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'Words As (Rubber) Bullets' Public Relations pioneer Edward L. Bernays and his work for political clients, 1918-1957.

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'WORDS AS (RUBBER) BULLETS'

Public Relations pioneer Edward L. Bernays and his work for political clients, 1918-1957.

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Introduction

In the spring of 1929, thirty debutants (on a list provided by *Vogue Magazine*) were sent a telegram reading:

In the interests of equality of the sexes and to fight another sex taboo I and other young women will light another torch of freedom by smoking cigarettes while strolling on Fifth Avenue on Easter Sunday. We are doing this to combat the silly prejudice that the cigarette is suitable for the home, the restaurant, the taxicab, the theater lobby but never no never for the sidewalk. Women smokers and their escorts will stroll from forty-Eighth Street to fifty-Fourth Street on Fifth Avenue between eleven-thirty and one o'clock.¹

The telegram was signed by Bertha Hunt, a secretary. The behind-the-scenes organizer of this feminist march was, however, a man called Edward Bernays. This stunt would later earn him the nickname 'The Father of Spin' or 'The Father of Public Relations'. Even *Life Magazine* called him 'one of the most influential figures of the century' on September 1st, 1990², a list compiling 200 figures made up by 60 historians, with not a single U.S. President.³

Public relations or marketing strategy has become one of the most influential and thriving businesses in the age of social media and streaming services. It is also one of the youngest sectors of the business world. With the arrival of new media, it will probably only grow and keep innovating, as consumerism grows, and the number of people communications experts must reach will only increase.

¹ E. L. Bernays, *Biography of an idea: memoirs of Public Relations counsel* (New York 1965), 387.

² Deseret News, 'Life lists 20th century's most influential Americans' 09-01-1990
<https://www.deseret.com/1990/9/1/18878997/life-lists-20th-century-s-most-influential-americans-br>

³ S. M. Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations. A History* (New Jersey 1994), 159.

The legend that one march was needed to get women to feel comfortable smoking in public is told by many Bernays-biographers, writers and documentary makers. But as numerous historians would agree, the influence of individuals should always be nuanced and thoroughly examined. Bernays worked for both commercial (most notably Lucky Strike) and, for this thesis more importantly, political clients. It was well documented that Bernays liked the nickname and the acclaim and wanted to make his presence in the world important. That is why this thesis focuses on his political work, more than his alleged increased sale of cigarettes. It will focus on the question if all the praise for Edward Bernays as an important political player and master manipulator is justified. This thesis explores how successful the implementations of Bernays' ideas about Public Relations to politics were. So, the main question here is: is the credit attributed to Bernays's political campaigns justified? The manipulation of public opinion has been important in the study of political discourse and propaganda, but Bernays is a controversial figure. Some may say he blatantly stole the ideas of other sociologists and psychologists; others deem him the father of Public Relations.

Bernays had and still has a great legacy in his work for commercial clients; the Torches of Freedom campaign is still world-famous. But that does not necessarily mean that he was an important player on the political stage, something that the 2002 documentary 'The Century of Self', made by Adam Curtis, does claim. The film paints a picture that Bernays manipulated the masses and aimed them in every direction he wanted. Bernays himself found that he changed the political landscape and found himself an important political player, but this thesis proves that he was merely an actor in the field and his campaigns did little to change American policymaking or the election process. Larry Tye praised him in the biography as the personification of PR, helping to shape our political discourse, but even he had to admit numerous times that his myth was sometimes self-proclaimed. Politics were important to Bernays. He wanted to be part of diplomatic history, but the argument here is that he was not in the end. He did not

incorporate much of his uncle's work, mainly the work of Lippmann and other colleagues and his work was mythicized in later years, without reason. He did not bring much to the table with his political campaigns and the literature praising his political work came with weak arguments.

This thesis is trying to argue that one should not overestimate the political power Bernays had over the people. The research starts in 1918 because Bernays began his political career this year as a member of the Creel Committee. 1957 is the last year he worked for a political client before he began his autobiography. His authority as an important PR man got easier as he grew older, and critics were not keen on taking an old man and his ways down in their articles. His nickname 'the father of Public Relations' had more of an endearing tone as 'Eddie' grew grayer and looked more paternal. His claims and comments were getting bolder nonetheless, perhaps because his memory was fading or with each repetition, he wanted his tales to sound more impressive.⁴ In this paper, his written work will be analyzed and contextualized. This paper will contribute to the historic debate about how the political landscape was influenced by the starting period of the Public Relations profession in combination with the more prominent role the media would occupy in this debate and explore whether Bernays was a large key player in the political field, as painted in his memoirs and by some historians and later PR colleagues.

Bernays's view of himself and his work in the world's Public Relations history can be seen in this handout from his office, distributed in 1952:

Edward L. Bernays is a notable, unique example of how a profession grew up with a man rather than a man growing up with a profession. For it was Edward L. Bernays who not only created and named the profession of counsel on Public Relations, but laid down, over

⁴ L. Tye, *Father of Spin* (New York 1998), 244.

three decades, a system of practice and ethics for this profession as valid today as when it was first pronounced...⁵

He clearly states in his autobiography that he works to get the recognition he (in his own opinion) deserves, as well as to exercise the professional standards he had set for himself. He also quotes one of his clients, Yale social psychologist Leonard Doob, in calling his work 'one of the most astonishing pieces of propaganda ever engineered in this country during peacetime.'⁶ He did have an important and special career but also was known to be a boaster. It is also clear in his autobiography, as he focuses on his accomplishments and blames failed projects on external forces or his colleagues. Therefore, his memoirs would be an unreliable source if it was used as the only primary literature. His peers were put off by this and one even referred to this phenomenon as 'Eddie's chutzpah', but those in other professions admired him greatly, like John T. Flynn in the May issues of 1932 of the *Atlantic Monthly*. He described Bernays as careless, diminutive, and an absent-minded professor and was, because of that, very positive about him.⁷ Journalist Ernest Poole praised his colleague Bernays in his autobiography *The Bridge* as 'one of the ablest and most devoted younger workers on our staff.'⁸ Bernays tried to be recognized as a true academic in his career, trying to write textbooks on the new profession and taking a teaching job at New York University, but he struggled to get recognized among peers. There are few introspective books on the science behind group manipulation and marketing written by established PR spokesmen, compared to journalism studies for example. Bernays claimed paternity in this area but not all his colleagues would agree with that.⁹

⁵ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 160.

⁶ Bernays, *Biography of an Idea*, 459.

⁷ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 160.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 164.

⁹ T. Morris and S. Goldsworthy, *PR – A Persuasive Industry? : Spin, Public Relations, and the Shaping of the Modern Media* (London 2008), 140 – 141.

Structure

In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Public Relations is described as an ‘aspect of communications involving the relations between an entity subject to or seeking public attention and the various publics that are or may be interested in it. The entity seeking attention could be a business corporation, an individual politician, a performer or author, a government or government agency, a charitable organization, a religious body, or almost any other person or organization.’¹⁰ The official terms are very broad and can be applied to almost all marketing tactics. The research in the thesis will focus on the work of Bernays, a PR agent, and his political campaigns and will be using his definition of the trade and his work. Bernays had different kinds of clients, like non-profit organizations, commercial clients, and religious groups, but only the political affiliations (including the NAACP) will be discussed.

The thesis will open with a chapter that will investigate the marketing tactics Bernays used and his connection to other scholars and businessmen who influenced and inspired him. His marketing strategies included the use of third parties, like opera singers to promote cigarettes or doctors to promote eating bacon for breakfast. He had a scientific approach to Public Relations and was a pioneer in the industry’s use of psychology. He drew inspiration from the findings of sociologists, journalists, philosophers, and psychologists like Walter Lippman, Sigmund Freud, and Benedict de Spinoza, and expressed great gratitude for the research that was done before he entered the profession.¹¹

¹⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Public relations: communications’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (last edited: 02-0402020) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-relations-communications> (Accessed on 04-24-2020).

¹¹ E. L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York 1961 [1923]), lvii.

The second chapter will focus on his work for individual political actors, especially President Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, and New York Mayor William O'Dwyer. The two presidential campaigns Bernays engaged in had different methods in approach and different outcomes. What will also be investigated is the way Bernays writes about these events himself; a great discrepancy can be noticed in his retelling of these. The political clients had a far greater impact on American society and more media attention from the start than most of his commercial clients and are for that reason important in Bernays's career, even though not all of them were successful.

One of his largest projects was as a PR counsel for India, his work to better the image of the just newly independent Republic of India and take on their Public Relations until 1957. India was newly independent and looked too friendly to the communist state for the Americans. His agency took on their whole propaganda program and image, but the focus was reassuring the United States that India would remain a capitalist country and ally. Public opinion about a foreign nation could be tested via their press coverage, so the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* will play a large part in this chapter.

Method and historiography

The 1965 memoirs of Bernays, *Biography of an idea: memoirs of Public Relations*, will be used as the main primary source. Besides that, Bernays has written various other works about Public Relations, such as *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York 1923), *Propaganda* (New York 1928), and *Public Relations* (New York 1945 and a revised edition in 1952), which will be important primary source material. In 1986, Bernays did an interview at Ball State University, but in his remarks repeated his books mostly. He talked about how he worked at the Committee on Public Information in World War One and for Hoover and how research is important when working with a new client.

The BBC made a four-part documentary in 2002 about the birth of consumer society, titled 'The Century of the Self' directed by Adam Curtis. In the first part called 'Happiness Machines', Bernays is thoroughly discussed. Unlike Curtis, this thesis argues that Freud was not his main inspiration and did not influence his work so greatly as discussed in the film. In the first minute of the first part of the documentary, we hear Curtis say '[Bernays's] influence on the twentieth century was nearly as great as his uncle's'.¹² This thesis argues that Bernays cannot be compared to the founder of modern psychology like that. Bernays may like the writings of Freud but for the psychological part of his famous campaign he hired Dr. A.A. Brill, what Curtis also mentions. In the first chapter the thesis discusses that Lippmann was far more important for his work than is his uncle. Curtis also argues that Bernays was the first person that linked Public Relations to politics with his work for Coolidge. This is also disputed.

Furthermore, Curtis, as well as Bernays, has the idea that people at the start of the twentieth century were animalistic, followed the masses, had no filter and believed everything propagandist. In this thesis we see that people, despite Bernays's efforts, still act unexpectedly, like with the Hoover campaign in chapter two. They do not always make purely rational decisions based on the information given, but also find important what politicians sound or feel like or how they carry themselves.

The question of Bernays's paternity in the field of Public Relation is highly debated. He had multiple nicknames, from Sire of the Big Sell to Pope of Propaganda, but the most popular was Father of Public Relations.¹³ Unlike Curtis, this thesis would admit, in terms of chronology, that would be incorrect. To quote Cutlip in the *New York Times* 18th of January 1991, 'When Edward L. Bernays opened his publicity office in a remodeled house at 19 East 48th Street in New York City in the summer of 1919, his was the eighth such

¹² A. Curtis, 'The Century of The Self – Part 1: Happiness Machines' *BBC* (2002) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPmg0R1M04&ab_channel=JustAdamCurtis (Accessed 08-12-2021).

¹³ Tye, *Father of Spin* 228.

agency, not the first.¹⁴ In terms of 'guidepost for future generations' Tye does agree with Curtis.¹⁵

The material of colleagues, historians, and family members and older footage of Bernays are used. This will also be added to the primary source material, along with a collection of letters Bernays and Freud had sent each other, available in the Library of Congress in Washington. However, this is not a complete collection of the correspondence between the two, only the messages kept by the Freud family. The Bernays family letters are available in Washington on request but not digitized, so will not be discussed in the thesis. The content of the letters is discussed in Bernays' memoirs and Tye's book. Besides his books and correspondence, newspaper articles about him from this period will also be used as primary source material. Bernays agreed that by press coverage, you can measure public opinion; 'The newspapers represented all shades of public opinion, and readers chose the medium that reflected their hopes and aspirations, likes and dislikes, beliefs and prejudices.'¹⁶

Walter Lippmann, one of the inspirations of Bernays, devoted a whole section of his most famous book to newspapers. Here he says that the reporting of the news is the bridge between government and the people and useful to both parties. It helps the public form an opinion and helps the government let their citizens know they are represented.¹⁷ In this time period, the press was the main information tool for the normal man and woman. What makes the press also an interesting source is that journalists, even though people may often disagree, attempt to be unbiased. Journalists will not go along in the 'Bernays parade' or 'Eddie's Chutzpah', as his colleagues have called it; this gives us a

¹⁴ S. M. Cutlip, 'Public Relations Was Lobbying From the Start' *New York Times* 01-18-1991 <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/docview/108651054/6E70EE83769F4FE0PQ/1?accountid=12045> (Accessed 08-13-2021), p. A30.

¹⁵ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 231 – 233.

¹⁶ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 67.

¹⁷ W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York 1922) p. 201 – 230.

great insight in what ways the reality matched with the stories Bernays wrote about in his books. They are in general not his employees, rivals, colleagues, friends or mentors. In historical research the most interesting source material are the reports made by someone the subject has no relation to. Even more so, Edward lied (or remembered it wrong) about the press multiple times. He makes numerous mistakes in dates and coverage of his campaigns in newspapers. The question here is if that is on purpose or just a product of the time passed.

The retelling of the events from the 1920s until the 1960s has been more and more exaggerated by Bernays in interviews as time went on. Accounts of the people who had worked with or run into Bernays in the past have stated that he was a man of great ego, who did not like to disappear in the background, even though that is something that sometimes was necessary for his work. That makes his primary source material biased and less trustworthy. This needs to be considered in the research. In Bernays' case, reliability is often an issue. Bernays' work is full of inconsistencies, which makes his retelling of events sometimes feel unreliable. In his memoirs, he refers to the wrong dates of newspapers or talks about nationwide reporting on events when no evidence of that can be found.

Most of Bernays's books, apart from his memoirs, were written to use for academic purposes. He wanted to create new science, a mixture of psychology, political sciences, and communication science. However, the books contain almost no references to other researchers or colleagues, even though he admitted he was greatly inspired by Lippmann and Freud. Even his claim to have come up with the term Public Relations has been disputed.¹⁸ Historian Ewen had the chance to interview him for his book on PR and wrote in his book admirably about Bernays, but even he had to confess that he underestimated Bernays in the interview: 'I had presupposed that his keenly aware shaper of public

¹⁸ S. C. Jansen, 'Semantic Tyranny: How Edward L. Bernays Stole Walter Lippmann's Mojo and Got Away With It and Why It Still Matters', *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013) 1094 – 1111, p. 1095.

perception, this trader in realities, was at the same time open to being candidly cross-examined. Yet, in the days following our meeting, it became clear to me that my entire visit had been orchestrated by a virtuoso.¹⁹ This shows that Bernays did not like to be the subject of research nor that he thought that transparency would better the academic study of PR, a field of study of which he was convinced that he was the patriarch.

Larry Tye published his biography on Bernays in 1998, which is to this date the most detailed book about the PR agent. Tye is mostly positive about the work of Bernays and the influence he had. In more recent years, historians like Vanessa Murphree²⁰ or Sue Curry Jansen²¹ have offered more critical assessments of Bernays and his work. Historical research has shifted its focus from individuals to greater developments and processes, causing Bernays's role in the history of PR to be pushed into the background somewhat. Tye, and to a certain extent Cutlip, use Bernays's words as their main information sources. Their books have a more descriptive narrative and are less critical of the facts Bernays has presented them, but those facts are not always as well-remembered or honestly presented in his memoirs or other writings, this thesis has found.

As a result of this one-sided research on Bernays, the reaction of the public to his (sometimes seen as bold) ideas are left undiscussed in Cutlip or Tye. Research into the question if the PR-pioneer has been honest in his books or remembers everything correctly is done little by them and this thesis tries to add background and fact-checking to his claims. Was Bernays revered or looked down on by his colleagues? Dr. Olasky of the University of Texas claims for instance that his first few books were positively received, and people were impressed, but it became clear almost straight away that there was

¹⁹ S. Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York 1996), 17.

²⁰ V. Murphree, 'Edwards Bernays's 1929 "Torches of Freedom" march: Myths and Historical Significance' *American journalism* 32:3 (2018), 258 – 281.

²¹ Jansen, 'Semantic Tyranny'.

concern about the power of the propagandist.²² Something that also must be considered is that Bernays's work for a while was not properly acknowledged, as it linked to the propaganda used in Nazi Germany by Joseph Goebbels. He was even called 'the new American Goebbels' in an article in 1934, which was not a respectable nickname to the Jewish Bernays.²³

Intriguingly, Bernays was always interested in maintaining his reputation, even among scholars. Tye argues that Bernays was the originator of the 'five stages of PR' theory (which will be discussed later) and that this set him apart from his peers. In 1948 Eric F. Goldman, a historian at Princeton University endorsed this perspective: 'Bernays moved along with the most advanced trends in the Public Relations field, thinking with, around, and ahead of them', he wrote in *Two-Way street*.²⁴ The public needed to be understood, more like a two-way street, he argued. But Bernays was deeply involved with the publishing of the book, from funding to its content, so the author may not be a neutral historian. Bernays had learned that arguments and praise were viewed as more compelling when they came from a highly respected expert. Goldman went on to become a top official to President Lyndon Johnson and later Johnson's biographer, so praise from this historian was well received. Bernays even purchased all the rights of the published book. He made editing suggestions, as we know from their correspondence. Goldman did mention some 'cooperation' of PR pioneers but also that it was used 'solely as my historical sense dictated' - the literal words Bernays fed him in a letter dated October 15, 1947.²⁵

Bernays not only deemed it important to get historians' approval but also focused on the admiration from the press. Magazines and newspapers ran numerous stories

²² M. N. Olasky, 'Retrospective: Bernays' Doctrine of Public Opinion' *Public Relations Review* 10:3 (1984) 3 – 12, p. 4 – 5.

²³ *Ibidem*, 6.

²⁴ E. F. Goldman, *Two-Way Street: The Emergence of the Public Relations Counsel* (Boston 1948), 16.

²⁵ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 239.

claiming him as one of the best Public Relations counsels. The *New York World-Telegram* called him 'a prophet to the people for the profit of his clients', *Literary Digest* said that he 'helped make press-agency a "science"' and *The New Yorker* argued him to be 'an idealist of the most profound order.'²⁶ The trade press was less favorable. PR men were seen as a waste of advertising revenues.

In historical research around the work of Bernays, the focus lies mainly on his 1929 *Torches of Freedom Parade*, like in the article 'The evolution of an idea: Charting the early Public Relations ideology of Edward L. Bernays' by Burton St. John III and Margot Opdycke Lamme in the *Journal of Communication Management*. They argue that this campaign is symbolic for his evolution: not an attempt to organize the masses but the creation of a link between his client's particular interest (selling cigarettes to women) and a carefully targeted public.²⁷

Historical context

To fully examine the time and culture Bernays was active in, a historical context must be created. Where the history of Propaganda begins, is not clear. Historian Raymond E. Brown argues that the earliest Public Relations campaign was founded by Saint Paul in the first century. It was his task to spread the Bible across the Roman Empire and convert especially the Jewish population. St. Paul visited churches, was the contact between the church and the pagans, and acted as a spokesperson on behalf of the new religion. Brown argues that the communication strategies that Paul uses are graphic and the evidence of that is clear in Romans and other Pauline epistles. Paul's use of colorful, vivid language was a version of *paragraphein*. For instance, in Galatians 3:1 and 3:8 he verbally describes the graphic images of Jesus' crucifixion agonies in his attempt to persuade the listening

²⁶ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 240.

²⁷ B. St. John III and M. Opdycke Lamme, 'The evolution of an idea: Charting the early Public Relations ideology of Edward L. Bernays' *Journal of Communication Management* 15:3 (2011) 223 – 235, p. 224.

public.²⁸ Because of this, we can call St. Paul one of the first practitioners and experts in communications and representation, in a time when a church leader had almost as much political power as a politician.²⁹

Social historians have not yet agreed on when PR started to play a commercial and political role in society; some date the use of propaganda back to ancient Judea and other historians claim that it started in Renaissance Florence. Bernays agreed with the Florence dating, just like Scott M. Cutlip, who is described as the ‘father of Public Relations education’ in the encyclopedia of Public Relations.³⁰ Public relations with religious, political, or non-profit motives were used throughout history and may or may not have started in Italy, but the corporate campaigns are relatively young in the history of PR. Most historians refer to the emerging railroad companies in the 1830s as the real start of Public Relations history in the economic domain, but still on a small scale.³¹

Big business and PR transition to the U.S.

The American Civil War lasted from 1861 until 1865 and many Americans felt confused in the period following the conflict. Before the war, the Anglo-American middle class set the public sphere and the social, economic, and cultural rules of society. After 1865 the United States was a more united society, as opposed to the state-focus before. This was all in combination with national industrialization, which caused a vast increase in the types of industries and sectors in the United States. The consequence was the emergence of a new elite class in society: the powerful bourgeoisie. Small-businessmen felt their role minimized and the corporations were, in their opinion, the cause of that. The public grew

²⁸ R. E. Brown, ‘St. Paul as a Public Relations practitioner: a metatheoretical speculation on messianic communication and symmetry’, *Public Relations Review* 29 (2003) 1-12, p. 9.

²⁹ M. Opdycke Lamme and K. Miller Russell, “Removing the Spin’: Toward a New Theory of Public Relations History’, *The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* (2010) 281 – 362, p. 291.

³⁰ R. L. Heath, *Encyclopedia of Public Relations: Volume 1* (Thousand Oaks 2005), 235.

³¹ Opdycke Lamme and Miller Russell, “Removing the Spin”, 322.

a distaste for big businesses, as they saw the economic and political power in the hands of this new class. As a result of that shift, politicians became less focused on small businesses in rural areas and more focused on the cities and these rich men.³² Journalism also became a more integral part of society. Progressive journalism had taken up the task of holding these corporations accountable for their actions. At the same time, newspapers and magazines became reliant on the investments and advertisements of the barons.³³

At the same time, progressivism rose and people in powerful positions were expected to be more involved in public concerns, such as business reform. This is when intellectual Walter Lippmann and journalist Ivy Lee had their formative years in the field of communications.³⁴ As mentioned, advertising space and the number of ads in magazines were growing throughout the 20th century. The increase in literacy and universal schooling equally stimulated the expansion of Public Relations. Bernays argued that the ability to shape and create public opinion had become essential at the time of writing *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923.³⁵ The term 'Public Relations' first surfaced in the inaugural *Yearbook of Railway Literature* from 1892 in an interview with Henry Vanderbilt.³⁶

Raymond Dodge, professor of psychology at Wesleyan University, wrote in 1920 that

The Great War has left us many disturbing legacies ... Prejudice, mutual distrust, social unrest, and political chaos rest heavily upon us. Not the least of our troublesome relics is the curse of propaganda, the greatest of indoor military sports . . . [...] The war is long since over, all but saying so; but our consciousness of the immanence of propaganda bids fair to be permanent. It has been discovered by individuals, by associations, and by

³² Ewen, *PR!*, 40 – 41.

³³ F. L. Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690 – 1960* (New York 1962), 546.

³⁴ Ewen, *PR!*, 60 – 61.

³⁵ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 217.

³⁶ Albig, *Modern Public Opinion*, 283.

governments that a certain kind of advertising can be used to mold public opinion and control democratic majorities. As long as public opinion rules the destinies of human affairs, there will be no end to an instrument that controls it . . .³⁷

Propaganda has been used in war, religion, and other domains and was considered to play in on the mind of the people. The research done about mass communication and media was heavily influenced by the twentieth-century wars. In early research, academic institutions, universities, and journals to support that research were funded and supported by the feuding powers at the time. World War One left the West in a severe economic depression and the economy and national morale needed a boost. There were tools needed to keep track of the national sentiment around government and the economy, so market institutions came up with the national polling industry and emphasized the importance of survey methodologies.³⁸

The research on the effects of propaganda rapidly increased in the 1930s and the first scientific journals on the matter were founded. With this, different camps in reviewing the emergence of Public Relations started to develop. One side saw propaganda undermining democracy as it reduced the critical thinking of the general population. The surveys and research used in these early days were not of the same scientific standard psychologists and sociologists use today. The questions presuppose a certain level of suspicion about the subject and are not objective.³⁹

³⁷ R. Dodge, 'The Psychology of Propaganda', *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association* 15:5 (1920) 241 - 252, p. 241.

³⁸ P. Pascual-Ferrá, 'The measurement of Trust in Communication Research, Part 1' *Communication Research Trends* 39:4 (2020) 1-34, p. 5-6.

³⁹ Pascual-Ferrá, 'The measurement of Trust', 6-7.

Politics

The term propaganda in a political context has been in use since the 1890s. The definition is different from today; at that time, it meant any communication by a political party or campaign.⁴⁰ Washington had 'publicity businesses' since 1902 and almost immediately there were concerns about this. In 1912 *New York Times* reporter Charles W. Thompson wrote about press agent Walmer (his full name is not known) who had to testify before the House committee investigating government press bureaus:

10 years ago a firm - Smith & Walmer - started a press bureau up here in the capitol, and up to that time I do not think such a thing had been much thought about. [...] I guess it was legitimate enough; at any rate, the idea apparently struck a number of public officials, and the whole press-agent business sprang up from that.⁴¹

So, it is safe to say that Smith & Walmer were among the first official press agencies specifically catered to government institutions.

In the First World War the Committee on Public Information (1917-1919), also known as the *Creel Committee* or CPI, was established by President Wilson. The institution was an independent agency created to influence public opinion around the U.S. effort in the war.⁴² Chairman and journalist George Creel wanted Wilson to create an independent committee to create 'not propaganda as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the word, meaning the propagation of the faith.'⁴³ The committee's main goal

⁴⁰ C. Myers, 'Reconsidering propaganda in U.S. Public Relations history: An analysis of propaganda in the popular press 1810-1918' *Public Relations Review* 41 (2015) 551 – 561, p. 554.

⁴¹ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 27 - 28.

⁴² Myers, 'Reconsidering propaganda', 554.

⁴³ G. Creel, *Rebel at Large: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years* (New York 1947), 158.

was to spread patriotic and positive information about the war overseas and inform the public about how to contribute.⁴⁴

In *Propaganda* in 1928, Bernays states that politicians had for a long time clung to old formulas and needed to improve their Public Relations methods. This is, according to him, the reason for most voters' apathy towards politics. The use of propaganda is an important adjunct in anyone's political career.⁴⁵ According to Bernays, politics used propaganda and press manipulation first and business learned from that. Nevertheless, politicians refused to use their already established methods in doing research and distribution of ideas: 'Because a politician knows political strategy.'⁴⁶ Making speeches specifically addressing certain groups in the hope to change their vote, was estimated to cost \$15.27 per won vote. Many politicians found this a waste of money and effort.⁴⁷

At this moment, there exists a debate on whether it is ethical to give Bernays the title of scholar or academic or if he can just be considered a contributor to the history of Public Relations, instead of a founding father. That question can only be answered if you look at his colleagues' work and influences. Bernays drew inspiration from his predecessors in many different areas. He liked to mention that he was related to Freud and used Ivy Lee's ideas but in practice he only used Lippmann's theories and work for his political campaigns, and even here not consistently. This will be discussed in the upcoming chapter.

How justified is the political relevance attributed to Bernays' PR work? One should not exaggerate this influence, this thesis shows.

⁴⁴ W. B. Anderson, 'The great war against venereal disease: How the government used PR to wage an anti-vice campaign', *Public Relations Review* 43 (2017) 507 – 516, p. 512 – 513.

⁴⁵ E. L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York 2005 [1928]), 110.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 112.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 111 – 112.

Chapter one: Influences and teachers

Historians and communications experts may find that Bernays is the first to use the term Public Relations, but he was influenced by predecessors who may not have used the term yet but are important figures in the field of communications. Bernays was certainly not a scholar but saw many of the men discussed below as his peers, another example of his arrogance.⁴⁸ This sense of self-importance has influenced literature on the PR-pioneer greatly as he does not really reflect on elections or projects with unfavorable results and discusses them only when he has to and very briefly. One of the reasons Curtis, Tye and other historians call Bernays instrumental in the twentieth century, is that he was the first to implement his uncle Freud's theories in his work. This chapter makes the case that not only was there little involvement of Freud, the honor of being the first should go to the men discussed below, his inspirations. He used Lippmann's and Spinoza's theories more in his political work than Freud's work in psychoanalytic research.

Ivy Lee

The railroad magnates became the first to study and take an interest in Public Relations, as they were among the dominant economic actors at the time and could use a more positive reputation. One of the earliest to send out a press release and one of the inspirations of Bernays was Ivy Lee in 1906, who worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Lee published a 1906 press release that gave information about an accident in Atlantic City, where fifty people died. It was his idea to transport the reporters to the place of the accident to increase transparency. This created support for the public and journalists, in a situation that could have generated bad press for the company. Six years later Lee was hired full-time. This made him the first Public Relations executive for a corporate

⁴⁸ A. Curtis, 'The Century of The Self – Part 1: Happiness Machines' *BBC* (2002) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPmg0R1M04&ab_channel=JustAdamCurtis (Accessed 18-03-2021).

enterprise, according to professors of Communication Clifford G. Christians, Mark Fackler and John P. Ferré.⁴⁹ The use of strategically placed articles in the newspaper is a method Bernays used regularly.

Ivy Lee shares the name of ‘father of modern Public Relations’ with Edward Bernays and is also cited to be one of the ‘empire builders’ of the profession.⁵⁰ However, he has different ideas about the profession. Lee used to be a journalist and used this expertise to inform the public about his commissioners and give advice to corporations or political institutions, like Rockefeller and the Council on Foreign Relations, on how to win public approval. Bernays came from a psychology background, where Lee was more business-driven.⁵¹ He focused more on policy management and in 1925 he defined Public Relations as ‘everything involved in the expression of an idea or of an institution-including the policy or idea expressed.’⁵² The characterization of the profession was much broader than in Bernays’s work.

Several historians and sociologists do not see Lee as the biggest influence on Bernays or the ‘founder of PR.’ That honor would go in their perspective to Walter Lippmann, who championed democratic transparency and published his most scholarly book, *Public Opinion* in 1922. Some might even go so far as to say Bernays shamelessly copied Lippmann.⁵³

Walter Lippmann

Many Public Relations men have come from journalistic backgrounds, like Bernays’s inspiration, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Walter Lippmann (1889 – 1974). His 1922 book

⁴⁹ Christians, Fackler and Ferré, *Public Communication*, 150 – 151.

⁵⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Public relations: communications’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (last edited: 02-04-2020) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-relations-communications> (Accessed on 24-04-2020).

⁵¹ Heath, *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*, 482.

⁵² Opdycke Lamme and Miller Russell, “Removing the Spin”, 284.

⁵³ Jansen, ‘Semantic Tyranny’, p. 1095 – 1097.

Public Opinion influenced him greatly, Edward admitted in his memoirs.⁵⁴ Lippmann's biographer Larry L. Adams describes him as 'one of the principal architects of the neo-Liberal synthesis in twentieth-century American social theory', because of the 1922 book.⁵⁵ In the 1920s he was considered the most esteemed political commentator and public opinion agent and later would receive highly praised titles, among 'most influential journalist of the 20th century'⁵⁶ and 'father of modern journalism.'⁵⁷

Lippmann developed a sympathy towards cynical and utilitarian leadership, which is sometimes referred to as 'democratic realism'.⁵⁸ What this outlook mainly discusses, is that politics must not be guided through democracy but a selected class. The people must not oversee the decision-making but be serviced by experts on governing and politics. The elite classes then must be kept in leadership positions.⁵⁹ As Lippmann explains in *Public Opinion*:

The purpose, then, is not to burden every citizen with expert opinions on all questions, but to push that burden away from him towards the responsible administrator. An intelligence system has value, of course, as a source of general information, and as a check on the daily press. But that is secondary. Its real use is as an aid to representative government and administration both in politics and industry.⁶⁰

He was one of the early mass culture analysts and was most notable for discussing how mass culture could be used by a government-licensed and funded 'propaganda machine'

⁵⁴ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 290.

⁵⁵ L. L. Adams, *Walter Lippmann* (New York 1977), 95.

⁵⁶ D. Warsh, 'Drucker Gives Lippmann Run As Most Influential Journalist', *Chicago Tribune* 02-22-1998 <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1998-02-22-9802220064-story.html> (Accessed 10-01-2021).

⁵⁷ N. Snow, *Information war: American propaganda, free speech and opinion control since 9/11* (New York 2003), 32.

⁵⁸ R. K. Nielsen, 'The One Thing Journalism Just Might do for Democracy' *Journalism Studies* 18:10 (2017) 1251 - 1262, p. 1257.

⁵⁹ Ewen, *PR!*, 146 - 147.

⁶⁰ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 399.

to retain democracy. For instance, in *Public Opinion*, Lippmann calls the masses dependent and incapable to influence public opinion, who must be led by an elite class 'whose interest reaches beyond the locality.' Unfortunately, this class is self-centered and irresponsible and therefore is not fit for governing positions.⁶¹ In other words, the masses need press releases and information campaigns from the establishment to form an opinion. Government cannot fulfill that responsibility; an 'elite' outsider must step in. That elite outsider must be an intellectual to teach the people. As learnt later in this research, Bernays tried to take on that role but is not seen as a scholar by academics. Self-government is a tempting idea, but will never work, according to Lippmann,

Outside the rather narrow range of our own possible attention, social control depends upon devising standards of living and methods of audit by which the acts of public officials and industrial directors are measured. We cannot ourselves inspire or guide all these acts, as the mystical democrat has always imagined. But we can steadily increase our real control over these acts by insisting that all of them shall be plainly recorded, and their results objectively measured.⁶²

There must be an independent class: an outsiders group keeping the government in check.

Crystallizing Public Opinion, Bernays's debut, was a reaction to Lippmann's *Public Opinion*. In this work, he defines PR through a diverse range of examples, from the Middle Ages⁶³ to advertisements in the *New York Tribune* in May 1922.⁶⁴ He analyses these examples with the help of Wilfred Trotter's theory on herd instinct from his 1916 book *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*. Trotter claims in this theory that humans are social animals, belonging to a herd. Their greatest desire is to remain inside the herd and to do

⁶¹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 310.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 314.

⁶³ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 64.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 92.

so, they follow the rest of the herd or their leader and do not think for themselves. So, large groups of people can be manipulated naturally and without much effort.⁶⁵ That is what some of Bernays's campaigns do, and he uses a third-person perspective to applaud the technique and method of those campaigns.

Bernays argues that the average person bases their conclusions on matters with little knowledge about the subject.⁶⁶ He quotes Trotter on this matter:

Direct observation of man reveals at once the fact that a very considerable proportion of his beliefs are non-rational to a degree which is immediately obvious without any special examination, and with no special resources other than common knowledge. If we examine the mental furniture of the average man, we shall find it made up of a vast number of judgments of a very precise kind upon subjects of very great variety, complexity, and difficulty.⁶⁷

According to his herd theory, the people's beliefs are based on the advice of their 'herd', which might be their religion or political preferences. The Public Relations counsel must consider this *a priori* judgment (as Trotter calls it) of any public he deals with before counseling.⁶⁸ Trotter is quoted as well in Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, in the sense that society uses a form of 'admission' to certain social classes. Membership of a social class relates to war, social change, marriage, or children, and opinions within this 'social set' are in the canons of family tradition or the class's mores. This is, according to Lippmann, generalized in the term instinct of the herd, and the only reference of Trotter he uses throughout the book.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ W. Trotter, *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (London 1921 [1916]), 29 – 30.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 63.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 35 - 36.

⁶⁸ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 67 - 68.

⁶⁹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 52.

Lippmann shared Bernays' view that propaganda did not deserve the negative definition it had received. Bernays' *Crystallizing Public Opinion* was a response to Lippmann's book but was intended for a broader public. He wanted to inform and make a description of the occupation of Public Relations counsel and that way use the innovations in social and psychological research to the advantage of his branch. Lippmann applied more complex analogies and theoretical speculations. Bernays used his own sales campaigns as examples.⁷⁰

Sue Curry Jansen argues that Bernays 'stole' Lippmann's ideas and played an important role in the development of corporate propaganda with a created image of himself as a liberal intellectual, unrightfully in her opinion.⁷¹ Bernays acknowledged that he used Lippmann's inspiration to make his own book a commercial success, even saying he wanted to use the term 'public opinion' in the title, as Lippmann's book created a general interest.⁷²

Jansen sees this as an example of Bernays' exploitation of Lippmann's research, even if just before that Bernays praised Lippmann as his inspiration but sees an opportunity in the fact that no other writer had covered the 'working relationship between private policies and practice and public opinion.'⁷³ Bernays thought that Lippmann only looked at public opinion from a theoretical perspective and never wanted to change it. In an interview in 1990, Bernays said: 'He talked of it as if he were a sociologist discussing a social caste system ... abstractly.'⁷⁴ Ewen painted Lippmann as the crafter of the theory, and Bernays as the one who perfected the practice. Bernays wanted to 'organize chaos' and Lippmann was a highly regarded scholar and had already

⁷⁰ Ewen, *PR!*, 164.

⁷¹ Jansen, 'Semantic Tyranny', p. 1095.

⁷² Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 291.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 290 – 291.

⁷⁴ Ewen, *PR!*, 159.

provoked many people in the intellectual circles – a great opportunity to hop on these already existing theories.⁷⁵

In *Propaganda* (1928) Bernays tried to sell the myth of propaganda as a ‘wholly rational endeavor, carried out methodically by careful experts skilled enough to lead “public opinion”’.⁷⁶ He referred to himself as a supreme manipulator, mastering the responses of the public, and attempted to write a history of his trade, with few sources to base his assessments on.⁷⁷

Bernays’ notion of experts is similar to Lippmann’s idea of experts who establish the facts. Lippmann gives that role to the media and journalists who can inform the people. Lippmann questions if democracy was the right form of government. Media could enable citizens to judge public affairs and provide the truth: ‘The most destructive form of untruth is sophistry and propaganda by those whose profession it is to report the news. The columns are common carriers. When those who control them arrogate to themselves the right to determine by their consciences what shall be reported and for what purpose, democracy is unworkable.’⁷⁸ Good journalists and press agents are *creators* of news, according to Bernays. The modern newspaper editors should approach a story in a variety of different approaches, much like human psychology, as every individual brings their own point of view on a matter. Reluctantly, Bernays does not see that in every case of reporting. The media does not always serve democracy best but is still an important part of the relationship between the public and government.⁷⁹

Combining Gustave Le Bon and Trotter’s ideas about a public moved by emotion and tamed by a rational expert, Bernays argued the theory about the group mind having,

⁷⁵ Ewen, *PR!*, 163 – 164.

⁷⁶ M. C. Miller in: E. L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York 2005 [1928]), 20.

⁷⁷ M. Rogers, ‘Propaganda (Book)’ *Library Journal* 129:18 (2004), p. 134.

⁷⁸ W. Lippmann, *Liberty and the news* (Lexington 2009 [1920]), 10 - 11.

⁷⁹ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 194 - 196.

'in place of thought, impulses, habits, and emotions.'⁸⁰ Lippmann was mainly concerned about the state and government and Bernays had more of a corporate approach to propaganda. Bernays even compares political leadership to running a successful summer resort or the stock exchange. He wrote that the successful propagandist must consider people's 'true motives' to control modern society, which are often not what they seem or what people themselves believe to be true.⁸¹ Lippmann was skeptical about democracy and outlined in his works some ideas about the irrational nature of the consumer and manipulation of that same nature, on the surface very much like Bernays' ideas. Only Lippmann published these ideas in *A preface to politics* in 1913 and *Drift and Mastery* in 1914, while *Crystallizing Public Opinion* came out in 1923. While these works differ from *Public Opinion*, their message was clearly echoed in Bernays' oeuvre. But the biggest difference between the two men is probably that Lippmann addressed mostly well-educated elites.⁸²

Lippmann was an early, very visible critic of Public Relations and the power it may have on society. As an author of popular books, editor of influential magazines, and counsel to important political figures no one can deny he cannot be overlooked in Public Relations history. Ewen calls Lippmann's most practical contribution to Public Relations his systematic approach to how media might be understood and exploited. Political science was for him the science that would frame public opinions for the press.⁸³ Bernays hated this academic approach to his field, but there is a clear system to be recognized in *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, with the first part of the book devoted to 'scope and functions' and the third part to 'technique and method'. It is also ironic that the historians or sociologists who deem Bernays the father of Public Relations critique Lippmann's

⁸⁰ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 73.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 74 - 75.

⁸² C. García, 'Rethinking Walter Lippmann's legacy in the history of Public Relations' *PRism* 7:1 (2010) 1 - 10, p. 4.

⁸³ Ewen, *PR!*, 150 - 151.

academic style. Even though what Bernays wanted most was to teach courses at universities, he resigned at Cambridge when he realized his students were only interested in making money fast, rather than learn about press manipulation and spent his final days writing memoirs and essays.⁸⁴

In Jansen's opinion '*Crystallizing Public Opinion* loots and vandalizes *Public Opinion*.'⁸⁵ The similarities between their techniques and theories are striking. Bernays mentions for example that the Public Relations man must be 'first of all a student' (of psychology and sociology).⁸⁶ Moreover, he describes public opinion as a constantly changing set of stereotypes⁸⁷. In his reasoning of this, he combined Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd*, Everett Martin's *Behavior of Crowds* and his uncle's writings.⁸⁸ British surgeon and sociologist Wilfred Trotter saw the crowd as ruled by Freudian instincts and the best way to control them is to manipulate and master them by an elite group of intellectuals, able to exploit psychological symbols Freud used with his patients.⁸⁹ The use of symbols was also endorsed by Benedict de Spinoza, discussed below. More scholars paved the way for Bernays, like Gustave Le Bon or French social scientist Gabriel Tarde, but no other combined all these theories so clearly together than Walter Lippmann. He claimed that leaders could not be expected to have a rational dialogue with their electorate about issues like justice or law and order.⁹⁰

In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann argues that the democratic ideal is an informed, rational public. In reality, the public responds to their own ideas about society in their heads. These pictures are heavily influenced by their imaginations, unrelated facts, hearsay and opinions. He wanted the experts, public officials and press agents to form

⁸⁴ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 799.

⁸⁵ Jansen, 'Semantic Tyranny', p. 1108.

⁸⁶ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 52.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 173.

⁸⁸ Goldman, *Two-Way Street* 17.

⁸⁹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 94 - 95.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 95.

the picture. Bernays, then, integrated these ideas into the emerging field and invented the idea of the Public Relations counsel as an elite professional who would inform and interpret the public and (ethically) influence public opinion. He shared this cynical view of the public and placed this responsibility on practitioners, who must 'serve the public interest.'⁹¹ Public relations and its counsels have an obligation to public interests. It can frame events, issues and policies for the public. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as spin and is a byproduct of Bernays' 'invisible government'⁹² and, as Lippmann calls it, the 'disinterested expert', who is employed as the mediator among representatives and 'prepares the facts for the men of action'.⁹³

Bernays considered *Crystallizing* as a success, but some reviews show the opposite. Former U.S. senator Ernest Gruening published a mocking review in 1924 in *The Nation*. *American Journal of Sociology*, in which Bernays would later publish an article, reviewed the book as an attempt of a practical publicist to interpret problems of publicity in terms of Trotter's theory of the Herd instinct.⁹⁴ However, Bernays did not care, as his objective was to distinguish Public Relations from the image the profession had at the time: self-promoters and advertising.⁹⁵ It worked; Bernays was even published a few times in academic journals and considered a social scientist with only a bachelor's degree in agriculture, as his essays were later published in 'The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.'⁹⁶

But Bernays saw the profession of propaganda not only as some communications tool but as something bigger, as a way of implementing his uncle's ideas about the mind.

⁹¹ K. Stoker and M. Stoker, 'The Paradox of Public Interest: How Serving Individual Superior Interest Fulfill Public Relations' Obligation to the Public Interest' *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 37:1 (2012) 31 - 45, p. 35.

⁹² Bernays, *Propaganda*, 37.

⁹³ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 375.

⁹⁴ *American Journal of Sociology* 30:6 (1925), p. 751.

⁹⁵ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, iv.

⁹⁶ E. L. Bernays, 'The Engineering of Consent' *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 250:1 (1947), 113 - 120.

In addition to that, he also saw psychology as an important component in group manipulation. However, Lippmann was one of the first to write in an academic sense about public opinion and laid down the principles for the profession, which would be used by the whole next generation, if they agreed with him or not.⁹⁷ He was the first to critique citizen reasoning in *Public Opinion* and Bernays connected to the herd instinct.

Sigmund Freud

Freud's ideas are widely accepted in the 21st century. His writings about the Oedipus complex, Ego, and Id are now part of the canon in the literature of psychology. But he is also still heavily criticized. This is no change from when he started around a hundred years ago. This especially applied to the higher classes, where it was not normal to talk this openly about feelings and desires.⁹⁸ In 1927, Bernays discussed the 'findings of introspective psychology' which are the secret behind his work and the 'diagnostic ability' that is required to read the public mind.⁹⁹ This is a clear reference to Freud, except that Bernays focused on the practicality of his discoveries and science, which can be used to overcome the past, like his campaign for mass-produced bread. He was compared multiple times with Freud and even called a philosopher or psychologist a few times himself.¹⁰⁰

Bernays has compared Public Relations to psychoanalysis, both using a nonjudgmental technique that can be applied to any institution, person or group that needed their image updated to the public sphere. Because of this, he refused to work with

⁹⁷ W. E. Saris and P. M. Sniderman, eds., *Studies in Public Opinion* (Princeton 2018), 134.

⁹⁸ A. Curtis, 'The Century of The Self – Part 1: Happiness Machines' *BBC* (2002)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPmg0R1M04&ab_channel=JustAdamCurtis (Accessed 30-10-2020).

⁹⁹ E. L. Bernays, 'Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and The How', *American Journal of Sociology* 33:6 (1928) 958 – 971, p. 961.

¹⁰⁰ S. Justman, 'Freud and His Nephew', *Social Research* 61:2 (1992) 457 – 476, p. 462.

or ‘treat’ ‘antisocial’ groups or people, as he had to ‘study’ his client like a psychologist.¹⁰¹ He stated in some correspondence with the Boston-based newspaper the *Independent* that a Public Relations counsel must believe in the legitimacy of his client’s cause and must believe it serves society in some way, as he viewed it as a very honorable profession. Bernays made it clear that he believed in what he was doing and noted that unethical behavior by professionals showed that their only motive was economic gain. He failed to mention, however, that a counsel could also diverge from the moral path because of other obligations or demands from the client.¹⁰² In his view, the Public Relations counsel must always adopt the ideas and point of view of his clients and can in fact refuse a client if he or she can be viewed as morally different from the subject--or as he put it ‘has committed an unsocial action.’¹⁰³ Freud and Bernays had frequent correspondence in the years 1919 to 1923. This was mostly about the authorization rights to Freud’s works. Bernays wanted to get his uncle published in the United States.¹⁰⁴

Bernays was one of the first to use his ideas to manipulate the masses. The idea behind this was linking products people did not need to their unconscious desires and, by that, boost sales of said product. And this phenomenon could be used commercially or politically. Manipulating public opinion and people’s perception about things like this is one of the keystones of our consumer society today, as this moment marks a clear paradigm shift from the conservative spending of the years prior and an increase in consumption, with a peak in the 1950s and 1960s. With the start of the two World Wars, these Freudian theories about the banality of the human mind were even more confirmed

¹⁰¹ W. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York 1993), 320 – 321.

¹⁰² T. H. Bivins, ‘A Golden Opportunity? Edward Bernays and the Dilemma of Ethics’, *American Journalism* 30:4 (2013) 496 – 519, p. 517.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, 512.

¹⁰⁴ S. Freud, *Sigmund Freud Papers: Family Papers, -1978; Correspondence with Sigmund Freud, 1876 to 1974; Bernays, Edward L. nephew; Photocopies and transcripts; 1922 to 1924. - 1924, 1922, Manuscript/Mixed Material*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss3999000004/> (Accessed 10-09-2020), image 18.

for him.¹⁰⁵ Right on time too, his theories on sexual freedom fit perfectly in the context of the Roaring Twenties and the post–World War One world. Freud got associated with the idea of social reform, as his theories about unconscious behavior could be applied to social and economic policy and sexual autonomy in the 1920s.¹⁰⁶

Lippmann did not agree with this yet in 1913: 'That the last few years have witnessed a revolution in the study of mental life is plain: the effects are felt not only in psychotherapy, but in education, morals, religion, and no end of cultural interests. The impetus of Freud is perhaps the greatest advance ever made towards the understanding and control of human character. But for the complexities of politics, it is not yet ready. It will take time and endless labor for a detailed study of social problems in the light of this growing knowledge.'¹⁰⁷

Bernays's Public Relations work helped to popularize his uncle's theories in the United States. Bernays pioneered psychoanalysis and other social sciences in his field by using them to manipulate public opinion 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.'¹⁰⁸ He called this technique the 'engineering of consent'. Freud's ideas about conscience and superego are among his most well-known theories, which can be easily translated to marketing and propaganda; 'The super-ego is an agency which has been inferred by us, and conscience is a function which we ascribe, among other functions, to that agency. This function consists in keeping a watch over the actions and intentions of the ego and judging

¹⁰⁵ A. Curtis, 'The Century of The Self – Part 1: Happiness Machines' *BBC* (2002) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPmg0R1M04&ab_channel=JustAdamCurtis (Accessed 30-10-2020).

¹⁰⁶ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 175 – 176.

¹⁰⁷ W. Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York/London 1962 [1914]), 68.

¹⁰⁸ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 71.

them, in exercising censorship.¹⁰⁹ The censorship keeps us from giving in to our actions and keeps us from real freedom: something Bernays would oppose as a supporter of liberalism, although not always considered a 'classic kind' liberal. Bernays stressed the importance of civil liberties, spoke out against Nazism and on behalf of several liberal politicians. He supported feminist causes before many men did and endorsed Roosevelt's New Deal, even though he worked for opponent Herbert Hoover. At the same time, he liked to flirt with the elite and was wary of the masses. He was anti-communists but also admired the Soviets' use of propaganda.¹¹⁰ He even targeted editorials specifically to liberals with his full-page series 'Plain Talk to Liberals' in 1944 editions of *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and the fraternity magazine *The Acacia Triad*.¹¹¹ Other historians would also categorize Bernays as a liberal.¹¹²

Benedict de Spinoza

Philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632 – 1677) agrees in his theologico-political treatise with Lippmann and, in combination with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic research, Bernays started to develop his approach to Public Relations on the importance of emotions in human behavior and their role concerning rational thought.¹¹³ In *Crystallizing Public Opinion* Bernays quotes Lippmann multiple times on the subject of how emotions create stereotypes (a term coined by Lippmann¹¹⁴) and generalities by the dominant, established group.¹¹⁵ Emotions have a great effect on perceptions and the mind without

¹⁰⁹ S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* Transl. J. Strachey (New York 1967), 83.

¹¹⁰ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 104 - 105.

¹¹¹ E.L. Bernays, 'Democracy in Education: Plain Talk to Liberals' *The Triad of Acacia Fraternity* 38:3 (1944), p. 71.

¹¹² I. Ross, *The Image Merchants: The fabulous world of American Public Relations* (London 1959), 54.

¹¹³ C. García, 'Searching for Benedict de Spinoza in the history of communication: His influence on Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays', *Public Relations Review* 41 (2015) 319 – 325, p. 322 – 323.

¹¹⁴ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 18 – 19.

¹¹⁵ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 114 – 115, 133, 159 – 160.

humans being aware of this phenomenon. Bernays used psychoanalysis to generate a Public Relations model or theory that incorporated social research and behavioral psychology to generate mind-changing campaigns, send messages and encourage certain behaviors.¹¹⁶

In *Propaganda* too, Bernays argued that people think ‘by means of cliché’, pat words or images which stand for a whole group of ideas or experiences.¹¹⁷ He found images to be persuasive; ‘a symbol may be defined as a shortcut to understanding and action. It is the currency of propaganda. It is a word or a picture... the acceptance of a symbol is emotional and expresses an associative mental process stemming from familiarity.’¹¹⁸ Spinoza shares this opinion with him, although in different terms. He tells his audience ‘to distinguish accurately between an idea, or concept, of the mind, and the images of things which we imagine’ because those images ‘are not ideas, but only fictions which we feign from a free choice of the will’ and the will always ‘involves an affirmation or negation’.¹¹⁹ Spinoza and Bernays both acknowledge the separation of idea and image because of the emotional interpretation of images.

Bernays began experimenting with symbols in his early years working as a pr-agent. He used the writings of Lippmann, Gustave Le Bon, and Spinoza for this research. As said above, Lippmann had stated that leaders could not be expected to have a rational dialogue with the public about important matters, like justice. That would not work and would take too long. Instead of this, they should try to work with the right wording or images to wield the public imagination and rally the public for their cause. Cinemas are ideal for exercising symbols. Hollywood often uses symbols to make clear who is ‘the good guy’ and who is ‘bad’.¹²⁰ Bernays stated in *Propaganda* on this: ‘It is chiefly the

¹¹⁶ García, ‘Searching for Spinoza’, 323.

¹¹⁷ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 74.

¹¹⁸ E. L. Bernays, *Public Relations* (Norman 1952), 166.

¹¹⁹ B. Spinoza, *Ethica* (Amsterdam 1996 [1677]), 64.

¹²⁰ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 95.

psychologists of the school of Freud who have pointed out that many of man's thoughts and actions are compensatory substitutes for desires which have [sic] been obliged to suppress. A thing may be desired not for its intrinsic worth or usefulness, but because he has unconsciously come to see it a symbol of something else.'¹²¹ Bernays felt that the mind of the people 'is composed of inherited prejudices and symbols and clichés and verbal formulas supplied to them by the leaders.'¹²² He clearly underlines the importance of symbols, but after that immediately adds that it is the propagandist and politician's job to form the will of people and ignore those same prejudices and symbols. Symbols were an integral part of many of his campaigns, like the Torches of Freedom campaign or the Green Ball, and in one of his first individual ventures as the advisor to the Coolidge campaign. The use and power of symbols in campaigns was an integral part of this and clearly an influence of Spinoza's theories.

Censorship

One of the great tools in manipulating public opinion is censorship, all thinkers discussed agree. But for a liberal like Bernays, it imposes a problem too, as it makes the press less unrestricted. Freud developed the idea of censorship of ideas and desires. He created the theory of manipulating thought whereby the dominant consciousness restricted the entrance of certain materials to conscious attention. People learn the standards and values of their peers and general culture, but also in an individual manner. Unfamiliar subjects and ideas are in this process rejected.¹²³

In *Propaganda*, Bernays underlined the importance of self-censoring in the editing of a newspaper. A politician can withhold news from a newspaper and therefore,

¹²¹ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 75.

¹²² *Ibidem*, 109.

¹²³ Albigh, *Modern Public Opinion*, 243.

effectively censor political news.¹²⁴ Lippmann (1923) argued that propaganda is dependent on censorship. Bernays did not agree: 'Propaganda is a purposeful, directed effort to overcome censorship—the censorship of the group mind and the herd reaction.' He refers here to the self-censorship of the individual. The person's logic prevents neutral decision-making based on experience and information.¹²⁵ The perception of politicians is constantly under examination of the public. Not only around elections but equally in public opinion, politicians want to be considered positively. Public relations is all about changing people's views of a certain subject. This can either be a person or a product. The public makes up their mind about for example a politician and self-censors all information not accommodating this view. It is the job of the propagandist to change that.

Journalists are not expected to self-censor. The editors work independently or at least try to, Bernays states in *Propaganda*. On the other side, news editors do not care if something is propaganda, fed to them by PR counsels.¹²⁶ Then again, in *Crystallizing*, Bernays has a different opinion. The press is restricted by external factors and conditions that they cannot control. Walter Lippmann believed that there exists a barrier in influence between the people and the events. The censorship journalists and editors must exercise is an inadequate presentation of the events they try to describe. They often try to retell the story to let it relate to the reader's life.¹²⁷ Bernays seems to agree.

While censorship is indeed a powerful tool to steer public opinion, he was also critical of it. One of his arguments was for instance that in 1946 the government did not inform the public the right way about the Hiroshima attack. This caused a false sense of invincibility. Years after this event, the Russians were forming more of a threat to the United States, which was confusing because of this idea of an unbeatable America. As a result, there was a sudden need to create scapegoats who could receive the blame and

¹²⁴ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 120.

¹²⁵ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 122.

¹²⁶ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 162 – 163.

¹²⁷ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 75.

because of this, McCarthyism could arise. With a better PR policy, Bernays writes, this would have been avoided – a bold claim to make.¹²⁸

Bernays was a firm believer in utilitarianism. This is not easy in his profession, as he sometimes needs to disguise his Public Relations work with misleading information. Honesty can be an issue for the work of the counselor who is committed to the community. But the counselor represents one client instead of another, which can cause them to make dishonest decisions.¹²⁹ Bernays on the other hand was less interested in transparency and more in results.¹³⁰

Early on in his career, Bernays contributed the article 'This business of Propaganda' (1928). He expressed his thoughts about the profession of Public Relations counsel and stressed a few of the virtues of PR men, emphasizing that in Bernays's opinion the Public Relations counsel must always support his clients' causes. The counsel will also not take cases of conflicting clients and always act in the media as the representative of their client, never making a personal performance.¹³¹ He is less outspoken about the issue of honesty and reliability, or as he calls it 'partisan representation of one point of view. [...] The only difference between "propaganda" and "education," really, is in the point of view. The advocacy of what we believe in is education. The advocacy of what we do not believe in is propaganda. Each of these nouns carries with it social and moral implications. Education is valuable, commendable, enlightening, instructive. Propaganda is insidious, dishonest, underhand, misleading. It is only to-day that the viewpoint on this question is undergoing a slight change [...].'¹³² There exists a paradox. The Public Relations counsel sometimes tells harsh truths that the public does not want to hear, and as a result gets called dishonest. Truth, in Bernays's opinion, is relative. This is particularly difficult in

¹²⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 794 – 796.

¹²⁹ Christians, Fackler and Ferré, *Public Communication*, 164 -165.

¹³⁰ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 73.

¹³¹ Bernays, 'This Business of Propaganda' 198.

¹³² Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 208 – 212.

reporting on policy decisions, where regularly there are more ways to look at a problem and the politicians have thought of an unpopular solution to a problem. When the public does not respond to that solution or the press does not report on all the different factors regarding the issue, they will lose trust in their government.¹³³

Political news and events reached so many more people and had more impact than a simple marketing campaign for cigarettes or fashion items could. As someone who liked praise, this appealed to Bernays. For the rest of his career, Bernays would use symbols and stereotypes in his campaigns. As for the rest of his teachers, only the lessons Lippmann had taught him he took with him in his political campaigns. The fact that he was Freud's nephew is often mentioned in books, by himself and by Adam Curtis in his documentary, but the famous idea of the cigarette as a phallus symbol is something Dr. A. A. Brill came up with and he did not continue to use sexual symbols in his pr work for the presidential campaigns.¹³⁴

Walter Lippmann is clearly a major intellectual inspiration for Bernays, but Bernays does have other people who influenced his work. He wanted to be seen as a peer of these men, more or less. Some historians go so far as to say Bernays stole his ideas from Lippmann, due to the similarities in their books. Documentary makers, journalists and writers writing about Bernays' brilliance tend to highlight his connection with his uncle. While it is true he was inspired by psychology and published Freud's books in the U.S., at Bernays's time Freud was not the only influential psychologist. He implemented Trotter, Lippmann and Spinoza's theories more than Freud's in his political work. Even in his most famous campaign, the Torches of Freedom, he was advised by Dr. A.A. Brill, not Freud. His correspondence with his uncle mainly consisted of the press surrounding the English translation of Freud's book. Bernays' focus included more than simply politics.

¹³³ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 213 – 214.

¹³⁴ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 386.

Chapter two: Political campaigns

Bernays' accomplishments in the commercial field are subject to studies over multiple academic fields. His work in the political arena is less of general interest. He started working for commercial clients, but could he successfully transplant his methods to the domain of political employers? In the history of Public Relations politics and the field's civic role have always been important, as the perfect picture is often needed to persuade voters. In the career of Bernays, as he grew more and more popular, politics was also an important element. This was his chance to be taken seriously. What this thesis has found however, is that his campaigns were either successful because of external factors or if they were unsuccessful, Bernays hardly discussed them, probably in an effort to prevent his reputation from declining in the public eye. Moreover, his ideas about the application of PR to the political domain, partly indebted to Lippmann, remain somewhat vague and inconsistent.

Bernays saw propaganda as an essential practice in a democratic society because Public Relations is a communication activity that involves communities, for better or worse. He described it as 'Public Relations is the practice of social responsibility'.¹³⁵ Public relations owed it to society to make it a better place. Bernays understood that propaganda could greatly influence democratic processes and looked at these processes as another marketplace of ideas. The political field is perfect to use as a tool to influence groups because it covers almost everything, like health, business, sports, and social issues. The public would not want to let the traditional media have the freedom to set up the agenda. They also wanted to feel like they played a role in this. The Public Relations agents could help those introducing issues and subjects into the political debate. The Public Relations counsel 'functions on a two-way street' interpreting 'public to client and

¹³⁵ Christians, Fackler and Ferré, *Public Communication*, 161 – 162.

client to public', Bernays has said.¹³⁶ In his definition, Public Relations is inherently political, as its purpose is to educate the citizens and promote civic causes.

According to Bernays, his success as a commercial Public Relations advisor made the profession already stand out in the 1920s and 30s. Businesses were becoming more interested in the public interest and public opinion and their clientele became more diverse. At the same time or as a result of this, the United States government began to recognize the importance of PR. Bernays sees his appointment as a member of the President's Emergency Committee for Employment in 1930 as an example of that.¹³⁷ It was time for Public Relations men to become political actors. The first job in a political field Bernays was able to fulfill was in the Creel Committee.

Rumors started circling in November 1918 about a possible end of the Great War. But at the Foreign Press Bureau, they were mainly interested in who would be going to Paris with the President for the Peace Conference.¹³⁸ Because of Edward Bernays' work for Wilson in the United States Committee on Public Information, he was asked, along with 15 other employees, to accompany the President to the Versailles Peace Conference where the Committee would provide technical assistance to the press present. In a 1959 interview, he said about this experience: 'it gave me the first real understanding of the power of ideas as weapons and words as bullets.'¹³⁹

The newspapers picked it up and ran stories about the expedition's mission to 'interpret the work of the Peace Conference by keeping up a worldwide propaganda to disseminate American accomplishments and ideals.'¹⁴⁰ Bernays received backlash over a press release he sent out and even Creel blamed the charges against him (about alleged censorship of the press during the war) made by the Republicans in Congress on Bernays'

¹³⁶ Ibidem, 162 – 163.

¹³⁷ Bernays, *Public Relations*, 105 – 106.

¹³⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 159.

¹³⁹ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 165.

¹⁴⁰ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 161 – 162.

rash statement.¹⁴¹ Twenty years later, it seemed like the mistake was still fresh in the minds of those involved. Mock and Larson wrote: 'President Wilson was given the military victory he wanted on November 11, 1918, and it seemed that his spokesmen of the CPI had likewise triumphed.'¹⁴² Nevertheless, Bernays became a known participant in the political field with this job on the committee, positively or negatively.

In the 1920s propaganda became a great whipping post to aim all cynicism at, after the United States failed to achieve its war aims of World War I. Once a job for the church, propaganda came to be defined as 'the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution.'¹⁴³ But the 20s gave propaganda its negative stigma, as writers and politicians used to claim that the United States had been tricked into entering the Great War by false propaganda of the British.¹⁴⁴

Methods of Public Relations were initially shaped to serve a corporate agenda but were rapidly adapted to a diverse range of purposes. Press agents were suddenly needed in all corners of society and press agents went on the federal payroll in the early years of the 20th century. By 1952, full-time PR employees numbered at 2,625.9 and part-time workers came to 1,007.5. There were no further surveys of federal employees working in the PR field after 1952. However, these figures are not reliable, as many agencies did not officially work in Public Relations and had misleading job titles. Congress showed hostility towards propaganda, fearing that manipulation of any sort (press or public opinion) would put unfair pressure on the legislative progress.^{145 146}

¹⁴¹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 19.

¹⁴² Mock and Larson, *Words that won*, 334.

¹⁴³ Merriam-Webster.com, 'Propaganda' Dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda> (Accessed 04-14-2021).

¹⁴⁴ Cutlip, *The Unseen Power*, 182 - 183.

¹⁴⁵ Ross, *The Image Merchants*, 204 - 205.

¹⁴⁶ M. N. Olasky, 'Reception of Edward Bernays' Doctrine of "Manipulating Public Opinion"' *Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* 67 (1982) 1 - 20, p. 6.

Calvin Coolidge

Edward Bernays became a household name in New York after his commercial success. Therefore, it was not a big surprise when President Coolidge contacted him in 1924. Coolidge was elected as vice-President under President Harding and replaced him after Harding's passing in August of 1923. His image needed polishing; according to reports, the American people found him to be sour. 'As if he had been weaned on a pickle', Theodore Roosevelt's daughter Alice had said to a journalist.¹⁴⁷ It is no secret that Coolidge's image was that of a man of few words and expressions. This was not bad news for most Americans; historians had noted that Coolidge's stiffness stood for a simpler, more comprehensible America and that this President embodied a man of patience. However, his critics would say he lacked leadership and initiative.¹⁴⁸

To give the Republican President's personality a boost, the Coolidge Non-Partisan League was created and Bernays was asked as a publicity counsel. It was not the custom to rally during campaigning in 1924 and actively seek publicity. Nevertheless, Bernays contacted well over a thousand newspapers to inform them about the importance of nonpartisanship. Secondly, Bernays looked for Democrats who would come out in support of Coolidge. He succeeded, mainly because these politicians hoped to get promotions in Coolidge's government.¹⁴⁹

Bernays already knew that persuading people into a nonpartisan position is not the way to win elections. Thus, the second strategy in his employment under President Coolidge was something he already used: the profit of celebrity endorsement. He previously used this in his campaigns by using opera singers to sell his cigarettes. Because the President's public persona was seen as cold and introverted, Bernays firstly wanted

¹⁴⁷ A. B. Rollins, "Some Surprises from Mr. Coolidge." *The Massachusetts Review* 6:3 (1965) 645 – 647, p. 647.

¹⁴⁸ K. W. Buckley, 'A President for the "Great Silent Majority": Bruce Barton's Construction of Calvin Coolidge', *The New England Quarterly* 76:4 (2003) 593 – 626, p. 593 – 594.

¹⁴⁹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 78.

to send a delegation of female novelists or mothers to the White House. He eventually decided to invite leading figures from the entertainment industry, like Al Jolson, Charlotte Greenwood and the Dolly Sisters, to have breakfast with the President. The idea behind this was that these people were seen by the public as warm and extraverted, next to Coolidge's coldness and austerity.¹⁵⁰ The event did not go exactly as planned, as the President's introverted image was not an exaggeration made up by the public and press. His face upon meeting the representatives of the entertainment industry remained completely unmoved and he did not speak very much, besides a 'good morning'.¹⁵¹

The next day the front page of *the New York Times* read: 'Actors eat cakes with the Coolidges: President nearly laughs'. It looked like the campaign was a success; the article even quoted Al Jolson saying: 'We are all Republicans from now on [...] We members of the theatre are perhaps in more intimate touch with the people than any other profession. We came to assure you of our support and offer to work for you and the Republican Party.'¹⁵² This sounds like a great endorsement from the country's top actors at the time, but on September 27th the same year *The Washington Post* had already written an article about the campaign breakfast a month before it commenced. Here the President is even quoted as saying that the endorsement was an extension of the support from four years ago; it was nothing special that the actors' league supported the Republican Party.¹⁵³ This is a parallel to the support of most Hollywood's actors for Democratic politicians we see today,¹⁵⁴ so that is not very special, new or unexpected. But Bernays had the task to polish

¹⁵⁰ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 339 – 340.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 341.

¹⁵² 'Actors eat cakes with the Coolidges' *New York Times* 10-18-1924 <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1924/10/18/104265552.html?pageNumber=1> (Accessed 10-19-2020), p. 1.

¹⁵³ 'Noted Actors Form a Coolidge League: Al Jolson, Ethel Barrymore and John Drew are among the Members' *The Washington Post* 27-09-1924 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/149377594/D5B6AD0820EA4A90PQ/1?accountid=12045> (Accessed 09-20-2020), p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ T. Jacobs, 'Why is Hollywood so liberal?' *Pacific Standard* 05-14-2019 <https://psmag.com/news/why-is-hollywood-so-liberal> (Accessed 09-20-2020).

up Coolidge's image so he would win the presidency, and in that, he succeeded. It is interesting to note that the use of celebrity endorsement can absolutely be seen as using symbols, in this case, symbols of 'good advice' to the people, in manipulating public opinion. The previous chapter also discussed the use of Hollywood actors, to symbolize 'good' or 'bad' in a story. Especially in the early twentieth century, the stories in Hollywood movies used the character arc of the 'good' hero versus the 'bad' villain. Actors were inherently connected to that stereotype. So, to relate an actor who usually plays the 'good' guy, like Jolson, to a public figure, said a public figure would receive a more positive reputation. Jolson was America's most famous and highest-paid entertainer at the time,¹⁵⁵ so probably represented good decisions.

The New York Review headlined 'Jolson Makes President Laugh for the First Time in Public.'¹⁵⁶ In the *New York World*: 'It took a group of New York actors three minutes to accomplish with Calvin Coolidge what society leaders of Washington had attempted and failed, what traditionally was impossible, at least in public, and what even the Senate during his two years and a half as presiding officer would not make him do. They forced him to show his teeth, open his mouth and laugh.'¹⁵⁷

'To the country at large the headlines and the stories reflected surprise and undoubtedly changed the reputation of Coolidge as intended', Bernays stated in his autobiography.¹⁵⁸ Despite his reelection, research has shown that the 30th President stayed unpopular in later years. Former President Truman even found him one of the eight worst Presidents of the country in 1953.¹⁵⁹ The 1982 Murray-Blessing survey asked 190 historians about their opinion. The liberal-leaning historians put Coolidge also as number 30 out of

¹⁵⁵ B. Bainbridge, *Front row: Evenings at the Theatre* (London 2005), 109.

¹⁵⁶ 'Jolson Makes President Laugh for the First Time in Public' *New York Review* 10-18-1924, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 79.

¹⁵⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 341.

¹⁵⁹ A. M. Schlesinger Jr., 'Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton' *Political Science Quarterly* 112:2 (1997) 179 – 190, p. 181.

36 presidents. The conservative historians put him just outside the lowest six.¹⁶⁰ Even his biographer Larry Tye, who put Bernays on a big pedestal throughout the whole book, had to give a more nuanced explanation in the retelling of the Coolidge campaign and cannot prove that Bernays changed Coolidge's image, but rather that the event 'touched a nerve',¹⁶¹ which is a surprisingly mild reaction in comparison to the rest of the book. There is no mention of this campaign in Curtis's documentary.

Coolidge is still known as one of the most conservative presidents in American history. After his election, the New Englander kept the image of a stern puritan, but could that have been a deal-breaker for the election? Some historians even think it helped him, as his predecessor died just as allegations and controversy following the Teapot Dome scandal – two Cabinet members even committed suicide – surrounded his administration in 1923. Only a reliable, serious, no-nonsense Presidential nominee with strong personal integrity could fix the reputation of the Republican Party, the historians believe.¹⁶²

Others credit the use of the radio as the reason that Coolidge had won. Those historians make a strong case, because it was the first time it was used in a campaign. Coolidge's voice was already familiar, and his New England accent sounded distinct. The Republican Convention would be the first broadcast over a multiple station hookup. Furthermore, the fact that the Republican Convention and Party, in general, ran more smoothly (Coolidge was nominated almost unanimously) than the Democratic Party may have had some effect on the election results too.¹⁶³ The effect, or even the arrival of the new medium in American political campaigns, was not mentioned once in Bernays' description of the 1924 election.

¹⁶⁰ R. Murray and T. Blessing, *Greatness in the White House: Rating the Presidents, From Washington Through Ronald Reagan* (University Park PA 1993), 135.

¹⁶¹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 79.

¹⁶² B. J. Schulman, *Student's Guide to Elections* (Washington 2008), 126.

¹⁶³ L. E. Weeks, 'The Radio Election of 1924' *Journal of Broadcasting* 8:3 (1964) 233 – 244, p. 233 – 235.

In *Crystallizing Public Opinion* Bernays does mention the radio, but not in relation to Coolidge. The book was published in the same year as the election; Bernays was probably working on it or just finished it during his time advising Coolidge. So, it is odd that he did not mention the influence the new medium had on public opinion. In the book, he even stated that 'by considering the radio from the standpoint of his work, the Public Relations counsel has a new medium which can readily reach huge sections of the public with his message.'¹⁶⁴

As elected President in tumultuous times, Coolidge had enough chances to become as legendary as some of his predecessors. Nevertheless, the irony of his term as President is that he was popular because of his lack of color, but also did not stand out because of this lack of color. Press agents and news media presented not the real Calvin Coolidge, but he never pretended to be anything else than he was. After this, publicity tactics became more researched and consciously cultivated.¹⁶⁵ Bernays, too, learned from his mistakes and experience. His next venture on the political stage would go in a different direction.

Herbert Hoover

'Ours is a government by opinion, and the press is a most important part of that process' is a quote by Bernays' employer eight years later, Herbert Hoover.¹⁶⁶ He got nominated as the Republican nominee in the 1932 presidential election. Bernays had worked for Hoover before, in the President's Emergency Committee for Employment in 1930, a year after the Wall Street Crash. So, the economy was high on the agenda and what the election

¹⁶⁴ Bernays, *Crystallizing*, 147 – 148.

¹⁶⁵ Albig, *Modern Public Opinion*, 147 – 148.

¹⁶⁶ R. M. Eisinger, 'Gauging Public Opinion in the Hoover White House: Understanding the Roots of Presidential Polling' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30:4 (2000) 643 – 661, p. 643.

was mostly about. The presidential nominee found that unemployment must be handled locally and had at that point done nothing to relieve the Depression.¹⁶⁷

Bernays was once again asked to come to the White House to share ideas about overcoming the Great Depression and how to beat his Democratic opponent, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Bernays planned to first enlist 25,000 business, labor and academic experts to join the Non-partisan Fact-Finding Committee, in favor of Hoover, which made the Committee much less impartial than the name would suggest. One of the 'fake news' stories they had put out was that the economy was about to turn around and that Roosevelt was not as progressive as he looked and was 'subject to Tammany and political jobbery.' Bernays's tactic was, as with Coolidge, dividing the opposition. This meant making 15 million voters change their opinion and vote Republican instead of Democrat.¹⁶⁸

Roosevelt was a tough opponent to beat in the middle of a recession and Hoover was not popular within the political elite, but the straw polls of the time showed during the whole campaign that Hoover took the lead. In that period these polls were seen as the most reliable tool to predict the upcoming election, but still misleading. Interviewers asked potential voters about their plans on voting, often in public places like train stations or political rallies. This was without an official system and biased. Most people at campaign rallies would have already made up their minds and unemployed citizens are underrepresented at train platforms. Besides that, Hoover's team used their data from a survey conducted in 1924 and 1928, four and one years before the Wall Street Crash, which changed the whole debate and politics around the election.¹⁶⁹ Bernays wanted to do things differently than with Coolidge and these surveys required more research than the image polishing in 1924.

¹⁶⁷ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 463.

¹⁶⁸ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 80.

¹⁶⁹ Eisinger, 'Gauging Public Opinion', 649 – 650.

Even though Hoover was leading in the results, he disapproved of the partisan nature of the polls. As a result, 5,000 new interviews were conducted amongst Republicans, Hoover supporters who voted for Democratic nominee Smith in 1928, Democrats, Roosevelt supporters who voted for Hoover in 1928, and Socialist Norman Thomas supporters. These were maybe more reliable results, but the results sent to Hoover showed him always winning the election. If the poll showed Hoover losing, an advisor would claim that the poll was flawed, or the survey was manipulated with anti-Hoover bias. This research overall had Hoover winning the election by a landslide. On the 25th of October 1932, a press release still stated that Hoover would win with an Electoral College vote of 269 to 70 and 71% of the total vote.¹⁷⁰

These false predictions, polls, and press releases were put out to the public because it was believed that this could be a tool to manipulate and control public opinion. Bernays encouraged this by motivating politicians to promote themselves in propagandistic ways:

It is, indeed, incomprehensible that politicians do not make use of the elaborate business methods that the industry has built up. Because a politician knows political strategy, can develop campaign issues, can devise strong planks for platforms, and envisage broad policies, it does not follow that he can be given the responsibility of selling ideas to a public as large as that of the United States.¹⁷¹

Bernays continued this by stating that a politician understands the public and knows what the public wants. Bernays depicts a politician as someone who always does what is best for his people, seemingly without an agenda. At the same time, he found that whatever

¹⁷⁰ Eisinger, 'Gauging Public Opinion', 650 – 652.

¹⁷¹ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 112.

the politicians stand for, their PR counsel should also believe in, otherwise the collaboration will never work.¹⁷²

As said before, the marketing surrounding this particular 'sale' was about the opponent. One campaign would have leading Democrats who thought it was a mistake to nominate Roosevelt instead of Al Smith being given a podium to speak out and divide the party. Another campaign showed Hoover as a compassionate, humane, and courageous leader who brought and would bring the nation peace and prosperity. Besides creating that image of the sitting President, Bernays' team also presented a plan to the public in which they promised a careful recovery of the economy, as Roosevelt's plan was quicker and (in their eyes) reckless. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Roosevelt from winning the Presidency with 472 electoral votes, against Hoover's 59.¹⁷³

His biographer Eugene Lyons argues that an important reason why Hoover lost was that he was exhausted by the campaign. The Republican National Committee was out of funds in the middle of the campaign and Hoover had to turn to fund-raising, instead of focusing on his addresses and his obligations as President.¹⁷⁴ Another explanation he gives is that the business elite was afraid of a Republican President and for that reason endorsed the Democratic nominee, who appeared to want to create more comfortable economic conditions for the big businesses. His policies were even compared to Mussolini's 'corporate state'. Professors Charles A. Beard and Mary Beard argued that Hoover had 'few ardent friends in Wall Street, which was supposed to be the nerve center of the economic system he was trying to resuscitate.'¹⁷⁵ Hoover's attacks on market manipulation were the cause of this, according to the professors and as a result the reason for the insufficient campaign funds.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² E. L. Bernays, 'This Business of Propaganda', *The Independent* 121:4083 (1928), 198.

¹⁷³ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 80.

¹⁷⁴ E. Lyons, *Herbert Hoover: A Biography* (New York 1964), 292.

¹⁷⁵ The Beards quoted in: Lyons, *Hoover*, 294.

¹⁷⁶ Lyons, *Hoover*, 293 – 294.

When comparing the campaign Bernays ran for Coolidge and Hoover, one could say that Hoover's had a more political approach. Coolidge relied on celebrity endorsements, but a few famous actors could not have convinced his whole electorate to vote for him. Historians still do not agree on what aspect of his personality or campaign won him the presidency. However, Hoover found himself in a more difficult political situation with the Great Depression, with a more experienced and older PR agent. He was critical of his polling system, which indeed did produce wrong results. Hoover's campaign looked more like a campaign in the 21st century. Nevertheless, Bernays and Tye hardly touched upon it. Tye spends one page on Hoover but three on the less interesting Coolidge, with a full report of the newspapers the morning after the election results and more references. In his autobiography, Bernays almost immediately skips to Hoover's inauguration in 1929 and Coolidge's campaign he describes in full detail, even recounting the conversations. It is also widely known that campaigning as a sitting President is a little less difficult than as an opponent. That is also seen by the fact that of the 45 men that held the office of president, only twelve served one term.¹⁷⁷

The fact that in the end Hoover lost and Coolidge won may have something to do with the unequal amount of attention Bernays gives campaigns in his memoirs. As said before Bernays was not someone who likes to disappear in the background, even though his job demanded that sometimes of him as a behind-the-scenes mass manipulator. Maybe this disappointment is the reason he did not work for large political clients for a while.

William O'Dwyer

Bernays kept writing, teaching, and working for commercial clients in the years following the Hoover campaign. He admits that the work around Coolidge and Hoover was not

¹⁷⁷ T. Murse, 'One-Term US Presidents: List of Incumbent U.S. Presidents Denied Re-Election', *Thoughtco* May 3, 2020 <https://www.thoughtco.com/one-term-us-presidents-3322257> (Accessed 19-10-2020).

extensively researched and partly improvised. By 1940 he had gathered more strategic plans that he could use for his work with William O'Dwyer, who was running for Mayor of New York City, against then-current Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia.¹⁷⁸

When O'Dwyer asked for Bernays's services, the first step was to survey the electorate, something he had not done in his other political campaigns. He mentioned researching in his 1986 interview at Ball State University and referred to it as 'Step two' in the process, although he never goes into much detail about the research.¹⁷⁹ In *Propaganda*, Bernays wrote about researching a product and analyzing the market. This can be applied to politics, but he discussed here, among other things, that when a group is devoted to the other product, they are a lost cause in terms of persuasion.¹⁸⁰ This is not great advice for a political campaign where the whole objective is focused on trying to get people to change sides.

In this period, measuring public opinion by research and surveys was still deemed impractical and not something PR-men did. Five boroughs in New York were polled, thousands of voters were interviewed, the recent elections were analyzed, and all data was being gathered on New Yorkers' political, economic, and educational associations. Bernays was progressive for this age, as he also ordered psychological surveys of voters of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. In the end, this all resulted in a 46-page report (which may have been the first of its kind) with the voters categorized by religion, ethnicity, issues, and ideology.¹⁸¹

The poll found that two key issues worried the New Yorkers mostly. The first one was that Catholics feared that La Guardia, who had a Jewish mother, might be re-elected.

¹⁷⁸ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 81.

¹⁷⁹ E. Bernays in: 'Edward L. Bernays interview, 1986-10-23', *Ball State University Libraries* 16-06-2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rg1jOLBzvvY&t=1350s&ab_channel=BallStateUniversityLibraries (Accessed 02-11-2020)

¹⁸⁰ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 114.

¹⁸¹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 81.

Secondly, the Jewish community was concerned about a possible Christian (and anti-Semite) front with an election of O'Dwyer. So, fear and xenophobia played a big part in this election.¹⁸² This was not unfounded; a 1938 survey found that approximately 60 percent of the respondents had a low opinion of Jews.¹⁸³

Bernays's advice was to approach Irish Catholics (like O'Dwyer himself) and remind them that as district attorney he helped break up mobster gangs, plus highlighting his Democratic Party ideals. Secondly, he had to change this stance when speaking to the Italians and focus on police reform, his political independence, and the fact that La Guardia did not appoint fellow Italians to jobs in the council. His pitch to the union members should be that he was pro-labor and pro-union. But as for big businesses he should tell them that his mantra was 'fairness in labor disputes, fair hearing of employers' side.'¹⁸⁴ The Jewish community took up a third of the population of New York City at that moment and felt a lot of insecurity in these times. Bernays advised that because they were the biggest block of swing voters, they were a great demographic to get supported by.¹⁸⁵

O'Dwyer's speech accepting the nomination of Mayor was published in *the New York Times* on September 19th, 1941. Bernays' recommendations were quite diverse and differed depending on what group O'Dwyer would be talking to, so following his advice, the plan was to stick to vague promises in this widely read speech. Nevertheless, O'Dwyer opened with: 'I propose to conduct an aggressive and constructive campaign.'¹⁸⁶ He went on with his first proposal which contained among other things the plan to fire the public

¹⁸² Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 650 – 651.

¹⁸³ F. C. Jaher, *The Jews and the Nation: Revolution, Emancipation, State Formation, and the Liberal Paradigm in America and France* (New Jersey 2002), 230.

¹⁸⁴ W. O'Dwyer, 'Text of O'Dwyer Speech Accepting Nomination for Mayor', *New York Times* 09-19-1941 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/105598026/fulltextPDF/5F25BA477BC74E45PO/2?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-03-2020).

¹⁸⁵ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 81 – 82.

¹⁸⁶ O'Dwyer, 'Text of O'Dwyer Speech' <https://search.proquest.com/docview/105598026/fulltextPDF/5F25BA477BC74E45PO/2?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-03-2020), p. 14.

servants his opponent wrongly appointed during his time as Mayor. After this, he moved on to talk about the people who see public office as a way to personal political gain and power. With that, he stressed that as a Democrat under a Democratic national government and governor, he would not be controlled by his colleagues higher up in the political field.

Further along in his speech, he mentioned crime. As Bernays recommended, he brought up the fact that as district attorney he reorganized the staff and had promised that the crime rate would go down. He claimed that under his office 87 murders in different boroughs and counties had been solved, prosecuted, and punished. Crime had overall decreased according to O'Dwyer, and Brooklyn had been cleaner. He also rejected communism, fascism, and Nazism in his statement, expressing that he supported Roosevelt's plan on foreign aid.¹⁸⁷

From reading the speech it looks like the only recommendation from Bernays O'Dwyer used in practice was the focus on crime. Furthermore, O'Dwyer emphasized many times that he planned to be an independent Mayor, who would not be influenced by other external forces or politicians.¹⁸⁸ The other messages that O'Dwyer should bring out at Bernays' advice would be carried by media outlets like the radio, newspapers, motion pictures, and newsreels. Bernays told O'Dwyer that 'every event, every speech, every release, every action, should fit into the broad pattern of the six points' of the earlier report.¹⁸⁹ About the first speech accepting the nomination Bernays wrote: 'Groups and individuals who had expressed no interest in his candidacy now supported his cause.'¹⁹⁰ What this was based on, what groups he meant, or what the reason is, he did not disclose.

¹⁸⁷ O'Dwyer, 'Text of O'Dwyer Speech'

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/105598026/fulltextPDF/5F25BA477BC74E45PQ/2?accountid=12045>

(Accessed 11-03-2020), p. 14.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 82.

¹⁹⁰ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 651.

O'Dwyer was defeated in this election by a narrow margin (he would eventually be elected in 1945). As said before, the work Bernays did was far more extensive than for Hoover or Coolidge, but in his biography William O'Dwyer is only discussed in one short page. The research he had done was never seen before and the election had the closest margin since 1905. Bernays also does not speak about this work in his television interviews (he did mention Hoover and Coolidge). It looks like this has to do with the defeat of the election. If so, an election may not be his preferred type of assignment, as there is always a chance of defeat and in Bernays' eyes, defeat means 'failure' – even though O'Dwyer took Bernays' advice and 4 years later won the election. Marketing specifically aimed at certain groups is something he had used before; for example, when reports were coming out about the health danger of smoking, Bernays hired doctors to endorse Lucky Strike. After the O'Dwyer project, he focused on longer projects, without the competitive element of a political race.

Other political clients and the NAACP

Bernays was offered during these political adventures the job of Public Relations counsel to multiple political actors, from Eleanor Roosevelt to Al Smith. One of his clients was President Eisenhower and his United States Information Agency. He had worked for the War Department before; after World War One he helped to find jobs for veterans with his campaigns. His task for the U.S. Information Agency was to distribute U.S. propaganda and give the army advice on Public Relations matters.¹⁹¹

Bernays also handled the publicity around the Atlanta convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1920, the first convention held in the South after the Civil War.¹⁹² It was an important campaign, as the

¹⁹¹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 84.

¹⁹² Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 209.

NAACP wanted to get a positive reaction in the press. There was still a lot of hostility against people of color and the Jim Crow laws were still in place in 1926. Bernays also pointed out that the emergence of a variety of social movements and commercial interests used propaganda to create an environment that can captivate a large group of people and gather their support. In his 1928 article 'Manipulating public opinion: The why and the how', Bernays claimed that public opinion could even be arranged for or against something as little as salad dressings, regardless of the viewpoint, product or issue. Propaganda has shown that it can garner momentum in the minds of hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁹³ In addition to this, his wife Doris Fleischman was already active in social reform as a proud feminist. She fought for the right to keep using her maiden name, attended the Women's Peace Parade in 1917, and wrote multiple books and articles urging women to assert themselves. She consulted clients on her husband's behalf too, and mostly handled the social matters, like the NAACP convention, as she was more soft-spoken than Edward.¹⁹⁴

Bernays decided to get in contact with the Northern press and sent Doris to Atlanta, who needed four bodyguards to guard her every time she left the hotel because she was sympathetic to the minority. In the end, Doris took this campaign almost entirely over.¹⁹⁵ One of the key topics that were discussed in Atlanta was the Hate Crimes Prevention Act. There was strong support from the Association for a bill expanding federal jurisdiction, which was still pending in Congress. At that moment there was a substantial increase in hate crimes against African American citizens, according to recent Justice Department reports.¹⁹⁶ A federal hate-crime law would be instituted seven years

¹⁹³ E. L. Bernays, 'Manipulating public opinion: The how and the why' *The American Journal of Sociology* 33: 6 (1928) 958-971, p. 969.

¹⁹⁴ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 123 - 125.

¹⁹⁵ Bernays, *Biography of an idea* 210 – 213.

¹⁹⁶ J. Z. Browne, 'Hate Crime Prevention Act issue for NAACP convention', *New York Amsterdam News* 08-06-1998 89:32 <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=979402&site=ehost-live> (Accessed 11-29-2020).

later which covered any person being intimidated because of his/her race, color, religion, or national origin.¹⁹⁷

If Bernays is to be believed, the press around the convention was a success. But there is no evidence that *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, or *Times Herald* wrote about the NAACP in Atlanta, despite Bernays's e-mails. Their archives are openly accessible and there is no mention of an Atlanta convention in the months surrounding it. But he recounted that the *Atlanta American* ran a special feature and interview on the conference and the *Atlanta Constitution* highlighted a statement sent by the Mayor and listed the progress the NAACP had made since 1910. Bernays stated in his autobiography first that he was in close contact with the *New York Times*, and he has shown that in his other work, but in his reflection about this event he quickly switched his attention to the *New York Globe* and *Evening Post*, which gave the convention wide coverage according to the autobiography. Bernays also reported that he was applauded by the NAACP leaders, like Oswald Garrison Villard.¹⁹⁸

Just three years later Bernays wrote about the event in the third person as if it was not his job to control the publicity. Here he nuanced his role and did not mention his involvement in the cause:

As for the practical results, the immediate one was a change in the minds of many southern editors who realized that the question at issue was not an emotional one, but a discussable one; and that this point of view was immediately reflected to their readers. As for the further results, these are hard to measure with a slide rule. The conference had its effect in changing the attitude of the southerners. [...] it is evident that the decline in lynching is an effect of this and other efforts of the association.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ '18 U.S. Code § 245. Federally protected activities', *Legal Information Institute* https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/245#b_2 (Accessed 11-29-2020).

¹⁹⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an idea* 214 – 216.

¹⁹⁹ Bernays, 'Manipulating Public Opinion' p. 963 – 964.

The press around the convention was partly the cause of the decline in lynching, he argued. Statistics provided by the Archives at Tuskegee Institute also show that the number of reported lynchings was declining in the years prior and increased a small amount in 1926,²⁰⁰ as also seen in figure one on the next page.²⁰¹

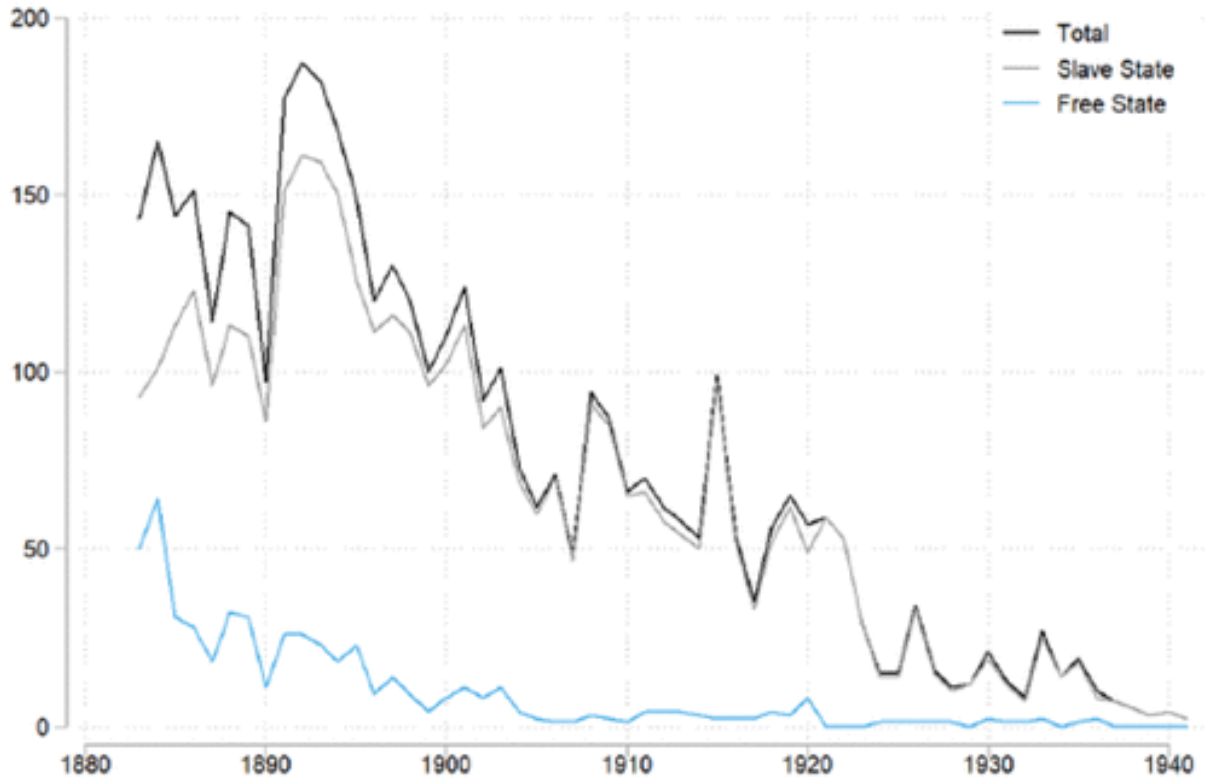
Yet, there was no violence at the actual convention, what some would call a success given the social climate in Georgia at the time. Bernays received a kind letter from assistant secretary Walter F. White stating his appreciation for Bernays' service, telling him 'the amount of publicity secured, largely through your efforts, was greater than at any other of the ten conferences preceding, although all of those ten conferences were held in northern cities.'²⁰²

Figure 1 Lynchings in the United States, by region and year. Source: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World.

²⁰⁰ 'Lynchings: By Year and Race', *Archives at Tuskegee Institute* <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html> (Accessed 11-22-2020).

²⁰¹ C. Seguin and D. Rigby, 'National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941', *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 5 (2019) 1 – 9, p. 6.

²⁰² 'Pioneer - Edward Bernays', *The Museum of Public Relations* <https://www.prmuseum.org/pioneer-edward-bernays> (Accessed 03-31-2021).



Bernays had quite the resume made up so far, with popular and much talked about commercial campaigns, presidential clients, advisors, and civil rights causes. It is clear that Bernays felt a strong impulse for his work for social institutions, especially the NAACP. He states in his autobiography: 'When I was in Atlanta for the NAACP, the flagrant breakdown of civil liberties made me realize this was a cause worth fighting for.'²⁰³ Bernays did not shy away from highlighting his work in these kinds of causes. Nevertheless, he worked for multiple civil liberty organizations. For instance, he was a member of Governor Lehman's Committee on Discrimination in 1942 and fought for free speech in the workplace in 1955.²⁰⁴ So there is reason to believe that Bernays worked for these causes because he was sympathetic towards them. It is also well documented that Bernays was amongst the marketing practitioners who were critical of racism early on, in

²⁰³ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 797.

²⁰⁴ E. L. Bernays, 'Is Free Speech Good for Business?', *Printers' Ink* 44:9 (1955), 631 - 632.

his case 1925.²⁰⁵ He states in his 1928 article for *The Independent* that he found that PR would not only serve the public good, but was also a profession like medicine and law, honorable and vital to public welfare and all with their own 'quacks.' Bernays assured that he believed a propagandist should not represent a cause that he/she considers 'socially unsound' and should not support a cause for a client that 'has committed an unsocial action' because he/she will never be dissociated from that client in the public's mind, and he/she will devote their time to change the public's opinion and judgments about the client.²⁰⁶

Bernays found it important for a PR counsel to work for a client with a message you can fully support.²⁰⁷ The role a counsel plays is an essential one, as it helps citizens to form an opinion on matters in the news. For that reason, he rejected a job offer of 125 dollars a week to work as an advisor for *Time* magazine founder Henry Luce.²⁰⁸ Later research has found that it was Luce who in fact declined to have Bernays as advisor, and not the other way around.²⁰⁹ For a man who holds his principles up to a high standard, he seems easy to persuade. In 1947 he was hired to spin the media around the new democratic state of India, after never once mentioning his interest or connection to the Asian country.

Republic of India

India was declared independent from Great Britain in 1947 with some help from the United States, as they pushed for impartial adjustment of all colonial claims in Wilson's fourteen points and advocated for the right to self-determination in internal law.

²⁰⁵ M. Tadajewski, 'Character analysis and racism in marketing theory and practice', *Marketing Theory* 12:4 (2012) 485 - 505, p. 493.

²⁰⁶ E. L. Bernays, 'This Business of Propaganda', *The Independent* 121:4083 (1928), 198.

²⁰⁷ Bernays, 'This Business of Propaganda', 198.

²⁰⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 364.

²⁰⁹ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 71.

According to Bernays, the new government feared that the American stand on Kashmir favored Pakistan and that Americans thought of India in stereotypes. At the same time, Americans had the feeling that India was against them, because of their neutral stance in the Korean War. But Nehru opposed a Communist system of government.²¹⁰ According to the *Washington Post* in 1947, India did have the second-largest communist population in Asia, after China, with 53.700 members of the Communist Party.²¹¹ The American people were also afraid that because of the resentment that would follow the colonial powers in the region, new Asian countries would be more sympathetic to communism as to capitalism.²¹²

The distrust of the American people is not baseless, if we look at the news reporting in that period. In January of 1947 American representative to the United Nations General Assembly John Foster Dulles was reported to have declared that in India, 'Soviet communism exercises a strong influence through the Interim Hindu Government.' Pandit Nehru, then vice president of the Viceroy's Executive Council and Member for External Affairs, assured in the *New York Times* that these claims were unfounded, and Dulles showed a 'lack of knowledge of the facts.' The *New York Times* article where this was reported added to this that Nehru never did deny the assertions officially.²¹³ The reports in 1947 still had a pro-colonist tone, as is seen in the way the *Times* reported 'World's Great Empires Suffer Internal Blows', opening the article with comparing the British empire with that of Rome and on the subject of Indian independence, focusing on the

²¹⁰ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 714.

²¹¹ J. E. Brown, '13 million listed as 'commies': Communists' world strength 13 million' *The Washington Post* 03-16-1947 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/151968386?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-12-2020), p.1.

²¹² M. Childs, 'Washington Calling: Seeds of War' *Washington Post* 08-05-1947 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/151915336/B55ED0BCAC3546CAPO/33?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-12-2020) p. 12.

²¹³ 'Influence of Soviet Upon India Is Denied', *New York Times* 01-12-1947 <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1947/01/21/99333072.html?pageNumber=11> (Accessed 11-12-2020), p. 11.

possibility of a civil war in the country.²¹⁴ There are numerous examples of the creation of a pro-communist image of India in the *New York Times* in 1947 and 1948. But the issue years later in 1951 the reporting has gotten more neutral, as Nehru was forced to denounce the communist influence on the new country multiple times.²¹⁵ He also confirmed the important relationship of the two countries on different occasions in the newspaper.²¹⁶

The United States even invested in India in 1951 by putting multimillion-dollar refineries in the country and signing an oil agreement. Naturally, this was done so that India would likely sympathize more with the United States and give them a stronger capitalist economy in a system they would less likely be walking away from if it works well.²¹⁷ What these articles have in common, though, is that they are mainly written by special correspondent Robert Trumbull and were stationed at the time in New Delhi. One journalist with a nuanced view of a country does not necessarily mean all the *New York Times* readers shared his opinion.

Bernays was asked to display the image of a young and wise democratic state. The U.S. had every reason to want a strong relationship with the newly autonomous country, as it would gain an important ally in Asia in opposition to a strong communist China.²¹⁸ Bernays decided to make India's communism stance clear with this campaign. The head of the India Information Bureau was told that he should explain to the U.S. newspapers

²¹⁴ 'World's Great Empires Suffer Internal Blows', *New York Times* 01-05-1947

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1947/01/05/issue.html> (Accessed 11-08-2020), p. 91.

²¹⁵ 'Nehru In Hyderabad - In Reds' Stronghold, He Denounces Their Policies as Futile' *New York Times* 12-16-1951 <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1951/12/16/89822265.html?pageNumber=12> (Accessed 11-08-2020), p. 12.

²¹⁶ R. Trumbull, 'Nehru Answers Some Basic Questions', *New York Times* 11-11-1951

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1951/11/11/121441901.html?pageNumber=225> (Accessed 11-09-2020), p. 225, 247 – 249.

²¹⁷ R. Trumbull, 'U.S. Oil Companies Investing in Investing in India' 12-01-1951

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1951/12/01/89819275.html?pageNumber=3> (Accessed 11-09-2020), p. 1, 3.

²¹⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 715.

that the Socialists were the second-biggest political party in India, not the communists. He re-used his policy on Lithuania by encouraging Indians to highlight their Bill of Rights, battles for public health and education, and other daily aspects that Americans could relate to.²¹⁹

Bernays gave the Indian Ambassador to the United States a list of questions for Nehru to answer when asked about U.S. consumption. Unfortunately for Bernays, in the *New York Times* interview with Nehru discussed above not one question came back.²²⁰ Bernays let the Indian ambassador travel through the United States with prepared speeches, different for each town and audience. One of the speeches about India's relations with the U.S. and Nehru's stand on communism at that moment was positively perceived by the media (amongst others).²²¹ The *New York Times* reported that Nehru had said that relations between India and the United States were 'getting on very well indeed'. They stressed that Nehru's Party has suffered multiple election defeats in the south at the hands of the Communist Party but that Nehru himself condemns the Marxist doctrine.²²² The *Washington Post* chose to emphasize the fact that Nehru's Congress Party won an overwhelming majority in parliament and that the Communist Party placed third.²²³ Bernays says about the speech that it was well received and that he got, once again, an overwhelmingly positive reaction from the press, calling it 'editorial praise'.²²⁴ In reality

²¹⁹ Tye, *Father of spin*, 159 – 160.

²²⁰ Bernays, *Biography of an idea*, 715 – 716.

²²¹ Kunczik, *Images of Nations*, 200.

²²² 'Nehru Endorses U.S. Aid Motives: He Differs With Burma and Indonesia – "Getting on Very Well" with America' *New York Times* 02-29-1952

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/112559709/2E5F8B571324105PO/3?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-13-2020), p. 3.

²²³ H. K. Milks, 'Nehru Sees Communism Bad for India' *The Washington Post* 02-29-1952

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/152477362/2E5F8B8571324105PO/2?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-13-2020), p. 15.

²²⁴ Bernays, *Biography of an Idea*, 726.

the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* articles about the event are rather neutral and the *Times* even highlighted Nehru's failure to gain ground in the southern states of India.²²⁵

The news surrounding India had clearly gotten better in these 5 years under Bernays supervision. As shown in the December 1950 article 'India Now Swings Sharply to West', in which it is once again repeated that Nehru sympathizes more with the West than with communist states China and the Soviet Union.²²⁶ Two years later, the public opinion seemed to have shifted, visible in the more than positive, long article by Robert Trumbull on October 5th, stating 'Stalinist communism, as the majority of Indians, see it, is another – and worse – form of imperialism.'²²⁷

Bernays resigned on May 26, 1957. In his letter to the Ambassador, he gives the unwillingness of Indian officials to accept his counsel on vital issues as the main reason for this. In his opinion, there was little understanding of American psychology, failure to understand the Western definitions of freedom and independence, mutual distrust and the Indians underestimated American intelligence and integrity.²²⁸

Bernays tends to, throughout his entire autobiography, attribute his PR success to himself. But in his final words about his collaboration with the Indian officials, he stated that they had an arrogant tendency to do things their own way and would not listen to him. So, his memoirs and retelling of events are again contradictory. What he did not talk about is that it was Ambassador Pandit that recognized in the first place that India had

²²⁵ 'Final Returns In India: Nehru's Congress Party Wins 75% of Contested Seats' *New York Times* 03-02-1952 <https://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/docview/112269815/B48DCB6E522C42C0PQ/2?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-13-2020).

²²⁶ R. Trumbull, 'India Now Swings Sharply to West: Political Leaders Demand End to Middle-of-Road Policy -- Nehru Believed Swayed Indians Swinging Sharply to West Friends and Foes are Cited Unfriendly View on Tibet', *New York Times* 12-10-1950 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/111399543?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-29-2020), p. 1

²²⁷ R. Trumbull, 'Behind India's Foreign Policy: Historic forces shape her "neutral" attitude but also make her basically anti-Communist', *New York Times* 10-05-1952 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/112378034/54229A591155463DPO/7?accountid=12045> (Accessed 11-13-2020), p. SM12.

²²⁸ Bernays, *Biography of an Idea*, 729 – 730.

an image problem but looked down at the American methods. Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies Eric D. Pullin argues that this desire to differentiate from the United States prevented India from establishing an effective propaganda organization. Indian officials concluded that Bernays, among other PR experts they had hired, did little to improve India's reputation in the United States and Pullin could agree that Bernays may deserve the contempt he received. In reports on India's propaganda, experts found that the Indian Government had failed mainly because of their lack of strategic vision and the lack of sufficient funds.²²⁹

So, according to Pullin, Bernays was right in the sense that the Indian officials were stubborn and difficult to work with. It is then not surprising that the propaganda department in India failed to develop after his departure. Bernays was under the impression that just after a few months of his help the 'climate of opinion' had greatly improved, without helping Indian officials set up their own methods and offices. His best work was early in his employment and that may be attributed to the friendly relationship between him and Ambassador Pandit. They exchanged flattering letters and he helped her with the publishing of her biography. He did not have high regard for her successor, Ambassador Sen.²³⁰

After this adventure Bernays resumed work for commercial and non-political clients, like the United Fruit Company. Even there he kept one foot in international politics, with his involvement in the CIA-supported coup that overthrew the government in Guatemala in 1954.²³¹ In formal sense, Bernays worked for a commercial client in this

²²⁹ E. D. Pullin, 'The Development of India's Propaganda Program: Principle and Parsimony', *The Asia Dialogue* 03-14-2017 <https://theasiadialogue.com/2017/03/14/the-development-of-indias-propaganda-program-principle-and-parsimony/> (Accessed 11-15-2020).

²³⁰ Tye, *Father of Spin*, 160.

²³¹ P. Farhi, 'The Original Spin Doctor; At 100, Edward Bernays & His Science of Public Relations' *The Washington Post* 11-23-1991 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1991/11/23/the-original-spin-doctor/109f782a-5964-4d99-94f7-b4b666bc1f74/> (Accessed on 06-28-2021), p. B1.

case and the event is interesting and complex enough for another thesis or dissertation, so this will not be further discussed here.

Bernays went to great lengths in his work for India. He has gotten himself in fights and the communication across the Atlantic ocean in the 1950s could not be flawless. He concerned himself with great diplomatic matters and the whole public image of one of the biggest countries on earth, which is admittedly impressive. The secondary literature and the historians on Asian History beg to differ and attribute the success – which just meant more positive articles – to his colleague Ambassador Pandit and argue that he did not fully succeed, as the propaganda strategy fell apart sometime after that. Bernays was at this point in his career too stubborn to adapt to the Indian ways. So, it is unfounded to say that Bernays has personally improved the public image of India.

Bernays focused his writing on his successes, that is clear. He is quite proud of himself even though the times he did have success it could be attributed to other factors. He seemed blinded by his own opinions, as he is wrong about very clear facts. The newspapers were not full of his campaigns. His candidates did not win often. His research was biased, and the number of lynchings did not decline. Morale and civic role were important to him in his work, but he also hired out; letting his wife for instance take on the whole campaign or give his client only a few tips to work with and nothing else. In India he failed to lay the groundwork needed to have a proper Public Relations office so after his resignation the strategy fell apart. Historians focused on India's politics in their early days as a free country agree that Bernays did little to improve their ways. The press coverage was more positive during his work as time went on, but that can also be just a consequence of the journalists getting more accustomed to the new international situation.

Conclusion

Edward L. Bernays, 'Father of Public Relations' or 'Pope of Propaganda,' was a successful man. But as far as his legacy in politics is concerned, he was merely an actor in the process. His campaigns were not fit for the political stage and there were too many factors to consider when running for President, Mayor, representing a country or a repressed group. His work is not in vain and Bernays did help his clients achieve his goals, but to call him one of the most influential people of the twentieth century in the political domain is highly exaggerated.

Bernays' status is often overrated and misjudged. To say he was the first Public Relations counsel is incorrect, as it is well documented that there were multiple people before him. Documentary makers, journalists and historians also like to point out that it was the collaboration between him and his uncle Freud that made him so special, but as also found, he did the publicity for Freud's books in the United States, but hired a different psychologist for his commercial work and used more of Lippmann, Trotter and Spinoza's theories in his political work.

As for his political ventures, a similar misjudgment can be found in the historiography. Bernays worked for Calvin Coolidge's presidential campaign in 1923. America needed a bland, proper president and Coolidge's stiff reputation was perfect for that role. Yet Bernays took it on to him to give the President more of a vibrant personality by inviting Hollywood actors for breakfast. Bernays claimed that the newspapers were unanimously excited for this event. Yet this turned out to be an exaggeration on Bernays's side. It is disputed that this event or the polished-up image did a lot for Coolidge's chance to win. The factors that won him the presidency were more likely the arrival of the radio, the advantage of already being a sitting president and Republican Party's organization.

The same is true for Hoover's campaign. Bernays decided to do more research than with Coolidge (but the results of the research were not reported back honestly to Hoover)

and Bernays attacked the Democrats, starting rumors in the hope of dividing the party and put out promises that President Hoover would be a humane leader, who would fix the economy carefully, instead of Roosevelt's quick and reckless' plan. Nevertheless, Roosevelt won the election by a landslide. Bernays' efforts were in vain.

O'Dwyer was also not elected, but only by a small margin and was later instated as Mayor. Bernays was particularly proud of his accomplishments on the project for the NAACP but as the research shows, the newspapers were not full of the stories about the Southern convention, nor did the lynchings – in spite of Bernays claiming the opposite – decrease, according to the data. The press wrote kindlier about India after the few years he was there, so it looked like his work had a positive influence. This can also be attributed to the world getting more familiar with the young independent state. After he left, the propaganda office of India fell apart as Bernays failed to educate the people in India about running a successful campaign. He focused more on his teaching and writing in later years.

Overall, there is no case to be made that Bernays did revolutionary work in the political domain. If he even won the elections or manipulated the press, it was exaggeratedly described in his memoirs (maybe to get his work recognized by his peers); that is probably why his myth stood the test of time. His use of symbolism, with all types of campaigns, worked as he wanted. The research he relied on was another big component he stressed in his books. In the end, researching and aiming campaigns at groups of people have not made these campaigns more effective, it seems. In his defense, the Public Relations field was still young and not every one of his clients followed his advice entirely.

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