

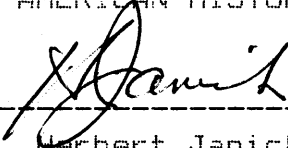
ABSTRACT

A THESIS

GEORGE CREEL, THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION,  
AND U.S. PROPAGANDA DURING WORLD WAR I  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
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BY  
STEWART HALSEY ROSS

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## Abstract

U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, by executive order of April 14, 1917, created a "Committee on Public Information" to be the nation's wartime propaganda organization and appointed muckraking journalist George Creel its chairman. Creel rapidly organized and efficiently administered a thoroughgoing public-relations and advertising effort, using all communications techniques suitable to the media of the times and directed to its target audiences--the U.S., its allies, neutral countries, enemies, and finally the Bolsheviks. Creel hired the nation's best marketing-communications people, enlisted leading professional writers and artists, and engaged well-known historians to serve as writers and consultants. Creel put his personal stamp on the CPI becoming the nation's undoubted propaganda czar.

The purpose of this paper is to show that Creel operated his remarkably powerful organization essentially without supervision or restriction--and independently of the State Department whose role CPI often usurped. Creel expanded its operations from an "information communicator" to an "intelligence gatherer" for the Administration as CPI's overseas agents operated increasingly in clandestine roles. By war's end, CPI even was able to function as a covert subverter of governments.

Despite Wilson's strong views that U.S. propaganda efforts should be "truthful"--and Creel's consistent complaints that CPI transmitted "information...not propaganda"--CPI censored, managed, and manufactured news in support of the war effort. Certainly, CPI met its goals; it successfully fought the fight "for the minds of man, for the conquest of their convictions" as Creel said again and again.

Perhaps CPI performed too well. Its drumbeat for domestic conformity supported active suppression of civil liberties; hatreds generated for "the Hun" demanded nothing less than Germany's unconditional surrender, limiting Wilson's flexibility in Paris; unleashed passions that helped spawn the post-war "Red Scare;" and contributed to 70 years of American hostility to the Soviet Union.