Edward Bernays

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Edward Louis Bernays (November 22, 1891 – March 9, 1995) was an Austrian-American pioneer in the field of public relations and propaganda, referred to in his obituary as "the father of public relations".^[1] He combined the ideas of Gustave Le Bon and Wilfred Trotter on crowd psychology with the psychoanalytical ideas of his uncle, Sigmund Freud.

He felt this manipulation was necessary in society, which he regarded as irrational and dangerous as a result of the "herd instinct" that Trotter had described. [2] Adam Curtis's awardwinning 2002 documentary for the BBC, *The Century of the*

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November 22, 1891

Vienna, Austria-Hungary

Died March 9, 1995 (aged 103)

Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

Occupation Public relations, advertising

Self, pinpoints Bernays as the originator of modern public relations, and Bernays was named one of the 100 most influential Americans of the 20th century by *Life* magazine.^[3]

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Life and influences

Born 1891 in Vienna to Jewish parents, Bernays was by two branches of his family tree the nephew of psychoanalysis pioneer Sigmund Freud. His mother was Sigmund's sister Anna and his father was Ely Bernays, brother of Freud's wife Martha Bernays. In 1892 his family moved to New York City, where he attended DeWitt Clinton High School.^[4] In 1912 he graduated from Cornell University with a degree in agriculture, but chose journalism as his first career. He married Doris E. Fleischman in 1922.^[5]

Bernays, working for the administration of Woodrow Wilson during World War I with the Committee on Public Information, was influential in promoting the idea that America's war efforts were primarily aimed at "bringing democracy to all of Europe". Following the war, he was invited by Woodrow Wilson to attend the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Stunned by the degree to which the democracy slogan had swayed the public both at home and abroad, he wondered whether this propaganda model could be employed during peacetime. Due to negative implications surrounding the word propaganda because of its use by the Germans in World War I, he promoted the term "Public Relations". [6] According to the BBC interview with Bernays's daughter Anne, Bernays felt that the public's democratic judgment was "not to be relied upon" and he feared that "they [the American public] could very easily vote for the wrong man or want the wrong thing, so that they had to be guided from above." This "guidance" was interpreted by Anne to mean that her father believed in a sort of "enlightened despotism" ideology. [7]

This thinking was heavily shared and influenced by Walter Lippmann, one of the most prominent American political columnists at the time. Bernays and Lippmann sat together on the U.S. Committee on Public Information, and Bernays quotes Lippmann extensively in his seminal work *Propaganda*.

Bernays also drew on the ideas of the French writer Gustave LeBon, the originator of crowd psychology, and of Wilfred Trotter, who promoted similar ideas in the anglophone world in his book *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*. Bernays refers to these two names in his writings. Trotter, who was a head and neck surgeon at University College Hospital, London, read Freud's works, and it was he who introduced Wilfred Bion, whom he lived and worked with, to Freud's ideas. When Freud fled Vienna for London after the Anschluss, Trotter became his personal physician, and Wilfred Bion and Ernest Jones became key members of the Freudian psychoanalysis movement in England, and would develop the field of Group Dynamics, largely associated with the Tavistock Institute where many of Freud's followers worked. Thus ideas of group psychology and psychoanalysis came together in London around World War II.

Bernays's public relations efforts helped to popularize Freud's theories in the United States. Bernays also pioneered the PR industry's use of psychology and other social sciences to design its public persuasion campaigns:

If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it? The recent practice of propaganda has proved that it is possible, at least up to a certain point and within certain limits. [8]

He called this scientific technique of opinion-molding the 'engineering of consent'. [9]

Bernays began his career as press agent in 1913, counseling to theaters, concerts and the ballet. In 1917, US President Woodrow Wilson engaged George Creel and realizing one of his ideas, he founded the Committee on Public Information. Bernays, Carl Byoir and John Price Jones worked together to influence public opinion towards supporting American participation in World War I.

In 1919, he opened an office as Public Relations Counselor in New York. He held the first Public Relations course at New York University in 1923, publishing the first groundbreaking book on public relations titled *Crystallizing Public Opinion* that same year.^[10]

As for Bernay's many accomplishments, he also worked with a vast number of famous clients, including President Calvin Coolidge, Procter & Gamble, CBS, the United Fruit Company, the American Tobacco Company, General Electric, Dodge Motors, and the fluoridationists of the Public Health Service. Beyond his contributions to these

famous and powerful clients, Bernays revolutionized public relations by combining traditional press agentry with the techniques of psychology and sociology to create what one writer has called "the science of ballyhoo".

Techniques

Bernays refined and popularized the use of the press release, following its invention by PR man Ivy Lee, who had issued a press release after the 1906 Atlantic City train wreck. One of the most famous campaigns of Bernays was the women's cigarette smoking campaign in 1920s. Bernays helped the smoking industry overcome one of the biggest social taboos of the time: women smoking in public. Women were only allowed to smoke in designated areas, or not at all. Women caught violating this rule were arrested. [11] Bernays staged the 1929 Easter parade in New York City, showing models holding lit Lucky Strike cigarettes, or "Torches of Freedom". After the historic public event, women started lighting up more than ever before. It was through Bernays that women's smoking habits started to become socially acceptable. Bernays created this event as news, which it was not. Bernays convinced industries that the news, not advertising, was the best medium to carry their message to an unsuspecting public.

One of Bernays's favorite techniques for manipulating public opinion was the indirect use of "third party authorities" to plead his clients' causes. "If you can influence the leaders, either with or without their conscious cooperation, you automatically influence the group which they sway." he said. In order to promote sales of bacon, for example, he conducted a survey of physicians and reported their recommendation that people eat heavy breakfasts. He sent the results of the survey to 5,000 physicians, along with publicity touting bacon and eggs as an ideal heavy breakfast and superior for health to the then traditional breakfast of tea (or coffee) and toast.

Bernays also drew upon his uncle Sigmund's psychoanalytic ideas for the benefit of commerce in order to promote, by indirection, commodities as diverse as cigarettes, soap and books. In addition to the theories of his uncle, Bernays used those of Ivan Pavlov.

PR industry historian Scott Cutlip describes Bernays as "perhaps the most fabulous and fascinating individual in public relations, a man who was bright, articulate to excess, and most of all, an innovative thinker and philosopher of this vocation that was in its infancy when he opened his office in New York in June 1919".

Bernays used the "Freudian theory" to deal with the public's conception of communism, as he believed that we should not be easing the public's fear of communism, but rather promote that fear and play with the public's emotions of it. This theory was so powerful that it became a weapon of its own during the Cold War.

Philosophy and public relations

Bernays's papers, opened in April 2010,^[12] contain a wealth of information on the founding of the field in the twenties. *The Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays* (1965) contains an overview of the decade. Many of the essays selected for the Coolidge-Consumerism collection from the Bernays Papers were written as early drafts for *The Biography of an Idea*.

Bernays, who pursued his calling in New York City from 1919 to 1963, styled himself a "public relations counsel". He had very pronounced views on the differences between what he did and what people in advertising did. A pivotal figure in the orchestration of elaborate corporate advertising campaigns and multi-media consumer spectacles, he nevertheless is among those listed in the acknowledgments section of the seminal government social science study "Recent Social Trends in the United States" (1933).

The belief that propaganda and news were legitimate tools of his business, and his ability to offer philosophical justifications for these beliefs that ultimately embraced the whole democratic way of life, in Bernays's mind set his work in public relations apart from what ad men did. The Bernays essays "A Public Relations Counsel States His Views" (1927) and "This Business of Propaganda" (1928) show that Bernays regarded advertising men as special pleaders, merely paid to persuade people to accept an idea or commodity. The public relations counsel, on the other hand, he saw as an Emersonian-like creator of events that dramatized new concepts and perceptions, and even influenced the actions of leaders and groups in society. (Though it is doubtful that transcendentalist Emerson, enamored as he was with the spiritual traditions of India and their denunciation of materialism—and promotion of a simplified "inward" existence instead—would have found Bernays and his efforts on behalf of corporations appealing.)

Bernays's vision was of a utopian society in which individuals' dangerous libidinal energies, the psychic and emotional energy associated with instinctual biological drives that Bernays viewed as inherently dangerous given his observation of societies like the Germans under Hitler, could be harnessed and channeled by a corporate elite for economic benefit. Through the use of mass production, big business could fulfill the constant cravings of the inherently irrational and desire-driven masses, simultaneously securing the niche of a mass production economy (even in peacetime), as well as sating the dangerous animal urges that threatened to tear society apart if left unquelled.

Bernays's magisterial, philosophical touch is in evidence in "Manipulating Public Opinion" (1928) when he writes: "This is an age of mass production. In the mass production of materials a broad technique has been developed and applied to their distribution. In this age, too, there must be a technique for the mass distribution of ideas." Yet he recognized the potential danger in so grand a scheme and in "This Business of Propaganda" (1928), as elsewhere, sounded the great caveat to his vision: a public relations counsel "must never accept a retainer or assume a position which puts his duty to the groups he represents above his duty to society". [13] (A curious comment, considering his willingness to promote products of questionable value to humanity—such as the aforementioned cigarettes: a publicity campaign he regretted later in life, after his wife died of lung cancer.)

Propaganda

In *Propaganda* (1928), Bernays argued that the manipulation of public opinion was a necessary part of democracy:^[14]

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ... We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society. ... In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons... who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind.

Articles in the journals of opinion, such as the one by Marlen Pew, *Edward L. Bernays Critiqued as "Young Machiavelli of Our Time"*,^[15] and the debate between Bernays and Everett Dean Martin in Forum, *Are We Victims of Propaganda?*, depicted Bernays negatively.^[16] He and other publicists were often attacked as propagandists and

deceptive manipulators, who represented lobby groups against the public interest and covertly contrived events that secured coverage as news stories, free of charge, for their clients instead of securing attention for them through paid advertisements.

Bernays's brilliance for promotion in this vein emerges clearly when one reads, in the *Bernays Typescript on Publicizing the New Dodge Cars*, 1927–1928: "Two Sixes", the story of how he managed to secure newspaper coverage for the radio programs he developed to promote the Dodge Brothers' new six-cylinder cars. The *Bernays Typescript on Publicizing the Fashion Industry*, 1925–27: "Hats and Stockings" and the *Bernays Typescript on Art in the Fashion Industry*, 1923–1927, reveal a similar flair for consumer manipulation in the arena of fashion.

Tie-in

As is evident from the description of his campaign to publicize the Dodge cars, Bernays had a particular gift for the marketing strategy called the "tie-up" or "tie-in". In this strategy, one venue, opportunity, or occasion for promoting a consumer product, for example, radio advertising, is linked to another, say, newspaper advertising, and even, at times, to a third, say a department store exhibition salesroom featuring the item, and possibly even a fourth, such as an important holiday, for example Thrift Week.^[17]

In addition to famous corporate clients, such as Procter & Gamble, the American Tobacco Company, Cartier Inc., Best Foods, CBS, the United Fruit Company, General Electric, Dodge Motors, the fluoridationists of the Public Health Service, Knox-Gelatin, and innumerable other big names, Bernays also worked on behalf of many non-profit institutions and organizations. These included, to name just a few, the Committee on Publicity Methods in Social Work (1926–1927), the Jewish Mental Health Society (1928), the Book Publishers Research Institute (1930–1931), the New York Infirmary for Women and Children (1933), the Committee for Consumer Legislation (1934), the Friends of Danish Freedom and Democracy (1940), [18][19][20] the Citywide Citizens' Committee on Harlem (1942), and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (1954–1961). For the U.S. government, he worked for the President's Emergency Committee on Employment (1930–1932) and President Calvin Coolidge.

In the 1950s, some of his ideas and vision helped portray India as the most democratic republic in Asia by having the People's Congress of India adapt a Bill of Rights. Freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of petition were added to the Constitution of India.

The amusing *Bernays Typescript on Public Relations Work and Politics, 1924*: "Breakfast with Coolidge" shows that President Coolidge too was among his clients. Bernays was hired to improve Coolidge's image before the 1924 presidential election.

Another selection from his papers, the *Typescript on Publicizing the Physical Culture Industry, 1927*: "Bernarr Macfadden", reveals Bernays's opinion of the leader of the physical culture movement. Yet another client, department store visionary Edward A. Filene, was the subject of the *Typescript on a Boston Department Store Magnate*. Bernays's *Typescript on the Importance of Samuel Strauss*: "1924 – Private Life" shows that the public relations counsel and his wife were fans of consumerism critic Samuel Strauss.

Campaigns

This list is incomplete; you can help by expanding it (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php? title=Edward Bernays&action=edit).

Some of the public relations and marketing campaigns Bernays worked on:

- 1913 Bernays was hired by the actor Richard Bennett to protect a play that supported sex education against police interference. Bernays set up a front group called the "Medical Review of Reviews Sociological Fund" (officially concerned with fighting venereal disease) for the purpose of endorsing the play. [21]
- 1915 Diaghilev's Ballet Russes American tour convinced magazines to write articles that told people that Ballet is fun to watch.
- 1920 Successfully hosted the first NAACP convention in Atlanta, Georgia. His campaign was considered successful because there was no violence at the convention. His campaign focused on the important contributions of African-Americans to Whites living in the South. He later received an award from the NAACP for his contribution.
- In the 1920s, working for the American Tobacco Company, he sent a group of young models to march in the New York City parade. He then told the press that a group of women's rights marchers would light "Torches of Freedom". On his signal, the models lit Lucky Strike cigarettes in front of the eager photographers. The *New York Times* (1 April 1929) printed: "Group of Girls Puff at Cigarettes as a Gesture of 'Freedom'". This helped to break the taboo against women smoking in public. During this decade he also handled publicity for the NAACP.^[22]
- Bernays once engineered a "pancake breakfast" with vaudevillians for Calvin Coolidge in what is widely considered one of the first overt media acts for a president.
- Bernays used his uncle Sigmund Freud's ideas to help convince the public, among other things, that bacon and eggs was the true all-American breakfast. [23]
- In October 1929, Bernays was involved in promoting Light's Golden Jubilee. The event, which spanned across several major cities in the U.S., was designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Thomas Edison's invention of the light-bulb (though the light-bulb had been previously invented by Joseph Swan). The publicity elements of the Jubilee including the special issuance of a U.S. postage stamp and Edison's "recreating" the invention of the light bulb for a nationwide radio audience provided evidence of Bernays's love for big ideas and "ballyhoo". A follow-up event for the 75th anniversary, produced for television by David O. Selznick, was titled *Light's Diamond Jubilee* and broadcast on all four American TV networks on October 24, 1954.
- Bernays attempted to help Venida hair nets company to get women to wear their hair longer so they would
 use hairnets more. The campaign failed but did get government officials to require hairnets for some jobs.
- Bernays worked with Procter & Gamble for Ivory-brand bar soap. The campaign successfully convinced people that Ivory soap was medically superior to other soaps. He also promoted soap through sculpting contests and floating contests because the soap floated better than its competitors'.
- Bernays helped the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) and other special interest groups to convince the American public that water fluoridation was safe and beneficial to human health. This was achieved by using the American Dental Association in a highly successful media campaign.^[24]
- In the 1930s, his Dixie Cup campaign was designed to convince consumers that only disposable cups were sanitary.

- In the 1930s, he attempted to convince women that Lucky Strike cigarettes' forest green pack was the most fashionable color. Letters were written to interior and fashion designers, department stores, and prominent women of society pushing green as the new hot color for the season. Balls, gallery exhibitions, and window displays all featured green after Bernays got through with them. The result was that green did indeed become a very hot color for the 1934 season and Lucky Strike kept their pack color and female clientele intact.
- He was the publicity director of the 1939 New York World's Fair.
- After his semi-retirement in the 1960s he worked with the pro-health anti-smoking lawyer John Banzhaf's group, ASH and supported other anti-smoking campaigns.

Overthrow of government of Guatemala

Bernays's most extreme political propaganda activities were said to be conducted on behalf of the multinational corporation United Fruit Company (today's Chiquita Brands International) and the U.S. government to facilitate the successful overthrow (see Operation PBSUCCESS) of the democratically elected president of Guatemala, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. Bernays's propaganda (documented in the BBC documentary, *The Century of the Self*), branding Arbenz as communist, was published in major U.S. media. According to a book review by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton of Larry Tye's biography of Bernays, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays & The Birth of PR*, "The term 'banana republic' actually originated in reference to United Fruit's domination of corrupt governments in Guatemala and other Central American countries." [25]

Recognition and criticism

Much of Bernays's reputation today stems from his persistent public relations campaign to build his own reputation as "America's No. 1 Publicist". During his active years, many of his peers in the industry were offended by Bernays's continuous self-promotion. According to Scott Cutlip, "Bernays was a brilliant person who had a spectacular career, but, to use an old-fashioned word, he was a braggart."^[26]

"When a person would first meet Bernays," says Cutlip, "it would not be long until Uncle Sigmund would be brought into the conversation. His relationship with Freud was always in the forefront of his thinking and his counseling." According to Irwin Ross, another writer, "Bernays liked to think of himself as a kind of psychoanalyst to troubled corporations." In the early 1920s, Bernays arranged an English-language translation of Freud's *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* for the US publication. In addition to publicizing Freud's ideas, Bernays used his association with Freud to establish his own reputation as a thinker and theorist—a reputation that was further enhanced when Bernays authored several landmark texts of his own, most notably *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923, ISBN 0-87140-975-5), *Propaganda* (1928, ISBN 0-8046-1511-X) and "The Engineering of Consent" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (March 1947).

Bernays defined the profession of "counsel on public relations" as a "practicing social scientist" whose "competence is like that of the industrial engineer, the management engineer, or the investment counselor in their respective fields". To assist clients, PR counselors used "understanding of the behavioral sciences and applying them – sociology, social psychology, anthropology, history, etc." In *Propaganda*, his most important book, Bernays argued that the scientific manipulation of public opinion was necessary to overcome chaos and conflict in society.

Bernays's celebration of propaganda helped define public relations, but it did not win the industry many friends. In a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter described Bernays and Ivy Lee as "professional poisoners of the public mind, exploiters of foolishness, fanaticism and self-interest". History

showed the flaw in Bernays's identification of the "manipulation of the masses"—as a natural and necessary feature of a democratic society—when the fascist rise to power in Germany demonstrated that propaganda could be used to subvert democracy as easily as it could be used to "resolve conflict".

In his 1965 autobiography, Bernays recalls a dinner at his home in 1933 where

Karl von Wiegand, foreign correspondent of the Hearst newspapers, an old hand at interpreting Europe and just returned from Germany, was telling us about Goebbels and his propaganda plans to consolidate Nazi power. Goebbels had shown Wiegand his propaganda library, the best Wiegand had ever seen. Goebbels, said Wiegand, was using my book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* as a basis for his destructive campaign against the Jews of Germany. This shocked me. ... Obviously the attack on the Jews of Germany was no emotional outburst of the Nazis, but a deliberate, planned campaign.^[27]

According to John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, in a published review of Larry Tye's biography of Bernays, [28]

It is impossible to fundamentally grasp the social, political, economic and cultural developments of the past 100 years without some understanding of Bernays and his professional heirs in the public relations industry. PR is a 20th-century phenomenon, and Bernays—widely eulogized as the "father of public relations" at the time of his death in 1995—played a major role in defining the industry's philosophy and methods.

As a result his legacy remains a highly contested one, as evidenced by Adam Curtis' 2002 BBC documentary *The Century of the Self*.

Works

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See also

- Crowd manipulation
- Propaganda
- Spin (public relations)
- Mass psychology
- Isaac Bernays (1792–1849) his great-grandfather
- Anne Bernays, his daughter
- Freud family, his relatives

Notes

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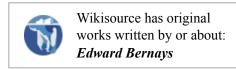
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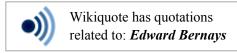
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External links

- The Father of Spin
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- The Edward L. Bernays papers, 1982–1998 (bulk 1993–1995)
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 Includes interviews with Larry Tye and Anne Bernays. (http://smellslikehumanspirit.com/edward-bernays-propaganda)
- The Century of the Self BBC Documentary (http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-century-of-the-self/)

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