A student's guide to the history of public relations and an inquiry into the use of public relations history in the classroom

Christine Dunnington
Rowan University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd

Part of the Public Relations and Advertising Commons

Recommended Citation
Dunnington, Christine, "A student's guide to the history of public relations and an inquiry into the use of public relations history in the classroom" (1999). Theses and Dissertations. 1792.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1792

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.
ABSTRACT


The purpose of this study was to compile a PR student-friendly history of public relations, as well as learn how several university PR programs include public relations history in their curriculum. Literary research and interviews provided the information required for this study. Most universities teach public relations history within an introductory course, providing a historical background for the methods used by practitioners today. Discussions with professors found that most would like to have the resources to go into greater detail about the roots of this relatively young profession.
MINI-ABSTRACT


The purpose of this study was to compile a PR student-friendly history of public relations, as well as learn how several university PR programs include PR history in their curriculum. Most professors would like to have the resources to go into greater detail about the roots of this relatively young profession.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents who always push me to read more, learn more and achieve more.

To Mark, for your support, encouragement and understanding.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction ................................................................. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for Study ................................................................. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitions of Terms ......................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations ................................................................. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Review of Related Literature ................................................. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Timeline for Students of Mass Media ................................. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Circus ................................................................. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let the Truth Define Your Image ........................................... 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bernays’ Idea ............................................................. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social History ............................................................. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate PR ............................................................. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government Relations ..................................................... 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Methods of Investigation ...................................................... 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Teaching PR History: Some Thoughts from Professors ............... 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Conclusion: A Brief History of Public Relations ....................... 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: Introduction, Need For Study, Definitions of Terms and Limitations

Introduction

While public relations is a relatively new profession and academic discipline, the practice of persuasion dates back to the first cave drawings, spoken languages and written words. According to J.A.R. Pimlott, in his book *Public Relations and American Democracy*, "propaganda...is coterminous with, and indispensable to, organized society." In addition, the role of propaganda has become more complex as society moves away from violence as a means of settling disputes.¹

Public relations has been through several transformations. Virgil’s *Aenid* was propaganda literature for Augustus and the Roman Empire. Saint Paul wrote his *Epistles* to encourage membership and increase morale. And with the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in 1450 came the dawn of the age of mass media.²

---


To better understand the practice of public relations today, it is helpful to look at a historical correlation between American history, the development of various forms of mass media, social science research methods and the responses of public relations practitioners. A historical study of the evolution of public relations would be beneficial to students in the fields of public relations, social sciences and history.

According to public relations author Philip Lesly, the latter third of the twentieth century is when public relations finally developed fully. Invention and then administration dominated the first and second thirds of the century, but “the latter portion is being dominated by the human climate.” And, “it is the distinct role of public relations to deal with the human climate—to sense its turns, to analyze it, to adjust to it, to help direct it.” 3 This “human climate” plays an integral part in the constantly increasing roles PR practitioners must fill. The profession has moved beyond press agentry to include internal communication, crisis management, as well as media relations.

Before universities developed curriculum for public relations students, those who wished to practice PR had to learn the field from a mentor, the writings of other professionals and/or by trial and error. Many of the early PR practitioners started out in the newspaper industry as reporters. From their experiences as members of the media they learned how to interact with the media on behalf of corporations, government and other organizations.

Students of public relations today choose to learn their chosen profession through study, practice and classwork. Going to school to become a public relations practitioner is a relatively new phenomenon. The University of Texas at Austin claims to have had the first full-time PR professor in the United States, and that was in 1964. Alan Scott, that same professor, taught that school’s first public relations courses in 1951.4

Need For Study

Half a century ago, when public relations was still in its early development as a profession, Bernays found that

    Even the largest corporations appoint men with few qualifications to executive and administrative jobs in public relations. Sometimes these men fail; sometimes they succeed through brilliant hard work. Sometimes they make good because of a charming, adaptable personality, and because no one knows what they are supposed to do.5

This is no longer the case; practitioners today must be knowledgeable in public relations writing and researching techniques, as well as theories and current trends.

Public relations practitioners are often faced with an up-hill battle. Grunig and Hunt offer insight into what can be one such battle: the PR practitioner’s relations with the media. “People you will meet in the news media often have their own slogans: ‘on the one hand there is truth and on the other hand there is public relations.’”6 Because students may run into such stereotypical attitudes, they should arm themselves with knowledge.

---

4 from The University of Texas at Austin website, www.utexas.edu/coc/lecture/academics_index.html
It is the intent of the author to provide a practical tool for students of public relations. To better understand current practices and trends, it is helpful for students to first have a basic knowledge of the historical basis for those practices and trends.

In-depth interviews of faculty in the communications departments at colleges and universities recognized for their programs in public relations found that students learn the history of their chosen profession in bits and pieces throughout their coursework. Often, such as at University of Maryland, College Park and at Rowan University, lower-level theory or introduction courses provide a brief look into PR's history. But the brevity of time spent on history does not diminish from the importance of students learning it. According to Lori Grunig, professor at University of Maryland, College Park, “it is very important for everyone entering a profession to learn where that profession comes from, as it is an aspect of professionalism.”

Dr. Melvin Sharp, professor at Ball State University, suggested that “it helps students understand that the profession is mandated by the social system.” He argues that an element of democracy is the need for public relations. Temple University professor Dr. Edward J. Lordan puts a narrower focus on this idea. “It is important for students to understand the evolution of the industry as it relates to the evolution of American business and American media,” he said.

For practitioners in any field, looking at the past often provides useful ideas for reacting to the present and planning for the future. Studying the history of public relations, therefore, is an integral part of an education in public relations. The goal of this paper is to provide a concise and useful history of public relations for communications
students. It will include discussion of the role of public relations in ratifying the U.S. Constitution, rallying support of such causes as the First and Second World Wars, anti-slavery and humanitarianism, and corporate America.

Definitions of Terms

Public relations has nearly as many definitions, ranging from simple to complex, as it has practitioners. A textbook definition, developed by Cutlip and Center in 1952 is as follows:

Public relations is the communication and interpretation of ideas and information to the publics of an institution; the communication and interpretation of information, ideas, and opinions from those publics to the institution in an effort to bring the two into harmonious adjustment.  

According to Richard Weiner, the editor of *Webster's New World Dictionary of Media and Communications,*

As professional communicators, public relations people are expected to know how to research, conceive, speak, write and produce messages to reach diverse audiences via an increasingly complex array of media.  

A simple, two-way symmetric definition of public relations is found in Lesly’s *Handbook of Public Relations and Communication.* It is “helping an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.”

For the purpose of this paper, the term public relations will represent an early definition, coined by Bernays: “1) information given to the public, 2) persuasion directed at the public to modify attitudes and actions of, and 3) efforts to integrate attitudes and

---

7 Cutlip and Center, as quoted in Grunig and Hunt, 43.
actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with that institution.". As this is a study of the history of public relations, the newer theories and definitions of public relations may not be relevant to some historical events; therefore, the older definition by Bernays, the self–proclaimed father of public relations, is a good starting point for this paper.

Limitations

The author intends this study to provide a brief history of the profession of public relations in the United States for students entering that field. This study is not inclusive, in that it does not discuss every step in the development of public relations, but rather provides representative examples within the framework of American History. Also, to limit the scope of this paper, world factors and influences will not be discussed in detail.

Histories could be written for government or education public relations, employee relations, media relations, or any of the other areas covered within the broad spectrum of “public relations.” The goal of this paper is to provide a useful history for corporate public relations students. Some discussion of public affairs is included to provide a more complete framework in relation to American history.

---

9 Lesly, 5.
10 Bernays, Idea, 785.
CHAPTER 2:
Review of Related Literature

Little has been written for students on the history of public relations. Communications textbooks contain, at most, a chapter on the subject and history books breeze over the impact of public relations in the development and growth of the United States. In recent years, a few books have been published on the subject. They are typically too in-depth for the average student, who needs to learn history as a tool for being a better practitioner, but not every detail of the profession’s development. The books available seem to be written for history students, not public relations students, who need to see how a basic understanding of a profession’s history is relevant to their practice.

At Rowan University’s library, the researcher found public relations text books, a thesis by Peggy Grosso and a book on the history of presidential press agents. Through the University’s online connections to Infotrac, Business Periodical Index, ERIC and the world wide web, searches of “public relations” and “history” resulted in several articles, a few of which were beneficial. These articles mainly had a media focus, which was useful for compiling the recent history of public relations.
A search of the Dissertation Abstracts database, at Rowan University’s library, found several works relating to the topics of history, public relations and communications. Only two proved useful for this project: Amplifying the Voice of Business: Hill and Knowlton’s Influence on Political, Public, and Media Discourse by Karen Sue Miller and Public Relations in the White House: News Management by Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon by Kathy Rogers Franklin.

At Alexander Library at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, the recently published works of Scott Cutlip and Stuart Ewen were available. Also found at this library was J.A.R. Pimlott’s Public Relations and American Democracy and Lesly’s Handbook of Public Relations and Communications by Philip Lesly.


The Gloucester County Library provided a copy of The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays & The Birth of Public Relations by Larry Tye. Additional books and articles were in the author’s private library, including Grunig and Hunt’s Managing Public Relations textbook, New York Times Book Review for The Father of Spin, The Historian (a publication for members of Phi Alpha Theta, the History Honor Society) and Ed Rollins’ Bare Knuckles and Backrooms.
A Timeline for Students of Mass Media

In 1973, Charles Steinberg wrote of the role of public relations and mass media in the development of public opinion. Included in this book, *The Mass Communicators: Public Relations, Public Opinion and Mass Media*, is a timeline of important events in the evolution of mass media, part of which is below.

1640—Printing of the first book in the United States (*The Bay Psalm Book*).
1665—First English newspaper (The London Gazette).
1784—First daily American newspaper (*The Pennsylvania Packet & Daily News*).
1844—Morse sent the first telegraph message.
1920—First regular radio broadcasting in Detroit and Pittsburgh.
1927—First talking picture (*The Jazz Singer*).
1941—First commercial television programming.

It is useful for students of public relations to have an idea of when events relevant to the history of their profession took place, so they may better understand why they are doing what they are doing today. Newspapers allowed for the success of the American Revolution, by disseminating information and new ideas. FDR used radio broadcasts for “Fireside Chats,” securing his popularity. Some theorize that John F. Kennedy won the election in 1960 because of the televised debates. Arthur S. Link states, “moreover, Kennedy succeeded far better than his opponent in giving an impression of boldness,

---

imagination, and poise.” And because of television, the whole country was able to see this. Public relations practitioners must always be open to new technology, especially new forms of media. Or, as Bernays explained in 1965:

Reaching the American public by electronic communication is commonplace today. We had no concept then of the potentialities of radio, let alone television [and internet]—an argument for letting imagination roam more boldly into the future than reason dictates.

But, according to J.A.R. Pimlott, it was not only the new mass media inventions that opened the door for public relations practitioners. Rather, the public relations practitioner “developed because of the demands of other people upon the media, and the latter became indispensable to all who had messages to communicate to large groups.”

At the Circus

The textbook, *Managing Public Relations*, introduces P.T. Barnum, of circus fame, as one of America’s most celebrated publicists. He created his circus empire through intense promotional activities. Barnum’s theory was “there’s no such thing as bad publicity.” He wanted his name in front of his potential audiences as often as possible. Barnum would hype outrageous show attractions, such as Siamese Twins and Jumbo the Elephant (both names that he coined), General Tom Thumb, the Cardiff Giant and Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightengale.”

---

14 Pimlott, 237.
15 Grunig and Hunt, 28.
Let the Truth Define Your Image

Ivy Ledbetter Lee, in the post-World War I era, was one of the influential pioneers who helped define and build a new vocation. With his roots in newspaper reporting, at a time when exposé writing (or muckraking) was the norm, Lee believed in telling the truth. His theory was that the organization’s behavior must be such that the truth cannot damage its image.\(^\text{16}\) In addition, Lee championed the cause of publicity agents informing the public. This was to replace the policy of “the public be damned,” popular with business giants, such as Rockefeller.

Scott Cutlip, in *The Unseen Power*, explains the difficult circumstances Lee was forced to deal with to practice public relations. When Lee joined with George Parker in 1905 to form one of the first publicity agencies, press agents had a very bad name. They were only used for circuses, Broadway and other forms of entertainment.\(^\text{17}\) “Lee was equally disdainful of the press agent,” and worked with the media as an intermediary to educate the public.\(^\text{18}\) He sent out more handouts than any of his predecessors, and in the process, made the news release more respectable. Instead of “planting” the releases, as many before him had, Lee always indicated for whom the release was written, and by whom.\(^\text{19}\)

Lee, though very successful in the early years of professional public relations, kept a low profile, as compared to Bernays, who wrote several books on the subject.

\(^{16}\) *ibid.*, 31.


\(^{18}\) *ibid.*, 52.
Unlike Edward L. Bernays who would follow him into public relations after World War I, Lee made no effort to outline a coherent philosophy for his new-found vocation even though he voiced the two-way concept. He constantly referred to his work as art. Nonetheless, he continued to ply his trade by counseling on dealing fairly with the press and public and urging business on its good behavior.  

Unfortunately, according to Grunig and Hunt, Lee’s later years were plagued by controversy and he died, at the age of 54, amid accusations of aiding the Nazis rise to power. In the 1930s, Lee advised the German Dye Trust, or I. G. Farben, which later came under control of the Nazis. When the company, under Nazi ownership, asked for Lee’s advice on improving relations with the U.S., he told them to use a policy of honesty and open communication. Though the Germans did not follow his advice, Lee’s reputation in the U.S. was seriously damaged when the House Special Committee on Un–American Activities investigated his connections with the Germans.  

\[19\] Grunig and Hunt, 33.  
\[21\] Grunig and Hunt, 35.
**Bernays’ Idea**

Biographies and autobiographies of early practitioners provide another source for historical information on the birth of public relations as a profession. One such work is *Biography of an Idea*, the first of two memoirs by Edward L. Bernays. His writings are an invaluable source for public relations historians. Bernays wrote several books, including *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923, in addition to his autobiographies, and hundreds of articles and letters to the editor. His goal was to add to the debate that was defining the new profession of public relations and to force people to take notice of this new profession.\(^22\)

Bernays’ *Biography of an Idea* tracks the author’s early life and involvement in developing the newly defined field of public relations. From his experiences working in publicity for the music and theater businesses to his participation in aiding the U.S. government’s propaganda program during World War I, Bernays provides a history of public relations in the context of his professional career and provides good background information on the economic and social conditions during public relations’ developmental period.

Bernays gives several examples of public relations in action in various stages: publicity, promotion, propaganda and public relations counseling. In 1932, Bernays was working with General Motors when Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., their forward-thinking president, discovered the new importance of public relations and integrated it into the company’s

---

activities and goals. "He believed that public relations was much more effective than advertising, which cost a terrific lot and was so overdone that it was almost impossible for copy to carry conviction."\(^{23}\) In the company’s 1932 annual report, Sloan helped lay the foundation for public relations by stressing that it “was an important factor to the company, and that meant to many companies in the United States that followed General Motors’ lead.”\(^{24}\)

One of the more interesting campaigns Bernays was involved in during his early career was the development of “Light’s Golden Jubilee.” This event celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of electric light. “Here was the co-ordinated, planned effort which demonstrated that the consent of the public to an idea could be engineered if the time for the idea had come.”\(^{25}\) This analysis shows Bernays’ understanding that sociological research (even if informally gathered) plays an important role in the public relations practitioner’s plans. This observation also expresses Bernays’ belief that public relations is an application of the social sciences. As a nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays was knowledgeable about the current theories on social psychology and applied these theories to his public relations work.

Another option for those wishing to learn more about this man, who many consider the father of public relations, is to read one of his biographies. The most recent, and complete biography of Bernays and his career, which spanned nearly eight decades, is *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations*, by Larry Tye. In

\(^{23}\) Bernays, 547.

\(^{24}\) *ibid.*
The New York Times Book Review, Ron Chernow admits that “this biography won’t be the ultimate word on Bernays, [but] it opens much new biographical territory and offers memorable vignettes of this little whirlwind of energy.”\textsuperscript{26} Tye explains in his introduction that he wrote the book with the purpose of using “Bernays’ life as a prism to understand the evolution of the craft of public relations and how it came to play such a critical—and sometimes insidious—role in American life.”\textsuperscript{27}

Tye’s book recounts the work Bernays did for the ballet, theater and music industries in his early years, as well as his later involvement with the cigarette industry and the government. “Although most Americans had never heard of Edward L. Bernays, he nevertheless had a profound impact on everything from the products they purchased to the places they visited to the foods they ate for breakfast.”\textsuperscript{28} The author highlights the questionable practices and publicity campaigns Bernays participated in. In his review, Chernow found “Tye argues intelligently that Ivy Lee and other practitioners of PR before World War I can lay greater claim than Bernays to having fathered the craft...[He] effectively deflates Bernays’ pompous claims for himself and demonstrates in the process the fleeting nature of spin.”\textsuperscript{29}

But, in the following excerpt, Tye does give Bernays credit for practicing the two–way method of PR counseling.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{ibid.}, 459-60.
\textsuperscript{27} Tye, ix.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{ibid.}, v111.
\textsuperscript{29} Chernow, 5.
Bernays first rule: Public relations is a two-way street. On one side the PR man interprets his client to the public, presenting as upbeat an image as he can. It is equally important to interpret the public to the client, telling company executives what people want and need, and altering the behavior of those executives just as he did that of the public.\textsuperscript{30}

To do this, the PR practitioner must understand the concepts of psychology and sociology, as well as the methods of social science research.

*PR! A Social History of Spin*, by Stuart Ewen opens with the recounting of a meeting the author had with Bernays. The author is reverent of the “father of public relations,” but in the same breath accuses him of spinning stories in order to promote himself.

I had gone to Cambridge to interview Bernays and gather hidden details about the history of the hidden—yet omnipresent—activity of public relations. In retrospect, I had greatly underestimated the individual with whom I would be talking. I had presupposed that this keenly aware shaper of public 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.\textsuperscript{31}

After a brief discussion of the use of persuasion during America’s revolutionary period, Ewen skips to the late 19th and early 20th century. Here, credit is given Bernays’ uncle, Sigmund Freud, and social psychology, increasingly popular at that time, for the growing use of propaganda by the government and businesses during and after World War I.

Bernays now envisaged public relations as a potent social instrument that, in the hands of disciplined specialists, might be employed for significant purposes....Publicity, he was persuaded, could be used to ‘organize chaos,’ to bring order out of confusion and social disarray.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} Tye, 91.
In his later life, Bernays was a consultant to a number of presidents. He was also named to Life's "100 Most Influential Americans of the 20th Century." This is no small feat, even for a man whose influence on American culture spanned nearly 100 years.

Social History

Three recent books compile the key events and stories of the people responsible for developing public relations as a profession, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, by Stuart Ewen and Scott Cutlip's *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, A History* and *Public Relations History: From the 17th to the 20th Century, The Antecedents*. According to Ewen, public relations as we know it today was born out of social events and movements, such as progressive journalism, the Great Depression, the New Deal and World War II.33 Cutlip's books are "the product of 35 years of research and study the events and practices that in hindsight we could define as public relations."34

Before delving into these books, though, it helps to have some background on the American social climate at the turn of the century. The history textbook *The American People* provides such a background.

In the 1890s, the magazine became the newest form of mass media, with vast circulation and self-segmented audiences. Progressive journalists, or muckrakers, as they were called, "were exploring and exposing every dark corner of American life....They fired the moral indignation of the middle classes by exposing the misery and corruption in

---

32 *ibid.*, 163.
33 *ibid.*, 20.
American society.” According to this history textbook, this journalistic movement set the stage for the later success of the New Deal, because progressive journalism cut across party lines and brought the ideas of social and economic reform to the attention of the American people.35

The Republican Party was divided when it came time for the election of 1912, allowing Wilson to win with 42 percent of the popular vote. He continued Theodore Roosevelt’s “reconstruction of the presidency into the powerful office that it is today.”36 During his first two years in office, Wilson resisted much of the progressive legislation, but later in his administration he realized that “limited progressivism would neither satisfy public opinion nor meet the problems of the modern age.”37 It was at this point that World War I began, temporarily ending the country’s concern with social and economic reform.

Shortly after entering World War I, Wilson’s administration established the U.S. Committee on Public Information. “The unprecedented creation of the CPI—a comprehensive propaganda bureau intended to mobilize and channel popular enthusiasm—reflected a general awareness of ‘public opinion’ among business and political elites.”38 Furthermore, the CPI “fostered a belief that public opinion might be managed, that a social climate, more friendly to business interests, could indeed be

35 Link, et. al., 538-39.
36 ibid., 591
37 ibid.,
38 Ewen, 104.
achieved.” Cutlip agrees, crediting the government’s propaganda campaign, led by George Creel and his Four-Minute Men with laying the groundwork for the growing craft of public relations. Community leaders from across the country would speak at their local theaters on the need to support the war effort.

Bernays participated in the Creel Committee and in his biography discusses the work. “Of course we had no chart, for at the time psychology was just a word and public relations counselors were unknown.” Cutlip also suggests that the work of the Red Cross, the Anti-Saloon League and the Women’s Suffrage Movement prepared Americans for the later work of public relations practitioners.

Ewen explains that by the time of the Great Depression, customer service became more important to gaining and keeping customers than manipulating public opinion. Economic strains made consumers hesitant, or unable, to spend money as they had during the Roaring Twenties. To understand their publics’ buying needs, businesses began the practice of polling. For example, AT&T incorporated on-going survey research as part of its public relations plan as early as 1929. Its goal was three-fold, to study public opinion and the business climate and to anticipate problems.

Also during the Great Depression, there was distrust and even hostility toward business because of the wide-spread economic hardships resulting from the collapse of

---

39 ibid., 131.
40 Cutlip, Power, 69.
42 Cutlip, Power, 105.
43 Ewen, 184-5.
44 ibid., 182.
the economy. “To make matters worse for the image of American business at this time, many businessmen continued to receive large salaries and pay little in taxes. Many even scolded the government for spending money on social spending and relief.” Those who didn’t blame business blamed President Hoover. Shantytowns were referred to as “Hoovervilles.” And the president’s poor relations with the press did not help matters.46

Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected in 1932, on the other hand, was quite skilled at working with the press and using mass media to influence public opinion. According to Cutlip, “Roosevelt was a master publicist in his own right.”47 FDR used that ability to bring the end of laissez-faire government and sell America on his New Deal. FDR’s radical policies for the recovery of America’s economy and social ills were based on the theories of the Progressive Era and those of British economist John Maynard Keynes. As described by Ewen, “the role of government, Keynes proposed, was to intercede as an agent on behalf of the social body, to ensure the ‘social interest’ of the community in those circumstances where the normal functioning of business fails to do so.”48

Though government public relations was gaining strength through these events, corporate public relations was an extremely difficult field to be in. The public relations agency grew during this time; corporations were concerned with molding of public opinion by the government and consumers were concerned about monopolies and the unfair advantage that big corporations had in respect to advertising and buying power.

45 ibid., 234.
46 ibid., 235-6.
47 Cutlip, Power, 37.
48 Ewen, 238.
Some in big business even feared the end of capitalism. During the Depression and New Deal, the U.S. government waged anti-business campaigns and imposed strict regulations that resulted in public distrust and attacks by the consumer movement. 49

World War II saved American big business with the strong war economy and business' ability to show a united front under the banner that all Americans must work together to "save the world from fascist aggression."50 Big business started promoting the company, not just its products, to predispose consumers to buying their products once the war ended. According to Ewen, the 1938 World's Fair was an effort by big business to promote the American Dream that Americans should look forward to after the war.51

With the Cold War came changes in federal spending. Huge, private military contracts took the money once used for social programs. The Red Scare and the need for military strength shadowed the threat of big business.52

But business was not as free as it had been earlier in the century. According to Philip Lesley, who wrote Lesly's Handbook of Public Relations and Communications, "by the time of Ike's second campaign most business leaders were reconciled to having a new 'silent partner' (as some executives dubbed the federal government)."53 By the end of the fifties, some corporations had developed public affairs departments "to formalize the firms' federal government relations and stimulate their executives to political activities."

49 ibid., 292.
50 ibid., 339.
51 ibid., 342.
52 ibid., 364.
53 Lesly, ed., 64.
These departments grew substantially in the seventies to address "urban affairs" and "social responsibility." To succeed, big business needed to participate in the community, leading to philanthropic and community initiatives, most often led by the public affairs, or public relations, department.

Agreeing with Ewen that public relations grew out of the social history of the twentieth century, is Charles Steinberg. In his book, *The Mass Communicators; Public Relations, Public Opinion and Mass Media*, he explains the development of public relations as a profession as a result of technological advances, such as radio and television.

A result of the rigid development of the media and the expanding economy of the twentieth century was the rise and acceptance of public relations as an established profession. The growth of public relations was not accidental. It was a logical and inevitable outcome of the complex society which resulted from the rise of technology.  

---

54 *ibid.*, 64-5.
55 Steinberg, 12.
Corporate PR

Early in the twentieth century, public relations expanded from press agentry and publicity to include developing a corporate image, creating relationships between companies and the media and counseling of management. “According to the legend, this was the period during which Ivy L. Lee and fellow pioneers gained the ear of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and other business leaders.”

Karen Sue Miller, in her dissertation, *Amplifying the Voice of Business: Hill and Knowlton's Influence on Political, Public, and Media Discourse in Postwar America*, investigates the history of one of New York’s premier agencies. She wrote “with the dual purpose of documenting how the firm operated and evaluating, through applications of social science theory and research, the effects its programs had.” Biographies and memoirs of influential practitioners and reviews of the profession’s development make up the limited number of published works on the history of public relations. Thus, this work is different, in that it studies “the history of an agency, one of the field’s most important forms.”

This agency was founded by John W. Hill after World War II, and for the next two decades specialized in public relations for trade associations. “The study concludes that although the agency was undeniably successful amplifying the voice of business..., such influence had little effect on social and political action.”

---

56 Pimlott, 7.
58 ibid.
Peggy Grosso, in her thesis, *Study of Corporate Public Relations as They Have Changed to Meet a Changing Marketplace*, studied the evolution of public relations in response to the Public Advocacy Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. “Advocates of the various causes have promised to be the great equalizers of modern society.”59 Her study focuses on how several corporations have responded to the consumer movement, in particular. She found that “to respond effectively to these groups and to their activities, corporations, big and small, have not only had to strengthen..., but also to shift the directions of their public relations activities.”60

The consumer movement gained presidential backing with John F. Kennedy’s address to Congress in 1962, which included what became known as his “Consumer Bill of Rights.” Included in this Bill of Rights:

- The right to safety,
- The right to be informed,
- The right to choose and
- The right to be heard61

Another huge influence on the consumer movement was the work of Ralph Nader. “Nader has been, for better or worse, the single most effective antagonist of American business. Thanks largely to the media, he has become a legend in his own time and an idol

---

60 *ibid.*, 1.
61 *ibid.*, 56.
to millions of Americans.” He warned Americans about the dangers of the Chevrolet Corvair and other products and product claims.

Because of this increased need for understanding what the consumer is thinking and saying and the proliferation of laws regulating how businesses act, Grosso believes the role of corporate public relations was strengthened by the events of the 1960s and 1970s. “Expertise in this aspect of corporate public relations can spell the difference between success and failure,” for businesses.

**Government Relations**

Public relations in the political world of the White House is often quite complicated, and, at times, cut throat. According to Ed Rollins, a political consultant and manager of the Reagan re-election campaign in 1984, “campaigns bring out the worst in people....If your candidate wins, he gets the credit and the job. If he loses, it’s your fault.”

Cathy Rogers Franklin studied the presidential public relations of three recent administrations in her dissertation, *Public Relations in the White House: News Management by Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon.* In the following excerpt, Franklin discusses three important factors necessary for successful presidential public relations.

> [It] requires dissemination of accurate information and two-way communication. Another important factor is the president’s and his public relations advisers’ understanding of the function and methods of the media. The president’s personality also plays an

---

62 *ibid.*, 57.

63 *ibid.*, 62.

important role, both in his own relationship with the media and in his selection of assistants, especially including the press secretary.”

In a recent issue of *The Historian*, a professor of history at Louisiana College, Thomas Howell, wrote of the government’s public relations practices during World War II. His research found that while it was against U.S. policy to participate in publicity campaigns, a group called the Writers War Board (WWB), which received funding indirectly from the government, by way of the Office of War Information (OWI), was successful at gaining publicity for the war effort. A 1944 WWB study found that a high percentage of stories written on behalf of the agency were published. They estimated that nine million people read their work.

During World War II, the government’s official policy on the dissemination of information to the public was a “strategy of truth.” The U.S. feared public outrage at the use of propaganda because of the recent use of propaganda by fascist regimes to gain power in Europe in the 1930s. Members of the WWB included Nero Wolfe detective books author Rex Stoute, novelist Pearl Buck and Broadway lyracist Oscar Hammerstein, II. The writers had works published in *Saturday Evening Post* and *Reader’s Digest*. They provided schools, theater groups and radio stations with “War Script of the Month,” for performance by volunteer actors and non-profit groups.

---


67 *ibid.*, 795-9
Though the WWB received some funding from the government, and ran publicity campaigns for government agencies, it was not controlled by the government and was not accountable to censors. Nonetheless, the WWB did have a policy statement that mandated that “your program should be the furtherance in every way at your command of government programs designed to help the war.”

World War II brought increased use of the presidential press conference. Dissemination of information to the press often takes place today at a White House press conference. But this was not always how it was done. The press conference was first used during Woodrow Wilson’s first administration, but did not occur regularly until Franklin D. Roosevelt came to office. He “gave new status, continuity and color to the news conferences.” FDR used his famous “fireside chats” as an extension of the press conference, to better communicate with the American public.

What started with FDR was continued with President Truman, and in the later years of Truman’s term, the presidential news conference gained even more in reach because of the emergence of television. “The White House news conference, in particular, has come to have great importance as a means of communication not only between the President and the people but between the United States and the world.” For example, in September of 1949, Truman used the forum of a news conference to alert the Western world to the fact that Russia had detonated an atomic device.

---

68 ibid., 797
70 ibid., 15.

The importance of this development can hardly be overestimated. While it was made clear only occasional news conferences would be so filmed and recorded, the important thing was that the precedent was set. On such occasions the President, as it were, was speaking directly to the American public and, indeed, the world public.\(^7\)

In more recent history, the importance of understanding the television-viewing and Internet-savvy American public has influenced how wars are waged and the outcomes of presidential elections. In 1990, a client of Hill and Knowlton, a powerful PR firm in Washington, was a group called Citizens for a Free Kuwait. “That client relationship catapulted the U.S. into the Gulf War in early 1991.”\(^7\)

The PR firm was paid $10.5 million by the group, primarily made up of members of Kuwait’s very wealthy ruling class, to “offset unfavorable publicity about Kuwait’s form of government as well as its human rights record.” Through research, Hill and Knowlton learned that Americans knew little about the small, oil-rich country and that they would be most likely to side with Kuwait if any atrocities by Iraqis against the Kuwaiti people were uncovered. So, “on October 10, 1990 Nayriah al-Sabah, a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl, testified before Congress,” about such atrocities. She specifically accused the Iraqis of “taking Kuwaiti babies from incubators in area hospitals.”\(^7\) Her testimony received wide coverage on the television news shows. Americans were horrified by the words and the visions those words depicted. Just a few months later, American soldiers were in the desert fighting the Gulf War.

---

\(^7\) *ibid.*, 61.


\(^7\) *ibid.*
In 1996, Clinton won reelection in part because his campaign staff was attuned to the American people and the team used polls to get instantaneous feedback to their campaign. Their understanding of how to form appropriate messages and interact via several media, including television and Internet, gave the Clinton campaign a distinct advantage over Dole’s. This is according to Richard Stengel and Eric Pooley, authors of “Masters of the Message: Inside the High-tech Machine That Set Clinton and Dole Polls Apart,” published in *Time* magazine.

The Clinton campaign used a “rocklike faith in opinion polls. The surveys were used not just to gauge voter attitudes but also to shape Clinton’s arguments, test and refine his television commercial and recast his public image.”74 In contrast, the decisions made by the Dole campaign team “were made by default,” and public opinion research took the form of studying reports from the AP wire.75 For students of governmental public relations, this article provides a play-by-play case study of the powers of public relations research. It also shows how practitioners must keep up with changes in technology and the media.

---


75 *ibid.*
Chapter 3:
Methods of Investigation

The Internet proved to be an invaluable tool for performing historical research. Starting at Rowan University Library’s Web site, a search was made of that library’s holdings using the subject terms “public relations and history” and “public relations and media.” Undergraduate and graduate textbooks and autobiographies, ranging from the earliest to the most recent, were found in this search. The same search was performed at the Web sites for Rutgers University Library, which provided additional sources.

For more up-to-date information, a similar search of Infotrac SearchBank, Dissertation Abstracts and Lexis–Nexis through a Rowan University networked computer, resulted in scores of magazine, journal, and newspaper article references, as well as a few related dissertations.

The Library of Congress is also online now, easing the burden for researchers who wish to take advantage of their extensive holdings. Many of the preliminary steps can be completed before traveling to Washington, D.C. At the Library of Congress, the researcher has access to books and periodicals that are unavailable at local libraries. A
historical study would be incomplete without this pilgrimage. Material documenting public relations' relationship with the media, such as *The Mass Communicators; Public Relations, Public Opinion and Mass Media* by Charles Steinberg (NY: Harper Brothers, 1958) and the London, Ontario Library Association’s Seminar “Library Communications with Radio and TV” (London Public Library and Art Museum, 1968) resulted from research at this national library.

The thesis by Peggy Grosso, “Study of Corporate Public Relations As They Have Changed To Meet a Changing Marketplace,” provided several sources, as well as a natural stepping stone for this project. Her research focused on the direct and indirect effects the Consumer Movement had on corporations and their public relations activities in the 1970s, as well as providing a limited history of public relations.

Additional research material was gathered at the Gloucester County Library and from the author’s personal library.

To learn about the public relations curriculum at various colleges and universities, the author conducted interviews with four professors. The professors contacted for this study were chosen by the author and her thesis adviser, Dr. Bagin, based on a listing of schools with PRSSA chapters and the reputations of their public relations’ programs. Professors were contacted by phone or E-mail, depending on their preference.

The professors were asked about their school’s PR curriculum and how the history of public relations is addressed within that curriculum, if it is at all. They were also asked their opinions on what should be included in a course or seminar on the history of public
relations. Prior to speaking with the professors, the author visited several university websites to learn about the various programs available for PR students.

The purpose of this preliminary research was to limit the time commitment required of the professors to explain their school’s program. The author was most interested in their ideas on what a public relations history course or text should include to best serve students. The focus of this research was on undergraduate programs, but if a public relations history course was offered at the graduate or post-graduate level, it was included.

The results of the surveys are discussed in Chapter 4, where each interview is discussed.
CHAPTER 4:  
Teaching PR History:  
Some Thoughts From Professors

Excerpts from conversations with public relations professors at several colleges and universities with established PR departments, compiled from a listing of schools with PRSSA chapters in 1998.

To further the study of public relations history, several professors were consulted to determine what students are learning about their profession’s history. Also, of interest to the author was the format in which public relations history is taught. Of the schools researched, the most common method of teaching the history is within a theory or introductory course. Often, public relations history is alluded to in other courses within the PR curriculum, as well.

University of Maryland at College Park offers an undergraduate sequence, a Master’s and a Ph.D. for students in public relations. An introductory level course, “PR Theory,” as described on the university’s website, discusses the “historical development and contemporary status of public relations in business, government, associations and other
organizations.” Dr. Lorissa Grunig explains, though, that there are “mentions in probably all courses.” At the graduate level, a special seminar is sometimes offered on the history, philosophy and ethics of public relations.

For students of mass media, University of Maryland offers “History of Mass Communication,” which follows the development of newspapers, magazines, radio, television and motion pictures. The course analyzes “the influences of the media on the historical development of America.” And advertising students have the option of taking “Advertising in America,” covering the history, regulations and role of advertising in the United States.

Grunig agrees with the author that it is important for students to learn the history of the profession they are entering. “It is an aspect of professionalism,” she said. But, PR students are not given the option to take a history of public relations course, as do students in mass media and advertising. Nonetheless, according to Grunig, students “need to understand that [PR practitioners] developed, not out of a vacuum, but from need, a need that is still with us.”

When asked what she would include in a course or seminar on PR history, Grunig suggested a non–traditional approach. “I would avoid the great man approach,” she said. This is because, though women are an important aspect of history, they often did not have the resources to tell their stories, or their work was taken for granted. It seems to her to be “more fair to shy away from the luminaries of the field.” She would teach the history with a global perspective. “Many people believe PR is a U.S. phenomenon, but
yet Germans have a strong claim.” She would acquaint her students to this and other
global perspectives.

Ball State University does take a non–traditional approach to the study of public
relations history, though not like that suggested by Grunig. Dr. Melvin Sharp explains
that his school teaches about the “empowerment of public opinion,” in theory classes. “It
helps students understand that the profession is mandated by the social system,” he said.

Ball State University offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in communications
studies and journalism. Each can be tailored for students wishing to work in the field of
public relations.

If given the opportunity to develop a curriculum for a history course or seminar,
Sharp would include discussion about the pioneers, such as Bernays and Lee. But, he
would “add to it by showing the development and evolution of democracy, advances in
technology, and global interdependence.” He would use the later to show the “context of
why PR developed into a profession in this century.”

Temple University’s webpage describes its combined journalism, public relations and
advertising undergraduate program as follows:

The basic curriculum for journalism, public relations & advertising
(referred to as JPRA) students is designed with the conviction that
proficiency in the field requires an educational background coupled
with rigorous professional training. The curriculum, therefore,
emphasizes subject matter from other disciplines, particularly those
in liberal arts and sciences....As preparation for a communications
career, the department requirements provide a solid foundation for
students who are likely to shift directions as they and the industry
change during that career.
Temple includes public relations history as a section of the introductory course in public relations. According to Dr. Edward J. Lordan, the school includes the history in its undergraduate and graduate curriculum because “it is important for students to understand the evolution of the industry as it relates to the evolution of American business and American media.” He feels this is particularly true since most practitioners enter business and work closely with the media.

Lordan also believes that “students need to see how and why the techniques have evolved, and to gain an historical perspective.” His history course or seminar would “definitely include reference to the history of media, because the two are so intertwined.” Lordan would also include “examples of successful campaigns, both in the private sector and in government work (WWI and WWII), so that students can see PR strategies and techniques played out over large issues and large audiences.”

University of Texas, Austin offers undergraduate students the option of a B.S. in public relations. Students must take classes in writing, principles and techniques. But, the emphasis in the curriculum is on communications theory courses.

Dr. Ron Anderson, professor at University of Texas, said he is able to spend only about one week on public relations history within the introductory principles course. He tries to use a “broad brush approach,” to cover more, but in less detail. He discusses public relations history within the framework of Grunig’s four models, giving examples from history of how each model is used. The introductory course also mentions “the big names, such as Bernays” and how they incorporated social science theory with early public relations practices.
Anderson said "it would be nice to have a full course on PR history. Public relations is so widely misunderstood." And, it is important for students to learn about the "central role that PR has played through the formation of this country." This provides a "sense of belonging." Before he could even think about what to include in a public relations history course, though, Anderson would first want to see what's been written recently on the subject. He would read Cutlip's books and any articles he could find in the PR Review and the Journal of PR Research.
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion
A Brief History of Public Relations

Public relations, in its simplest form, dates back to the first cave drawings, spoken languages and written words. The art of communication, the basis for public relations as we know it today, developed through a need to persuade. The earliest written works were sponsored by either church or state. Virgil’s *Aenid* was propaganda literature for Augustus and the Roman Empire. Saint Paul wrote his *Epistles* to encourage membership in the Church and increase morale.

In 1456, Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press, making the Bible and other books accessible to more people. From this one invention evolved the age of mass media. In the early 17th Century, newspapers were first published. As publics gained access to more information and ideas, they gained more power. In response, over time, governments and their leaders became more concerned with public opinion.\(^\text{76}\)

According to Newsom, Scott and Turk, the development of public relations into a profession in the U.S. took place in five stages: preliminary, communicating/initiating, communicating/interacting, communicating/interpreting, and communicating/buffering.

\(^{76}\) Grunig and Hunt, 17.
reacting/responding, planning/preventing and professionalism. These stages are more clearly defined by looking at the corresponding periods in U.S. history.

In the preliminary period, channels of communication were developing. This took place from 1600 to 1799 with the initial colonization of the New World and the American Revolution. To entice settlers to the New World, businessmen who had vested interests in the settling of the colonies wrote reports and stories about the wondrous and fertile land. “A Brief True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia,” was written by Thomas Hariot and published by Sir Walter Raleigh to raise funds and persuade men to make the long, and often dangerous, journey. Lord Baltimore was another talented recruiter; he lured settlers to the Maryland Colony with stories of fortunes to be made. William Penn’s colony promised religious freedom, tempting many who had suffered from religious persecution.

Several years later, supporters of the Revolutionary War participated in numerous public relations–like activities. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams used their propaganda skills to gain support for their cause, a cause that many citizens cared little about. They saturated the media over a 20–year period, through the use of newspapers, pamphlets, town meetings and sermons. The 85 Federalist Papers, for example, were written in 1787–88 by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay to build public support for ratification of the United States Constitution.

---

77 Newsom, Scott and Turk, 33-35.
78 Cutlip, The Antecedents, 2.
79 *ibid.*, 34.
The Boston Tea Party was a staged event to crystallize public opinion and gain international news coverage.

From 1800 to 1899, Americans moved West, fought the Civil War and benefited from the Industrial Revolution. This period of “remarkable political, economic and social transformation,” was the framework for the communication/initiating stage of public relations development.80

In this stage, the railroad and telegraph made “national news” a reality by laying “the groundwork for a continental market network, which in turn made possible the mass production and distribution of goods in the late nineteenth century.”81 Railroads also required “large and complex business operations,” the first American enterprises to have such diverse needs. The resulting huge railroad companies were segmented into manufacturing, distribution and administration.82

With the debut of the penny press in the 1830s, the practice of press agentry and publicity became the first formal public relations specialization. Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and Buffalo Bill Cody were created and made popular by press agents. The Daniel Boone legend was successful in promoting the frontier, urging many men to take off for the excitement of the Wild West. In the process, his creator used the legend to lure settlers and sell his land for great profit.83

---

80 Lesly, ed., 3.
81 Link, et. al., 435.
82 Link, et. al., 435.
Construction on the railroads west of the Mississippi River began in the 1850s. Because the railroads had much to benefit from industrious people settling in the new western cities, they used persuasive techniques to lure people west. When industry grew in those cities, the railroads were assured increased business.84

Persuasive journalism played a strong role in the Civil War. Abolitionists wrote of the horrors of slavery. William Lloyd Garrison published “The Liberator,” an anti-slavery newspaper and Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The goal of this type of literature was to make the public feel a connection to those in bondage, as well as to influence public opinion to support the war.

According to P. T. Barnum, one of America’s most celebrated publicists, “there’s no such thing as bad publicity.” He created his circus empire, in the late 1800s, through intense promotional activities. He wanted his name in front of his potential audiences as often as possible. Barnum would hype outrageous show attractions, such as Siamese Twins and Jumbo the Elephant (both names that he coined), General Tom Thumb, the Cardiff Giant and Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightingale.” To keep his circus and its attractions in the news, Barnum would welcome controversy and write letters to newspapers under assumed names, both praising and criticizing the show.85

In the 1890s, the magazine became the newest form of mass media, with vast circulation and self-segmented audiences. Progressive journalists, or muckrakers, as they were called, “were exploring and exposing every dark corner of American life....They fired

84 ibid., 147.
85 Grunig and Hunt, 28.
the moral indignation of the middle classes by exposing the misery and corruption in American society.

In the reacting/responding stage, writers were hired as spokespeople for special interests of businesses and government. Word manipulation and advertisements were common methods for one-way communication with consumers; the goals only being to sell the product and react to crises. This took place from 1900 to 1939, concurrent with the Progressive Era, World War I, the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. Two men who played integral roles in the founding of public relations as a unique field, Ivy Lee and Edward L. Bernays, both got their start during this period.

Ivy Ledbetter Lee was a newspaper reporter by trade. In 1905 he joined with George Parker to form Parker and Lee, in New York City, the nation's third public relations agency. Though the partnership only lasted four years, Lee continued his work with Lee, Harris, and Lee, which opened in 1916. His clients included the anthracite coal operators in 1906 and the Rockefeller family in 1914. The policy Lee acted upon for each of his clients was one of honesty; if telling the truth could hurt the organization, than the organization must change its behavior. To Lee, public relations was the art of "counseling on dealing fairly with the press and public and urging business on its good behavior."

When Lee started his public relations work, press agents had a very bad name. They were used only for circuses, Broadway and other forms of entertainment. "Lee was

86 Link, et. al., 538-39.
87 Cutlip, Power, 59.
88 ibid., 51.
equally disdainful of the press agent,” and worked with the media as an intermediary to educate the public.\textsuperscript{89}

It was during this time that newspaper and magazine reporters had a policy of exposing the corruption of big business and government. Lincoln Steffens wrote about the widespread corruption in city governments. Ida Tarbell exposed Standard Oil Company in an unflattering light. Probably most popular were the books and articles by Upton Sinclair, including his narrative on the unsanitary conditions in the meat-packing industry. Muckraking, as this type of reporting was called, resulted in an increased need for public relations.\textsuperscript{90} Lee was well positioned to advise his clients on avoiding bad press. His policy of truth corresponds with his experiences in the newspaper trade.

A trademark of Lee’s was his extensive use of the “handout,” a precursor of the news release used today. He was the first public relations practitioner to mark clearly on the release, who wrote it and for whom it was written. Press agents prior to this had often used assumed names and left out the name of the client, attempting to use the release as a tool for manipulation.\textsuperscript{91}

Lee died a young man, at the age of 54, amid accusations of aiding the Nazis rise to power. In the 1930’s, Lee advised the German Dye Trust, also known as I. G. Farben, which later came under control of the Nazis. When the company, under Nazi ownership, asked for Lee’s advice on improving relations with the U.S., he told them to use a policy of honesty and open communication. Though the Germans did not follow his advice,

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{ibid.}, 52.

\textsuperscript{90} Grunig and Hunt, 31.
Lee’s reputation in the U.S. was seriously damaged when the House Special Committee on Un–American Activities investigated his connections with the Germans.\textsuperscript{92}

Edward L. Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, was born in Austria and immigrated with his parents to New York as a young child. Like Lee, Bernays got his start in journalism. But unlike Lee, who felt public relations was an art, Bernays saw it as a science. Many of his contemporaries believed that social sciences made mass persuasion possible. While Bernays made use of social science theories, he knew that the “engineering of consent,” is only possible when it is in the public’s best interest.

In 1923, Bernays wrote his first of three books about public relations, \textit{Crystallizing Public Opinion}, in which the concept of public relations counsel was first introduced. He also wrote hundreds of articles and letters to the editor. His goal was to add to the debate on the new role of public relations and force public recognition of this new profession. In his autobiography, Bernays describes the growth of public relations, prior to World War II:

From 1920 to 1929,... our public relations activity, accepted in some quarters, was misjudged or misunderstood in others as a euphemism for press–agency, space grabbing, or machiavellian shenanigans.... From 1930 to 1940, recognition of what we did expanded. The literature of public relations grew, university courses multiplied, and discussion in the lay trade and professional press contributed to public understanding. Business increased its use of public relations, and the number of practitioners expanded.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{ibid.}, 33.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{ibid.}, 35.
Bernays’ earliest clients were in entertainment, including ballet, opera, plays and music. Through his work with these clients he developed crude research techniques to gain a better understanding of the publics’ needs. By incorporating social science research methods with his knowledge of publicity, Bernays developed a PR model that is often used today: public relations as a two-way street. The practitioner should not only explain his client to its publics, but also explain the publics to his client, to better serve the organization and the community. As Bernays explains, this shift from press agentry to public relations counsel “was no mere difference in nomenclature, no euphemistic changeover. It was a different activity, in approach and execution....[We were now] dealing with interaction between client and public.”

In 1932, Bernays was working with General Motors when Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., their forward-thinking president, discovered the new importance of public relations and integrated it into the company’s activities and goals. “He believed that public relations was much more effective than advertising, which cost a terrific lot and was so overdone that it was almost impossible for copy to carry conviction.” In the company’s 1932 annual report, Sloan helped lay the foundation for public relations by stressing that it “was an important factor to the company, and that meant to many companies in the United States that followed General Motors’ lead.”

---

94 ibid., 92–3 and 104–5.
95 ibid., 287.
96 Bernays, Idea, 547.
97 ibid.
Another campaign that both Bernays and Lee worked on was the development of “Light’s Golden Jubilee,” though neither knew the other was working the same job. This event celebrated the 50th anniversary of electric light. According to Bernays, “here was the co-ordinated, planned effort which demonstrated that the consent of the public to an idea could be engineered if the time for the idea had come.” This analysis shows Bernays’ understanding that sociological research (even if informally gathered) plays an important role in the public relations practitioner’s plans. This observation also expresses Bernays’ belief that public relations is an application of the social sciences.

In his later life, Bernays was a consultant to a number of presidents. He was also named to Life’s “100 Most Influential Americans of the 20th Century.” This is no small feat, even for a man whose influence on American culture spanned nearly 100 years.

The popularity of mass psychology and Freud’s theories, combined with the successful use of propaganda during World War I, gave American business renewed confidence in its ability to sell products. According to Roger Babson, an influential business analyst, in 1921, “The war taught us the power of propaganda. Now when we have anything to sell the American people, we know how to sell it.” Babson was over-confident, though, because during the Great Depression, business was plagued by strict governmental regulations and harsh criticism from the muckraking journalists.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected in 1932 to pull the country out of the Great Depression, was a natural publicist. He was quite skilled at working with the press and

---

98 ibid., 459-60.
99 Ewen, 131.
using mass media to influence public opinion. FDR used that ability to bring the end of laissez-faire government and sell America on his New Deal. He was also able to portray a strong image, though his body was weakened and disabled by paralysis.

FDR was a strong believer in the power of public education and public discourse, and he used his talents for working with the press to further that public education and discourse. For example, FDR was successful at using “fireside chats” and other radio broadcasts to share his ideas and concerns with the American people. In the process, he often gained support for his policies because he appeared to have open lines of communication with the American people.

The planning/preventing stage took place from 1940 to 1979 within the framework of World War II, the McCarthy Era and the Consumer Movement. Americans watched the McCarthy hearings, the Vietnam War and 60 Minutes on television. In this stage, public affairs departments were introduced “to formalize the firms’ federal government relations and stimulate their executives to political activities.”

During World War II, businesses were using public relations campaigns to promote the company, not just products. Products were often too difficult to obtain during the war years because of rationing and governmental restrictions on production. So, the goal was to show Americans what they had to look forward to. At the 1938 World’s Fair, corporate sponsors promoted what they defined as the “American Dream,” which all Americans could aspire to in the post-war society. As early as 1942, companies were

---

100 Cutlip, Power, 37.
101 Ewen, 240.
planning to create more jobs for veterans and war workers to sustain high levels of production, even after the war ended.\textsuperscript{103}

It was also during World War II that opinion research, through polling and statistical surveys, gained in popularity. Elmo Roper, Opinion Research Corporation and Psychological Corporation specialized in this type of scientific opinion poll. But, as early as 1929, AT&T was using on-going, non-scientific survey research as a part of their public relations plan. The goal, like in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as today, was to study public opinion and the business climate, as well as anticipate problems.\textsuperscript{104}

World War II also brought increased use of the presidential press conference. Dissemination of information to the press often takes place today at a White House press conference, but this was not always how it was done. The press conference was first used during Woodrow Wilson's first administration, but did not occur regularly until FDR came to office. He "gave new status, continuity and color to the news conferences."\textsuperscript{105}

In this stage, technological advances created new industries and stimulated the economy. For example, "television sparked the growth of the electronics industry after the war." In 1947, there were 7000 televisions in American homes. By 1960, the number was up to 54 million.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{102} Lesly, ed., 64.
\textsuperscript{103} Ewen, 342.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{ibid.}, 182 & 345.
\textsuperscript{106} Link, \textit{et. al.}, 791.
The new medium of television meant public relations practitioners had to update their techniques. Speeches for television audiences need to have short, conversational sentences with common words. Plus, the spokesperson must be telegenic; a good voice is no longer enough to be persuasive.

In 1944, at the Boston Conference on Distribution, T.F. Joyce—general manager of RCA’s Radio–Phonograph–Television Department—described to the attendees how television would change the parameters of persuasion techniques:

If we have 30 million television equipped homes by the end of 1955, we will have 30 million showrooms where personal, dramatized demonstrations can be made, simultaneously.

The preceding quote exemplifies the rapid changes within society that we have become accustomed to. In an early textbook for students of public relations, Philip Lesly described this change as follows:

[It used to be that] events moved slowly and society changed only a bit at a time. Today, events tend to change with the speed of the electronic signals that propel them; and the social and economic structure changes with startling suddenness.

Finally, starting in the 1980s and continuing today, public relations has entered into the stage of professionalism. This has coincided with the development of the global marketplace and global communication. In this stage, public relations has made an effort to “control its development, use and practice on an international level.” For example,
the Public Relations Society of America has developed a certification process for practitioners requiring several years of field experience, as well as demonstration of competency by passing an exam.

Personal computers and the Internet require further specialization for public relations practitioners. E-commerce, organizational web sites and intranets fall into the realm of responsibilities for today’s public relations professionals. Technological advances have made resources more readily available, too. Many newspapers update the online versions of their papers several times a day. This allows a practitioner in media relations to have access to hundreds of newspapers, right on their computer. Fax machines and Email have replaced hand delivery of news releases.

Charles Steinberg suggests that public relations communication has come full circle. First, all communication took place on the basic level of man–to–man. Then, with the introduction of the printing press, communication took the form of man (via printed word)–to–many. Finally, radio, television and computer give the illusion of again communicating at that basic level of man–to–man.\footnote{Steinberg, 8.}

Public relations, as a definitive field of study has a relatively short history. It was not defined as a profession until Bernays coined the term “public relations counsel” in the 1920s. But, as we have seen, the practice of public relations is as ancient as the earliest forms of communication.

\footnote{Steinberg, 8.}
BIBLIOGRAPHY:


University of Texas at Austin website, www.utexas.edu.coc/lecture/academics_index.html

Interviews

Anderson, Ron. Professor of Public Relations, University of Texas, Austin, June 9, 1999.

Grunig, Lorissa. Professor of Public Relations, University of Maryland, College Park, May 17, 1999.


Sharp, Melvin. Professor of Public Relations, Ball State University, Milwaukee, May 27, 1999.