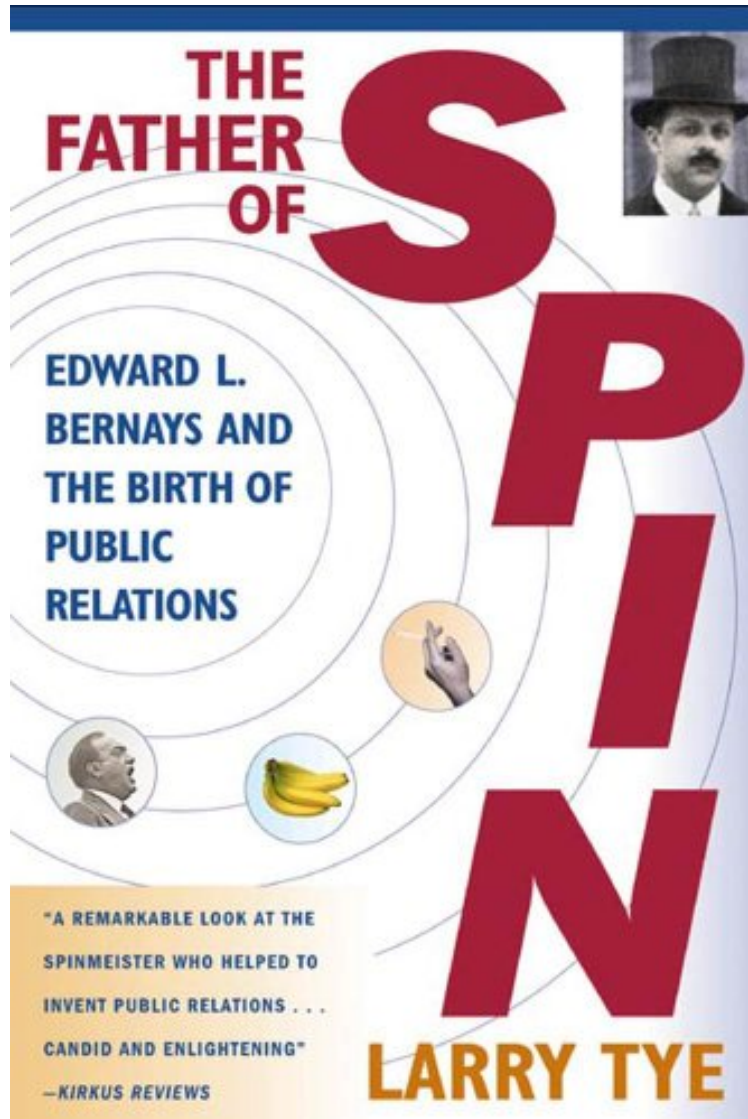


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The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations

Larry Tye

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very helpful to understand the essence of PR.

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.

.com Biographer Larry Tye can't help but be entertained by his subject's professional antics. Edward L. Bernays (1892-1995), a pioneering practitioner of public relations, zestfully ballyhooed his clients, utilizing a shrewd blend of publicity stunts, careful cultivation of the press, and solicited endorsements from "experts." Yet journalist Tye is also aware of the moral ambiguities inherent in the career of a man who vigorously promoted cigarette smoking and whose work for the United Fruit Company played at least some role in the 1954 military overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected government. This judicious book balances appreciation for Bernays' inventiveness with a sober understanding of its consequences, including the extent to which PR permeates contemporary American life. --Wendy Smith
From Publishers Weekly
Dubbed the "Prince of Puff" and the "Baron of Ballyhoo," Edward L. Bernays, who died in 1995 at the age of 103, was arguably the most influential publicist of the 20th century. The nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays brought an astute grasp of human behavior to the nascent field of public relations, opening his own PR firm in 1919 and launching celebrated publicity campaigns for American Tobacco, Ivory Soap, United Fruit, book publishers, manufacturers of eggs and bacon and the platforms of presidents from Coolidge to Eisenhower. In this comprehensive biography, Tye, a Boston Globe reporter, attributes Bernay's success to a marketing philosophy that he terms "Big Think," which combined high-concept publicity stunts, endorsements from doctors, national surveys and other forms of publicity whose actual product endorsement was cleverly veiled. To promote Lucky Strike cigarettes among women in an age in which smoking in public was still outre, for example, he arranged for a parade of smoking debutantes to march down Fifth Avenue. To market Ivory soap, he created a hugely popular national soap-sculpting contest. A domineering and self-absorbed man who never missed a chance to promote himself ("in an era of mass communication," he often remarked, "modesty is a private virtue and a public fault"), Bernays eventually became a pariah in the industry that he helped to create. At times, Tye too blithely credits Bernays for shaping events and product success, rather than seeing his work as only one part of the welter of mass media manipulations that have long since transformed American life. But Tye succeeds in piercing the rapidly spinning mythology that perpetually surrounded the man who, he convincingly argues, pioneered the modern science of spin. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Library Journal
The hyperbolic modern world of mass culture, constant polling, and spin cycles got its start in the 1920s with the exploits of Edward Bernays, the "father of public relations." So claims Boston Globe journalist Tye, whose entertaining study combines a healthy jadedness about media manipulation with a fondness for his pioneer subject. Armed with a few of his uncle Sigmund Freud's insights, Bernays stoked the fires of the mass id, "crystallizing public opinion" for 435 clients ranging from Enrico Caruso to General Electric, Calvin Coolidge to Ivory Soap. To encourage women to smoke publicly, he sent a parade of them puffing down Fifth Avenue on Easter 1929. He popularized the "expert" survey, staged news events, planted stories, and created charitable-sounding business commissions. For the United Fruit Company in the 1950s he even helped topple the leftist government of Guatemala. Tye's book ably follows Bernays's ever-widening stunts, from his World War I enlistment work through the transforming decades to his death in 1995. Recommended for all history and business collections.
ANathan Ward, "Library Journal" Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.