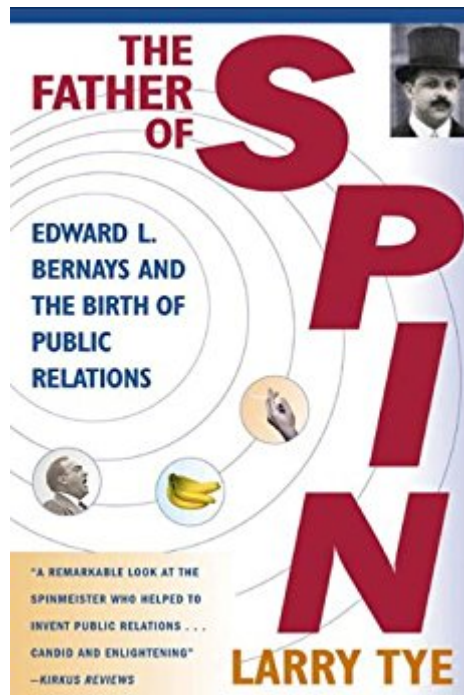


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# The Father Of Spin: Edward L. Bernays And The Birth Of Public Relations



## Synopsis

The Father of Spin is the first full-length biography of the legendary Edward L. Bernays, who, beginning in the 1920s, was one of the first and most successful practitioners of the art of public relations. In this engrossing biography, Larry Tye uses Bernays's 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. Drawing on interviews with primary sources and voluminous private papers, Tye presents a fascinating and revealing portrait of the man who, more than any other, defined and personified public relations, a profession that today helps shape our political discourse and define our commercial choices.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

You've seen Wag the Dog and Primary Colors, you've watched politicians talk out of both sides of their mouths, you've seen the President get into trouble only to have the spin doctors bail him out. Ever wonder where it all started? This book is what you need to read to find out. Larry Tye gives you the reader an in depth look at Edward Bernay's and the birth of public relation or the beginnings of spin. From Bernay's start in the 1920's to his revolutionary ideas of parading women down the

streets of New York to promote smoking you'll get a first hand look at how spin works. Read through the 260 plus pages and see why we use spin, how public relations can and does affect public opinion. Watch and learn from the father or master of the public relations. Larry Tye has a well researched and extremely detail account of the beginnings. Fascinated and educated are the two words to describe what I walked away from this book with. Fascination about Bernay's ability to make things come out his way and sway the public to follow, educated has to how spin control works in today's culture. A great read for all!

You can't possibly understand the history of the 20th century without coming to grips with Edward Bernays. Bernays bragged in his autobiography that Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels valued his book "Crystalizing Public Opinion" above all others in his library. Bernays, a relative of Sigmund Freud, applied his formidable intellect to corporate-sponsored tasks such as convincing women to smoke and demonizing movements for land reform in the Third World. Sadly, this thoroughly amoral individual's outlook on life - bend the truth for the highest bidder regardless of who is harmed - has become the norm, not the exception, among "communications" professionals who apply their craft with a charm and polish that belies the often deadly consequences of their "campaigns."

Admittedly, I expected a lot from this book. I had just learned about Bernays from Stuart Ewen's book *Spin: A Social History of PR* & was looking forward to getting a balanced picture of this alleged master. Tye's book did not fit the bill and, unfortunately, most of Bernay's books seem to be out of print. My main problem with the book is that Tye does not document the connection between Bernay's schemes & their outcomes - were Bernay's efforts smoke & mirrors that simply presaged natural turns in public opinion or did they actually manage to influence public opinion? This is the main question that I wanted the book to address, and it simply did not do it. Furthermore, the book is structured non-chronologically, and Tye does not have the skill as an author to bring Bernay's life together coherently in this manner; at best the structure is a good idea poorly executed. Check out Ewen's book for a more cogent history of public relations (including Bernay's innovations).

Bernays is generally acknowledged as the Father of PR. But, is he also the Father of Spin? Tye writes a fascinating biography of this key communications individual, filled with the key episodes that earned Bernays his moniker. From getting women to smoke to getting people to eat bacon, Bernays always seemed to figure out a way. But, Tye focuses heavily on these episodes and gives short shift

to the implications and consequences of Bernays's actions beyond fattening the bottom line. While it is true Bernays could not have fully appreciated all the consequences, his relentless drive to serve his clients reveals a man who forgot that public relations means being the conduit between the public and the client, not being another salesman, no matter how clever. If you're interested in seeing the modern fruition of Bernays's tactics, then I suggest Michael Levine's *Guerilla PR: Wired*, which updates Bernays's ideas into the digital age. Overall, this book is well-worth reading if you're interested in a man's actions. But, if you're interested in seeing how a man's actions can affect the world, then you might be better off with another book.

Tye's book is a must-read for any self-respecting PR wizard. How Bernays was able to engineer PR strategies for such diverse products as books and bananas, from Mack trucks to Lucky Strikes and even foreign countries, is ingenious and artful. His creativity hath no bounds. He elevated the practice to a social science, and build roads for the profession. He drafted a historical argument, outlining 5 stages of PR history in America, the last stage being the most interesting to me. This was the "Period of Mutual Understanding," quote: "a time when PR came to mean 'not a one-way street for giving information to the public for our clients but rather one of interpreting the public to the client as a basis for their action and, after the action had been carried out, interpreting the client to the public.'" If only all of us could be so articulate with our clients! Entertaining accounts on how he performed the craft (i.e., selling books by selling builders on the inclusion of book shelves in new homes) and his allegiance to "Big Think," were my favorite parts and I could not hear enough about them. The book explores the complex, contradictory nature he possessed and a surprise revelation in the end (and at the end of Bernay's life), will have you spellbound in disbelief.

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