**Assignment #3**

**The Need for Hermeneutics in Today’s Media and Propaganda-Savy Society**

COM 803-12: Hermeneutics and Communication (Fall 2024, Subterm A)

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### *Instructor Assignment Essay*

1. Write a 5-page paper about the need for hermeneutics, or how to intelligently read the scholarly subject literature and published social research about the topic of your research interest. Explain why learning how to read scholarly literature is needed to learn how to do scholarly writing about your research interest. Cite sources from the seminal course resources and find at least two articles about a topic of your interest.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the issue of hermeneutics and a subject of their research interest for this assignment.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of ten scholarly research sources (NOTE: Use at least five books provided in course resources and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**The Need for Hermeneutics in Today’s Media and Propaganda-Savy Society**

**Introduction**

There is an urgent need for hermeneutics in today’s society where propaganda has become a major cause for action and decisions by Americans. Today’s society is one characterized by extraordinary use of social media and rapid diffusion of all types of communication media and access to the Internet. This has been good because it has increased social and cultural interaction across diverse places and spaces. At the same time, this increased access has created great opportunities for rumors, propaganda, and lies that are influencing people’s decisions, mindsets, and behaviors in highly negative ways. The media, which was once meant to be one of the great bases of continued democratic society, has become enraptured in the process of sometimes spreading highly misleading information and ideas that are dangerous to individuals, groups, and community. Moreover, people are quick to take what they hear as reality and fact. The nature of American politics and the increasing absence of civic knowledge and basic understanding of economy, history, culture, geography and our most fundamental ideas have resulted in a dire need for hermeneutics in today’s society. As more and more Americans are misled by bad actors, the media, politicians and uneducated influencers, there is a great need for hermeneutics in American schools, colleges, and universities so that individuals can develop the skills to better understand what they read and listen.

The past eight years beginning with the United States Presidential election that saw Hilary Rodham Clinton and Donald J. Trump run for the White House and leading up to the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020, the Presidency of Joe Biden, and now to the emerging presidential election between Kamala Harris and Donald J. Trump in November 2024, have been extraordinary in terms of the role of the media, and especially social media and the widespread propaganda that have beset American society and citizens from all sides – not just from actors and players on the American social-political scene, but also from outsiders including other nations’ governments and private groups from those societies seeking to affect American politics and lives. Given such an atmosphere, the need for Hermeneutics has never been so urgent in American society and schools, colleges, and universities need to adopt a mandatory course to equip students to safely navigate their way in this media and propaganda-savvy global arena.

**America’s Media and Propaganda-Savvy Culture**

We are living in a propaganda-savvy culture where the American media has become a spectacle for so many actors and influencers. Some are trying to convince us to support and endorse their ideological and political ideas on issues such as abortion, immigration, and various community and national policy issues including differential perspectives on health, education, and economy. Some are trying to mislead with misinformation to start their own ideological following or group, while others are parts of larger entities capitalizing upon public deception. These many untrustworthy sources of published texts and other sources create a problem with understanding and lead to people acting on unchecked opinions and misinformation (Booth, Colomb, Williams & Bizup, 2016). With foundational knowledge of hermeneutics, citizens will develop both awareness and strategies for interpreting and understanding numerous and different types of textual materials. Today’s news and information media are plastered with propaganda and are characterized by high levels of corruption and polarization (Levy, 2021). As a result, people find it most challenging to distinguish between fact and fiction, between the real and the fake, while others simply lack the foundational knowledge to evaluate and assess these media sources for their own good.

While American politics has always been high entertaining, 2016 became especially propaganda-driven because of candidate Donald J. Trump and his campaign strategies, and the involvement of foreign actors in the United States presidential election. Since then, propaganda in the form of misinformation, misrepresentation, false and misleading publications and news headlines have become commonplace. This extensive presence of misleading information and publications, especially via social media, is affecting the mental health of Americans (Braghieri, Levy & Makarin, 2022), especially because too many lack the skills and abilities to interpret and understand the true meaning of such communications.

**The Value and Importance of Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the science and methodology of interpretation. Hermeneutics is about understanding texts and other sources in order to understand their meaning (Gilhus, 2021). As individuals and Americans, we encounter and are bombarded by texts and other sources every day that affect our thinking, our behaviors, our responses to news, ideas, political headlines and other aspects of society and the global world and economy. Americans are exposed by various media to news from unworthy websites and sources on a daily basis (Guess, Nyhan & Reifler, 2020). With much of the news being disseminated in writing via online publications of books, blogs, social media posts, and websites, white papers, peer-reviewed articles, and other sources, Americans need to not just be literate to understand the contents of these texts and other sources, they need to be able to understand their meaning and value. Hermeneutics offers the opportunity for Americans to learn and understand how to interpret the true meaning of texts no matter what the sources are.

Hermeneutics equips individuals and communities with the skills and knowledge of how to properly read, understand and interpret texts. Literacy or the ability to recognize words is simply not enough to understand literature of any kind (Duvall & Hays, 2012; Adler & Van Doren, 1965). Schools, colleges, and universities need to start investing more time in teaching their pupils how to approach and read literature, whether it is the Bible or any type of literature. One of the challenges that must be overcome in order to foster better hermeneutics in American society is changing Americans’ attitude toward reading. As Hack (2008) notes, “Our attitude makes a difference in what we read and how we read it: the morning newspaper will never be as compelling as a letter from a lover, nor will it be read and savored – and re-read – with the same care or attention to detail” (p. 8). This is very much the case. For example, students who have negative attitudes toward reading usually underperform on tests and in academic achievements compared to their counterparts who are motivated about reading (Tus, 2020; Par, 2020). Thus, the attitude with which we approach texts and other sources matter.

Hermeneutics as a discipline will teach Americans not just methods of interpreting texts, but teach them how to identify trustworthy research on which to base their decisions and actions (Booth, Colomb, Williams & Bizup, 2016). Hermeneutics can help to rekindle the zeal to read more efficiently and effectively. That is, it can better inform our understanding of words or texts and guard us from misinterpretation, deception, and the effects of propaganda. As Zimmerman (2015) notes, Hermeneutics helps us to better understand human language to reacquaints us with the love of words. When we love words and language, we seek to use them accurately and in accordance with truth and in moral ways. Hermeneutics is not just about teaching individuals how to read and understand text, but it is also about teaching them how to appreciate written or spoken words in ways that are credible. Interpreting and understanding texts or other materials published or broadcasted or in other forms can better inform Americans in helping to sustain their rights and opportunities, especially when it comes to them making decisions regarding their freedom and voting on certain policy issues. For example, many Americans are not proficient at interpreting amendments and other issues written on voting ballots.

**Conclusion**

There is an urgent need for hermeneutics in today’s society where propaganda has become a major cause for action and decisions by Americans. Americans are bombarded by texts from all directions that are affecting how they react, behave, respond to each other, and the decisions that they make regarding democracy, governance, and rights. The Internet, social media, traditional mass media, and other news and information sources have high levels of propaganda and misinformation that can mislead individuals in their understanding of what is happening around them today. While individuals have a responsibility to sort out and discern information, most lack the ability and training to do so because they simply do not know how to properly and accurately decipher texts and language. This explains why over the past several years, from the 2016 U.S. presidential election to the COVID-19 Pandemic, to the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and so many other challenges, Americans have so much misunderstanding of what is really at stake. The urgent need to teach Americans how to read, understand, and interpret texts and other sources is evident, and schools, colleges, and universities need to respond to this need by making Hermeneutics a mandatory part of their curriculum.

**Works Cited**

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