writes that "American mass communication theory and research, at least in its theoretical vision, is a series of footnotes to Lippmann's *Public Opinion*" (p. 207).

Although central to the history of American social sciences and communication research, Lippmann's work and role are often misunderstood. According to Sue Curry Jansen (2012), "the historical Lippmann is misrepresented and misused, and these distortions of Lippmann are reproduced in much contemporary work in the field of communication" (p. 18). Jansen is highly critical of the influential narrative put forth by James Carey (1987)—and popularized by Noam Chomsky's use of Lippmann's formula, the "manufacture of consent"—which insisted on the connection between Lippmann's First World War experience in propaganda and his alleged anti-democratic views. Casting Lippmann's views against John Dewey's democratic theory, Carey accuses Lippmann to have "turned the political world over to private and specialized interests, albeit interests regulated by his new samurai class" (p. 23). Against such interpretation, a new body of historiography is deconstructing Carey's rendition of the Dewey-Lippmann debate and reinventing Lippmann as a democrat (Schudson, 2008), a critical thinker (Jansen, 2012), and a theorist who can contribute to reinvigorating cultural studies (Tell, 2013).

The question of Lippmann's involvement in propaganda work and his views about the manufacture of consent are closely related to these recent historical interpretations. Most of these works tend to minimize Lippmann's role in propaganda operations during the First World War, when he served as Secretary of the Inquiry and captain in the Intelligence Division.<sup>3</sup> For example, Jansen writes that Lippmann was "a vehement critic of propaganda who condemned the manufacture of consent" (Jansen, 2013a, p. 1094) and "the most prominent postwar critic of America's wartime propaganda machinery" (Jansen, 2013b, p. 302). Pointing to studies such as *A Test of the News* (Lippmann & Merz, 1920) and *Liberty and the News* (Lippmann, 1920), which are rightly described as original attempts to debunk wartime propaganda, Jansen (2013b) emphasized Lippmann's faith in "disinterested reporting" and in the strict division between news and editorials. Far from being an important shaper of wartime psychological strategy, Lippmann is portrayed as a repenting, second-order propagandist about whom there is "much adieu about very little" (Jansen, 2013b, p. 79). Similarly, Crick (2009) writes that "despite having been involved in the American propaganda effort in World War I, Lippmann never advocated propaganda as a tool for domestic politics" (p. 489). Both claims are partially true, but ignore Lippmann's adventure in

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<sup>3</sup> The Inquiry was a secret committee of social scientists planning postwar foreign policy. Lippmann's tasks as captain in the Intelligence Division included writing psychological warfare leaflets, interrogating German war prisoners to assess the effects of propaganda, and serving on the Inter-Allied Propaganda Board.

propaganda during the Second World War, which opens the possibility of a critical reassessment of his views on propaganda and his legacy in communication studies.

This story is also significant considering the role the Second World War's propaganda and psychological warfare agencies played in the institutionalization of communication research. As Simpson (1994) convincingly argues, "it is unlikely that communication research could have emerged in anything like its present form without regular transfusions of money for the leading lights in the field from U.S. military, intelligence, and propaganda agencies" (p. 4). The case of the Rockefeller Foundation best exemplifies the complex interweaving of early communication research and psychological warfare. During the late 1930s, the foundation financed many major communication research projects. Harold Lasswell, Hadley Cantril, and Paul Lazarsfeld were among those who benefited from substantial research grants. By 1939, at the outbreak of war in Europe, the foundation "repurposed its radio research projects into a private propaganda and intelligence network" (Pooley, 2011, p. 226). To this end, the foundation enlisted many leading communication scholars in the Communications Group with the twofold task to consolidate American public opinion in favor of the war and to provide the field of communication with a coherent paradigm. At that time, communication was conceived of as a science of coercion "useful to achieve ideological, political, or military goals" (Simpson, 1994, p. 6), and several members of the Communications Group "regarded the development of conformity of opinion as the main goal of their research" (Glander, 2000, p. 47). In fact, the Rockefeller Foundation operated "as a *de facto* arm of the American state" (Buxton, 1994b, p. 168) during the war.

During the war, Lippmann had connections with several of the Rockefeller Foundation's sponsored research programs, including Harold N. Graves Jr.'s Study of Political Broadcasting at Princeton's Listening Center, Elmo Roper's Fortune Poll, and George Gallup's American Institute of Public Opinion, and his influence over the Communications Group is already well attested (Buxton, 1994a; Simpson, 1994).<sup>4</sup> In a 1939 working paper, the group proposed the creation of "a central coordinating agency" for communication research, clearly echoing one famous proposition made in *Public Opinion* (Glander, 2000, p. 43). The group's rationale was heavily influenced by Lippmann; like him, its members believed the state of emergency justified the active manufacturing of public opinion (Gary, 1996). This was a line of argument developed by Lippmann (1922), along with the claim that radio should "increase tolerance towards experts and expert knowledge in social affairs" (Princeton Radio Survey-Rockefeller Foundation reviewing committee 1939, cited by Buxton, 1994a, p. 195). In short, "the group was concerned with what Walter Lippmann (and Noam Chomsky) would have considered to be the manufacture of consent" (Buxton, 1994a, p. 200).

This article shows that Lippmann was not only an important intellectual influence for the Communications Group members but also one of those who helped strengthen the ties between communication research and propaganda and psychological warfare agencies. In other words, while Lippmann's conception of communication and public opinion were programmatic, he himself was one of

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<sup>4</sup> Graves to Lippmann, January 6, 1940; Graves to Lippmann, January 29, 1940 (Walter Lippmann Papers [WLP], Box 97, Folder 1746).

the few “insiders” who significantly contributed to setting up, guiding, and operating the American propaganda and psychological warfare network during the Second World War.

Following a succinct overview of the development of the American propaganda and psychological warfare network during the war, I focus on three key dimensions of Lippmann’s involvement in this network that have hitherto remained unexplored by communication scholars and historians. First, I explore Lippmann’s involvement in the activities of the Committee for National Morale. He regularly exchanged views with the committee’s leaders and promoted their agenda in his widely syndicated column. Second, I turn to the relationship between Lippmann and Wild Bill Donovan, the most successful American propagandist and psychological warrior of the era. This intriguing and paradoxical relationship between America’s top spy and its most prominent columnist proved to be an enduring one as Lippmann helped set up Donovan’s Office of the Coordinator of Information and forged connections within the world of secret services that endured into the early years of the Cold War. Third, I discuss Lippmann’s relationship with Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy and, as a result, his participation in the Psychological Warfare Branch, including his role in the imprisonment of Japanese Americans during the war.

### **The Second World War’s Propaganda and Psychological Warfare Network**

During the Second World War, one of the first steps toward the establishment of the propaganda and psychological warfare network was the creation of the Committee for National Morale in July 1940. Affiliated with the Council for Democracy, this civilian committee was founded “to work out a plan of action for an American morale service to turn back the German psychological attack.”<sup>5</sup> The founder of the committee, a Persian art scholar named Arthur Upham Pope, had worked at the War Department during the First World War and had many contacts among psychologists and social scientists who proved eager to enlist (Caphew, 1999). The committee, which stands “among one of the most significant of academic social science’s war apparatus” (Sproule, 1997, p. 181), included early communication research figures, famous social scientists, and to-be propagandists such as Gordon W. Allport, Hadley Cantril, Elmer Davis, Leonard Doob, George Gallup, Kurt Lewin, and Frank N. Stanton.

In January 1941, the Roosevelt administration granted the committee \$5,000 to draft a plan concerning the organization of wartime propaganda. Presented in February 1941, their report “strongly urges the establishment of a governmental agency immediately” and offered the full collaboration of the committee, “to assist in organizing such an agency and in setting it into immediate operation” (Committee for National Morale, 1941, p. 12). Roosevelt then established the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI; July 1941) and the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF; October 1941).

Colonel Donovan’s COI was supposed to perform intelligence collection and foreign propaganda work. In fact, its operations and aims were largely determined by Donovan, whose idea of psychological warfare was “to beat the Germans at their own game” (Laurie, 1996, p. 79). The agency was soon staffed by a mix of journalists, academics, and military men, and was fully operational by December 1941. The OFF was led by Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish, and adopted a so-called strategy of truth that

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<sup>5</sup> Pope to Lippmann, October 16, 1940 (WLP, Box 96, Folder 1726).

they conceived to be the opposite of totalitarian propaganda. As MacLeish put it, "we do not, like the propaganda bureaus of the dictators, tell one story at home and another abroad" (Hart, 2013, p. 75). Notwithstanding these claims, the OFF was mostly considered a propaganda agency by American citizens, and the press launched numerous attacks on it (Rogers, 1994).

In June 1942, with the United States now officially at war, Roosevelt ordered a major reorganization of the two offices. Donovan's COI became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a paramilitary organization primarily devoted to covert psychological warfare and intelligence operations in foreign countries. Directed by Elmer Davis, a CBS news reporter and Committee for National Morale member, the Office of War Information (OWI) was created to consolidate the functions of the OFF and attracted many prominent communication scholars, including Wilbur Schramm, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Harold Lasswell, Samuel Stouffer, Carl Hovland, Hadley Cantril, Robert K. Merton, George Gallup, and Elmo Roper. Operating both in the United States and in foreign countries, its purview included propaganda, psychological warfare, news management, and censorship.

In parallel to the development of these civilian and paramilitary agencies, another part of the network was developed within the Army. Key to this initiative was Assistant to the Secretary of War John J. McCloy who had traveled to Nazi Germany and was impressed by the effectiveness of fascist propaganda. In June 1941, McCloy ordered Brigadier General Sherman Miles to set up a special study group to plan future psychological warfare operations. Miles appointed Colonel Percy Black to direct a small Psychologic Branch within the Army's Intelligence Division. The group carefully and deliberately avoided using terms such as "propaganda" and "control of opinion," and was often only referred to as the "Special Study Group" (Paddock, 2002, p. 9).

The OSS and the OWI agencies were dissolved in September 1945, but many of their respective branches were transferred to other agencies. During the Cold War, the propaganda and psychological warfare network did not disband, but reorganized itself through new institutions, including several university-based research centers benefiting from substantial CIA funding such as Wilbur Schramm's Institute for Communication Research at the University of Illinois and Ithiel de Sola Pool's Center for International Studies at the MIT (Glander, 2000; Simpson, 1994).

The story of the Second World War propaganda and psychological warfare network, with its numerous reshuffling of cards, echoes two overlapping questions that were never completely resolved by the administration. The first question concerns the direction and organization of propaganda and psychological warfare. Roosevelt seriously considered appointing George Creel, the leader of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during the First World War. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes opposed this plan and managed to finance the Committee for National Morale, hoping that the social scientists might provide an alternative to Creel's return (Turner, 2013). The second question concerns the definition of propaganda and psychological warfare. Was a genuinely democratic and American type of propaganda—so-called propaganda by the fact—possible or even desirable, as MacLeish and others asserted? Was it really about beating the Germans at their own game, as Donovan and McCloy argued? Should there be a difference between domestic and foreign operations? How many agencies should be responsible and who was to direct them, civilians or the military? Lippmann was among those who

suggested solutions and promoted the involvement of social scientists in propaganda and psychological warfare operations.

### **The “Layman Journalist” and the Committee for National Morale**

According to Arthur Upham Pope, Chairman of the Committee for National Morale, Lippmann had been “sympathetic and helpful” during the summer of 1940, when the committee was getting started.<sup>6</sup> Not only did Lippmann regularly exchange views with the founding members of the committee, but he also used his column to promote its agenda on multiple occasions.

On July 25, 1940, Thomas W. Huntington, who was to serve as secretary of the committee, sent Lippmann a copy of a letter to the editor he contributed to *The New York Times* earlier that month. Huntington’s letter, titled “Attack on Nerves—the ‘Secret Weapon’ Held to be Mental Breakdown,” described how “since 1918, German scientific research has been at work perfecting what it has today produced—a mechanism capable of converting human beings into masses of purposeless flesh, incapable of resistance in the face of an advancing military force.”<sup>7</sup> Huntington argued that radio, newspapers, and cinematographs were central to this “nerves war” as they significantly contributed to “the disorientation of the opinions and emotional attitudes of the great mass of the civil population.” Huntington wrote,

The purpose of this letter is to appeal to the leaders of American science to create among themselves a functioning unit, constituted at first of only five to ten specialists in human psychology, publicity, an allied problem, under the aegis of one or more of our leading American universities or scientific institutions or society.<sup>8</sup>

The group was supposed “to plan quickly for an adequately comprehensive further study of the strategy of this new war of words and nerves, leading to the formulation and recommendation of adequate lines of defense, national in scope.”

With the letter to the editor, Huntington enclosed a note inviting Lippmann to “contribute as the organization of plans progresses further.” Lippmann replied that “the best way to get anything done is to take it up with a few American scientists and create the nucleus of the necessary organization, and then, outside laymen journalists will have something to support.”<sup>9</sup> Lippmann also exchanged views with the committee’s chairman, Arthur Upham Pope, whom he had known since the First World War, during which they were both at the War Department.<sup>10</sup> In August 1940, Pope, sent to Lippmann “a preliminary program to show just roughly what a morale commission can and ought to do.”<sup>11</sup> Lippmann replied that he was “very much interested” in the program and that Pope “couldn’t have a better group of men for this work,

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<sup>6</sup> Pope to Lippmann, October 25, 1941.

<sup>7</sup> Huntington to Lippmann, July 25, 1940 (WLP, Box 129, Folder 2519).

<sup>8</sup> Huntington to Lippmann, July 25, 1940.

<sup>9</sup> Lippmann to Huntington, August 6, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Pope to Lippmann, March 3, 1917; April 6, 1918; May 22, 1918 (WLP, Box 27, Folder 992).

<sup>11</sup> Pope to Lippmann, August 10, 1940.

nor could a more important piece of work be undertaken."<sup>12</sup> In a subsequent letter, Pope sent to Lippmann a memo highlighting what the group was driving at, and wrote that he could be "of greatest assistance, at this juncture—or any other juncture."<sup>13</sup> When the committee finally began its activities, Pope regularly wrote to Lippmann to set up meetings or send him the committee's publications, including its first, *German Psychological Warfare*.<sup>14</sup>

During autumn 1940, Lippmann's newspaper column clearly echoed the committee's agenda and conception of the problem of national morale. In a sense, he himself became one of the "laymen journalists" who finally had something to support. On September 3, 1940, Lippmann raised the problem of the nation's "psychological unpreparedness," as construed by Dr. Alfred Vagts, a member of the committee. Lippmann and Vagts's argument was that American colleges failed to teach young Americans "that they are the children of a high destiny, in the line of great men who performed great deeds."<sup>15</sup> Without a collective consciousness of the nation's greatness, Lippmann feared that America "will go to sleep and then wake up in panic," never finding "the unity which will make it secure or the hard unconquerable spirit which, if it is tested, will make it victorious." Lippmann criticized American historians who "have emptied American history of all significant meaning, of its value as a source of wisdom, of its power to teach by example" (Lippmann, 1940a, see footnote 15). His argument, emphasizing the crucial role of social sciences and humanities in the war, was consistent with the work of the committee and anticipated Wilbur Schramm's 1942 OFF plan for "a comprehensive propaganda network aimed at universities and schools" (cited in Babe, 2015, p. 91).

In his column "The Blindfolded Player," published on November 22, 1940, Lippmann (1940b) contrasted the all-powerful Nazi propaganda to the democratic propaganda of the British. "A democracy dealing with a totalitarian state is like a card player who sees only his own hand, whereas the other fellow sees all the cards that have been dealt," he wrote, emphasizing how the secretiveness of totalitarian states gave them a strategic advantage. Such a stark contrast is key to the committee's argument: On the one hand, the alleged power of Nazi propaganda and the indeterminate menace triggered by its secretiveness serves as justification for the Americans to organize defensive propaganda themselves. Yet on the other hand, Lippmann presents British propaganda as a genuinely democratic model, opposed in its nature to the totalitarian kind. In his subsequent article "The War of Nerves," published December 3, 1940 (its title echoes Huntington's letter to the editor in July of that year), Lippmann (1940c) described the powerful effects of news on day-to-day morale, and the tendency of too many to be alternately overconfident and overly depressed. He identified the origins of such nervous instability "in the deepest malady of modern society, in the loss by so many men of the conviction that the human will is free and that, therefore, each man has a personal moral personality for his acts." In contrast to such a "sin against the soul of man," Lippmann praised the "sheer force of the human will to become the masters rather than the victims of fate" (Lippmann, 1940c, see footnote 15). Once again, this diagnosis and cure can be traced

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<sup>12</sup> Lippmann to Pope, August 19, 1940.

<sup>13</sup> Pope to Lippmann, September 17, 1941.

<sup>14</sup> Pope to Lippmann, October 25, 1941.

<sup>15</sup> All references to Lippmann's column are drawn from Columbia University Libraries Archival Collections, Walter Lippmann, "Today and Tomorrow" Columns, 1931–1950.

back to the committee's suspicions about the totalitarian tendencies of mass media, and its insistence on the creation of democratic personalities committed to diversity (Turner, 2013). Journalist Raymond Gram Swing, a founding member of the committee, wrote to Lippmann that he was "deeply grateful" for the column.<sup>16</sup>

As the propaganda and psychological warfare agencies developed, Lippmann helped to strengthen their connections with the communication scholars and social scientists of the committee. For example, when the COI was created in July 1941, he advised Donovan to get in touch with Carl J. Friedrich, a committee member and director of Harvard's Radio Broadcasting Research Project, who had just completed a study entitled *Controlling Broadcasting in Wartime*.<sup>17</sup> On another occasion in August 1943, a government official from the War Department sent a confidential proposal to Lippmann for a propaganda campaign they planned to launch over Germany. Committee member Hadley Cantril, one of the founders of the field of mass communication research, had prepared the proposal.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Curious Relationship of Walter Lippmann and Wild Bill Donovan**

During the summer of 1941, when Donovan's Office of the Coordinator of Information was set up, Lippmann played an important role in defining the agency's mission and helped to recruit some of its top executives and most prominent scholars. His role in the COI can be traced back to his privileged yet enigmatic relationship with Colonel William Donovan. When Lippmann and Donovan first met remains unclear, but they had probably known each other since the early 1920s when Lippmann's career was taking off and Donovan was an influential New York lawyer and politician.

In April 1938, shortly before the outbreak of war, Lippmann began renting Donovan's house in Georgetown. "It is one of the pleasantest houses to live in that I have ever known," an enthusiastic Lippmann wrote to Donovan.<sup>19</sup> But at the end of May, Lippmann and his wife set off to Europe for the summer, and upon their return in September, they moved out of Donovan's house.<sup>20</sup> At that time, Donovan was about to begin a series of trips to Europe at the special request of President Roosevelt himself. His mission was to build a global intelligence network.

When Donovan was appointed director of the COI, Lippmann provided him with a list of men he thought suitable to fill the top executive positions of the new agency. In July 1941, following up from a previous conversation, Lippmann interestingly suggested geographer and John Hopkins University

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<sup>16</sup> Gram Swing to Lippmann, December 3, 1940 (WLP, Box 104, Folder 2033).

<sup>17</sup> Lippmann to Friedrich, July 31, 1941 (WLP, Box 72, Folder 834). During the 1930s, Friedrich, along with his Harvard colleague Gordon W. Allport, was one of the leading authorities on the study of propaganda. In 1935, Friedrich discussed his research with Lippmann and asked for an introduction to George Gallup (Friedrich to Lippmann, October 29, 1935).

<sup>18</sup> Cox to Lippmann, August 2, 1943 (WLP, Box 65, Folder 531).

<sup>19</sup> Lippmann to Donovan, April 7, 1938 (WLP, Box 67, Folder 629).

<sup>20</sup> Lippmann to Stickney, December 21, 1938 (WLP, Box 104, Folder 2006).

President Isaiah Bowman for his knowledge of "the geography of South America."<sup>21</sup> Referring to their First World War joint involvement in the Inquiry, in which Bowman replaced Lippmann following overseas deployment, "Bowman," Lippmann added, "was one of the principal figures of Colonel House's organization that I mentioned to you the other day." Lippmann also directly recommended to Donovan high-profile scholars such as Yale University Professor Nicholas J. Spykman and historians Dexter Perkins, A. Whitney Griswold, and William Yandell Elliott. In September 1941, Archibald MacLeish sent a note to Lippmann confirming their common involvement in the recruitment of academics:

Bill Donovan has asked me to invite the members of the little group I was telling you about the other evening to dinner with him . . . at his house. . . . It has proved to be the devil [*sic*] and all to get various people with their various jobs lined up and I very much hope Monday will prove to be convenient for you.<sup>22</sup>

In a following letter to Donovan, Lippmann offered a detailed written program for the COI's analysis of foreign propaganda:

Following our conversation of last night: There should be, at regular intervals, an analytical report on Axis propaganda. I have seen reports of the kind I have in mind in England, where they are being prepared by the Ministry of Information as secret documents for the use of the cabinet. My idea is to issue somewhat similar reports in order to enable the American people to identify Axis propaganda when they meet it. A copy of one of the British reports would provide a first working model. . . . No editorial comment, direct or indirect, should be permitted in the report and it should be written in a cold, dry style. The scheme should be discussed with representative publications and editors before adoption. In inaugurating the scheme there should be a narrative exposition of the measures taken in Axis countries to prevent the people from hearing from the outer world—punishment for listening to radio, confiscation of radio sets, censorship, jamming, etc., etc. It should then be stated that, in the United States, we prefer to reverse the totalitarian method, and instead of suppressing alien propaganda, we propose to receive it, analyze it, identify it, and make it clearly and regularly known to the public.<sup>23</sup>

Lippmann wrote this letter 24 years after he proposed a draft program of what was to become the CPI, which was similarly conceived to be "a clearing house of information for the activities of the government" and supposed to "follow and report upon the allied, neutral and enemy press."<sup>24</sup> As far back as 1917, Lippmann favored the involvement of social scientists and communication scholars in propaganda

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<sup>21</sup> Lippmann to Donovan, July 24, 1941.

<sup>22</sup> MacLeish to Lippmann, September 23, 1941 (WLP, Box 88, Folder 1421). A previous letter from Donovan mentioned "the group that MacLiesh [*sic*] brought in to make suggestions as to the man to head up the analytical machine." Donovan to Lippmann, July 31, 1941.

<sup>23</sup> Lippmann to Donovan, October 7, 1941.

<sup>24</sup> Lippmann to House, April 12, 1917 (WLP, Box 14, Folder 564).

matter. At the time, he suggested building the to-be CPI around the Columbia School of Journalism Intelligence and Publicity Division set up by Professor Walter B. Pitkin.<sup>25</sup> Among other initiatives, Pitkin's division issued a series of pamphlets, authored by Columbia University professors, on the "problems and duties of American citizens in meeting the national needs in the present world controversy" ("Journalism scribes," 1917, p. 3).

A last significant episode that sheds light on the Lippmann and Donovan's relationship occurred a few years later, at the beginning of the Cold War. In May 1948, CBS journalist George Polk was mysteriously murdered while covering the Greek Civil War. Lippmann, who knew Polk and had recommended his application for a Nieman Fellowship, was soon appointed head of a committee of media representatives—which became known as the "Lippmann Committee"—responsible for monitoring the Greeks' investigation of the murder and for preventing any form of cover-up. As surprising as it may sound, Lippmann appointed his good old friend Bill Donovan as the committee's special advisor. At the time, Donovan was very much involved in the newly formed CIA, which he regarded as his own child (Marton, 1990, p. 202).

In August, Greek police arrested journalist Gregory Staktopoulos for the murder of George Polk. Staktopoulos confessed to a communist conspiracy to kill Polk under extensive torture, and was sentenced to prison. Lippmann privately admitted that he was not convinced at all by the Greek investigation, but kept his doubts out of his final report (Steel, 1980, p. 487). The case was closed, even though many members of the New York Newspaper Guild tried to form their own investigative commission. The guild's actions were preempted by the Lippmann Committee, which refused to lend them money. Journalists John Donovan, Ted Berkman, and William Price conducted their own investigations and did not agree with the Lippmann Committee's conclusions. Colonel Jim Kellis, who was part of Donovan's team of investigators, also came to the conclusion that Staktopoulos was a scapegoat and he brought the matter to Lippmann on several occasions, but Lippmann kept Kellis's discoveries very much to himself (Marton, 1990, p. 261). It is clear today that Staktopoulos was framed and that the Lippmann Committee played a role in a cover-up operation orchestrated by various intelligence agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA; Marton, 1990).

#### **John J. McCloy's Psychological Warfare Branch and the Massive Internment of Japanese Americans**

Lippmann's involvement with John J. McCloy's Psychological Warfare Branch can be traced back to April 25, 1941, only three days after McCloy took office as Assistant Secretary of War and a few weeks before the creation of the branch. On that day, at the Army and Navy Club, McCloy had lunch with Lippmann, Brigadier General Sherman Miles, and Colonel O. N. Solbert, who eventually succeeded Colonel Percy Black as head of the branch. According to McCloy's agenda, the meeting concerned "public information."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> At least two more plans for the CPI were submitted, one by journalist David Lawrence and another by foreign correspondent Arthur Bullard.

<sup>26</sup> Diary of John J. McCloy, April 25, 1941 (John J. McCloy Papers, Box DY1, Folders 1–3).

In August of that year, as the branch was setting up, Edwin Ray Guthrie, a psychologist and psychological warfare specialist acting as an expert consultant to the Secretary of War, contacted Lippmann. Guthrie asked Lippmann to join "a small group of officers and civilian experts to initiate special studies in connection with the work of the military intelligence division."<sup>27</sup> The "advisory committee of expert Consultants to the Secretary of War," continued Guthrie, was to be composed of "men preeminent in their respective field of endeavor, who cannot give their full-time services to the government, but whose professional advice is made available to the Special Study Group." Among its members, the committee included psychology professors and Committee for National Morale members Walter Bingham and Robert Yerkes, who both had played key roles in the War Department during the First World War (Capshew, 1999). The scribbles on the letter suggest that Lippmann responded by phone.

During the war, Lippmann and McCloy regularly exchanged views on various questions, including the content of the U.S. Army's newspaper *The Stars and Stripes* and psychological warfare in occupied Germany.<sup>28</sup> At the time, McCloy trusted Lippmann enough to show him army intelligence report (Hoffmann, 1995). However, their exchanges were mostly related to the situation on the West Coast.<sup>29</sup> After Pearl Harbor, Lippmann and McCloy both were concerned by the specter of Japanese propaganda on the coast and were afraid that Japanese fifth columns were planning to use short-wave radio to coordinate future attacks on American soil.<sup>30</sup> McCloy soon came to the conclusion that a large "evacuation" of Japanese Americans was necessary. According to his biographer, McCloy was more responsible than anyone else for the internment of more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry during the war (Bird, 1992). Lippmann also played an important role in the operation. After being briefed by General John DeWitt—whose views concerning the internment of Japanese Americans were similar to McCloy's—Lippmann, without acknowledging the meeting or his frequent exchanges with McCloy (Irons, 1983), published his most infamous column, "The Fifth Column on the Coast" (Lippmann, 1942a). Repeating DeWitt's twisted argument, Lippmann argued that the coast was "in imminent danger of a combined attack from within and from without" and that the absence of sabotage on the coast was "a sign that the blow is well-organized and that it is held back until it can be struck with maximum effect." In other words, for Lippmann, the fact that nothing happened was a sign that terrible things were about to happen.

Syndicated in some 250 newspapers, Lippmann's column had tremendous impact: It triggered public hysteria and proved decisive in winning crucial support for McCloy against other high-ranking officials, including Attorney General Francis Biddle, who opposed the plan for internment.<sup>31</sup> Lippmann's argument was popularized by strident right-wing journalist Westbrook Pegler, among others, who referred to Lippmann as "a high-grade fellow with a heavy sense of responsibility" (cited in Irons, 1983, p. 61). At

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<sup>27</sup> Guthrie to Lippmann, August 2, 1941 (WLP, Box 106, Folder 2130).

<sup>28</sup> Lippmann to McCloy, October 21, 1942; McCloy to Lippmann, May 30, 1945 (WLP, Box 86, Folder 1393).

<sup>29</sup> McCloy to Lippmann, June 8, 1942; June 15, 1942; June 24, 1942; Lippmann to McCloy, June 18, 1942.

<sup>30</sup> In February 1942, Lippmann went to the West Coast to investigate this issue and meet with military personnel (Steel, 1980, p. 393).

<sup>31</sup> Concerning Lippmann's column, Francis Biddle observed, "It seems close to shouting FIRE! in the theater; and if race riot occurs, these writers will bear a heavy responsibility" (Daniels, 1971, p. 70).

the time, Lippmann was far from being the only newspaperman to call for such a radical measure to be taken. But the general public and many fellow journalists considered Lippmann "the most wise and forceful spokesman for objectivity in journalism" (Schudson, 1978, p. 151). Lippmann's voice was highly credible to many people who were convinced that he was recommending a course of action based on objective facts. On the contrary, Lippmann played a key role in a well-conceived propaganda campaign conducted by officials who decided "to put a bit of 'manufactured' confusion to work for them in order to sustain their version of stability" (Bishop, 2000, p. 72) and who were eager to strengthen public opinion in favor of war.

### **Conclusion: Revisiting Lippmann's Legacy in Communication Studies**

This overview of Lippmann's involvement in the Second World War propaganda and psychological warfare network remains partial. On several other occasions, Lippmann's path intersected with other actors from this network in very significant ways. For example, Lippmann also had contact with British intelligence and propaganda agencies during the war. He was a close associate of William S. Stephenson (alias "Intrepid"), the head of the New York-based British Security Coordination (BSC). The BSC collaborated closely with Donovan's COI and OSS and manipulated the American press and public opinion to stimulate pro-war sentiments. According to Mahl (1998),

The "BSC Account" lists Lippmann "among those who rendered service of particular value," but he was not only taking advice, he was giving it. In late winter or early spring 1940, Lippmann even told the British to initiate Secret Intelligence Service operations against American isolationists. His exact thoughts are unknown. His specific ideas were "too delicate" for the British Foreign Office to put to paper, but the idea is quite clear. Lippmann was a heavyweight. His suggestions on how to handle the American public reached as high as the British War Cabinet. (pp. 54–55)

Lippmann's involvement in propaganda and psychological warfare continued in the early years of the Cold War. In 1953, he worked as an expert consultant to William H. Jackson's Committee on International Information Activities (Jackson Committee/PCIIA). Finley (2016) suggests that Lippmann, along with Edward Bernays and Milton Eisenhower, "represented an informal discourse coalition" arguing that organizational solutions were not enough and that "sustaining a new, unified, and dynamic Cold War effort required a shift in individual mentalities and practices" (pp. 189–190). Lippmann specifically suggested the creation of a "war college for psychological warfare" (Finley, 2016, p. 196) as a solution. In a private letter to the committee's chair, he wrote, "there is need for indoctrination in the art of political warfare of people engaged in it" and recommended "to make it compulsory to all people working on your project that they read and study Machiavelli's *Discourses*. They are much more valuable in this field than *The Prince*, which is usually read."<sup>32</sup> During the same period, Lippmann, along with Harold Lasswell and Edward P. Lilly, consulted with the newly formed United States Information Agency and assisted with the Operations Coordinating Board Doctrinal Warfare and Ideological Programs task forces (Barnhisel, 2015).

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<sup>32</sup> Lippmann to Jackson, March 28, 1953 (WLP, Box 80, Folder 1136).

During the Second World War, Lippmann was far from being a repentant propagandist or a journalist embodying disinterested reporting. It is true that he publicly criticized wartime agencies a few times. For example, in his column of July 11, 1942, he argued that war information was transmitted badly to the public and that government agencies should work more closely with journalists. But such criticisms should be understood in the context of Lippmann's involvement with behind-the-scenes activities and rivalries. Following Pearl Harbor, he regularly criticized the underdevelopment of wartime agencies, urging for "a drastic change in the whole organization" and the creation of a cabinet-level position (Lippmann, 1941a). In the following months, rumors of a major reorganization intensified. In March 1942, a dispatch from the Associated Press announced the upcoming merger of all war publicity: "Not only government officials, but numerous outside publicists, including Walter Lippmann and Elmer Davis have been mentioned as possibilities" ("Co-ordination," 1942) for heading the new agency. From April to July 1942, several newspapers and magazines reported that Lippmann was on the short-list (the so-called dope lists) for the role. It is difficult to assess to what extent Lippmann was interested in the position and his embarrassment when he was not appointed.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, three days after Davis took office, Lippmann (1942b) deplored that the new position—unlike what he suggested—did not have cabinet rank and second-guessed the appointment of Davis, who he described as a "technician" without political experience. A few weeks later, in a series of private letters, Lippmann asked Davis to give him access to some of the OWI material broadcast to foreign countries, and then blamed him for being unable to provide it.<sup>34</sup> At one point, Lippmann even threatened to publicly criticize Davis: "I do not want to wish to make a public issue of this matter if it can be avoided. But this may become unavoidable if you refuse the information, and also refuse to explain why you refuse it."<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, Lippmann's public criticisms of wartime agencies always dealt with trivial questions, and never concerned the hard questions he himself formulated in the 1920s about democracy in the age of propaganda. When *The New York Times* journalist Arthur Krock observed that "a free press had vanished for the duration of the war" (1941, p. E3), Lippmann counterattacked, writing that such a remark was "dangerously defeatist and misleading" (1941b).

With regard to the contemporary debates concerning Lippmann's legacy in communication studies, this examination of his activities during the Second World War should be considered with great caution. Life and work can only illuminate one another partially, so it would be a great mistake to reduce Lippmann to an apologist and practitioner of propaganda and psychological warfare. His work contributed to broaching new questions about media effects, agenda setting, and gatekeeping. *A Test of the News* (Lippmann & Merz, 1920) and *Liberty and the News* (Lippmann, 1920) can rightfully be described as original attempts to debunk wartime propaganda, and Lippmann's (1922) notion of "stereotype" proved useful to many propaganda critics. Lippmann's paradoxical stance concerning propaganda is in fact typical of an era during which numerous humanist intellectuals, including the members of the Committee for

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<sup>33</sup> In August 1945, Lippmann turned down James Byrne's proposition to run the information and propaganda activities that had just been transferred from the OWI to the State Department (Steel, 1980, pp. 422–423).

<sup>34</sup> Lippmann to Davis, July 24, 1942; July 29, 1942; November 25, 1942; Davis to Lippmann, November 24, 1942 (WLP, Box 66, Folder 579).

<sup>35</sup> Lippmann to Davis, November 21, 1942.

National Morale, debunked enemy propaganda and simultaneously wished to implement a "good," "national," and "protective" propaganda (Gary, 1996). When Lippmann wrote to MacLeish that he hoped to "reverse the totalitarian method," he meant something similar. But Lippmann's behind-the-scenes activities, especially his role in the cover-up of George Polk's murder and his acquaintance with Donovan and other psychological warfare moguls are realities that cannot be avoided in any discussion about his legacy, and this also applies to his role in the imprisonment of Japanese Americans. At the same time, while considering these hard facts, it should be remembered that the Cold War political climate was complex to navigate, and journalism had greatly changed since Lippmann's era (see McGarr, 2017). In the 1920s and 1930s, it was still considered normal for a journalist to run for public office, and journalists had greater access to public figures and politicians. In the same vein, the notion of propaganda bears a much more negative connotation today than it did during the two world wars, and the risks of anachronisms are great.

The history of communication research makes frequent use of great men, and Lippmann has been part of this story. Until the mid-1990s, the history of the field was mostly the history of its "founding fathers" and their great ideas or, alternatively, Katz and Lazarsfeld's famous narrative of the coming to life of communication research during the Second World War, reducing pre-war research to naïve speculations. Often interwoven, these two narratives constitute, even today, most of the field's remembered past (Pooley, 2008). The two stories similarly focus on key actors (and their ideas) and were designed with the strategic aim of legitimating the field and some of its actors, while remaining silent about more embarrassing episodes. Both narratives carefully avoid pointing out that many prominent founders of the field were Cold Warriors pursuing secret government research on propaganda and psychological warfare.

Despite the pioneering work of the "new historians" since the mid-1990s, which emphasizes the relationship between propaganda and psychological warfare agencies and the institutionalization of communication research in the 1940s and 1950s, the recent revival of interest in Lippmann remains mostly concerned with the classic works he wrote in the 1920s. For example, Jansen (2012) emphasizes Lippmann's pragmatism and opposes his early works to the "middle-range theorizing" dominating communication research in the 1940s and 1950s. Blaming "a dramatic shift in the American intellectual and cultural climate" (Jansen, 2012, p. 21), Jansen deplores that Lippmann's ideas were not attractive to the scholars of the era. For Jansen (2012), Lippmann's support of "disinterested science" and "categorical opposition to propaganda in all its forms" (p. 21) estranged him from the founders of the field by the late 1940s.

The picture we offer here contrasts with this historical interpretation and with the received history about the origins of the field, which emphasizes ideas over institutionalization. Looking at Lippmann's role, it is possible to consider the history of the field in a more coherent way, from the First World War to the early days of the Cold War, while assessing the complex coshaping of ideas, contexts, and actors in the coming to life of communication research.

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