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"Persuasion for Profit": Public Relations and Corporate Power at Midcentury

by

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Introduction

> "In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons...who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind."
>
> – Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (1928)

This is a story about the development of public relations in the mid-20th century, told through the work of Edward L. Bernays. Bernays, widely considered a "father of public relations" (PR), was an unapologetic "persuader for profit" who left behind an impressive number of books, articles, and guides defining what PR is and how to do it well.[1] Through these texts and his campaigns, he tirelessly promoted the field of public relations and his role within it. In doing so, Bernays helped ensure that PR would leave a deep imprint on the political and economic history of the 20th century.

PR is a line of work meant to operate behind the scenes, influencing public opinion in the client's favor without the public catching on. Of course, PR counsels may not always meet this goal; yet as we will see, even PR's sharpest critics could be taken in by corporate-sponsored narratives. Tracing the development and impact of a profession that deals with intangible concepts like public opinion poses certain challenges, but it is worth undertaking. The stories people believe – about themselves, the companies they work for or buy from, or

[1] I borrow my title from advertiser Nicholas Samstag's 1957 book *Persuasion for Profit*. Samstag's writing, particularly his chapter of Bernays' 1955 *The Engineering of Consent*, is remarkable for its clear-eyed treatment of the ethics of persuasion. Chapter 2 will discuss both texts in depth.

the way history was made – are no less impactful for being difficult to quantify. The global economic system, at least, has decided that PR's services are worth paying for. In 2021, the PR industry was valued at over $92 billion worldwide, and is expected to grow to nearly $150 billion by 2026.[2] It is clear that, by the 21st century, PR has become a ubiquitous part of corporate and governmental practice. It is my intention with this project to explore the context in which this global industry first developed techniques of mass persuasion that could service corporate and/or political ends. How and why did PR counsels like Bernays define the work they did, and what did their campaigns seek to achieve?

Locating the Public

Before we can understand the development of public relations, we must first examine the "public" in question. Stuart Ewen's *PR! A Social History of Spin* provides a helpful overview of the development of the "modern public" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The concept emerged from scholars concerned with the breakdown of older forms of authority and the rise of mass democracy. Responding to the French revolution and the upheavals that followed, social psychologist Gustave Le Bon declared in 1896 that "the divine right of the masses is about to replace the divine right of kings."[3] For Le Bon, this transition was not cause for celebration. He argued that "crowd psychology" was an inherently reactive, irrational, and destabilizing force. Crowds cannot be appealed to by

[2] "Public Relations Global Market Report 2022," *The Business Research Company*, December 2021, https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/public-relations-global-market-report.
[3] Stuart Ewen quotes Gustave Le Bon's *The Origins of Crowd Psychology* on page 68. Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996).

logic; rather, moved by passion and impulse, the crowd subsumes the individuality and reasoning capacity of its members.

Other theorists were similarly concerned with questions of collective rationality, but some found hope in the "public" as opposed to the "crowd." In 1901, French sociologist Gabriel Tarde argued that crowds were a "social group of the past," whereas the public was "the social group of the future." If in the 18th century the public had been defined by the exchange of ideas in a physical marketplace, then by the 20th century that ideal had given way to a "disembodied" public united by its shared consumption of mass media. The modern public was a disjointed community of newspaper readers, argued Tarde, and as such was both more passive than the irrational crowd as well as more susceptible to logical appeals.[4]

Many agreed with Tarde's framing of the modern public and the importance of news media in shaping public thought. Ferdinand Tönnies, a German sociologist, argued that "'the newspaper had become an unprecedented machinery for the manufacture and marketing of public opinion.'"[5] He believed that the power of the press to shape public opinion "'[was] comparable and, in some respects, superior to the material power which the states possess…the press is not confined within natural borders.'"[6] Merging the concerns of Tarde and Le Bon, American social psychologist Edward A. Ross described the organs of mass media as "'space-annihilating devices'" through which "'a vast public shares the

[4] Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 68.
[5] Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 70.
[6] Ewen quotes Tönnies on page 71 of *PR! A Social History of Spin*.

same rage, alarm, enthusiasm, or horror. Then, as each part of the mass becomes acquainted with the sentiment of the rest, the feeling is generalized and intensified. In the end the public swallows up the individuality of its members.'"[7] But while the public and the crowd both quashed individual thought, the public mind could be controlled and channeled toward rational action in a way the crowd could not. As Ewen summarized: "If *the crowd* was perceived as dangerous, driven by irrational appetites, *the public* – as an audience of readers – seemed more receptive to idea, to rationalization, to the allure of factual proof…What the public saw, heard, and knew were all, according to this analysis, subject to the influences of editorial control."[8]

The Early History of Public Relations

The Progressive Movement of the early 20th century was a political response to some of the questions that confronted theorists of the "public." How can societies maintain order and cohesion in the face of massive cultural, technological, and economic transformation? To what extent is full democratic participation possible, or desirable? Progressive reforms that sought to curtail political corruption and expand voting access, combined with advancements in communications technology and the exposure of corporate malpractice by muckraking journalists, made public opinion a newly important consideration for powerful institutions and individuals. But the strategic importance of public opinion would not necessarily lead to greater power or agency for the masses.

[7] Ewen quotes Ross on pages 71-72 of *PR! A Social History of Spin*.
[8] Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 73.

The early history of public relations originated with the recognition that corporations could not continue blithely ignoring public perceptions of their behavior. Fortunately for them, the susceptibility of public opinion to mass media offered a path forward. One of the earliest practitioners of what we now consider public relations, Ivy Lee, began working as a spokesperson for captains of industry in the early 1900s. Lee's experience working for the coal industry convinced him that open communication with the press was essential to corporate prosperity in the 20th century. During a labor crisis in 1902, union leaders had courted journalistic favor while corporate bosses, following tradition, had dismissed the press; the union won over public opinion while the company sparked widespread outrage.[9] Still feeling the aftershocks four years later, the mining company hired Lee, who encouraged his client to adopt a communicative stance toward the press. Under his guidance, the company secured more favorable press coverage.[10]

Lee and his business partner's 1906 "Declaration of Principles" affirmed the lessons he'd learned from that incident by establishing a public relations credo ostensibly dedicated to "Accuracy, Authenticity, [and] Interest."[11] The Declaration, sent out to city editors, proclaimed: "'This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open…our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects

[9] Lee was employed by the Anthracite Coal Operators' Committee of Seven. Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 77.
[10] Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 77.
[11] This was the motto Lee and his then-partner, George Parker, adopted for their new office.

which it is of value and interest to the public to know about.'"[12] In seeking to present their work in opposition to the "hucksters" of older fields like "press agentry" and "publicity," the "Declaration" marked an important step toward defining the bounds of a new profession. But, as Lee would later make clear, "truth" was defined by what the client said it was.[13] Qualified truth-telling would remain a core part of PR mythology even as the profession underwent massive change.

The Impact of World War I

Both historians and practitioners of PR agree that World War I was a watershed event in the history of mass persuasion and public opinion. Woodrow Wilson had run for reelection in 1916 as the man who "kept us out of war," but by 1917, he had decided he could not keep the United States out of the conflict any longer. In order to rally an isolationist country for war overseas, the Wilson administration established the Committee on Public Information (CPI). The CPI, headed by George Creel, was the country's first state propaganda agency, and it made use of every medium of communication possible to influence American public opinion in favor of the war. These methods included the distribution of

[12] Karen Russell Miller and Carl O. Bishop, "Understanding Ivy Lee's declaration of principles: U.S. newspaper and magazine coverage of publicity and press agentry, 1865-1904," *Public Relations Review* 35, no. 2 (June 2009), 91.

[13] In 1915, as part of the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations' investigation into the massacre of strikers and their families at a Rockefeller-owned coal mine, Lee was called to testify about his work for the Rockefellers during this incident. When asked, "You were out there to give the facts, the truth about the strike, the fullest publicity?" Lee responded, "Yes, the truth as the [mine] operators saw it." He went on: "I had no responsibility for the facts and no duty beyond compiling them and getting them into the best form for publicity work." See Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 80.

millions of pamphlets and posters; the production of films depicting brutish German soldiers; advertising and news divisions which produced CPI-sponsored content; and the "Four Minute Men," a program which enlisted 75,000 people nationwide to attend their local cinemas and, during intermission, stand and deliver concise speeches that emphasized CPI talking points.[14] Decades later, the Council on Foreign Relations reported that the CPI had been responsible for the outpouring of public support for the war, writing that "with his associates [George Creel] planned and carried out what was perhaps the most effective job of large-scale propaganda which the world had ever witnessed...There was no escape from the bombardment."[15]

Meanwhile, the prosecution of the war entailed vast amounts of domestic manufacturing. Even before the United States declared war in 1917, the country had scaled up production to supply the Allies with weapons, foodstuffs, and other necessary materials. It would be decades before Dwight Eisenhower warned the country about the "military-industrial complex," but munitions companies, converted factories, and business leaders profited heavily from this arrangement. When the war ended, the demand for this production dried up. Economists, government officials and business leaders began to seek ways to reconcile the postwar problem of overproduction and underconsumption. The challenge then became convincing Americans to buy more than they needed – to reject the prevailing Protestant work ethic and seek fulfillment in consumer goods.

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[14] J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6-16.
[15] Harold J. Tobin and Percy W. Bidwell, *Mobilizing Civilian America* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1940), 76.

According to historian Stuart Ewen, the emergence of American consumer culture during this period was the deliberate creation of corporate leaders via the burgeoning fields of advertising and public relations. New forms of mass media, like radio and motion pictures, joined newspapers and magazines to offer a wide variety of mediums through which to influence people's buying behavior.[16]

Thus where the end of WWI had created an economic imbalance that business leaders sought to address by increasing consumer demand, the domestic propaganda war provided a guidebook on how to do it. WWI had proven that propaganda, particularly that which made use of images, themes, and symbols, was immensely powerful. At the war's end, many of the people staffing government propaganda agencies went on to become prominent figures in the emerging fields of public relations, advertising, and fundraising. John Price Jones, who would go on to found one of the most successful fundraising and PR firms in America, honed his skills as the assistant publicity director for the Liberty Loan program.[17] Carl Byoir, who later founded a major PR firm, worked for the CPI, as did Edward Bernays, a recent graduate of Cornell and press agent. As Edward Bernays remembered later, "During World War I and the immediate postwar years a new profession developed in response to the demand for trained, skilled

[16] Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977).
[17] "John Price Jones, Fund-Raiser Who Collected a Billion, Dead; Former Reporter Persuaded Harvard Alumni to Give Record $15 Million," *The New York Times*, December 24, 1964, https://www.nytimes.com/1964/12/24/archives/john-price-jones-fundraiser-who-collected-a-billion-dead-former.html.

specialists to advise others on the technique of engineering public consent, a profession providing counsel on public relations."[18]

As people like Bernays began to carve out a niche for public relations in the post-WWI era, many Progressive thinkers disillusioned by the war came to doubt ordinary people's capacity for rational deliberation at all. As Walter Lippmann wrote in *The Phantom Public* (1925), "we must abandon the notion that the people govern."[19] He argued that the democratic ideal of a sovereign, "omnicompetent" citizen is "unattainable," as much a fiction as the public itself. However, this "phantom public" can nevertheless be called upon to extend legitimacy to the leadership of individual experts. On its own, public opinion is irrational, but "under favorable institutions, sound leadership and decent training" it may become "a reserve of force…placed at the disposal of those who stood for workable law as against brute assertion."[20] As such, public opinion should not be considered the free expression of the people's will so much as their "alignment" with a limited range of choices set forth by these experts.[21] But how can leaders align the "vague and confusing medley" of people's "general opinions" into "one general will"? Reflecting his familiarity with psychoanalytic theory, Lippman argued that this process demands "the use of symbols which assemble emotions

[18] Edward L. Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 250, no. 1 (March 1, 1947): 115.
[19] Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public: A Sequel to Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), 51.
[20] Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 386.
[21] His pessimistic assessment of democracy sparked numerous rebuttals, most famously John Dewey's *The Public and its Problems* (1927). Dewey argued that although the public was currently "eclipsed" by the institutions meant to express its will, genuine democracy was yet possible and worth striving towards. Education that cultivated critical thinking skills would be part of the solution. But Dewey's arguments were frequently abstract and lacked clear steps on how to achieve his ideas.

after they have been detached from their ideas." Overall, "the process…by which general opinions are brought to cooperation consists of an intensification of feeling and a degradation of significance."[22]

By Bernays' own admission, Lippmann was a major influence on his thinking, as were older theorists of the "crowd" like Gustave Le Bon. [23] But where Lippmann provided eloquent theories, Edward Bernays operationalized them, presenting PR as the profession that could expertly influence public opinion for the benefit of societal order. In 1919, he opened the Edward L. Bernays Firm with his wife, Doris Fleischman.[24] As the firm began to expand its clientele, Bernays became a prominent figure in the professionalization of PR that took place in the 1920s. Beginning with *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923, Bernays published books, articles and op-eds that sought to define the theory and practice of PR. These publications not only raised Bernays' profile, but helped distinguish public relations as its own profession while answering critics that saw PR practitioners as unscrupulous propagandists.

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[22] Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 385.

[23] For example, Bernays' 1928 *Propaganda* echoed Lippmann's sentiments in *The Phantom Public* when he wrote, "In theory, every citizen makes up his mind on public questions and matters of private conduct. In practice, if all men had to study for themselves the abstruse economic, political, and ethical data involved in every question, they would find it impossible to come to a conclusion about anything. We have voluntarily agreed to let an invisible government sift the data and high-spot the outstanding issues so that our field of choice shall be narrowed to practical proportions." Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1928), 10-11.

[24] Fleischman, a brilliant PR counsel in her own right, worked closely with her husband throughout their long careers. By all accounts, Fleischman – a feminist who kept her maiden name when she married – was essential to the success of the firm that bore her husband's name. However, she remained largely behind the scenes and left a paper trail far smaller than "Eddie." Further research on Fleischman's role in the Bernays firm would yield a more complete picture of 20th-century public relations. See Larry Tye's biography of Edward Bernays, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1998), 123-27.

Bernays' promotion of himself and his profession continued throughout his decades-long career. His centrality to the formation of PR in the 20th century led me to focus on his work. Bernays was a fascinating, idiosyncratic character whose life's work brought him into contact with many of the 20th century's most famous businesspeople, artists, and politicians. He started out as a graduate of Cornell's agricultural program, a degree his father pushed him into; he quickly pivoted to journalism and then to press agentry, representing famed opera singer Enrico Caruso and the Ballet Russe dance company in the 1910s.[25] He eventually did PR for clients as varied as the government of India, Calvin Coolidge, the American Tobacco Company, and Dixie Cups. He was an atheist Jew with liberal politics, making him an outsider in most business circles; though, as we will see later on, his work led him to violate his stated principles in substantive ways.[26]

Significantly, he was the double nephew of Sigmund Freud – his father married Freud's sister, his father's sister married Freud– and his closeness with his uncle granted him a deep familiarity with psychoanalytic theory that he incorporated into his work.[27] As Bernays' biographer Larry Tye put it, "[Bernays] was as driven as his uncle to know what subconscious forces motivated people, and he used Freud's writings to help him understand. But while the esteemed analyst tried to use psychology to free his patients from emotional crutches, Bernays used it to rob consumers of their free will, helping his clients predict, then manipulate, the very way their customers thought and acted – all of which he

[25] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 3-15.
[26] For more on Bernays' relationship to Judaism, see Chapter 6 of Tye's *The Father of Spin.*
[27] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 8-9.

openly acknowledged in his writings."[28] And he wrote a lot. Perhaps most importantly for an historian, Bernays left behind a massive paper trail. His published works were only a small fraction of the total he produced. Upon his death in 1995, 900 boxes of Bernays' personal and professional correspondence, memos, PR materials, and even tax records were donated to the Library of Congress, an arrangement he had worked out before he died. Bernays saw himself as a historical figure and he prepared accordingly.

The more I researched Bernays, the more I considered the potential pitfalls of studying someone who so badly wanted to be studied. Bernays' line of work revolved around constructing narratives and passing them off as objective reality. He understood well the power of historical myths, of symbols and themes, of simplified explanations and memorable slogans (e.g., "the father of PR"). He had a vested interest in portraying his individual campaigns and the profession he had helped create as immensely impactful. But for all his self-aggrandizement and spin, he could also be shockingly forthright in his discussions of propaganda and mass persuasion. Bernays considered himself among what he called the "invisible governors… who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world."[29] While many of his contemporaries may have privately shared this view, Bernays was the type to say the quiet part out loud. But even his most controversial statements were deliberately provocative. When he spoke, he wanted to be heard. Throughout this project I have aimed to strike a balance between dismissing Bernays' grandiose

[28] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 97.
[29] Bernays, *Propaganda*, 9-10.

statements outright and unquestioningly accepting the mystique he sought to create about himself and his work. To that end, I've tried to analyze why and for whom each source was made, whether PR manual, op-ed, or business memo. What investments might Bernays have had in the stories they tell?

The Overview

For all Bernays' efforts, public relations did not start to become a widely accepted business practice until the early post-WWII era. Just as WWI had been the driving force behind professionalization of PR in the 1920s, WWII set the stage for a postwar professionalization on a much larger scale.[30] As I will discuss in Chapter 2, wartime propaganda agencies served as the training ground for a new generation of PR counsels. Meanwhile, the aftershocks of the Great Depression and the war led business leaders to find the services that PR offered increasingly appealing.[31] The engineering of consent, a theory Bernays first articulated in an essay in 1947, was part of a wider process of defining a rapidly growing profession. In the article, which he later expanded into a book of essays

[30] The 1920s were an important period of professionalization for advertising, journalism, and public opinion polling, too. For more on the relationship between the professionalization processes of PR and journalism in the post-WWI period, see Burton St. John's "CLAIMING JOURNALISTIC TRUTH: US Press Guardedness toward Edward L. Bernays' Conception of the Minority Voice and the 'Corroding Acid' of Propaganda," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2009): 353–67. For the changing relationship of PR to advertising and journalism, see Chapter VII of Richard S. Tedlow's *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich: Jai Press Inc, 1979).

[31] According to Richard Tedlow, in the early postwar era "corporate public relations experienced the most dramatic growth in its history." A 1946 survey from the Opinion Research Corporation, for instance, found that 9/10 companies were increasing their PR budgets that year. See *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 150-51.

in 1955, he outlined the methodological and ethical approaches PR counsels should take to "engineer" the consent of the masses for "sound social ends."[32]

Chapter 2 will treat the engineering of consent as a necessary lens through which to understand public relations and mass persuasion in a period when PR was becoming more popular than ever before. As I will argue, consent engineering was about more than simply extending professional advice to other PR counsels. As the title implies, Bernays portrayed his work as a scientific theory applicable not only to PR but to any effort to manipulate public opinion. The implications of this approach extended far beyond the field of PR, sparking heated debates about the permissibility of propaganda and persuasion. In Chapter 2, I will analyze Bernays' 1947 article and 1955 book that articulated the theory of consent engineering, as well as the context in which they were made. What techniques and ethical guidelines did Bernays (and his co-authors) advocate? What assumptions about the public and its susceptibility to persuasion did these guidelines reflect? How did public perception of PR motivate these texts, and how did critics of PR respond to them?

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine the engineering of consent in practice. Bernays was a busy man: as he was writing articles and rounding up contributors for his 1955 book, his firm was also running PR campaigns for a wide variety of high-profile clients. To examine how Bernays' theories functioned in practice, I have selected two case studies: United Fruit Company and Mack Trucks, Inc. These clients and their objectives were worlds apart, but the two campaigns shared a few

[32] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 113.

key commonalities. Both campaigns occurred during (for United Fruit) or between (for Mack) the publications of Bernays' two texts on consent engineering. Both coincided, at least in part, with the early Cold War, a context that, I will argue, deeply shaped the objectives, themes, and symbols of the campaign. Finally, each campaign was connected to monumental changes in American domestic and foreign politics: in the case of United Fruit, the CIA-backed coup in Guatemala in 1954; in the case of Mack Trucks, the construction of the interstate highway system in 1956. That the campaigns were otherwise so different, furthermore, allows us to adjudicate Bernays' claim that his methods were effective regardless of context. Throughout the case studies, I will consider the following: what was Bernays was hired to do? How did changing political circumstances impact the campaigns' underlying objectives and public-facing rhetoric? To what extent did the campaigns make use of the techniques outlined in "The Engineering of Consent," and did Bernays follow the ethical guidelines that he advocated? How might we consider the effectiveness of Bernays' work?

Chapter 2: PR in its Own Words

If you asked the father of public relations to tell the story of his profession, it would go something like this:

Allied success in WWI hinged on the "war on words" fought at home and abroad by federal information agencies like George Creel's Committee on Public Information, for which Edward Bernays and other soon-prominent communications specialists worked. The effectiveness of the techniques they developed to convince the public to support the war, boost morale, and dampen the enemy's spirits, facilitated the country's victory. Coming out of war, the need for such technicians to aid leaders in the problems of "adjustment" only increased as the public and its opinions became at once more connected (thanks to mass media) and more far-flung from its leaders.[33] Public opinion had never been more important in securing the success or failure of the ideas and programs of leadership. The public relations counsel emerged to meet the needs of leaders in business and government in "dealing with their publics," correcting "maladjustments" between the client's objectives and public opinion and applying the latest social scientific research to the problem of securing public support for business or government prerogatives.[34] In so doing they ensured social order and stability through the smooth functioning of mass democratic society.

[33] Edward L. Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 250, no. 1 (March 1, 1947): 113.
[34] Edward L. Bernays, "Preface," in *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), ed. Edward L. Bernays (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 5.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the history of public relations is more complicated than Bernays let on. Rarely in these neat summaries of his field (which pepper many of his articles, manuals, and correspondence about public relations) did Bernays mention Ivy Lee, his predecessor by nearly two decades in the art of securing public goodwill for a client. Also obscured in his account is the delayed usage of the term "counsel on public relations" (which Bernays invented in 1919 for its association with legal counsel) or the persistent conflation of the emerging field of PR with press agentry, advertising, "hucksterism," and propaganda (an association that Bernays sometimes endorsed and sometimes rejected).

Instead, Bernays portrayed public relations as an inevitable consequence of twin phenomena: the growing importance of public opinion to institutional success; and the need for experts of mass communication to help institutions and their publics gain a better understanding of one another. This historical narrative served PR practitioners' purposes in several ways. First, it conveniently positioned public relations as the guarantor of both societal order and business success. Moreover, it reified the profession itself by providing PR practitioners with a shared history and mythos (including a cast of legendary characters like Bernays himself). Nor should we take for granted Bernays' and other practitioners' assertions of best practices and ethical obligations as simply a commentary on what already existed. As Bernays and others acknowledged, PR was a profession in flux even after WWII. These PR histories, guides, and articles should be read not only as descriptive but prescriptive, writing into existence the

bounds of a certain type of persuasive work called "public relations." Against which critiques were these bounds being drawn? What sociopolitical climate impelled practitioners to write essays and books defending their ethical and professional duties? How did the end of WWII and the dawn of the Cold War inform the development of public relations, both in the economic and political incentives creating new demand for PR expertise, and in the values and rhetoric that informed the field's strategies and self-conceptualizations? How did that same backdrop shape the values and rhetoric that informed critiques of PR? These are the questions I will explore in Chapter 2: how a profession defines itself, and why.

Postwar Public Relations

Bernays formulated his theory of "the engineering of consent" – first described in a 1947 essay, then expanded into a 1955 book of essays that he edited – at a time when the field of PR was undergoing massive change. The information agencies of WWII had employed scores of PR practitioners – one contemporary observer estimated that 75,000 people did PR for the military during WWII – and many of those practitioners looked forward to a lucrative career in the private sector at the war's end.[35] The demand was there. As Stuart Ewen has argued, WWII was a "salve" for Big Business that helped resuscitate its image in the public imagination after the damaging years of the Depression and

[35] Richard S. Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich: Jai Press Inc, 1979), 156.

the New Deal.[36] As evidence of corporate contributions to the war effort, business leaders could point to the wonders of wartime production or to the "public service advertising" conducted by the Wartime Advertising Council (in which advertisers provided services free of cost to the government during war, a practice internally recognized by its proponents as "public relations for advertising").[37]

Still, business leaders were extremely concerned about the prospects for capitalizing on these gains in the early postwar years. As Elizabeth Fones-Wolf has argued, business leaders in the 1940s and '50s strove to return to the values of the 1920s, when consumerism was promoted as the pinnacle of societal progress and personal satisfaction. The Depression years had made that ethos ring hollow to many Americans, who, in the eyes of business leaders, had grown alarmingly comfortable with the level of government involvement in the economy that the New Deal and WWII had entailed.[38] In response, the business community increasingly turned to "consent engineers" to sell their vision of postwar America.[39]

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[36] Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 340.
[37] The Wartime Advertising Council was renamed the Advertising Council in 1945 and continued to wage "public service" campaigns on behalf of entities as varied as forest fire prevention (Smokey the Bear was an Ad Council creation) and the entire "American Economic System." See Robert Griffith, "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960," *The Business History Review* 57, no. 3 (1983): 395.
[38] Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 16.
[39] The Advertising Council is an apt example of the use of PR methods by the business community. Founded in 1942 as the War Advertising Council, this association, made up of advertisers, provided "public service advertising" to the government free of cost. Internally, this practice was openly acknowledged as "public relations for advertising." See Robert Griffith's article "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960," for a history of the Ad Council and other corporate spin operations like "economic education" campaigns.

Yet by the end of WWII there were but a handful of professional associations for PR counsels, "none of them well recognized or to any extent influential" (complained a PR counsel in 1946).[40] Nor did there exist a widely shared set of best practices or ethical codes, though Bernays had been publishing books on the subject since *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923. PR manuals could hardly agree upon a definition of the field itself. The postwar attempts to professionalize PR, of which Bernays' 1947 essay was a part, should thus be seen against this backdrop of definitional confusion on one hand, and rejuvenated interest in the field on the other, both from practitioners and from their corporate employers.

The flood of new practitioners entering the field after the war raised new concerns about professional standards and ethics. As Bernays would put it in a 1953 article for the trade magazine *Printer's Ink:* "as in every other new and expanding field – public relations, for instance – charlatanism has invaded."[41] Older, established practitioners had a vested interest in raising the bar for who could call themselves "public relations counsels," which would help reduce professional competition by limiting entry into the field. Moreover, increased professionalization could improve PR's prestige by allowing practitioners to better sell themselves as ethical experts whose "technical body of knowledge" would yield crucial insights to the problems of business.[42]

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[40] Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 158.
[41] Edward L. Bernays, "Looking for a social scientist? Here's how to find him," *Printer's Ink*, September 11, 1953, 56. His statement implies that prior to the current period of expansion, PR was free of unethical or fraudulent conduct. That was, of course, not the case.
[42] Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 156.

This function was critical in an age when, despite PR's growing popularity in the late 1930s through WWII, corporate management was still skeptical of what the PR counsel had to offer. As business historian Richard Tedlow has argued, "'selling the boss on the validity of his work" was still the PR counsel's main obstacle.[43] This was challenging enough for the older practitioners who shared their political and economic sensibilities with their bosses. For some of the more liberal newcomers, who envisioned themselves as policy consultants pushing management to align corporate actions with public desires, it was an even harder sell. Unsurprisingly, corporate leadership was more interested in aligning public opinion with its actions rather than the other way around, and if PR counsels offered policy advice, it often went unheeded. Thus unlike the medical and legal professions whose terms and prestige they sought to borrow, PR counsels had little autonomy vis-a-vis their clients. To disagree with management put many PR practitioners on shaky ground.[44]

Despite his vaunted status as an early and prominent practitioner of public relations, Edward Bernays often shared the goals and outlook of the liberal newcomers. For a start, Bernays was an atheist Jew with liberal politics, and his public support for feminism, racial equality, and labor unions set him apart from the Protestant conservative business community that made up most of his employers and fellow practitioners. However, his public support for these issues

[43] Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 160.
[44] Claims that PR counseling helped to 'liberalize' corporate policy and make it more responsive to public wishes should be taken with skepticism. In some cases, that was probably the case, but was far from the rule. It is difficult to say the extent to which some of these more 'liberal-minded' PR counsels helped change policy.

cannot be separated from his penchant for self-promotion and publicity. In 1922, for example, his marriage to Doris Fleischman made headlines when, after the ceremony, she signed into the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel still using her maiden name. Bernays had been the one to call the reporters.[45] Soon after the marriage, she became an equal partner at Bernays' firm, and would go on to manage many high-profile clients. But, as Bernays' biographer notes, she never received as much credit as her husband for their shared work, and she routinely worked the "second shift."[46] One of his more well-known PR stunts, the "Torches of Freedom" March at New York's 1929 Easter Parade, used the language of gender equality to advocate the destruction of societal taboos against women smoking. But this so-called liberation had an ulterior motive: Bernays' firm had orchestrated the event as a consultant to American Tobacco.[47]

Elsewhere, Bernays supported racial and religious tolerance, including doing public relations for the NAACP. And unlike many of his colleagues in the business world, he voiced support for labor unions: for example, in his 1940 guide *Speak Up for Democracy!*, "anti-labor groups" list alongside "anti-alien groups" and "super-patriots" as homegrown "saboteurs of democracy" for whom readers

[45] Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Father of Public Relations* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1998), 121-123.
[46] Sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the term "the second shift" to refer to the domestic labor performed by working mothers in addition to their paid employment. Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 135-137.
[47] Historian Vanessa Murphree has argued that Bernays and subsequent PR historians have grossly exaggerated the impact of the "Torches of Freedom" march, which is better seen as a self-serving PR myth than a genuine moment of cultural transformation. She produces convincing evidence that the supposed taboos against women smoking in public were already well on their way out; moreover, many periodicals dismissed the march at the time as likely sponsored by the cigarette industry. See Murphree, "Edward Bernays's 1929 "Torches of Freedom" March: Myths and Historical Significance," in *American Journalism* 32, no. 3 (July 3, 2015).

must be on the lookout.[48] His outspoken support for the New Deal and for organized labor, not to mention his unceasing self-promotion, made him few friends in the newly formed professional associations of the 1930s and '40s.[49] As we will see in Chapter 3, however, Bernays spent the 1940s and '50s working for a company that would orchestrate the overthrow of the democratically elected leftwing president of Guatemala.

Both the fact of Bernays' political contradictions as well as his relentless publicity-seeking serve as reminders of the pitfalls of taking Bernays at his word. That is not to say that Bernays could not be remarkably open about his views on mass manipulation. Support for "Democracy" notwithstanding, Bernays was no democrat in the classical sense. Throughout his life, he expressed his belief in the need for an elite intelligentsia to shape the opinions and actions of the masses. But in his view, there was no contradiction between supporting mass democracy and shaping the opinions and actions of its citizenry. In fact, he routinely celebrated the supposed power of PR to help champion minority causes that might otherwise be trampled by the inertia of majority opinion. People do not come to the right ideas on their own. Instead, the PR counsel engineers public support for the "pro-social" ideas and causes that keep democratic society running smoothly.

These arguments were not new to the postwar era. Bernays had been writing about the malleability of public opinion and the beneficial uses of propaganda since the 1920s.[50] But his postwar tracts deserve particular attention for how

[48] Edward L. Bernays, *Speak Up For Democracy: What You Can Do - A Practical Plan of Action for Every American Citizen* (New York: Viking Press, 1940), 20-23.
[49] Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 157-159.
[50] See Bernays' *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923) and *Propaganda* (1928).

extensively and pragmatically they synthesized these ideas into a thoroughgoing approach to accomplishing what Bernays termed "the engineering of consent." In the sections that follow, I will do close readings of the articulations of this theory in 1947 and 1955, examining the practices and ethical guidelines they advocated as well as the historical backdrop against which they were made.

"The Engineering of Consent"

Edward L. Bernays opened his 1947 essay, "The Engineering of Consent," with the declaration that the Bill of Rights' guarantees to free speech, assembly, petition, and the press, have "tacitly expanded…to include the right of persuasion." According to Bernays, the right to persuade is open to all Americans. Mass communications may have transformed the country into "a small room in which a single whisper is magnified thousands of times," but any person can be the whisperer. Mastery of "the techniques of communication" is a prerequisite for leading effectively; those who fail to recognize the importance of these techniques cannot succeed in reaching a public that, despite consuming much of the same media, is physically more remote from its leaders than ever before. In a world that "has grown both smaller and very much larger," leaders and the communications specialists by their side have turned to "the engineering of consent" to govern an increasingly large and diffuse country.[51]

Bernays described "the engineering of consent" as the scientific approach to "getting people to support ideas or programs."[52] In an unruly and uneducated

[51] Edward L. Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 113.
[52] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 114.

society, the practice is crucial to democratic governance. Ideally, of course, the public's consent should rest on its "complete understanding" of the issue, but such a lofty bar is impossibly high in the real world where unceasing crises require leaders to make decisions before the average American has time to come to a full understanding of the issue.[53] The engineering of consent thus meets the gap between ideal and reality by bringing the public around "to socially constructive goals and values."[54]

The necessity of consent engineering becomes especially clear in wartime. It was the "war of words" fought by the Committee on Public Information that convinced the public to support U.S. participation in WWI and stay committed to it. In the decades after WWI, moreover, PR emerged as the professional inheritor of wartime consent engineering. Just like a "civil engineer" building a bridge, the consent engineers of public relations bring a scientific approach to planning and executing their campaigns.[55] The preliminary steps must include "calculation of resources"; "determination of objectives"; and comprehensive knowledge of the issue and the publics whose consent is desired. Public relations manuals (of which Bernays wrote plenty), media directories, and public opinion questionnaires (especially ones that target group leaders like the heads of civic groups) are vital to the preliminary research phase of any campaign. PR counsels must then choose themes and accompanying symbols that align with the campaign's objectives. And finally, the PR counsel must select and time his tactics, particularly the

[53]Bernays notes on page 114 that the average American has only six years of education.
[54] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 114.
[55] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 116.

orchestration of "newsworthy events," so as to most effectively dramatize the ideas he wishes to impart.[56]

But who defines what is "socially constructive"? Bernays acknowledged that the persuasive techniques of consent engineering may be "subverted."[57] For that reason, PR counsels must be attentive to discerning pro-social from anti-social causes when choosing clients. However, the means themselves are not in question. Widespread support for good ideas and programs – and here Bernays listed several causes including "racial and religious tolerance" and New Deal legislation – don't just happen on their own. The engineering of consent brings them into being by ensuring that the right ideas "become part and parcel of the people themselves."[58] If the battle for the public mind must be fought with the techniques of consent engineering, then the only solution is to "out-maneuver" their opponents through a better mastery of the techniques of their trade.[59]

Such a perspective characterized Joseph T. Klapper's analysis of Bernays' approach. Published in 1948 in *The American Scholar*, Klapper's article "Mass Media and the Engineering of Consent" explored the capabilities and limitations of engineering consent via mass media. For Klapper, the dangers of consent engineering lay not in the manipulation of public opinion itself but in the possibility that, through mass media, public opinion might become oppressively homogeneous. He noted that Americans' fear of persuasion and propaganda had worked its way into the home, the classroom, and the scholarly foundation.

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[56] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 119.
[57] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 115.
[58] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 120.
[59] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 115.

However, these widespread fears, while "not unfounded," were "inexactly expressed": in his view, the engineering of consent was so fundamental as to be unconcerning. After all, it "appeared wherever there are two unidentical minds and a means of communication."[60]

Instead, the distinctively troubling aspect of this new era of propaganda was the use of mass media as the means of dissemination. Some critics believed mass media would be used to engineer consent for a "rightist totalitarianism," while others predicted its leftwing complement.[61] However, in Klapper's view, both perspectives misunderstand that mass media panders to the center, not the extremes. Corporate sponsors' interests lie in amplifying existing attitudes, not propagandizing radically new ones: this allows them to reach the largest possible audience while implicitly supporting the social and economic system that has facilitated their success. Therefore, "the essential danger of mass media in America lies in their ability to inflate existing consent to the point of a dull unanimity, and so to achieve social and economic stasis."[62] Government ownership or regulation of media would succeed only in replacing one "monopoly propaganda" with another, while attempts to free media from the stultifying effects of corporate sponsorship through public financing would not be enough to make a difference. The only resistance to this "dull unanimity," Klapper argued, lies in harnessing the tools of consent engineering to cultivate "an extensive critical spirit." New findings in attitude psychology indicate that might be

[60] Joseph T. Klapper, "Mass Media and the Engineering of Consent," *The American Scholar* 17, no. 4 (Autumn 1948), 420.
[61] Klapper, "Mass Media," 421.
[62] Klapper, "Mass Media," 428.

possible. Using mass media to "engineer inquiry, or even a variety of consents," would thus eliminate "the peril of unanimity."[63]

Klapper did not elaborate how to use the media to "engineer inquiry, or…a variety of consents," nor did he explain how doing so would be able to outweigh the profit incentive toward conformity that he identified elsewhere. However, in arguing for the use of consent engineering to accomplish some democratic aim (in this case, to foster an appetite for dissenting views), Klapper was in good company. Propaganda historian J. Michael Sproule has argued that the engineering of consent "most aptly captured" the perspective of both practitioners and scholars of mass persuasion in the early Cold War.[64] If progressive critics in academia had earlier criticized the means of persuasion and sought to instruct Americans to recognize and steel themselves against propaganda, then during and after WWII social scientists increasingly favored the practitioner's emphasis on "propaganda enhancement" rather than analysis and/or resistance. This perspective was not new to the Cold War. Terence Ball's essay "The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America" illustrates that Progressive-era thinkers like Walter Lippmann and John Dewey argued that a "more rational system of economic planning and social control" was necessary to meet the challenges of governing a mass democracy.[65] The Depression Era helped institutionalize social science as the government increasingly turned to social scientists to manage

[63] Klapper, "Mass Media," 429.
[64] J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 213.
[65] Lippmann's *Drift and Mastery,* for example, that "rational" approaches to governance could help regain control over the forces of societal "drift." Terence Ball, "The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 79.

economic issues. However, as a 1950 report from the Russell Sage Foundation noted, it was during "the prosecution of World War II…[that] social scientists were converted into social practitioners."[66] The U.S. government's employment of social scientists in its sprawling array of propaganda agencies, as well as the funding provided to private research organizations like Hadley Cantril's Research Council, Inc., helped strengthen government-academic ties that would persist long after the end of the war.[67]

These developments greatly reinforced the idea that social scientists' role was to "use social data for the cure of social ills."[68] In the early Cold War, a combination of forces – "threats of communist expansion, America's new pre-eminence as a world power, the coming of the welfare-warfare state, the rise of the multiversity, and the largess of the large philanthropic foundations" – helped to create "the climate in which a positivistic vision of an instrumentally useful and normative neutral social science could take root and flourish."[69] The "communication elite" who had been employed in government or government-adjacent propaganda agencies during WWII remained determined to "[sell] liberal democracy," only this time as an alternative to communism, not fascism.[70]

Unlike with the social sciences, practitioners of PR and other persuasive fields like advertising could not credibly claim they were neutral technicians. However,

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[66] Ball, "The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America," 81.
[67] For a more comprehensive discussion of the relationships between academic social science, government agencies, and practitioners, see the chapter "Propaganda for Democracy" in Sproule's *Propaganda and Democracy*.
[68] As the Social Science Research Council's Pendleton Herring put it in 1947. Quoted by Ball on page 82.
[69] Ball, "The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America," 88.
[70] Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 213.

these practitioners could still use the rhetoric of social engineering-for-democracy to portray themselves and their work as both socially useful and ethically guided. The next several years saw numerous articles, op-eds, and books gesture in this direction.[71] Meanwhile, the number of people calling themselves "public relations counsels" exploded; the landscape of mass media began to shift considerably with the advent of television; and corporations made great strides toward making PR a key part of their internal and external operations.

Within this context, *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), a book of essays edited by Bernays, offers a fascinating window into the rhetorical and strategic techniques of professional persuaders in the mid-1950s. If the 1947 essay had sought to define an overarching praxis of persuasion, then the 1955 volume indicated Bernays' assessment that his vision had not yet been realized. In the preface, he defined public relations as "the attempt, by information, persuasion, and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement, or institution."[72] As he did with his appeal to "the right to persuasion" in the 1947 essay, Bernays portrayed the three tools of "information, persuasion, and adjustment" – as integral to democratic governance. The book then proceeds as a guide to the latest thinking on how best to wield the tools of consent engineering. For each chapter, Bernays enlisted "expert" advice on one of the following steps of engineering consent:

1. Define your objectives.
2. Research your publics.

[71] See Cutlip and Center's *Effective Public Relations* (1952) and Bernays' *Public Relations* (1952).
[72] Bernays, "Preface," in *The Engineering of* Consent, 3-4.

3. Modify your objectives to reach goals that are attainable.

4. Decide on your strategy.

5. Set up your themes, symbols, and appeals.

6. Blueprint an effective organization to carry on activity.

7. Chart your plan for both timing and tactics.

8. Carry out your tactics.

Who were these experts? Curiously, only two out of the seven Bernays recruited to write were PR counsels themselves (Doris Fleischman, his wife and business partner, and Howard Walden Cutler, his associate).[73] The fields represented by the other essayists include not only PR but advertising, marketing, fundraising, media, education, and the military. These practitioners' shared expertise on consent engineering forms the basis of the book's credibility, and Bernays took care to mention each author's credentials in the opening pages. Their "many years of practical experience" ensure that the book presents "a comprehensive, integrated picture of the field" – not only of PR, but rather the engineering of consent at large.[74] Therefore, Bernays envisioned "the engineering of consent" as a scientific approach to mass persuasion that PR embodied but did not monopolize. Public relations is consent engineering, but not all consent engineering is public relations. Thus we may proceed knowing that, in the eyes of Bernays and the prominent practitioners featured in this volume, the tips and

[73] Bernays, "Preface," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 4.
[74] Bernays, "Preface," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 4.

tricks of one trade applied to another. What, then, makes for a good consent engineer in 1955?

The model PR counsel in Cutler's opening essay, "Objectives," applies his expertise in group psychology, research methods, and communication to help the client define specific and attainable goals. The essay establishes several key themes that crop up throughout the volume: PR counsels must plan far ahead, and campaigns must be deliberately designed; counsels must align their objectives with strategies, tactics, and research, keeping in mind the resources at their disposal; and counsels must inform their plans with research based on an array of sources, including opinion polls, employment surveys, and labor data. Moreover, the essay borrows the language and idioms of the physical and social sciences to portray PR counsels as scientific experts in their own right who deserve professional autonomy and respect.[75] Like the experts in these other fields, the client and PR counsel must have "frank and free discussion" on an equal playing field.[76]

The second essay, "Research," expands on Cutler's scientific language to portray both human nature and the work of consent engineers in scientific terms. The author, Sherwood Dodge, was the VP of marketing at the advertising agency Foote, Cone and Belding. He defined research as "a form of human behavior involving the collection and interpretation of data."[77] Thus, we are all scientific

[75] For example, on page 44 Cutler describes the PR counsel as the "expert trained to estimate psychological reaction and to foresee the probable emotional response of publics to various types of stimuli."
[76] Cutler, "Objectives," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 38.
[77] Sherwood Dodge, "Research," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 56.

researchers moving from "hypothesis-to-verification, to improved hypothesis-to-verification" from the day we're born.[78] Public relations or market research is of a specialized type, of course, but is not fundamentally different from the problem-solving of everyday life. As with the other essayists who hailed from non-PR fields, Dodge noted that while his field is distinct from PR – marketing is concerned with "the distribution of products," whereas public relations is concerned with "the distribution of ideas that may or not may include products" – they are similar enough to share values and methods. [79] In this case, both wish to increase the company's "share of mind," or, "the flow of goods through people's heads."[80] To do so effectively, research in marketing or PR should frame its problems in terms of how best to engineer consent.[81] Like the other essays, Dodge then moved from general theories to pragmatic advice, offering a brief lesson in statistical sampling and encouraging readers to experiment with small-scale surveys. After all, "the successful engineering of the consent of millions can be foretold by the study of hundreds."[82]

Doris Fleischman and Howard Walden Cutler's essay, "Themes and Symbols," follows a similar structure, moving from definitions in the first section to procedural tips in the second. The authors, both associates in the Edward L. Bernays firm (Fleischman had the added distinction of being Bernays' wife and longtime collaborator), began by defining terms: if themes are the "concepts" of

[78] Sherwood Dodge, "Research," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 56.
[79] Sherwood Dodge, "Research," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 63-4.
[80] Dodge cites public opinion researcher Cornelius Dubois for the phrase.
[81] For example, on page 67 Dodge writes that, when framing messaging, PR counsels must consider: "Is my presentation of myself or my idea the most likely one to obtain consent?"
[82] Sherwood Dodge, "Research," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 93.

public relations, then symbols are the "representatives" of the theme that convey "'a mood or attitude with respect to an already given referent.'"[83] Once again, the authors based their strategic arguments in group psychology: in their view, rational appeals to the public would be ineffective or even counterproductive. Instead, PR counsels must employ themes that "appeal to basic human motivations" like the desire for security. [84] For Fleischman and Cutler, people believe "what they have been conditioned to believe"; when confronted with some truth they dislike, they stubbornly hold fast to what they already think.[85]

Having settled that philosophical debate, the authors turned to the four categories of themes: "for the individual"; "for sub-groups" (groupings based on some common attribute like gender or union membership); "for the basic social unit" (i.e., the family); and for "over-all publics."[86] Which themes to select for a given project depends on the publics the practitioner wishes to reach. The PR counsel should be well-read in the social sciences to ensure that their thematic choices are informed by the latest research on public opinion and human motivation. Once the themes have been chosen, the PR counsel must select symbols to illustrate them. The utility of these themes and symbols, the authors explained, is to "humanize" the corporation or institution.[87] Successfully done, the PR campaign will convince the public that their interests coincide with the client's.

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[83] The authors quote Columbia professor R. M. MacIver's "Symbols and Values: An Initial Study." Doris Fleischman and Howard Walden Cutler, "Themes and Symbols," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 138.
[84] Fleischman and Cutler, "Themes and Symbols," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 139.
[85] Fleischman and Cutler, "Themes and Symbols," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 140.
[86] Fleischman and Cutler, "Themes and Symbols," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 141-144.
[87] Fleischman and Cutler, "Themes and Symbols," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 151.

Lest that sound manipulative, John Price Jones' subsequent essay, "Organization," reminds the reader that consent engineering done well serves the public interest through its contributions to societal order. The "sound ideas and causes" which we cherish in a democracy do not spring fully formed into being; rather they require "organized effort" to sway public opinion in their direction.[88] Like Fleischman and Cutler, Jones took a relative view of truth, writing that where education seeks to present all sides of a story to illuminate the truth, PR is better understood as the advocacy of "what is accepted by an individual or a group as a truth."[89] Sound organization is the prerequisite for advocating these truths effectively. Among other techniques, sound organization requires representative leadership;[90] a committed rank-and-file who are made to feel "like [generals] in their own area";[91] and outreach based on appeals to people's deep-seated motivations, whether it be self-interest, the public interest, or the social/business benefit that comes from being associated with the cause or the people serving it.[92] Whatever the reason people have for joining, what matters is that their service has "furthered the democratic process."[93] Echoing the Constitution, Jones concluded that, by reducing chaos and disorder, engineering consent for "sound public opinion" brings us toward "a more perfect world."[94]

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[88] John Price Jones, "Organization for Public Relations," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 160.
[89] John Price Jones, "Organization," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 157.
[90] By representative, Jones means leaders must represent "all the larger groups who are to be approached for support of the idea or cause." Jones, "Organization," 170.
[91] Jones, "Organization," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 174.
[92] Jones notes on page 178 that, while serving the public interest is typically a secondary motivation to self-interest, it is nonetheless significant, especially when being seen serving the public interest serves the private interest of some individual or group.
[93] Jones, "Organization," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 179.
[94] Jones, "Organization," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 184.

That the education editor at the New York Times wrote the next essay on "Planning" indicates the extent to which journalism and PR had grown more aligned by midcentury than they had been in prior decades.[95] Benjamin Fine's essay encourages PR counsels first and foremost to adopt a "planning approach"[96] in which "everything that takes place is scheduled" out for one or more years.[97] Notable in his essay is the emphasis on satisfying both internal publics (employees, management, stockholders) and external publics (customers, distributors, citizens, the government). Like the other essayists, Fine called for the use of research to determine the publics' attitudes, at which point the counsel can determine how to "[bridge] the gaps" between these attitudes and your objectives.[98] Sometimes, this step necessitates shifting one's own policies and/or objectives. To that end, having institutional leaders and policymakers aligned with the PR counsel is essential to the campaign's success. Invariably, the campaign will also require the use of media to help change attitudes, and to this point Fine included a list of different mediums of mass communication – including newspapers, trade journals, television, and radio – for the planner's consideration. A successful PR plan may also include the "formation of prestige committees," which can help win over internal and external publics by accruing legitimacy to the cause for which the PR counsel seeks to engineer consent.[99] Overall, Fine envisioned the PR counsel as a long-term, continuous planner who helps the client

[95] Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 185.
[96] Benjamine Fine, "Planning," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 185.
[97] Fine, "Planning," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 202-03.
[98] Fine, "Planning," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 191.
[99] Fine, "Planning," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 209.

build goodwill and ensure that its policies are honest and attentive to the publics' desires.

For A. Robert Ginsburgh, the author of "Tactics," the ideal PR counsel was, similarly, a resourceful and fastidious planner who made extensive use of different types of mass communication. As a retired Brigadier General for the USAF, Ginsburgh was the only military professional writing for *The Engineering of Consent*. Unsurprisingly, he viewed tactics through a militaristic lens, writing that the word tactic "comes from the vocabulary of the soldier," and refers to "the skillful use of the men and the weapons available…as part of a greater strategic plan." Similarly, "tactics" in a PR context refer to "the tools and methods used to convey thought for the purpose of achieving in the minds of people a favorable reception for an idea as part of an overall program."[100] In both cases, a good tactician makes the most of what they have and fits their tactics into a broader strategy.

Like the other essayists, Ginsburgh then moved into a discussion of the specific "tools and methods used to convey thoughts," providing an extended discussion on various mediums of communication (divided into written, spoken, and image-based categories) and the different techniques needed for each.[101] Notably, he urged PR counsels to pay more attention to the power of the image; visual mediums like TV have vast PR capabilities that "have only been scratched."[102] Overall, Ginsburgh's tactician takes into consideration the ways

[100] A. Robert Ginsburgh, "The Tactics of Public Relations," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 214.
[101] Ginsburgh, "Tactics," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 214-235.
[102] Ginsburgh, "Tactics," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 235.

that technology has changed and continues to change communication. The successful tactician is resourceful, economical, and plans far ahead.

According to these essayists, the engineering of consent is integral to democracy: the practice helps maintain societal order while giving leaders the tools to bring the public around to the right ideas. In portraying the field this way, they were addressing their critics, but only implicitly. By contrast, Nicholas Samstag's essay, "Strategy," is unusual in how forthrightly it reckons with the ethical implications of persuasion and the limits of individuals to meet personal or professional ideals. Samstag, the director of promotion for *Time*, began by defining his terms: "strategy," wrote Samstag, hails from the ancient Greek "strategos," or "leader of an army," and the ideal strategist concerns himself not only with immediate tactics but with the overall objectives, the "co-ordination of the ends and the means."[103] Thus the difference between strategy and tactics "lies in the mind of the planner" and the extent to which he places long-term objectives alongside short-term gains.[104] However, mere mortals often fall short of such a lofty ideal, instead merging tactics with strategy and confusing forethought with post-rationalization. ("'Is this how I figured it in advance — or is this how I justified it later?'"[105] Samstag admitted of his own strategic thinking in the opening paragraph.) This is easy to comprehend, Samstag rationalized, when we consider "the unreliability of history itself," based as it is on our interpretation of

[103] Nicholas Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 100.
[104] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 101. Italicized in original.
[105] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 94.

the past rather than the past itself.[106] Accordingly, strategists may sometimes need to prioritize people's "interpretation of the truth" above the truth itself.[107] In doing so Samstag traced an intellectual lineage from Ancient Greece to the present day to introduce the notion that truth is what we make of it.

Samstag then gracefully moved from the etymology to the application of strategy. If history and truth are relative in the minds of the public, then promotion men must act accordingly. To this point Samstag cited sociologist Vilfredo Pareto's findings that human activities are seldom based on reasoning and economist Richard V. Worthington's analysis that ""people must be controlled by manipulating their [instincts and emotions] rather than by changing their reasonings.""[108] Thus good strategy, whether in advertising or warfare, is "'based upon emotions and not upon intelligence.'"[109]

Having established the theoretical basis, Samstag then provided a laundry list of different persuasive techniques that make good use of emotional appeals: the "strategy of participation," whereby you make the audience feel as though they play a meaningful role in some top-down decision; the strategy of "personalization," exemplified by corporate mascots like Mr. Peanut, which harnesses "the universal truth that people like people more than things";[110] the "strategy of omission," which replaces punishment with the "withholding of an action" (like the exclusion of an employee from a quarterly list of best salesmen)

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[106] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 96. Here Samstag cites Herbert J. Muller's *Uses of the Past*.
[107] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 96.
[108] Quoted by Samstag on page 98.
[109] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 97.
[110] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 120.

to nudge the target toward some desired behavior;[111] the "fait accompli," or strike first, strategy, a favorite of both Hitler and Joseph McCarthy;[112] and the "bland withdrawal," a strategy which often followed McCarthy's fait accomplis, based on the assumption that "retractions and corrections never get as much attention in the press as does the original sensational statement…"[113] Samstag made sure to establish he is no fan of Hitler or McCarthy (he credited the latter with mastering these strategies "to our Republic's cost") but he recognized the politicians' strategic prowess.[114]

How, then, did Samstag square the means with the ends, if the same means deployed by *Time Magazine* can likewise be used to accomplish Hitler's or McCarthy's objectives? Here we come to the most perplexing and fascinating passage in the book, "the ethics of strategy."[115] He wrote: "It may be said that to take advantage of a man's credulity, to exploit his misapprehensions, to capitalize on his ignorance is morally reprehensible — and this may well be the case."[116] Anticipating another counterargument, Samstag then acknowledged that even the best intentions wouldn't justify the use of unethical means, as no one can be certain how a thing will end. Having addressed his critics straight on, where did Samstag fall? He did not know – and was "neither contented nor arrogant in that unsatisfactory answer."[117] Besides, it hardly matters: the purpose of the essay is

[111] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 130-31.
[112] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 122-23.
[113] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 124.
[114] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 123.
[115] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent,* 136-37. Bernays described it as "a though-provoking summing-up" on page 15 in the preface.
[116] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 137.
[117] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 137.

not to adjudicate the strategists but to provide them the "*instrument[s] for winning.*"[118] It falls to the individual to decide what one's conscience allows. If the difference between strategy and tactics lies "in the mind of the planner," the answer to ethical questions lies in the conscience of the individual strategist.[119]

Two years later, Samstag published his own book, a treatise on and guidebook to promotional work entitled *Persuasion for Profit.* If in "Strategy" Samstag had addressed the ethics of the means of persuasion, this time he concerned himself only with the ends. The bluntly named book sets out to "help the reader to persuade others,"[120] and its chapters rest on two convictions: One, that "men exist only by the consent of other men" – that is to say, we are constantly engaging in acts of persuasion – and two, that "although men conspire to pretend that they choose one alternative over another for logical reasons, it is rarely true that they do."[121] Persuasion is ubiquitous; persuasion by emotional appeal is human nature.

Like *The Engineering of Consent*, most of *Persuasion for Profit* is devoted to pragmatic advice for "promotion men" of all stripes (though where Bernays focused on PR, Samstag spotlighted his own field of expertise, advertising).[122] He opened the book by asserting that "promotion is the procedure of distributing as widely and persuasively as possible those truths which it is to your advantage to

[118] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 137. Emphasis in original.
[119] Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 101. Italicized in original.
[120] Nicholas Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), viii.
[121] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, xi.
[122] "Promotion men" is Samstag's preferred catch-all term for advertisers, PR counsels, and others Bernays would call "consent engineers," or who Vance Packard called "the hidden persuaders" that same year. He explains the difference between "promotion" and its smaller branches like advertising and merchandising in Chapter 1.

make known."[123] Public relations, advertising, and publicity are subsidiary branches of promotion, all concerned with the strategic distribution of advantageous truths. Conversely, he warned his readers against "self-injurious truth-telling" whereby misguided or careless promotion men use the "wrong" truths in their promotional messaging.[124] The subsequent chapters cover the procedures of promotion, including lessons in market research and "writing for persuasion"; a chapter entitled "The Promotion Instinct" uses much of the same material as "Strategy," including the same list of tried-and-true techniques.

However, the final chapter, "The Promotion Man: His Status and His Conscience," takes up the ethical conversation Samstag started in 1955, examining the individual practitioner "through the eyes of society" and through his own.[125] Advertisers, Samstag bemoaned, are frequently saddled by society's misconceptions and critiques. The intellectual "huckster baiters" decry advertising as pseudo-scientific, garish, or exploitative, while proclaiming the virtues of their own fields like engineering or journalism.[126] The rest of the public views advertising as a shady business, yet they envy admen's perceived luxuries; similarly, some businessmen resent their advertising colleagues' supposedly higher incomes. Samstag carefully refuted each of these critiques. The self-congratulatory "huckster baiters" are alternately close-minded (like the engineer who rejects social scientific research as hopelessly imprecise) or hypocritical (like the journalists who imagine that, unlike admen, their own editorial opinions are

[123] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 4.
[124] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 7.
[125] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 170.
[126] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 175.

entirely free from economic pressure). And no, admen don't make more than other businessmen – in fact, Tables 1-3 show they often make less![127]

Unlike in "Strategy," though, Samstag's discussion of the ethics of persuasion no longer engaged with the specter of manipulation. The closest Samstag came to addressing whether the methods of consent engineering are ethical – not the issues being persuaded, but the methods themselves – is when he excoriated journalist Bernard de Voto's claim that advertising is "continually guilty of stating falsehoods as if they were truths."[128] Yes, he admitted, some advertisers overstate the implications of expert research, and a very few might lie; but false advertising is but a small fraction of the whole, and it is unfair to conflate a few bad apples with the whole bunch. Besides, overarching ethical restraints do exist for advertisers, largely the same as for the businesses that hire them: do not sell a product or service that causes harm; and do not misrepresent what it is you're selling. For advertisers (like doctors or lawyers, he wrote) there is a third, extra, rule: once you decide your client fits the above criteria well enough to please your conscience, you must commit to the job 100%. The ethical decision thus takes place before the work has begun.

Despite these ethical codes, most advertising men still suffer from "disturbed consciences" that result from being asked to promote something with which they disagree.[129] For an example, Samstag offered the pro-integration

[127] Samstag included several tables of salary data from the Executive Compensation Service of the American Management Association and writer Walter Lowen. These tables illustrate that the average income of a company's "top advertising executive" is frequently much lower than other top business executives in other departments. See pages 181-183.
[128] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 176.
[129] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 187.

editor of a Southern newspaper ordered by management to "[raise] hell" about Brown v. Board in his next editorial.[130] His conundrum, Samstag implied sympathetically, represents the human condition itself: how does one balance the need for success with the need to follow our conscience? As with "Strategy," Samstag decided that it falls to the individual to make those calls throughout one's life. By this logic, the means of persuasion are not up for debate, only what's being persuaded.

To summarize: in the words of Samstag, Bernays, and the other essayists in Bernays' volume, the engineering of consent is a scientific approach to mass persuasion, yet it is also a sophisticated outgrowth of everyday communication. The engineering of consent can be accomplished with a certain set of procedures – setting objectives, planning ahead, conducting research, crafting themes and symbols, selecting strategies and tactics. It makes use of a certain type of tools – mediums of mass communication like newspapers, radio, and TV, as well as internal mediums like house organs or word-of-mouth endorsements between employees. The targets of consent engineering are any publics whose attitudes or behavior are of interest to some organization. These target audiences, if not completely irrational, are guided more by emotion than fact; efforts to manipulate them should proceed accordingly. And though this manipulative set of practices may be subverted to bad ends, the engineering of consent is also the best way to organize support for the right causes and ideas. The engineering of consent, performed ethically and well, is vital to democracy.

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[130] Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit*, 194.

The Critics

The question remains: why publish *The Engineering of Consent* at all?[131] If the book serves as a kind of PR for PR, which critiques does it try to answer? Did it succeed? As I have discussed, the end of WWII saw an explosion of interest in PR, both from wartime practitioners now seeking private employment, as well as from business leaders attempting to displace the New Deal ethos with business-friendly norms. New pushes for professionalization sprang up in response, seeking to dissuade some of these newcomers from entering the field and to lend prestige and legitimacy to those that remained. However, Americans remained deeply concerned with threats of communist infiltration, propaganda, and mass persuasion. Intellectuals of the 1950s, moreover, were some of the fiercest critics of persuasion for profit, and it is their critiques – and the broader sociopolitical climate in which they made them – that I will turn to next.

Liberal cultural criticism of the 1950s depicted a society in flux, in which unprecedented economic expansion and the rise of a "mass culture" brought certain gains – like the gradual reduction of poverty and social conflict through the expansion of the middle class – while imperiling America's supposed "national culture" of pluck and individualism through the encouragement of conformity and consumerism. *The Lonely Crowd* (1951) set the stage for this strain of cultural commentary, providing many of the idioms that shaped other contemporary critiques of Cold War culture. In the book, sociologists David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney discussed the transformation of

[131] Or *Persuasion for Profit*, or Bernays' *Public Relations* (1952), or Cutlip and Center's *Effective Public Relations* (1952), or a host of other PR guides.

American culture from "inner-directed" to "other-directed": whereas Americans had once measured themselves against the values passed down from their elders, they now cared more about conforming themselves to the opinions of their peer groups and the trends conveyed through mass media.[132] As Todd Gitlin summarized in his 2000 preface to the book, "Father might be reputed to know best, but if he did, it was increasingly because a television program said so."[133] An economic system based on production was shifting to consumption; the ascendant power of the corporation threatened to steamroll individuality with its demands for mass conformity.

William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) echoed and expanded upon *The Lonely Crowd*'s concern with corporate-driven homogeneity. By encouraging "belongingness" over creative independence, well-roundedness over specialized brilliance, and the "social ethic" over the Protestant ethic, the modern corporation set itself on a road to failure. It did so by encouraging the creation of the "organization man," who happily accepts the notion that there need not exist any conflict between the individual and society.[134] In doing so he flattens his individuality. In Whyte's view, this erroneous idea originated in the field of human relations, which posited that any conflict between labor and management was rooted in misunderstanding instead of in conflicting economic goals.[135] That idea, in turn, reflected the human relations doctrine that "the individual is a

[132] David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
[133] Todd Gitlin, "Preface," in *The Lonely Crowd*, xii.
[134] William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 3.
[135] Whyte singles out "the father of the human-relations school," Elton Mayo, and the movement he helped start in 1927 with the famous Hawthorne study. See pages 33-35.

nonlogical animal incapable of rationally solving his own problems or, in fact, of recognizing what the problem is."[136] Whyte, by contrast, exalted the individual's capacity for creative genius, crediting American culture with cultivating that genius. Thus the "social ethic," which teaches people that "other-directedness" is not only useful but morally right, will lead to the downfall of what makes America great.[137] In making these critiques, Whyte – a business journalist at Fortune Magazine – intended to reform the corporate world by showing how counterproductive it was to their own interests to prioritize cooperation and "belongingness" at the expense of individual creativity.[138]

Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, published the following year, similarly drew on Riesman's description of the shift to "other-directedness" to critique the rise of engineered conformity. Although subsequent commentators and critics have overemphasized the book's discussion of subliminal research, the 1957 sensation had a broader focus on what he called "the depth approach": "the use of mass psychoanalysis to guide campaigns of persuasion," employed by "professional persuaders…in their groping for more effective way to sell us their wares – whether products, ideas, attitudes, candidates, goals, or states of mind."[139] In particular, Packard highlighted the emerging field of motivation research and its attempt to provide clients with studies of the deep-seated desires, fears and

[136] Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 36.
[137] Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 396.
[138] Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 398-99.
[139] Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: David McKay Company, 1957), 3. The book became an instant bestseller and propelled Packard, then a recently-unemployed journalist, into wealth and fame. See Daniel Horowitz's *Vance Packard & American Social Criticism* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 102-109.

urges driving consumer behavior in order to push that behavior toward profitable outcomes.[140]

As Packard argued in his chapter "The Engineered Yes," PR similarly applies the depth approach to its attempts at social engineering en masse. Quoting extensively from *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), Packard linked PR's central assumptions (like the public's susceptibility to emotional appeals) and its methods (like PR's use of social scientific studies of human behavior) to practices in the broader field of "persuasion for profit."[141] In the final chapter, "The Question of Morality," Packard explored "the implications of all this persuasion in terms of our existing morality," criticizing the persuaders' "attitude that man exists to be manipulated."[142] He identified several of their common defenses: first, that "persuasion-for-profit" is a win-win game that raises the GNP while "giving [people] what they want";[143] or, alternately, that the "old doctrine "Let the Buyer Beware"" shifts the responsibility from the persuader to the consumer for any "antisocial" results of mass persuasion.[144] As some persuaders themselves seem to recognize, neither justification suffices to answer for mass manipulation.[145]

What can be done in the face of these ethical conundrums? For a start, Packard argued that the Advertising Research Foundation and the Public Relations Society of America should establish "realistic up-to-date codes defining

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[140] Ernest Dichter's Institute for Motivation Research, founded in 1946, pioneered this approach. Dichter's methods and philosophies receive much attention in *The Hidden Persuaders*.
[141] To use Nicholas Samstag's memorable phrase.
[142] Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, 255.
[143] On page 256, Packard cites an executive quoted in a *Business Week* article.
[144] Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, 257.
[145] Packard quotes Nicholas Samstag's "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), particularly his epilogue on the "ethics of strategy," to speak to this ethical ambivalence on the persuaders' part.

the behavior of ethically responsible persuaders."[146] He recommended something similar for the social scientists who provide the persuaders their tools, urging organizations like the American Psychological Association to establish ethical rules for "the kind of co-operation that can be condoned and not condoned in working with the people-manipulators."[147] These codes, Packard implied, could prevent some of the more egregious forms of mass persuasion. But the underlying moral questions – about the kind of society runaway consumerism is creating, or the permissibility of manipulation via emotional appeal – remain. To that point, Packard hoped his book would help the reader develop a "recognition reflex" to persuasion and thereby learn to resist it.[148] But he acknowledged that asking the public to become "carefully rational in all our acts" is neither realistic nor desirable. It is only human – and sometimes "pleasanter and easier" – to act "nonlogically."[149] Instead, we should stand up for the "right to privacy in our minds – privacy to be either rational or irrational."[150] This is the right that the depth persuaders violate.

Like Whyte and Packard, liberal columnist/academic Max Lerner was heavily influenced by Riesman's "lonely crowd," and used its idioms to critique the forces he believed were stifling individual creativity and agency.[151] Unlike Whyte,

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[146] Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, 259.
[147] Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, 261.
[148] Packard cites Clyde Miller's *The Process of Persuasion* as the source for the notion of the "recognition reflex." See Clyde R. Miller's *The Process of Persuasion* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1946).
[149] Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, 266.
[150] Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, 266. Curiously, Packard echoes the rhetoric of rational choice even when discussing our "right" to be arational.
[151] In the 1950s, Max Lerner was a columnist at the NY Post and a professor of American Civilization at Brandeis University.

though, he was no friend of corporate power, and he shared Packard's ambivalence toward the means of consent engineering. Also like Packard, he took greatest issue with what he saw as the business community's violation of individual rights. His magnum opus *America as a Civilization: Life and Thought in the United States Today* (1957) borrowed from Riesman's formulation of the new "types" of Americans driving some of the more unsavory changes in American culture and politics. These changes included the creep of consumerism into the realm of politics as well as the use of mass media to attempt to manipulate the public mind. He singled out the "power elite of opinion-molders and taste-shapers whose symbol has become Madison Avenue, where the offices of the broadcasting chains, advertising agencies, and the public-relations firms cluster."[152] Unlike the corporate-managerial type, the power of the Madison Avenue elites flowed "from their capacity to shape the stereotypes and mold the tastes of the opinion public and buying public who are reached by Big Media."[153]

PR counsels exemplify an ascendant and unscrupulous subgroup of this new elite: "if anyone in America today has access to the experience which would enable him to write a new grammar of power, reclothing Machiavelli's Prince in more modern dress, it is the sophisticated, resourceful, amoral public-relations man."[154] Anticipating the arguments of later PR historians like Stuart Ewen, Lerner traced the postwar explosion of PR to the New Deal era, in which the popularity of Roosevelt's call to "drive the money-changers out of the temple"

[152] Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization: Life and Thought in the United States Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 483.
[153] Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, 484.
[154] Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, 310.

had forced the corporations into a "gilded doghouse." To escape, they sought the help of PR practitioners "who would dry-clean their public wash and give them a general valet service so as always to appear in public at their best."[155] For Lerner, the PR counsel was neither a policy consultant nor a liberalizing reformer but a cynical spin doctor putting a handsome veneer on corporate malpractice.

More troubling still was the spread of advertising and PR from the corporate into the political sphere, an approach which threatened to "dehumanize the political process itself" by turning elections into "sales [campaigns]" with candidates sold as products to voters-turned-consumers.[156] Crucially, this approach treats the ordinary American as "a passive entity… who is led but does not shape his leadership, who is counted but does not confound his counters." In so doing the Madison Avenue elites profoundly underestimate Americans' capacities as "willing and valuing human [beings]."[157] Thus Lerner linked his belief in individual agency with the sanctity of the political sphere.

In sum, these academics and journalists were deeply concerned with what they perceived as threats to the individual agency and rights central to their notion of American culture and identity. For Klapper, the author of "Mass Media and the Engineering of Consent," it was the power of corporate-controlled media to engineer uniform public opinion; for Riesman, the shift from personal integrity and individuality toward "other-directedness"; for Whyte, the conformist corporate culture that taught the "organization man" it was better to belong than to

[155] Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, 310.
[156] Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, 387.
[157] Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, 388.

dissent; for Packard, the "hidden persuaders" using academic psychology to violate our right to mental privacy; and for Lerner, the attempted manipulation of public opinion and the political system by corporate-sponsored consent engineers. They may have differed in their assessment of the methods of mass persuasion as either helpful or harmful to the American way, but their critiques articulated a common vision of the American way itself. In this vision, individual creativity and agency were integral to American prosperity; critical thinking and open-mindedness were key attributes of right-thinking American minds. What they saw as an ascendant culture of conformity, imposed by mass media, consumer abundance, and/or corporations, imperiled both the cultural and political spheres (which, for them, were inextricably linked). PR counsels, with their utilization of mass media to push corporate narratives on an unsuspecting public, were part of this menace.

Scholars like Jackson Lears and Alan Brinkley have pointed out that the cultural panic in the 1950s over conformity was, if not entirely inaccurate, somewhat myopic. Implicit in these critiques of mass conformity and spiritual emptiness as outgrowths of postwar economic abundance was the assumption that such abundance was widely shared. In "The Illusion of Unity," Brinkley argues that "these ideas – the assumption of increasing and virtually universal abundance, the assumption of shared values and goals, the belief in the end of conflict – reflected the experiences of members of the white middle class and of educated white middle-class men in particular."[158] The second-wave feminism

[158] Alan Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2001), 66.

that emerged in the 1960s illustrated, for instance, that middle-class women were, privately at least, deeply dissatisfied with the cultural norms that had pushed many of them back into the home in the 1950s.[159] Moreover, even if some aspects of the middle-class experience promoted conformity – for example, increased suburbanization and the bureaucratization of white-collar work – the majority of Americans were still shut out of that world.[160] Much of working-class and nonwhite America did not share in the economic gains shunting many into the middle class, and they did not identify with the "mainstream" culture that was, allegedly, becoming increasingly homogeneous.[161]

Nevertheless, the intellectual critics who identified these conformist threats had faith in education as the solution. As Jamie Cohen-Cole discusses in *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature*, liberal intellectuals and educational policymakers in the late 1940s and 1950s envisioned education as the antidote to authoritarianism, disunity, and conformity through its potential to cultivate an "open mind." Educational curricula were designed around the goal of providing the American public with a shared set of intellectual skills through which, the thinking went, they would become open-minded critical thinkers equipped to oppose bigotry at home and communist menace abroad.[162] If you could teach people to identify and think critically about propaganda, they

[159] Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity," 71.
[160] Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity," 67-72.
[161] Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 48-52.
[162] Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 27. See Chapter 1, "Democratic Minds for a Complex Society."

would reject authoritarianism in favor of liberal democracy. This faith can be seen in Packard's remark that he hoped his book's lessons would help readers build up a "recognition reflex" against hidden persuasion, or in Clyde Miller's *The Process of Persuasion*, from which Packard drew the phrase.[163] Max Lerner, a professor himself, similarly upheld education as a foil to consent engineering when he went head-to-head with the Madison Avenue elites on television in 1959.[164] The discussion that followed offers an opportunity to see these opposing perspectives on persuasion, propaganda and education confront each other in real time.

Debating Persuasion

In 1959, the aptly titled NBC program "The Open Mind" (tagline: "free to examine, to question, to disagree") invited Max Lerner, Nicholas Samstag, and William A. Durbin to debate the ethics of "persuasion for profit." Richard D. Heffner, the program's host and professor of American history and political science at Rutgers, moderated the conversation.[165] Samstag, Director of Promotion at *Time*, and Durbin, PR Director of the pharmaceutical conglomerate American Cyanamid Corporation, represented the practitioner perspective while Lerner was the voice of the liberal intellectual/educator. The irreconcilability of

[163] For other examples of the educational approach to propaganda detection and resistance, see the publications of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (1937-1941) or Emory Bogardus' *The Making of Public Opinion* (New York: Association Press, 1951).
[164] However, Lerner was not an ambiguous supporter of value-neutral propaganda analysis and detection. For example, in 1941 he wrote to the Institute of Propaganda Analysis to offer his thoughts on the effect their educational materials had on readers: the "fear of being tricked," he wrote, leads to a "collective indecision" instead of the will to act in the fight against fascism. Overall he "shared much of the IPA's 'social outlook.'" See pages 170-72 in J. Michael Sproule's chapter "Propaganda Analysis, Incorporated," in *Propaganda and Democracy*.
[165] Felicia R. Lee, "50 Years of Open-Minded Interviews," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2006. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/13/arts/television/13mind.html.

the guests' positions became clear immediately. Heffner began the first episode of the two-part series by explaining they'd selected the episode's title, "Persuasion for Profit," over other options like "Rape of Mind," "Induced Thinking," or "The Engineering of Consent," because the former had the "smallest connotation of something evil." Put on the defensive, Samstag immediately asserted that although persuasion may carry "evil" connotations, "I don't believe there's anything intrinsically wrong about persuasion because, obviously, everything is based upon it." Echoing fellow *Engineering of Consent* essayist Sherwood Dodge, Samstag contended that everyone is a persuader, "all their lives in all their relationships with everyone they meet."[166]

Durbin similarly defended the means of persuasion, arguing that the ethical test of persuasion comes down to "whether or not it is being done for a laudable purpose." And persuasion for profit does serve a laudable purpose, because profit-making, though unfairly maligned, forms the base of "our whole enterprise system." PR thus meets a societal need by "letting the public know" the "truth" about the corporation: "If it is going to exist and prosper, it must do so in a climate of understanding."[167]

Lerner objected on philosophical and moral grounds. At its core, he said, persuasion for profit violates Kant's categorical imperative by treating the individual as a means to an end rather than an end in himself. Advertisers and PR counsels target the individual's mind, manipulating "those creative forces of the

[166] Klapper's "Mass Media and the Engineering of Consent" also shared that view. The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part I," January 19, 1959, https://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/business/persuasion-for-profit-part-i/.
[167] The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part I."

unconscious" for their own gain.[168] They "approach him as if he were a child or an animal or some force in nature," exploiting mankind's psychological vulnerabilities to their advantage.[169] But education is different. The essence of teaching is not manipulation but cultivation of the mind, wherein teachers meet students on a "plane of equality" and help them "get at the truth."[170] Echoing critiques he made in *America as a Civilization*, Lerner went on to lament the spread of PR/advertising methods into other spheres like education, art, literature, popular culture, and politics. Persuasion in politics, like in education, is based on a fundamentally different ideal than persuasion for profit: the ideal relationship between the politician and the public is premised on a "two-way relationship" in which each party learns from the other.[171] Ideal politicians, like ideal educators, hold the public's best interests as the end goal.

Samstag dismissed Lerner's idealism, arguing that most educators just propagandize their version of the truth rather than helping students discover their own. Promotion men like him, moreover, learned persuasive methods from politicians, not the other way around. Durbin, meanwhile, offered a wishful defense of man's capacity for reason, saying he "would like to think that…the rational being does have something to do with [the choices he makes]."[172] (And if that were the case, then charges of manipulation – defined by Heffner as being moved for non-logical reasons – would not apply.) Finally, Samstag rebutted

[168] The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part II," January 23, 1959, https://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/business/persuasion-for-profit-part-ii/.
[169] The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part I."
[170] The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part I."
[171] The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part I."
[172] The Open Mind, "Persuasion for Profit, Part II."

Lerner on his own terms, arguing that corporate persuaders *do* help the individual through the beneficial products and services they convince him to buy. In doing so, they help themselves. What's the problem if everyone wins?

Samstag's main objective, of course, was not to win over Lerner or Heffner. Instead, he was trying to convince NBC's national viewership, many of whom were likely skeptical toward advertising and PR, that "persuasion for profit" was societally beneficial and ethically permissible. Lerner sought to portray his educational work in the same light. For him, and for the larger world of intellectual criticism he spoke for, some kinds of persuasion – education, politics, art – were acceptable, at least in their ideal forms. Others – PR, advertising, foreign propaganda – were not. In this largely philosophical debate of ideal forms and human nature, little attention was paid to the economic incentives and technological advances making mass persuasion such an available and lucrative strategy for big business. Perhaps discussing the corrupting influence of corporate sponsorship on mass media, as Klapper did in his 1948 journal article, would have been an impossible conversation on a commercial broadcast reliant on advertising.[173] Platform aside, how these men defended their positions on NBC is revealing of the larger debates occurring in the early Cold War about the legitimacy of and social need for leading the masses toward the right decisions. Here, as elsewhere, the consent engineers and the liberal educators talked past each other seeking to persuade the American public of the right and wrong kinds

[173] See the discussion of Joseph T. Klapper's "Mass Media and the Engineering of Consent" earlier in the chapter.

of persuasion. As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, however, living up to those ideals would prove difficult for both sides.

Chapter 3: Communism in the Caribbean

Throughout *The Engineering of Consent*, the authors acknowledged that the techniques of mass persuasion they described might be applied to immoral ends. However, they insisted that its antisocial potential would be counteracted by practitioners' adherence to a set of ethical guidelines. These guidelines imagined the PR counsel as a two-way interpreter, helping the client to appeal to its publics effectively while urging the client to meet the public's demands if the situation demanded it. According to these texts, practitioners must balance their professional and moral obligations, rejecting unethical clients outright but committing wholeheartedly to the job once the decision had been made. As I have argued, these standards were not created in a vacuum; rather, they were part of a larger process of professionalization that was itself a response to the increased visibility and distrust of PR following WWII. *The Engineering of Consent* was not, then, simply a helpful guide for other PR counsels, nor a value-neutral statement on 1950s PR values. As such, we should not accept it unquestioningly as a reflection of how all or even most PR professionals conducted their professional and ethical lives. The question remains of how these practices played out in real life.

In the next two chapters, I will use Edward Bernays' work for United Fruit Company and Mack Trucks, Inc., as case studies of consent engineering in practice. I will begin with what is perhaps Bernays' most infamous campaign: his work for United Fruit Company during the 1954 coup in Guatemala that the

company helped engineer. Historians like Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer have analyzed Bernays' contributions to that campaign, while others, like Thomas C. Bivins, have analyzed the relationship between Bernays' ethics and practices in the late 1920s. To my knowledge, however, no in-depth comparison of Bernays' Cold War-era campaigns to his contemporary ethical and professional standards has been undertaken. I hope that these case studies will contribute to that body of scholarship as I consider the following: How exactly did the political and economic backdrop to these campaigns shape the client's objectives and Bernays' methods? Which publics did Bernays seek to reach, and what themes and symbols did he select to do so? How did this messaging change over time? To what extent did he follow the ethical rules he advocated?

The Making of "El Pulpo"

When Samuel Zemurray, banana tycoon and the president of United Fruit Company, hired Edward Bernays around 1940, the company had already had an immense presence in throughout South and Central America for some seventy years. The history of the United Fruit Company in Latin America is well-documented by historians like Stephen Schlesinger, Stephen Kinzer, Cindy Forster, Marcelo Bucheli, and Peter Chapman. However, for the purposes of our story, I'll provide a brief overview of the Company's presence in Guatemala.

In 1870, merchant and ship captain Lorenzo Dow Baker began shipping bananas from Jamaica to the Northeastern U.S., buying bunches for cheap and

selling them at huge markups in coastal cities.[174] His profits convinced him to expand the enterprise, and in 1885, he co-founded the Boston Fruit Company with his partner, Andrew Preston, and nine other men. They set up shop in Jamaica, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, purchasing bananas from local growers and shipping them to the U.S. By 1898, Americans wanted more bananas than the Company could supply. To meet the overwhelming demand, the Company decided to purchase its own land in the tropics and establish plantations that were entirely under its supervision.[175] Boston Fruit then turned its attention to Minor Keith, an American businessman who, by 1899, had built up a railroad empire throughout Central America and aspired to monopolize all commerce in the region. Although he had already acquired impressive political and economic power in the region, marrying the former Costa Rican president's daughter and making several lucrative construction deals with heads of state, he had also racked up considerable debt. So when Boston Fruit proposed a merge, he agreed, forming the United Fruit Company on March 30, 1899.

At the outset, the company that would become known as "El Pulpo" held considerable assets, owning 112 miles of railroad in Central America and 212,394 acres of land across Central America and the Caribbean.[176] From there, the company spread its tentacles throughout Central America through lucrative business deals with strongman heads of state. In January 1901, the Company

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[174] Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1998), 160-61.
[175] Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc.,1982), 66.
[176] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 67.

made its first foray into Guatemala through one such deal with President Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who granted the company a contract to ship Guatemalan mail. Three years later, Estrada Cabrera approved a ninety-nine-year lease for United Fruit to finish building and continue operating the main rail line running from Guatemala City to the Atlantic harbor at Puerto Barrios. These deals may have provided much-needed infrastructure for Guatemala, but they also helped ensure United Fruit's economic stranglehold over the region.

Meanwhile, a Belarussian immigrant named Samuel Zemurray began to build up a banana fortune of his own by engineering a coup in Honduras in 1905 to install a president who'd do business directly with him.[177] A bold and intelligent businessman, Zemurray expanded his Honduran enterprise until United Fruit bought him out in 1930 for $31.5 million. However, the Great Depression saw the Company's profits plummet, taking Zemurray's stock down with them. Confident and brash businessman that he was, Zemurray traveled to United Fruit headquarters in Boston in 1933 and demanded that, as the largest shareholder, he take over as managing director.[178] His bold move worked, and Zemurray's leadership and agricultural expertise over the next decade would help the company weather many economic, political and agricultural crises.[179] As ever, lucrative relationships with Central American dictators helped, too.

Jorge Ubico, who took power in Guatemala in 1931, was another in a long line of strongman dictators who safeguarded the interests of the country's

[177] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 68.
[178] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 161.
[179] For example, a devastating outbreak of banana diseases imperiled the company's plantations in the mid-1930s, primarily in Honduras.

landholders and corporations. In 1936, Ubico approved a 99-year agreement with United Fruit for a second plantation at Tiquisate, on Guatemala's Pacific Coast, granting enormous concessions to the Company: exemption from internal taxation; exemption from all taxation until 1954 for United Fruit's de facto subsidiary International Railways of Central America (IRCA), which controlled Guatemala's sole Atlantic port, Puerto Barrios, as well as virtually all railroads in the country; and duty-free importation of the goods required to run the plantations. Ubico also demanded that United Fruit guarantee that plantation workers' wages not exceed fifty cents per day, a move intended to prevent non-UF agricultural workers (whose employers typically paid even less) from demanding higher wages. This type of partnership, which United Fruit had enjoyed for decades, helped make it the single largest employer and landholder in Guatemala, and had given the company and its subsidiaries a near-total monopoly over internal shipping (through the IRCA railroad system) and exportation (through Puerto Barrios and the Company-owned "great white fleet" of fifty freighters with easy access to the port).[180]

Enter Bernays

Bernays' tenure as PR counsel to United Fruit thus began while company-friendly leadership still governed Guatemala, several years before the leftward turn that threatened to undermine United Fruit's domination of the region. Nevertheless, Zemurray understood the need to maintain public favor to succeed.

[180] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 70.

In those early years, Bernays' work employed what his biographer Larry Tye would later call "Big Think," or, pursuing indirect means to achieve the client's objectives. Public relations orthodoxy maintained that the role of the PR person was to do away with secrecy and "let the public know" all the good the client did. That claim to truthfulness had been a mainstay of PR since the early days of Ivy Lee, and it was that attitude that Bernays claimed to bring to his work for United Fruit. He was going to publicize the ""remarkable" things the company was doing in Latin America."[181]

To that end, United Fruit created a company newspaper handed out to agricultural workers and other employees. (However, most Guatemalans, especially rural peasants, were illiterate.) UF also created the Latin American Report, which provided information on the company and the region to journalists and businessmen. The Report was headed by William Gaudet, a journalist who, as it was later discovered, had simultaneous contacts with both United Fruit and the CIA. (A harbinger, perhaps, of the types of collaboration yet to come.)[182] The scope of United Fruit's propaganda reached beyond journalists and businessmen, however. As Bernays had done for many clients before, he created a front group to serve as a clearinghouse of "informational material" on Guatemala written by United Fruit and/or Bernays' firm's publicists. The so-called "Middle America Information Bureau" (MAIB) provided articles, planned conferences, and published "fact sheets" and bibliographies of resources on Guatemala. This

[181] Schlesinger and Kinzer quote Bernays on page 81 of *Bitter Fruit.*
[182] Thomas P. McCann, *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit*, ed. Henry Scammell (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1976), 48.

material encouraged Americans not only to buy more bananas but to draw cultural and economic connections between "Middle America" and their own lives.[183]

For an ordinary American reading an article on Guatemala in their local paper, or even for editors, businessmen, or school officials who requested MAIB material for their own use, the extent of the organization's reach was likely impossible to discern. However, it was part of Bernays' job to tabulate that reach for his clients at United Fruit. The November and December 1943 "Activities Reports," created by Bernays for his superiors, indicate the Bureau's impressively large network of contacts in media, government, trade associations, and other "opinion-molding" institutions in the U.S. This network was employed to great effect. The November report, for example, details "two highly successful forum meetings on Middle America and United States relations," one in Oklahoma, the other in St. Louis.[184] From November 19-20, 1943, United Fruit rep John N. Kelley and MAIB staffer Charles M. Wilson spoke to college students, faculty members, and the State Historical Society; attended luncheons at the Chamber of Commerce; and made appearances on an internationally broadcast NBC show. From November 23-24, Kelley and Wilson collaborated with the Inter-American Center of St. Louis, St. Louis University and the St. Louis Board of Education on "a two-day institute on Middle America." Bernays included excerpts from the pamphlet distributed at the conference: "The Institute on Middle America will

[183] The term "Middle America" was itself a creation of Bernays, encompassing Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, "British Honduras" (now Belize), Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. See Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 163.
[184] Edward L. Bernays, "Activities Report on Cooperation Secured Between American Group Leaders and Opinion Molders and Middle America Information Bureau November 1943." Page 3. Box I: 362, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

help you learn the facts about Middle America – its economy, its agriculture, its relation to the United States, its history, its culture…its social conditions…To know Middle America builds Pan American strength which is so vital to victory and postwar trade."[185]

The December 1943 report further reveals the strategies employed by the MAIB to spark Americans' curiosity in Guatemala and to encourage them to link their economic well-being to Guatemalan agriculture.[186] Page after page of the report lists the titles of articles disseminated by the Bureau to publications across the U.S., from New London, CT, to Mendocino, CA. These articles tended to follow one of several storylines: the contributions of "Middle America" to the Allied war effort (through, for instance, the production of rubber); "local color" stories about Guatemalan culture and/or communities; recipes featuring Guatemalan cuisine and/or bananas; or the economic interdependence of Guatemalan and American markets. For good measure, Bernays provided his bosses with a selection of the recipients' feedback: several newspaper editors remarked that it made good filler material, and editors of home and cooking magazines said their readers were enjoying the Guatemalan recipes.[187]

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[185] Bernays, "Activities Report on Cooperation Secured Between American Group Leaders and Opinion Molders and Middle America Information Bureau November 1943." Page 6. Box I: 362, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[186] Bernays, "Analysis of Newspaper Clippings," in "Activities Report on Cooperation Secured Between American Group Leaders and Opinion Molders and Middle America Information Bureau December 1943." Box I: 362, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[187] "Interesting and very informative. We use a lot of it," said Lawrence Martin, Managing Editor of the Denver Post; "Extremely valuable as miscellany," said John E. Bierok, Exchange Editor of the New York Herald Tribune; "We use it in editorial columns as feature filler material," said Paul R. Squires, Editor of the Tipton Daily Tribune (IN). Not all editors were so exuberant, though. Glen Perrins, Managing Editor of Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT), remarked: "They're fine." Bernays, "Comments of Newspaper Editors," in "Activities Report on Cooperation Secured Between American Group Leaders and Opinion Molders and Middle America Information Bureau

Overall, the circulation report tabulated that their contact list of "opinion molders and group leaders" – including news editors, schoolteachers, men's and women's club leaders, bankers, and college professors – had grown to 9,294 people, while the total circulation of Bureau articles over the course of the year had reached a stunning 121,694,956.[188] Taken together, the luncheons and conferences of the November report and the media strategy from December reflect a multifaceted campaign to create in the minds of Americans an affinity with Guatemala, economically, culturally, and politically.

Bernays' work was not, therefore, limited to the immediate goal of getting customers to favor United Fruit over a competitor, nor even to convincing people to buy more bananas. He was a PR man, not an advertiser, and he understood the utility of marshaling public opinion to coincide with the client's objectives. As we see with the Middle America Information Bureau, winning the public's "good will" was not just about convincing people to think favorably about United Fruit. In this case, it also meant sparking American interest in an entire region whose boundaries had been drawn by Bernays himself. To do so, he masterfully deployed the strategies that had been a part of his wheelhouse for decades: creating newsworthy events, like the Oklahoma City/St. Louis conferences, the reportage of which extended far beyond the conference attendees; maintaining

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December 1943." Box I: 362, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[188] There remains, of course, the question of whether to take Bernays at his word. Historians of PR have argued that practitioners have been much more consistently effective at swaying the opinions of management than they have been in swaying public opinion in any one direction. However, the report's attention to detail — page after page fastidiously listing the titles of articles, the newspaper in which they were published, and the size of circulation — seem credible enough, especially given Bernays' practice of keeping fastidious accounts of media coverage of any material relating to his clients.

and employing a vast network of media, governmental, and institutional group leaders; and providing "informational material" that, while not explicitly false, provided the "facts" as his client saw them, for publication in supposedly objective newspapers and magazines.

Neither United Fruit nor Bernays' firm was ever indicated as the organizer of the luncheons and conferences or as the copywriter of the articles. For their part, the "opinion molders and group leaders" that received the information didn't appear to ask too many questions about where it was coming from. Massive political changes in Guatemala would lead United Fruit to intensify its propaganda campaign in the U.S., shifting its thematic emphases toward alarmist and anticommunist portrayals of the Guatemalan government. However, even as the themes and objectives changed, the strategies employed by Bernays in these early years set the stage for what came later.

The October Revolution and its Aftermath

As Schlesinger and Kinzer note in *Bitter Fruit*, all the celebratory newsletters and frivolous filler articles in the world could not deter the rising political unrest in Guatemala. Despite the Ubico government's efforts toward economic development, the middle classes remained excluded from political power, and they grew increasingly resentful. Teacher- and university student-led protests, some of which began as narrower campus issues, soon exploded into a nationwide movement as the government's crackdown inspired backlash from other sectors of

society.[189] In June 1944, the death of a schoolteacher at a peaceful demonstration added flames to the fire, leading to nationwide protests and a general strike. Under immense pressure, Ubico resigned on July 1, 1944, but first he worked to ensure that the junta that replaced him remained under military control.[190] His eventual replacement, General Federico Ponce Vaides, proved similarly repressive. He passed minor reforms, like raising teachers' salaries, but increased political surveillance and cracked down on dissenters.

In response, opposition forces began to organize from within the power structure, exploiting divisions in the military while rallying around a candidate who could oppose Ponce in the upcoming election.[191] They chose Juan Jose Arévalo Bermejo, a teacher who had spent the last fourteen years in exile in Argentina. Upon his arrival in Guatemala in September, though, he went into hiding, as Ponce had issued a warrant for his arrest. The following month saw a brutal crackdown on opposition forces, including the assassination of the editor of an anti-administration periodical.[192] But on October 20, 1944, junior officers Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and Major Francisco Javier Arana initiated a rebellion from within the military. In the predawn hours, they killed their superior officers at Fort Matamoros, initiating a nationwide uprising. By October 22, Ponce too was out of power. Arana and Arbenz, the new heroes of the "October Revolution," formed an interim junta with businessman Jorge Toriello, and they

[189] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 27; Kenneth J. Grieb, "The Guatemalan Military and the Revolution of 1944," *The Americas* 32, no. 4 (April 1976): 529-30.
[190] Kenneth J. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico, Guatemala 1931-1944* (Athens: Ohio University Press), 1979, 271-273.
[191] Grieb, "The Guatemalan Military," 539.
[192] Grieb, "The Guatemalan Military," 538.

quickly announced their plans to hold free elections. Arévalo's victory in December 1945 was won with support not only from the junta but also from newly created political parties and 85% of the electorate.[193]

The election of Arévalo broke a long tradition of United Fruit-friendly dictators in Guatemala was broken and marked the beginning of the "Guatemalan Revolution." The new constitution, passed by the newly elected Congress just before Arévalo's inauguration in 1945, outlawed racial discrimination, guaranteed equal pay for men and women, instituted protections for workers, and gave the government the right to expropriate private property.[194] Over the next several years, Arévalo's administration made major changes to Guatemala's political system, dramatically expanding legal protections for the working class, women, and racial minorities. These reforms included the 1946 Social Security Law, modeled after New Deal Social Security; the 1947 Labor Code, modeled after the Wagner Act, which protected urban and rural workers' right to unionize and strike; and the 1949 Law of Forced Rental, which permitted peasants to petition to rent uncultivated land from plantation owners.[195] Arevalo's "spiritual socialism," modeled more on FDR than on Marx, did not radically redistribute income or land to the peasantry in his six-year term. Rather, the "most important result" of his reforms "was simply to accustom ordinary Guatemalans to the fact

[193] The electorate consisted only of literate and male voters. See Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 32-33.
[194] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 32-33.
[195] However, as Schlesinger and Kinzer note, "unionization in the countryside was forbidden on all but the largest farms lest strikes interrupt the harvest. Nonetheless, the code had a major impact in a country where until then a peasant could be jailed if his "labor card" did not show that he had contributed the requisite number of days of forced labor to rich landowners." See pages 39-41 of *Bitter Fruit*.

that the institutions of government did indeed have the ability to function on their behalf."[196]

To United Fruit, these changes were deeply alarming, and deciding how to contend with Guatemala's political situation proved a source of tension within the company. Bernays visited United Fruit's Guatemalan plantations in 1947 and witnessed its quasi-feudal, racist system at work. As he would advocate in *The Engineering of Consent* and elsewhere, he then pressured his employers to reform their policies, writing a report upon returning to the U.S. that called attention to the absence of agricultural manuals and libraries for workers and criticized the substandard housing the company had provided for American supervisors. He also denounced the company's racist treatment of native workers, both through official company policies – for example, that "all persons of color…give right of way to whites and remove their hats while talking to them" – and through the behavior of white American overseers toward Indian farmworkers.[197] In doing so, he upheld the dictum that "deeds – not words alone – must be the basis of any successful public relations activity."[198]

Yet these changes were not made. Instead, Bernays' report got the silent treatment from his employers. Contrary to his own advice, though, Bernays stayed on even as new leadership increasingly threatened to undermine his work.[199] In

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[196] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 42.
[197] The authors note that the overseers were largely recruited from the Deep South for their ability to handle the climate, and they brought their racial attitudes with them. Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 71.
[198] Howard Walden Cutler, "Objectives," in *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), ed. Edward L. Bernays (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 40.
[199] According to Larry Tye, Bernays had "repeatedly admonished his PR colleagues not to represent unsavory clients and not to stick around when their advice was ignored." See *The Father of Spin*, 165.

1948, the Middle America Information Bureau was disbanded at the behest of the new president Thomas Cabot Lodge, brother of U.S. diplomat John Moors Cabot.[200] Lodge was unimpressed by Bernays' "Big Think" strategies, judging not only the program but Bernays' overall PR role as inefficient and wasteful. Lodge was soon making enemies beyond Bernays, however, clashing with his colleagues over his proposal to move United Fruit's center of production from Guatemala to Ecuador to evade banana diseases and political troubles. By 1949, Zemurray fired Lodge.

It is unclear if the Middle American Information Bureau was ever revived after Lodge left the Company. Whether under that name or not, the strategies employed there – crafting "news" stories, sending information about Guatemala to vast contact lists of "opinion molders," and obscuring the source of the information to the public – continued to characterize United Fruit's propaganda wars.[201] By the late 1940s, though, the political situation in Guatemala demanded a more robust PR strategy than when Ubico was in power. The 1947 Labor Code, which gave workers the right to unionize and strike, had particularly alarmed United Fruit, and even the U.S. government's protests to Guatemala on their behalf did no good. From June 1948 to March 1949, a series of strikes against

[200] Thomas Cabot was the brother of John Moors Cabot, who would later serve as Assistant Secretary of State of Inter-American Affairs during the lead-up to the 1954 coup. Government-corporate ties ran deep. See Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 82.
[201] Larry Tye's *The Father of Spin* implies the Middle America Information Bureau died with Lodge's order, and I did not find any material explicitly created or sent by the MAIB after 1949. However, an undated report written during or after 1952 recommended that the "Middle America Information Bureau should send reprint of this article to total list of 27,000 group leaders and opinion moulders." Undated memo, Folder 3 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras 1976-77, n.d., Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

United Fruit further set the company against the new government. As he had done before, Bernays counseled reform to his superiors, warning in 1950 that "Communist-inspired movements" would gain popularity in Guatemala if United Fruit made no changes to their practices.[202] As before, though, Bernays stayed on and intensified the propaganda war on behalf of his client regardless of whether they heeded his calls for reform on strategic grounds.

As the MAIB material demonstrates, Bernays' WWII-era thematic emphases included but were not limited to national defense. The same was true during the Cold War. Alongside anticommunist rhetoric, Bernays also labored to associate bananas with a healthy diet while expanding the market for the fruit in the U.S. Central to these efforts was Bernays' years-long effort to support and publicize the work of pediatrician Sidney Haas. Dr. Haas had become famous in the 1920s for his pioneering work in treating celiac disease in children with the banana-heavy "Haas diet." Celiac disease had, at the time, a 30% mortality rate in children, and Haas's treatment was remarkably effective in nursing sick children back to health. What medical researchers did not realize then was that the diet's benefits came not from the presence of bananas, but from the total lack of gluten products.[203] By the 1940s and early 1950s, researchers like Willem Karel Dicke had already begun to make the connection between celiac and its triggers, noting

[202] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 80.
[203] Jill Neimark, "Doctors Once Thought Bananas Cured Celiac Disease. They Saved Kids' Lives — At A Cost," *NPR*, May 24, 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/05/24/529527564/doctors-once-thought-bananas-cured-celiac-disease-it-saved-kids-lives-at-a-cost.

that the exclusion of wheat, rye, and oats from patients' diets led to improvement in their condition.[204]

Dr. Haas wasn't eager to surrender his treatment's privileged status, however, and that was where Bernays' goals coincided with his. Maintaining the prominence of the Haas diet in celiac treatment became a professional objective. In the late 1940s, Bernays began working to promote the Haas diet in the media and the medical establishment. On April 5, 1949, dozens of doctors and other public figures gathered at the NY Academy of Medicine Hotel to attend a "Golden Luncheon" commemorating Dr. Haas' 50th year in medicine. The event, which featured speeches from prominent public figures, the presentation of a book of physicians' tributes to Haas, and banana cream pie for dessert, was the first in a series of PR activities orchestrated by Bernays.[205] For the next several years, his firm worked directly with Dr. Haas and his son, Dr. Merrill Haas, to pull together the doctors' research into a monograph for eventual publication in 1951. His office delegated associates to compile literature reviews of celiac research using the Haas diet to be sent to medical textbooks. Bernays also made an effort to monitor new research that opposed Haas's findings and explore opportunities for United Fruit to fund its own research.[206] For example, an undated "Memo on

[204] Dicke's 1950 thesis, as well as an earlier report from 1941, had demonstrated these findings. A paper identifying gluten as the offending protein would not be published until 1952. See G.P. van Berge-Henegouwen and C. J. Mulder, "Pioneer in the gluten free diet: Willem-Karel Dicke 1905-1962, over 50 years of gluten free diet," *Gut* 34, no. 11 (November 1993).

[205] In Bernays' archives are drafts of news releases about the event; lists of invitees; and news clippings of coverage of the event in the New York Herald Tribune and the New York Times. Robert Moses spoke alongside two prominent pediatricians, while Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Bernays' friend and editor of the Times, was in attendance.

[206] I did not see any mention of Dicke in Bernays' correspondence regarding the Haas diet. However, Bernays and his associates Milton Zisowitz and Marshall McClintock paid close

Celiac Syndrome" in Bernays' papers notes that "Presbyterian Hospital is the center for celiac research…These researches should be helpful to United Fruit. Money needs indicate a gift…Negotiations to do this would have to be carried on diplomatically to preserve all amenities. But it is believed Presbyterian would welcome, if so carried on."[207] Neither Bernays' nor United Fruit's involvement in Haas's research was ever disclosed.[208]

Exactly what drove Bernays to focus on this somewhat-obscure market for bananas is unclear. Perhaps it was simply one facet of indirectly cultivating United Fruit's public image: accused of worker exploitation and under threat from leftwing policies abroad, the company's reputation could rebound via association with the "curative powers" of the banana. The strategy may also be read as one of many efforts to increase banana consumption amongst Americans. Plenty of people suffer from celiac, and bolstering the Haas diet in the medical establishment would mean capturing a niche, but sizable, market for bananas for decades to come.[209] Whatever the motivation, Bernays' promotion of Haas' research exemplifies his skillful harnessing of scientific expertise and legitimacy in service of his client's interests, a strategy employed across various campaigns (as we will see in Chapter 4).

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attention to the work of Drs. Dorothy Andersen and Paul di Sant'Agnese, which challenged the notion of bananas as a curative for celiac.

[207] Bernays, "Memo on Celiac Syndrome," page 4. Folder Miscellany United Fruit Co. Apr. – June 1949, Box I: 373, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[208] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 162.

[209] Young patients on the Haas diet could be prescribed 200 bananas a week. See Neimark, "Doctors Once Thought Bananas Cured Celiac Disease."

Guatemala Under Siege

If United Fruit was unwilling to listen to Bernays' policy recommendations, they were more than ready to heed his strategic advice. By the end of Arévalo's presidency, Bernays' role had become recruiting liberal "opinion molders"– newspaper editors, journalists, politicians – to the viewpoint that United Fruit was a benevolent company besieged by a hostile government increasingly subject to Communist infiltration. In the winter of 1950, Bernays convinced *The New York Herald Tribune* to send journalist Fitzhugh Turner to Guatemala, resulting in an alarmist five-part series entitled "Communism in the Caribbean."[210] The articles, which included pieces like "U.S. Business Interests in Guatemala Are Under Constant Attack by Labor and Leftist Propagandists," or "Legion of Adventurers and Exiles is Plotting a Foray Against Guatemala's Neighbors," portrayed Guatemala as a threat not only to the "Middle American" region but to the United States.[211] Turner was not the only journalist to return from Guatemala seeing Red. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of *The New York Times* and a relative of Bernays' wife Doris, visited Guatemala in 1950 with his friend Richard Patterson, the U.S. ambassador. After witnessing labor protests (which were rumored to have been orchestrated by United Fruit) Sulzberger returned from Guatemala convinced that Soviet forces were at work and assigned Will Lissner to the beat. Lissner would become a reliably anti-communist reporter on Guatemala to the

[210] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 84.
[211] Fitzhugh Turner, *"*Communism in the Caribbean*"* series, February 8-13, 1950. Folder 10, Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras 1950-53, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

point that he would send private notes to Bernays, remarking, for instance, on mentions of United Fruit in Guatemalan Communist newspapers.[212]

Journalists were not the only recipients of United Fruit's special attention. For example, when freelance author John Martin planned to visit Guatemala in January 1950, Bernays wrote to Whitman to suggest that "the United Fruit Company may care to take him under their wing…I think that exposing him to the sociological, archaeological, and public health activities of the United Fruit Company would be interesting and possibly helpful to the Company."[213] Introductions between Martin and other United Fruit executives followed soon afterward. What exactly John Martin took away from his Company-guided tours of banana plantations and Company schools is hard to say. It is clear, however, that Bernays and his employers were determined that American journalists, politicians and writers be told United Fruit's story about Guatemala. By the end of Arévalo's presidency, this story had shifted from wartime production and cultural curiosities to Soviet menace and free enterprise under threat. However, some underlying emphases remained the same: American and Guatemalan fortunes are linked; and what's good for United Fruit Company is good for the American public, too.[214]

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[212] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 84. See also Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 169.
[213] Bernays, Letter to Edmund Whitman, January 10, 1950. Folder Correspondence United Fruit Co. Jan 1950, Box I: 273, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[214] In doing so, United Fruit PR was in keeping with *The Engineering of Consent's* essay "Themes and Symbols," in which Doris Fleischman and Howard Walden Cutler argued that the purpose of themes and symbols is to "humanize" the corporation and convince the audience that the corporation's private interest is shared by the public.

Not all journalists who visited Guatemala came away convinced by United Fruit's narrative, of course. Samuel Guy Inman, for example, visited the country in 1950 and "discovered some virtue in the nation's reforms."[215] The booklet he published the following year on his experience there, entitled "A New Day in Guatemala: A Study of the Present Social Revolution," is telling of the overall tone of American media coverage of Guatemala by the end of Arévalo's presidency. In the opening pages, Inman recalled that, a quarter century earlier, "there was let loose in this country a terrific campaign of propaganda to prove that the social Revolution in Mexico was communist inspired…In recent months, Mexico's southern neighbor, Guatemala, after efforts to liberate her own people from economic slavery, has been subject in a similar way to the same kind of publicity in the United States as that given Mexico. The Chicago Tribune, The New York Herald-Tribune, The Reader's Digest, The Saturday Evening Post, The New York Times, and other periodicals have published warnings reminiscent of the old discredited productions concerning Mexico, that Russia was about to enter this country through our back door in Guatemala."[216]

However, Inman's attempts to shift the narrative were, for the most part, ignored by key "opinion molders." Upon his return from Guatemala, Inman hosted a press conference in New York City to share what he'd learned from interviewing Arévalo. During the interview, the Guatemalan president had professed his admiration for FDR and refuted any alleged loyalties to the Soviet

[215] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 85.
[216] Samuel Guy Inman, *A New Day in Guatemala: A Study of the Present Social Revolution*, (Wilson: Worldover Press, 1951), iii.

Union.[217] A few publications sent reporters to hear Inman talk, including the "International News Service, United Press, Newsweek, Overseas Press," and *The New York Times*. Others, notably *The New York Herald Tribune* (the publisher of Turner's "sensational" anticommunist series) ignored it entirely. Overall, Inman's more sympathetic coverage of the Guatemalan government was the exception to the rule.

That much of American news coverage of Guatemala seemed to toe United Fruit's party line cannot be attributed entirely to Bernays, or even to United Fruit. The Company had a vast network of lobbyists, intelligence officials and politicians who could be called upon to advocate on their behalf in Washington in public and private ways.[218] And in the early days of the Red Scare, zealously anticommunist journalism was certainly not limited to coverage of Guatemala. However, that fact is perhaps indicative of Bernays' larger strategy. As he had argued in his 1947 essay "The Engineering of Consent," effective PR counsels study public opinion, mass media and "opinion leaders," then deploy what they've learned to choose themes that "appeal to the motives of the public."[219] It should come as no surprise that, at the dawn of the Second Red Scare, United

[217] Inman noted that "International News Service, United Press, Newsweek, Overseas Press, and others," especially the New York Times, gave his press conference some attention. Others, notably The New York Herald Tribune (publisher of Turner's "sensational" anticommunist series) ignored it entirely. See "A New Day," pages 37-38.
[218] For example, Thomas G. Corcoran, whose long history in politics granted him a vast network of Washington politicians and CIA officials, had been working discretely as a lobbyist for the Company since 1947. Certain politicians could be called upon to advocate for United Fruit, too, as when Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., denounced the Labor Code on the Senate Floor in 1949. See Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 83 and 90-91.
[219] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 119.

Fruit's entreaties to the public and to Washington were couched in anticommunist rhetoric.

Arbenz, Agrarian Reform, and the CIA

When Jacobo Arbenz won the November 1950 election, Bernays' propaganda war intensified as United Fruit pursued increasingly aggressive means of resisting Guatemala's leftward turn. The methods that Bernays employed were, at their core, quite similar to earlier efforts like the Middle America Information Bureau, and they echoed his writings in "The Engineering of Consent" and elsewhere: target your themes toward your publics' values; harness the tools of mass media; and coordinate your actions such that they "set in motion a broad activity, the success of which depends on interlocking all phases and elements of the proposed strategy, implemented by tactics that are timed to the moment of maximum effectiveness."[220] This "interlocking" approach can be seen in Bernays' memo to Director of Publicity Edmund Whitman two days after Arbenz' victory. Bernays explained that there were two courses of action they could take: a gradualist approach; "or we can make an effort to attempt to create high visibility for the entire situation by a concerted effort aimed at a number of different media, using different themes and angles and approaches for each of these media." He recommended the latter, adding that simultaneously pitching stories to numerous high-profile publications would yield "a broad coverage that would break around the same time." These articles could be written by the paper's own staff, or, "in

[220] Edward L. Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 250, no. 1 (March 1, 1947): 119.

certain other cases, the magazine might ask us to supply the story, and we, in turn, would engage a most suitable writer to handle the matter…"[221]

The strategy wasn't picked up right away. On Dec. 6, 1950, Whitman informed Bernays that "we are going to mark time on the matter of stirring up journalistic interest in Middle America. However, your thoughtful note of November 15 will be a helpful guide to us when we dig into this later on."[222] But they came back to Bernays' thoroughgoing approach before long. Soon after Arbenz' victory, Zemurray enlisted Bernays to initiate another series of journalists' visits to Guatemala. Thomas McCann, who'd been hired by Whitman in 1952, recalled that these trips, "billed as "fact-finding" tours," were "'months in the planning stage, carefully timed and regulated with no expense spared.'"[223] According to McCann, the journalists invited to these trips would see a version of Guatemala that was "carefully staged and regulated by the host," constituting "a serious attempt to compromise objectivity." But this compromise was, he argued, "implicit in the invitation…It is difficult to make a convincing case for manipulation of the press when the victims proved so eager for the experience."[224]

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[221] Bernays enclosed a list of recommended publications: American Magazine, American Mercury, Atlantic Monthly, Coronet, Cosmopolitan, Harper's, Holland's, Reader's Digest, Saturday Evening Post, and Redbook. See: Bernays, Letter to Edmund Whitman, November 14, 1950. Folder Correspondence United Fruit Co. Nov, 1950, Box I: 374, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[222] Edmund S. Whitman, Letter to Bernays, December 6, 1950. Folder Correspondence Dec 1950, Box I: 374, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[223] McCann, *An American Company*, 47; Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 87. Schlesinger and Kinzer quote a letter from McCann to Nat Wartels, President of Crown Publishers, on July 12, 1976, provided to them by McCann.

[224] McCann, *An American Company*, 47.

When the journalists returned from their all-expenses-paid trip to the newsroom, they frequently wrote articles about Guatemala that reflected the facts as United Fruit saw them.[225] Bernays also kept in close touch with journalists assigned to the Guatemala beat and skillfully exploited his ties to the editors of prominent liberal publications like *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The New Leader* to ensure United Fruit-friendly coverage.[226] The former, for example, published a series of articles on the Company in Guatemala that were, in fact, written by Whitman. *The New Leader* took out a series of public service advertisements sponsored by United Fruit intended to tout the Company's philanthropic commitments.[227]

This collaboration with the liberal press meant that, by the time Arbenz initiated the key policy of his administration – implementing the 1952 Agrarian Reform Law – "the company was ready for him."[1] The law made good on the government's constitutional right to expropriate private land for just compensation, establishing that uncultivated land exceeding 225 acres could be seized by the government and redistributed to the landless majority. At this point, 85% of United Fruit's 550,000 acreage was uncultivated.[228] To make matters worse, the Company had undervalued its vast landholdings for tax purposes for

[225] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 88.
[226] For example, Bernays kept in contact with *New York Times* journalists Herbert Mathews, Will Lissner and Sydney Gruson. Herbert Mathews quit the *Times* before long. Gruson and Lissner, however, continued to provide the Company reliable coverage of Guatemala, such that Mathews later called them "'God's gift to the United Fruit Company.'" See Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 88.
[227] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 88.
[228] United Fruit justified this practice as insurance in the case of plant diseases destroying existing plantations. Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 75.

decades. Therefore, it had much to lose when the Arbenz administration offered to pay United Fruit exactly what the Company had claimed its land was worth.

In response, the Company mobilized on several fronts. Bernays may have been a key part of United Fruit's propaganda wars, but he was far from the only weapon in their arsenal. First, the Company enlisted its allies in the U.S. State Department to issue a formal complaint to the Guatemalan government regarding what it deemed unlawful compensation for the expropriated land. Arbenz' administration refused to adjust their terms.[229] Behind the scenes, United Fruit took a more radical approach. In 1952, the Company helped finance Operation Fortune, a CIA-led plan to depose Arbenz that would have provided arms to Colonel Castillo Armas to support his invasion of Guatemala.[230] Initially, President Truman agreed to the plan, but he later rescinded his approval under pressure from the State Department.

The inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower in 1953 marked the beginning of a new era of covert U.S. intervention in foreign countries.[231][232] Eisenhower was far more willing than Truman had been to use the CIA to further American interests, and he strongly wished to avoid being seen as "soft" on Communism.[233] His

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[229] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 76.
[230] Operation Fortune was backed also by the dictators of Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. United Fruit lobbyist Tommy Corcoran acted as liaison between the Company and the CIA. See Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 92.
[231] Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), 127-131.
[232] In the introduction to his 1955 book *La Batalla de Guatemala,* Guatemalan Foreign Minister Jorge Toriello recalled that, "with the Republican Party's ascension to power in the United States and the State Department's alliance with the coalition of forces opposed to the October Revolution, the defamatory campaign against Guatemala acquired the character of an international conflict. It ceased to be a conflict of private American interests against the government to become a case of "The United States versus Guatemala." Translated by me from Spanish original. *La Batalla de Guatemala* (Mexico: Cuadernos Americanos, 1955), 12.
[233] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 100.

appointment of Allen Dulles as the Director of the CIA and his brother John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State ensured that his administration was staffed at the highest levels with men unafraid to wield their power to overthrow foreign governments deemed threatening to U.S. interests.[234] Furthermore, Eisenhower's administration was stacked with high-ranking officials who had deep connections to United Fruit. The Dulles brothers, for instance, had previously worked for the law firm that represented the Schroder Banking Corporation, which was in turn the primary financial adviser to United Fruit's railroad subsidiary IRCA. Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, formerly of the CIA, went on to seek employment at United Fruit through Tommy Corcoran (Smith would later find a position on the Board of the Company in 1955). Edmund Whitman's wife Anne was Eisenhower's personal secretary.[235] The connections went both ways; many high-ranking executives or advisers to United Fruit had prior experience in Washington. For example, Spruille Braden, former U.S. ambassador to Chile and Undersecretary of State for Latin American Affairs under Truman, worked as a paid consultant for United Fruit in the early 1950s.[236] These connections ensured that United Fruit had access to and pull within the highest echelons of the federal government.

Unsurprisingly, then, much of the information about Guatemala available to the Eisenhower administration originated from United Fruit. John Clements Associates, the conservative PR firm hired by United Fruit to cover the "right

[234] See Stephen Kinzer's *The Brothers* for an in-depth exploration of the Dulles' actions during the Cold War.
[235] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 106-07.
[236] McCann, *An American Company,* 55.

flank" of American media and politics, had prepared a "Report on Guatemala" that portrayed a dire picture of Soviet influence within Arbenz' administration.[237] (Thomas McCann later called it a "total distortion."[238]) As the CIA helped the Report make the rounds in the federal government, more officials became convinced that aggressive action in Guatemala would be necessary.[239] And coming off of the recent successful ouster of the President of Iran by the CIA and MI6, regime change in Guatemala seemed eminently possible.

In August of 1953, President Eisenhower authorized Operation Success, the CIA's covert operation to oust Jacobo Arbenz and install a new leader more friendly to American interests. However, they had learned from their recent mistakes in Guatemala; Operation Success would be far more gradual and well-planned than either the Salamá revolt or Operation Fortune.[240] These plans involved: collaborating with Guatemalan opposition forces, Central American dictators, and United Fruit representatives to select a figurehead for the government-to-be; establishing a base of operations in Honduras; providing military training and arms to the invading force, including some American pilots; sowing discord in Arbenz' administration; and, finally, a propaganda war fought on many fronts, including a CIA-crafted radio station called the "Voice of

[237] Chapman, *Bananas*, 129.
[238] McCann sarcastically noted that the author of the report, "a journalist for hire, was so proud of his contribution to literature that he insisted on a pseudonym, and then later requested that even the pseudonym be deleted from the title sheet." McCann, *An American Company*, 49.
[239] Chapman claimed that the report's "findings became accepted government thinking." Chapman, *Bananas*, 129.
[240] Schlesinger and Kinzer, 108-09.

Liberation" that broadcast disinformation intended to disorient and frighten civilians and authorities."[241]

It remains unclear the extent to which Bernays knew about these plans. I found no definitive evidence that Bernays had prior knowledge of Arbenz' downfall, though he did correspond with Whitman and Corcoran regarding press coverage of Guatemala. It would be hard to imagine that he had no idea what was coming. For all his talk of influencing policy for the public good, Bernays' role as PR counsel was, in the end, to engineer consent for what his client deemed necessary.

While the U.S. government prepared to overthrow Arbenz, Bernays continued to push the narrative that Guatemala was fast becoming a "beachhead of Communism." As the implementation of the Agrarian Reform Law got underway in 1953, Bernays started sending "confidential newsletters" to an extensive list of press contacts.[242] The initial outreach to editors or journalists would describe the newsletter, called "Guatemala News Notes," as a "truthful, unbiased picture of the social, political and economic trends," provided "to a limited number of journalists interested in foreign affairs background information on current happenings in the American tropics."[243] The recipients, eager to get access to on-

[241] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 124-129, 166-170, 184-85; Chapman, *Bananas*, 135.
[242] According to Thomas McCann, the list was sent out to 250 journalists. (See page 59 of *An American Company*). Based on the archives, it seems that some newsletters reached a smaller number. Many newsletters in Bernays' archives still have notes attached via paper clip that read, for instance, "Sent out May 27 to our list of 78 contacts." Folder 12 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras Apr. – June 1954, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[243] Edmund Whitman, Letter to Mr. Jules Dubois, Chicago Tribune, April 13, 1955. Folder 3 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras 1976-77, n.d., Box III: 38, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

the-ground information about Guatemala, frequently accepted Bernays' and/or Whitman's offers without further question.[244]

As the State Department and the CIA moved to "isolate Guatemala diplomatically, worked with U.S. businesses to create an economic crisis there, and funded and equipped an exile invasion force based in Honduras," the newsletters provided American news media with United Fruit's take on the public-facing side of these preparations.[245] Invariably they presented the events from a staunchly anticommunist and anti-government perspective. In March of 1954, the Tenth Inter-American Conference of the Organization of American States (OAS) was held in Caracas, Venezuela. Secretary Dulles, head of the U.S. delegation, led the charge on a resolution intended to provide some measure of legal cover to the eventual coup. The resolution declared that "the domination or control of the political institutions of any American state by the international communist movement, extending to this Hemisphere the political system of an extra-continental power, would constitute a threat to the sovereignty and political independence of the American states…and would call for a Meeting of Consultation to consider the adoption of appropriate action in accordance with existing treaties." The resolution also recommended that member states move to

[244] Some journalists probed further but seemed satisfied upon confirming their assumption that the information originated with United Fruit. For example, on June 30, 1954, Dick Burke of *The Buffalo Evening News* wrote to Bernays to thank him for sending the newsletter, writing: "I am sure the material will be of help in the story now unfolding in Guatemala…I suppose [the news-notes] originate in the offices of the company. Could you – when you have time – tell me a little more about them?" Bernays later responded that "these Guatemala News Notes are prepared by researchers in the Boston office of United Fruit from reports that come in daily from the field." Folder 1, Box III: 38, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[245] Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 77.

"require disclosure of the identity, activities, and sources of funds of those who are spreading propaganda of the international communist movement or who travel in the interests of that movement, and of those who act as its agents or in its behalf…"[246]

In a meeting of the National Security Council on March 18, Secretary Dulles expressed to Eisenhower and others that the resolution would help the U.S. "operate more effectively to meet Communist subversion in the American republics and at the same time avoid the charge of interference in the affairs of any other sovereign state."[247] The resolution may not have mentioned Guatemala explicitly, but it was widely understood to which country the resolution alluded. (And those privy to Operation Success no doubt understood what kinds of "charges of interference" might be forthcoming later that year.)[248]

Guatemalan Foreign Minister Toriello objected bitterly to the resolution and refused to agree to it, declaring that "we feel this proposal was merely a pretext for intervention in our internal affairs… cataloguing as "communism" every manifestation of nationalism or economic independence…"[249] How did United Fruit's PR team portray his complaints to American journalists? Guatemala News Notes summarized his objections in this way: "The Guatemalan government served notice on her fellow American states at the Caracas Conference that it

[246] "Tenth Inter-American Conference," *The American Journal of International Law* 48, no. 3 (1954): 124.
[247] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954, Volume IV, The American Republics, Multilateral Relations, Document 77. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d77.
[248] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 143.
[249] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 143.

intends to go along its own Communist-dominated path regardless of what they do or say."[250]

The American press was not, of course, the decisive factor in the eventual overthrow of the Arbenz administration. But, as New York Times writer Herbert Mathews remembered later, it was the press that "helped create the climate of opinion in the United States that would tolerate the events that followed."[251] And that, for United Fruit, was Bernays' role. In May 1954, the mailing list received a Senate report analyzing the "strength of the international communist movement," declaring that Communists' "direct participation in national politics is significant only in Guatemala."[252] They received articles like "It's Time to Face the Facts: Guatemalan Government is Incontrovertibly Red," alongside Congressional representatives' speeches declaring that, "The Monroe Doctrine can be as surely violated by this kind of Communist infiltration of the government by an American state as it could be by new foreign settlement in the Americas." [253][254]

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[250] "Guatemala News Notes," March 18, 1954. Folder 10 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras 1950-53, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
[251] McCann, *An American Company*, 47.
[252] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Strength of the International Communist Movement, from the Special Subcommittee on Security Affairs, May 1954 – Printed for the use of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, S. Rep. Folder 12 Client File United Fruit Co: Guatemala + Honduras Apr.–June 1954, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
[253] Edward Tomlinson, "It's Time to Face the Facts: Guatemalan Government is Incontrovertibly Red," *The Washington Daily News*, May 31, 1954. Folder 12 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras Apr. – June 1954, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
[254] "Communist Infiltration in Guatemala, Speech of Hon. Jacob K. Javits of New York in the House of Representatives," June 11, 1954. Folder 12 Client File United Fruit Co: Guatemala+ Honduras Apr.-June 1954, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

When the "liberation army" headed by Colonel Castillo Armas invaded Guatemala on June 18, 1954, Bernays continued to supply the newsletters to his "confidential list." The News Notes sought to ensure that the coup would be seen as a homegrown liberation, not an invasion financed by the U.S. The News Notes from June 25, for example, quoted *The Washington Post* and *Times-Herald*: ""It will be enlightening to see whether the Guatemalan government will be able to sustain its charges of external aggression presented to the United Nations. *There is nothing so far, as the State Department has said, to indicate the invading force is composed of anything but Guatemalans who have become fed up with the Communism of the Arbenz government* (emphasis added).""[255]

By that point, however, Bernays and the other propagandists at work had already succeeded in "[creating] the climate of opinion" that accepted United Fruit's narrative as reality.[256] This was, as I have shown, a task years in the making, and it did not end with the coup. In his 1976 book, McCann asserted that the newsletters were "so successful that we later broadened them to include Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama which meant that for about eight years (1953-1960) a great deal of the news of Central America which appeared in the North American press was supplied, edited and sometimes made by United Fruit's public relations department in New York."[257] As late as 1958, Bernays was still adding journalists to the mailing list, keeping readers up to date on issues ranging

[255] "Guatemala News Notes," June 25, 1954. Folder 12 Client File United Fruit Co: Guatemala+ Honduras Apr.-June 1954, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[256] McCann, *An American Company*, 47.
[257] McCann, *An American Company*, 49.

from the Company's settlement with the Department of Justice over an antitrust lawsuit to the Guatemalan government's retrospective analysis that banana workers' strike in 1954 had resulted in "disastrous" losses in revenue."[258]

And then, in early 1959, Bernays was let go by United Fruit. In his biography, Bernays attributed the layoff to a "drastic pulling in" of the budget following "'Castro's expropriation of the company acreage and a resulting decline in profits and dividends.'"[259] The events that Bernays and his colleagues at United Fruit helped set in motion, however, continued to resonate in Guatemala and beyond. Arbenz' ouster marked the first Cold War intervention by the U.S. in the Western Hemisphere, but it was not the last. Bernays' PR campaign, in fact, served as a model for future interventions in Cuba and in Vietnam.[260] In Guatemala, 1954 signaled the end of a ten-year period of social and political reform in exchange for decades of violent conflict. Historian Greg Grandin writes that "in the wake of 1954, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces and ideas fed off each other, leading to a downward spiral of crisis and terror."[261] The counterrevolutionary coalition for which Castillo Armas served as the figurehead fell apart, too beholden to the Guatemalan oligarchy and U.S. economic interests to follow through on its liberal democratic promises.[262] Following Armas' 1957 assassination by his bodyguard, the ruling party, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN) "abandoned its effort to fashion itself as an agent of progressive

[258] "Guatemala News Notes," March 19, 1958; undated memo. Folder 1 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras, Jan. - Mar. 1958, Box III: 39, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[259] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 180.
[260] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 156.
[261] Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 89.
[262] Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 86.

liberal democracy, instead transforming into a brute defender of the agrarian oligarchy."[263] The next four decades would be wracked by political instability, civil war, and government-ordered "disappearances" on a mass scale.

Ethical Questions

In this chapter I set out to explore Bernays' work for United Fruit–which lasted from 1940 until 1959 – against the backdrop of his articulations in 1947 and 1955 of what he termed "the engineering of consent." In these texts, Bernays and the other contributors, themselves professional persuaders of many stripes, argued that it is indeed possible to be an ethical, effective consent engineer. The ideal consent engineer/PR counsel plans ahead, conducts research, selects themes and symbols to appeal to the client's desired publics, and commits only to campaigns that serve pro-social ends. These texts were created at crucial junctures during Bernays' time at United Fruit – the middle of Arévalo's presidency, in 1947, and just following the ouster of Arbenz, in 1955 – and thus it stands to reason that his instructions for good PR work and his actual work might reflect one another.

And they do, at least in part. Bernays' work at United Fruit certainly exemplified a "planning approach," as his thoughtful letters to Whitman and detailed PR reports indicate. As Thomas McCann recalled, Bernays' press junkets were scrupulously planned far in advance.[264] In these PR plans and internal memos, Bernays laid out his objectives and designed courses of action to meet

[263] Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 87.
[264] McCann, *An American Company*, 47.

them. Central to his strategy was the use of news media to "[advocate] what is accepted by an individual or group as a truth."[265] He and his colleagues wrote news stories and sent them to editors eager to fill up their pages free of cost. Bernays drew on his preexisting connections to prominent editors and established new ones to whichever journalists were assigned to cover Guatemala. Part of the work of establishing these relationships included well-planned, tightly controlled tours of United Fruit plantations and other sites in Guatemala to present a particular version of the client and the country. The United Fruit-friendly articles that resulted from these visits would then be amplified by Bernays' newsletters and mailing lists, tirelessly sending article after article to publications large and small across America.

How did he decide what shape the narrative would take? As I have demonstrated, the underlying concerns of United Fruit Company hinged on the maintenance of political power and economic control in the "banana republic." But that's not the way the story was told. As he advised in "The Engineering of Consent," Bernays selected his themes and symbols carefully to fit the values and motivations of the various audiences. Naturally, the themes and symbols changed over time. When he was brought on in 1940, that meant appealing primarily to wartime concerns. The Middle American Information Bureau disseminated articles touting Guatemala's importance to Allied success. In other Company publications, Bernays sought to link United Fruit to national defense and

[265] John Price Jones, "Organization for Public Relations," in *The Engineering of Consent*, 157.

hemispheric stability.[266] As Fleischman and Cutler recommended in 1955, the themes and content varied by publication and intended audience; for instance, "Middle American" recipes and defense-themed articles found their way into daily newspapers while "bulletins and maps" were sent to high schools.[267]

As it became clear that the October Revolution would pose a threat to United Fruit's economic model, Bernays' propaganda shifted to align with his client's changing objectives and the backdrop of the Cold War. While John Clements Associates appealed to conservatives, Bernays worked his magic on the liberals – which is to say he planned extensively, orchestrated press junkets, established and maintained close relationships with sympathetic journalists, and became a significant provider of all information on Guatemala to newsrooms across the U.S.[268] While McCarthy was making headlines accusing Hollywood and the State Department of harboring Communists, Bernays sent journalists to Guatemala who returned convinced the Guatemalan government was being overrun by Communists. The dominant narrative of United Fruit propaganda from 1944-54 became a tale of Soviet infiltration and Guatemalan mistreatment of a benevolent, "civilizing" company. However, as was the case during WWII, this propaganda

[266] This could be done through mentions of the Company's "Great White Fleet," freighter ships that were used in WWII to transport soldiers and supplies as well as bananas. Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 162.
[267] For instance, in the December 1943 Activities Report for the MAIB, F. B. Metzler, a teacher at Albany High School in California, commented that, "You may be assured we shall use any other bulletins and maps you have available for schools as we are giving special emphasis to Middle America in our classes." See "Comments from Officials in Schools and Education Who Have Requested Material on Middle America in December," in "Activities Report on Cooperation Secured Between American Group Leaders and Opinion Molders and Middle America Information Bureau December 1943." Box I: 362, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[268] McCann, *An American Company*, 59.

did not deal exclusively with issues of national defense; war was not the only salient narrative. Themes and symbols should appeal to "deep-seated human motivations," including not only security and defense (of a country, an ideology, or an economic system); but also health and longevity. Bernays' side campaign from 1949 to 1951 to promote Dr. Haas and his research portrayed bananas as symbols of good health and medicine.

The journalistic establishment was crucial to the success of these methods. Why did they prove such willing participants? Journalism had long defined itself in opposition to PR: the professionalization of journalism in the 1920s was fueled by a backlash against PR counsels like Bernays who touted the pro-social purposes of propaganda as a voice for overlooked minority perspectives. Eager to position themselves as the standard-bearers of credibility, journalists developed a fact-based "scientific approach" to reporting. However, the increased reliance on expert information "had the unintended effect of news workers turning to PR sources for the data and contacts needed to report stories."[269] That susceptibility can be seen in United Fruit historian Peter Chapman's suggestion that "many journalists saw their trade as reporting the 'facts' presented to them by apparently decent and honest people."[270]

Moreover, what was considered objective fact in this period was politically circumscribed by the Red Scare. As Nancy Bernhard writes, "vigorous anticommunism became consistent with objectivity through the bipolar world

[269] Burton St. John, "CLAIMING JOURNALISTIC TRUTH: US press guardedness toward Edward L. Bernays' conception of the minority voice and the "corroding acid" of propaganda," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2009), 353-55.
[270] Chapman, *Bananas*, 138.

view of the Cold War."[271] Journalists frustrated by those limits may have feared that news coverage deemed insufficiently anticommunist would make them the target of Joseph McCarthy or people like him. In this environment of normative anticommunism, what applied to McCarthy may equally apply to Bernays: both men "mastered the props and gestures of objectivity…simulating just the kind of facts that the prevailing routines of objective journalism spotlighted."[272] Yet as McCann reminds us, calling this manipulation of the press may be overly generous "when the victims proved so eager."[273] Other journalists may simply have been happy to have reliable, current sources of material with which to fill columns and sell copies.

What was fact, and what was fiction, anyway? Had Guatemala become "incontrovertibly red," endangering the Americas as a "beachhead" of Soviet influence?[274] This remains a matter of historical debate.[275] Communists certainly had influence within the Guatemalan government as an important component of both Arévalo's and Arbenz' political coalitions. Yet they were never the dominant force in Guatemalan politics, and neither president was a Communist himself. Furthermore, charges of Soviet designs on Guatemala have not held up;

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[271] Nancy Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 165.
[272] Bernhard, *U.S. Television News*, 156. Here, Bernhard is paraphrasing Richard Rovere's perspective on McCarthy as part of a larger review of the literature on McCarthy and print objectivity.
[273] McCann, *An American Company*, 47.
[274] Edward Tomlinson, "It's Time to Face the Facts: Guatemalan Government is Incontrovertibly Red," *The Washington Daily News*, May 31, 1954. Folder 12 Client File United Fruit Co.: Guatemala + Honduras Apr. – June 1954, Box III: 37, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
[275] Implicit in the way the question is sometimes asked, of course, is the notion that, had Communists been a significant political force in Guatemala, U.S. intervention would have been justified.

declassified documents in latter decades revealed no significant communication between Guatemala and the U.S.S.R., and the U.S.S.R had no plans to establish a base of operations in Guatemala.[276] Events that helped drum up fear of Soviet conspiracy – like an April 1954 shipment of arms from Czechoslovakia to Guatemala – were met with relief from the CIA, which had already decided to overthrow Arbenz months earlier.[277]

Long after Bernays left United Fruit, though, he continued to defend his work there. When Thomas McCann published *An American Company* in 1976, which portrayed Bernays as an astute spin doctor, Bernays wrote not only to McCann's publisher but also to newspapers that published reviews of his book to argue that McCann's account was slanderous and untrue.[278] Clearly Bernays felt that McCann had jeopardized his public status as a liberal, as well as his lifelong claim that PR counsels should only accept clients whose values and activities align with the public interest.

As we saw in Chapter 2, however, the ethical code articulated in *The Engineering of Consent* and *Persuasion for Profit* leaves much to the individual PR counsel's subjective judgment about what constitutes the "public interest" (or, for that matter, truth). The role of the PR counsel is to bring the people around to

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[276] Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 107; 148.

[277] Guatemala had been blocked from buying weapons from the U.S. since 1948; as a result, other Allied nations refused to sell to them, either. As a result, "by 1954, the Guatemalans were complaining that the American embargo had become so effective that not only were they unable to equip their army, but they could not even buy low-caliber ammo for the Hunting and Fishing Club…" In this environment, the Czechoslovakian purchase was, according to historian Cole Blasier, a "kind of last resort" to prepare for the invasion that seemed to be on the horizon. Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 149. The authors cite Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant: U.S. Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 160.

[278] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 181-182.

"sound social ends" and to disseminate "advantageous truths."[279] What, for Bernays, constituted sound social ends? His writing advocated "racial and religious tolerance"; he was an outspoken supporter of feminism and of unions, even in conservative business circles; he urged his clients, including United Fruit, to reform practices he found discriminatory or unjust.[280] At a time when the business community sought to undercut the appeal of the New Deal by "selling free enterprise," Bernays helped his corporate clients reposition themselves as stewards of the American Dream.[281] This is not necessarily a contradiction in terms; liberalism and capitalism go hand in hand.

Yet after witnessing United Fruit's exploitative practices and their refusals to change, he stayed on to help wage a propaganda war that culminated in the overthrow of a government making radical moves to uplift workers and racial minorities. Whether motivated by anticommunist conviction or not, Bernays' actions clearly conflicted with his professed values and, consequently, with his ethical duty to ensure they were not violated by the clients he worked for. On one hand, his six-figure salary was an obvious incentive to overlook his qualms. One wonders, however, how much his work for United Fruit truly provoked a crisis of conscience. In an unpublished memoir from 1979, Bernays recalled that "our most exciting client for over a decade was the brilliant industrial statesman Samuel Zemurray of the United Fruit Company, who headed a modern-day

[279] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 113; Nicholas Samstag, *Persuasion for Profit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 4.
[280] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 120; Richard S. Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich: Jai Press Inc, 1979), 158.
[281] To use Elizabeth Fones-Wolf's term from her book *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

counterpart of the East India Company."[282] His comparison to that earlier colonial enterprise is intended as a compliment, not a critique. Rather, in his telling, the whole affair sounds like a great adventure. Amidst "attempts of take-over in some Middle American countries by Communists…we were living out Oliver Wendell Holmes' dictum that he who has not lived in the turmoil of his time might better not have lived at all…"[283]

[282] The manuscript is undated, but as Bernays noted being married for 57 years, he likely wrote it around 1979.
[283] "Public Relations Counsel: A Personal History," (unpublished), n.d. Page 86. Folder 6, Box III: 68, Edward L. Bernays, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Chapter 4: National Security Rides on Trucks

In 1991, the New York Times wrote a profile of Edward Bernays commemorating his 100th birthday. When the interviewer asked the aging PR counsel to pick his most successful campaign, Bernays did not hesitate in his response: "'It was the late 1940's and E. L. Bransome, the president of Mack Truck, asked for help in getting more roads paved.'"[284] Under Bernays' consultation, Bransome held a news conference to urge Congress to construct an interstate highway. And, according to Bernays, that "news conference pushed Congress to approve money for Route 66 and ultimately led to the Interstate highways." In Bernays' words, "one single idea changed the economics of the country.""[285]

Was his work for Mack – and this one news conference – as singularly impactful as Bernays made it out to be in that interview? It's doubtful. Bernays was always prone to self-aggrandizing statements, especially in his later years.[286] Whether an exaggeration or not, though, it is nonetheless remarkable that, nearly a half century later, Bernays remembered his campaign for Mack Truck as the

[284] Bransome's middle initial seems to be a minor matter of historical confusion. Archival records have "E. B. Bransome"; Bernays, at 100, remembered it as "L" (assuming the journalist didn't misquote him); and a *Time* feature article on Mack from 1951 called the company President "Edwin Dagobert Bransome." "Business: Comeback for Mack," *Time*, February 19, 1951, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,814361,00.html.
[285] Glenn Rifkin, "At 100, Public Relations' Pioneer Criticizes Some of His Heirs," *The New York Times*, December 30, 1991, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/16/specials/bernays-100.html.
[286] Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1998), 260-61.

most successful of his decades-long career. As such, the campaign demands more scholarly attention than it has heretofore received. Few historians have written about Bernays' work for Mack; what little exists echoes Bernays' own viewpoint that his work and his client were central to the eventual passage of the Interstate Highway Act in 1956.

For example, Bernays' biographer Larry Tye prefaces Bernays' employment at Mack in this way:

"Fearful of losing their grip on shipping, train operators had launched a fierce campaign to convince the public that trucks were ruining the roads and to persuade states to levy road taxes high enough to price trucks out of the freight business. The railroads, however, hadn't counted on Big Think."[287] Tye went on to quote Bernays' recollection that ""our population was growing…The static element was the highway system. An idea hit me...If we could promise American motorists future satisfaction on their roads and work to bring that about, the gripe against the heavy trucks would be dissipated and by tomorrow the problem would be solved.""[288]

The campaign that emerged from this idea involved the use of tried-and-tested techniques: a preliminary "'overt act,'" in the form of Mack President E. L. Bransome's speech; '"segmenting,' or identifying potential allies so they could be targeted with appeals"; making front groups to send out promotional material and create state associations to wage smaller campaigns; and individual outreach to powerful government figures. And, according to Tye, "it worked: Congress in

[287] "Big Think" is Tye's term for Bernays' indirect and ambitious approach to PR campaigns.
[288] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 57.

1950 approved $566 million in road-building funds for each of the next two years, and two years later it upped the ante to $652 million, the most it had ever authorized and a critical step toward completion of the interstate highway network."[289] Although Tye acknowledged that "several other forces were pushing for such a system, none was as determined as Mack and its allies. And while the railroads' share of the shipping business already was slipping, this helped cement the trend toward greater reliance on roads and less on rails."[290]

Bernays' work for Mack Truck coincided with a period of heightened debates over the future of American infrastructure. The geographic, political, and economic landscape of the U.S. had changed radically since 1941. The U.S.'s entry into World War II helped push the country out of the Depression; by the end of the war, the U.S. had ascended to global hegemonic status. On the international stage, the U.S. was rapidly assuming its new role as an anticommunist crusader, sending troops to Greece and Turkey in 1947 and Korea in 1950.[291] And while the war had devastated most countries, the American economy was the largest in the world. Domestically, the U.S.'s prosperity and superpower status posed new challenges while exacerbating older ones. The startling revelation in 1949 that the Soviet Union had succeeded in developing atomic weapons kicked off an era of domestic civil defense. As U.S. leaders urged concerned citizens to stock up their pantries and build bomb shelters in the backyard, they worried about how millions of city-dwellers would evacuate in the event of an atomic attack. Would the

[289] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 58.
[290] Tye, *The Father of Spin*, 58.
[291] "The Truman Doctrine, 1947," *U. S. Department of State Archive*, https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/cwr/82210.htm.

current highway system suffice? Furthermore, the passage of the GI Bill in 1944, particularly its generous homeownership assistance, brought increased pressure to build homes outside of urban centers.[292]

Given the variety of forces lining up behind highway construction at midcentury, Bernays clearly overstated his role in the eventual creation of the interstate system. As I will demonstrate in the first section of this chapter, Mack was but one company in a wide array of special interest groups that constituted the highway lobby. But while I aim to temper Bernays' self-aggrandizing narrative by providing historical context, I do not mean to imply that the campaign was insignificant. As I will show, the campaign for Mack had an impressively wide scope, reaching thousands of American newsrooms and distributing millions of pieces of publicity material. Furthermore, the way the campaign was conducted furthers many of the themes that I have been exploring throughout the thesis. As with United Fruit Company, Bernays patterned the campaign's themes and symbols on Cold War concerns. In particular, the campaign for Mack aimed to link national security with economic development and encourage the voting public and their representatives to see roads and highways as "weapons…[in] our arsenal of democracy."[293] Furthermore, the extent of Bernays' adherence to the methodology and ethics of consent engineering for Mack addresses many of the questions explored in the previous

[292] Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[293] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 8-9. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

chapter. Does the identity of the speaker matter, strategically and ethically, when disseminating information to the public on behalf of a client? What are the methodological and ethical implications of harnessing scientific expertise in a public relations campaign? Finally, what do Bernays' methods and ethical defenses reflect about his underlying assumptions about the public and its manipulability?

The Formation of the Highway Lobby

Early lobbying efforts to convince the government to invest in highways began in the 1880s with the Good Roads Movement. The movement united a coalition of special interests ranging from cycling enthusiasts and farmers to civil engineers, highway contractors, and manufacturers of automobiles and road construction equipment. Though the movement eventually splintered, by the 1920s "a true highway lobby had emerged."[294] Many groups stood to benefit from greater government investment in highways, including "tire manufacturers and dealers, parts suppliers, oil companies, service-station owners, road builders, and land developers," as well as urban merchants and city planners.[295] Highway engineers, steadfast in their conviction of the necessity of more highways, were also an instrumental component of the effort to "foist the cost of highway construction (and maintenance, to the extent that it was considered at all) onto the public in general rather than highway users in particular."[296] Naturally, those who

[294] Barry B. LePatner, *Too Big to Fall: America's Failing Infrastructure and the Way Forward* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2010), 48.
[295] LePatner, *Too Big to Fall*, 48.
[296] LePatner, *Too Big to Fall*, 48.

used the highways the most benefited disproportionately from this cost-sharing arrangement, and they mobilized to defend it. In the 1940s, Connecticut and Pennsylvania's decision to construct toll roads – which imposed much higher and more direct fees on motorists than the previous arrangement – helped spark backlash among this diffuse coalition of special interest groups dedicated to preserving "free roads."[297]

The formation of the American Road Builders Association (ARBA) in 1943 reflected this wider mobilization. General Motors was the largest single contributor to ARBA, but the group included many other automobile manufacturers, trucking and oil interests, state-highway administrators, bus operators, as well as trade associations like the American Trucking Association and the American Manufacturers Association.[298] According to historian Kenneth Jackson, ARBA and its allies together formed "a lobbying enterprise second only to that of the munitions industry."[299] This lobbying enterprise initially focused on state and local issues, working to "block tollway schemes, out-distance railroaders, and secure lower taxes" on a piecemeal basis.[300] However, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the highway lobby began taking these efforts to the national level. More states had begun to follow PA and CT's example by building (or planning to build) toll roads. The increase in revenue that tolls could provide

[297] LePatner cites Owen D. Gutfreund's book *Twentieth-Century Sprawl* on page 49.
[298] Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 248-249.
[299] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 249.
[300] Rose and Mohl, *Interstate: Highway Politics and Policy Since 1939* (University of Tennessee Press, 2012), 42.

was highly attractive to state governments, which could direct the money to a variety of state programs or use it for the upkeep of the highways.

As the postwar economy boomed and suburbanization accelerated, the existing transportation system was clearly not up to the task of maintaining the roads. The Federal Highway Act of 1916 may have secured federal funding for road construction, but not upkeep; automobile accidents, traffic jams, and delayed shipments were increasingly common. Many people attributed these ills to the degradation of roads caused by trucks carrying heavy loads, and the railroads were eager to encourage such thinking through their own public relations counsels. But trucking groups like Mack were determined that solutions to the nation's infrastructure problems would not come at the expense of their industry, and they were adamantly opposed to allowing railroads to "[take] advantage" of the situation to advance their own economic standing.[301] They mobilized to oppose legislation that imposed higher gasoline taxes, weight limits, toll roads, or any other measure that would hurt their interests.

As a major truck and bus manufacturer, Mack was central to many of the lobbying campaigns and trade associations that emerged to counter the railroad industry and harmful state legislation. An internal memo from Mack employee D. C. Fenner to Bernays in May 1950 illuminates Mack's position within this overlapping network of special interests. Bernays had written to Mack's Vice President, H.W. Dodge, in April 1950 to recommend that the company aim to have its employees promoted to leadership roles at fourteen prominent lobbying

[301] Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 41.

organizations; Dodge had then referred him to Fenner to explain Mack's current affiliation with these groups.

As it turned out, Mack was deeply embedded in this network. Fenner explained each lobbying association one by one:[302] As the "most efficiently managed trade association in the highway transportation industry," the American Manufacturers' Association (AMA) included "practically all car and truck manufacturers excepting only Ford and Brockway." Mack was on several AMA committees, including the Board of Directors, Truck Public Relations, Field Relations, and Manufacturing. Mack's membership in these committees ensured it had an important role in the lobbying enterprise: "Nothing can get very far in the motor vehicle field without the approval of the AMA Board."[303] Mack was also represented on the Board of Directors and several other committees of the National Council of Private Motor Truck Owners (NCPMTO), a nonprofit "devoted to rights and abilities of private enterprise to operate commercial motor vehicles in agriculture and industry."[304] The Automotive Safety Foundation (ASF), an organization which received half its funding from the AMA, featured Mack on its Board of Directors and Operating Committee.[305]

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[302] This was not an exhaustive list by any means. Fenner provided information on the organizations that Bernays had requested, but there were dozens of other state and local associations of which Mack was a member. Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[303] Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950, 1. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[304] Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950, 1. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[305] According to Fenner, the ASF received the rest of its funding from "Petroleum, Parts, Cement, Rubber, Finance and allied industries." Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950, 1-3.

Moreover, Mack had ties to associations that went beyond official committee membership. Through the company's membership in the AMA, Mack was linked to groups dependent on AMA funding, including the Society of Automotive Engineers – which AMA hired to do "special technical work" – and the National Highway Users Conference. The latter group "[promoted] sound public policies on highway use, safety, taxation, finance and administration" and served as a "clearing house for information on proposed national, state and municipal legislation affecting vehicle taxation and regulation and highway construction."[306] While the memo did not specify the exact nature of the relationship, Fenner told Bernays that Mack's affiliations also extended to the National Association of Motor Bus Operators, the American Transit Association, and the National Sand and Gravel Association. Mack was active at the state level as well, getting involved in state-level battles to defeat legislation harmful to trucking interests. In New York State, for instance, Mack contributed to the NY Truck Owners Protective Committee in their fight against a State Assembly resolution that would "[foster] very heavy increases in truck taxes for the general fund of the State, but not for roads."[307] The company also regularly made $100 contributions to dozens of state trucking associations across the country.[308]

Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[306] Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950, 3. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[307] Fenner noted he was "still a member of their executive and steering committees."

[308] Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950, 4. Letter from Letter from A. C. Fetzer to Bernays, May 9, 1950. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Notably, Mack had no affiliation with the American Automobile Association (AAA), which Fenner described as "strongly anti-truck on every measure… Up to now the automotive industry has tried to maintain one big family of all types of users of the highway." However, according to Fenner, the AAA failed to realize its common interests: if trucks were to be "strangled" by legislation, private automobiles would follow. Notably, Fenner blamed the AAA's PR consultancy, Carl Byoir Associates, for "trying to split the family up into opposing groups."[309]

That Carl Byoir, one of the most prominent corporate PR firms in the U.S., was working for the AAA while Bernays worked for Mack and the AMA devoted entire committees to trucking PR, reflected a larger shift occurring across corporate America. Public relations was fast becoming a central part of corporate strategy. As I have discussed, Big Business's reputation had rebounded significantly since the dark days of the Depression, but the early postwar era had seen massive strike waves, the persistence of government price controls, and rampant inflation that many Americans blamed on corporations. Businessmen were increasingly concerned by what they saw as the American public's unenlightened attitudes toward free market capitalism. "Economic education" campaigns by conservative business groups like NAM, public service advertisements, and the immense growth of PR budgets and departments were

[309] Letter from D. C. Fenner to Bernays, May 22, 1950, 2-3. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

among the most important of Big Business's efforts to "sell free enterprise" to the American public.[310]

Within Mack, officials framed the company's problems, as well as solutions, in terms of PR. Internal documents indicate that this outlook was shared throughout the industry. In an April 1950 letter describing a recent AMA meeting, Mack representative Henry Rowold proclaimed, "The Public Relations Committee [of A.M.A.] believes that at no time in history has the public relations of the motor truck operators been in worse shape." Later in the letter, Rowold wrote: "There is no question but that there is a big public relations job to be done to gain better support of the American Public for the trucking industries."[311]

To conceptualize the company's and industry's problems in this way reflected what Richard Tedlow has called PR's "basic tenet since the earliest days of Ivy Lee": "that an underlying harmony of interests existed which needed only proper communication to be generally recognized."[312] By this logic, American taxpayers, trucking employees, and state and federal lawmakers – the publics – needed only to hear the trucking industry's side of the story to realize that what was good for the industry was good for them, too.

Of course, telling that story was no simple task. That was where Bernays came in.

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[310] Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
[311] Letter from Henry Rowold to Bernays, May 22, 1950. Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[312] Richard S. Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich: Jai Press Inc, 1979), 72.

The Campaign Begins

Based on the dates of the records in Bernays' archives, his work for Mack lasted from 1949 until 1952. During that time, he employed many of the same methods that characterized his ongoing work for United Fruit.[313] Broadly speaking, these methods included: the creation of front groups intended to serve as clearing houses of "informational material," including company news releases, favorable news coverage, and academic studies; the strategic dissemination of that material to different audiences, or publics, via internal company memos, trade magazines, general periodicals, among other mediums; the corresponding maintenance of lists of press contacts; conferences and other "overt acts" meant to "dramatize" the campaign's ideas; and the promotion of scientific findings that proved useful to company objectives.[314]

As he advocated in "The Engineering of Consent," underlying the news releases, conferences, and other orchestrated events were a set of themes and symbols selected to appeal to the public's values and concerns. Compared to the campaign for United Fruit, Bernays' time at Mack was far shorter and the thematic and symbolic emphases changed less over time. Like United Fruit, the themes and symbols of the campaign were largely grafted onto the anxieties of the early Cold War period. If Bernays had invoked the specter of Communist infiltration in America's backyard for United Fruit in the early postwar years, then his rhetoric for Mack shared a geographic dimension in the sense of connecting

[313] Bernays worked for United Fruit from roughly 1940 until 1959.
[314] Tye quotes Bernays' biography in *The Father of Spin*, 58; Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 119.

and thereby fortifying the interior of the United States from Soviet attack. Communism and atomic threat were not the only things on Americans' minds, however. In the first year of Mack's PR campaign, in fact, militaristic themes were secondary to the rhetoric of economic prosperity and capitalist progress. As Bernays searched for more compelling appeals to public opinion, though, he deliberately shifted the campaign to spotlight national and civil defense. Doing so, he believed, would identify trucking with "the anxieties and hopes of the citizen for a stronger America."[315] In this next section, I will turn to the methods and rhetoric of the campaign and examine how and why they changed over time.

April 28, 1950 was a momentous day for Mack Truck. It was on that day that Vice President H. W. Dodge delivered the speech to the National Tank Truck Carriers Conference that marked the official start of Mack's public relations campaign. This campaign, Dodge announced to trucking industry leaders, would be "a broad-gauged sequence of activities to bring all the social forces which make up American life to an understanding of the national transportation problem and its possible solution." What were these problems? While railroad propaganda sought to convince the public that trucking damaged the roads and foisted the cost of the damage onto taxpayers, truckers also had to contend with inconsistent state laws and a road system built to handle the traffic of an earlier era. To solve these issues, Dodge announced, the campaign would "let the public decide, let the

[315] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 9. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

legislatures act in the full glare of accurate knowledge."[316] Thus armed with the facts, the company was confident that "[the public] will act in its own interests, which coincide with the interests of the trucking industry." Mack Truck employees heard the same message about the new campaign. An internal PR bulletin sent on May 25, 1950 – the first of many – informed its employees that "[this program] has been undertaken in the public's interest, Mack's interest, and in your interest."[317]

The speech and its subsequent dissemination via news release and company bulletin were only the public-facing inaugurations of an extensive PR program slated to occur over the following year. Dodge's speech was Project #1 in a series of 27 projects which, taken together, reflect a remarkable level of planning, foresight and attention to theme and symbol: in short, the type of approach advocated in "The Engineering of Consent" and elsewhere. Project #2 enabled the dissemination of the news releases, PR bulletins, and other "informational material" through the creation of three front groups. (Gone were the days where Bernays proudly embraced the term "propaganda." By 1950, "propaganda" was a term reserved for the Communists and the railroads. Our material, claimed Bernays, is all "information" and "fact.") The first group, the Trucking Information Service (TIS), would "disseminate informational material to newspapers, magazines, radio, trade press and communication media in general,

[316] "Mack Trucks to Mobilize Public in New Action Program to Dramatize Importance of Trucking to U. S. Economy," April 29, 1950. News release. Folder Projects #1, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[317] "Public Relations Bulletin #1," May 25, 1950. Folder Projects #6, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

and to serve as a clearing house of fact and information for such media."[318] The Trucking Service Bureau (TSB) would do the same for "the trucking industry and to truck users to build goodwill for the trucking industry."[319] Finally, "Better Living Through Increased Highway Transportation" served to "distribute information concerning trucking industry and highway transportation to group leaders and opinion moulders among the general public in order that they may in turn reflect the same point of view to their constituent groups."[320] Each front group's correspondence was to be sent from a nom-de-plume, with "Richard Carr" signing TIS's letters, "Roger Barnes" signing TSB's, and "Henry Hammond" signing Better Living's. All, of course, were penned by Bernays or his associates. The front groups would become the basis of much of Mack's public relations activities going forward.

Other projects in the list of 27 helped "activate" the front groups by creating letterheads and stationery for each group (Project #3); drafting the "initial publicity material" for each bureau and the letters of reply (Projects #8, 8A); and "establishing [the] flow of information from truck users" (Project #15). Initial publicity material included "pamphlets, lecture outlines, background material, especially tailored to meet the demands of the different groups which the three services are aiming to reach…[and] designed to develop social and legislative

[318] "Project #2A." Folder Projects #2 Mack Trucks, Inc. Establishment & Activation of Trucking Information Service, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[319] "Project #2B," Folder Projects #2 Mack Trucks, Inc. Establishment & Activation of Trucking Information Service, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[320] "Project #2C," Folder Projects #2 Mack Trucks, Inc. Establishment & Activation of Trucking Information Service, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

action and help carry out the basic objectives of the program."[321] Project #15 enlisted the help of truck users to supply that material, asking the mailing list of the Trucking Service Bureau for help in keeping the TSB up to date on "events in their territory of mutual interest to all truckers, such as pending local legislation, attacks by railroads against truckers, etc." The outreach letters emphasized that the information they provided to Mack would then allow the Trucking Information Service to supply the news media with "material which will aid them in building intelligent and effective public understanding of the vital role which motor transportation plays in our national economy."[322]

Other projects aimed to create the "newsworthy events" that Bernays believed were a crucial component of a successful PR campaign. As he wrote in 1947, "it is the overt act that makes news, and news in turn shapes the attitudes and actions of people."[323] Planning these events such that they are "projected over the communication systems to infinitely more people than those actually participating" ensures that they "vividly dramatize ideas for those who do not witness" them.[324] Project #13 aimed to fill that role through the "development of detailed plans for dramatic publicity for the use of local newspapers and radio stations based on events stemming from Mack's three caravans travelling from city to city." These events might include enlisting a trucker "who drove one of the

[321] See Folders for Projects #3, #8, and #15 in Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[322] "Suggested Letter for Project #15 - Establishing Flow of Information From Truck Users," 1. Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[323] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 119.
[324] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 119.

first Mack trucks" to drive the caravan, in order to "dramatize the progress of" the company, or using the caravan to "carry a letter" from the mayor of one city to another to "stress the importance of motor truck transportation in the prosperity of the two communities."[325] Project #11, meanwhile, set in motion Mack's "Golden Anniversary" to celebrate the company's fiftieth year.[326]

Several of the projects reflected Bernays' appreciation for the importance of what he termed "group leaders and opinion moulders" to the task of moving public opinion in the client's favor. Project #4, for example, would draft letters addressed from one "group leader" to another in the dairy, oil, busing, and trucking industries. Writing as a fellow industry member, these letters would remind the recipient of our mutual interests with trucking and with Mack in particular. ("As milk dealers, we have many problems of mutual concern these days. One of our biggest is our stake in better streets and highways…As a manufacturer it seems to me that Mack has taken an important step to further the broad aims of the trucking industry.")[327] A "Mr. Doll" would "arrange contacts to secure authorization of leaders to have letter go over their signature."[328] Meanwhile, Project #12 called for holding "individual informational luncheon

[325] "Project #13." Folder Projects #13 Mack Trucks, Inc. 1950 Caravan Publicity Events – Development," Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[326] "Project #11," Folder Projects #11 Preliminary Planning for Luncheon, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[327] "Suggested Letter from One Milk Dealer to Another," Folder Projects #4 Projects: Mack Trucks, Inc. Ltr Campaign fm. Gp. Leaders in Various Flds. To Members in Those Fields, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[328] "Suggested Letter from One Milk Dealer to Another," Folder Projects #4 Projects: Mack Trucks, Inc. Ltr Campaign fm. Gp. Leaders in Various Flds. To Members in Those Fields, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

conferences" between Bransome, Dodge, and important "financial editors of leading New York newspapers and magazines."[329]

The value of the "group leaders" and "opinion moulders" lay in the diversity of audiences, or publics, they could influence. As Benjamin Fine would later write in *The Engineering of Consent*, all institutions have "internal and external publics" that "must be satisfied."[330] If the letter campaigns and informational luncheons were intended to satisfy the external publics, Projects #6 and 7 targeted the internal. Project #6 would inform Mack employees of the ongoing campaign "with a view toward arousing the active interest and cooperation of the sales force."[331] Another component of #6, a pamphlet entitled "How to Meet the Press and Radio," advised Mack employees on how to represent the company to the media. "Be polite; be clear; be frank; be accurate…Keep cool. Even if you are irritated, don't show it."[332]

Project #7, "Stimulating the Interest of Mack Personnel in the Company's Public Relations Program," aimed for similar objectives, though it's unclear if this project was ever put into practice. The report read: "The Bernays office will explore and make recommendations" on issuing regular bulletins to employees, setting up company awards for "new production methods, new products," and

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[329] "Project #12," Folder Projects #12 Mack Trucks, Inc. 1950 Information Conference with Editors.
[330] Benjamin Fine, "Planning," in *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), ed. Edward L. Bernays (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 189.
[331] "Project #6." Folder Projects #6: Keeping the Mack Sales Force Informed of the Company's Public Relations Program, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[332] "How to Meet the Press and Radio: A Publicity Manual for Truckers," 24. Folder Projects #6: Keeping the Mack Sales Force Informed of the Company's Public Relations Program, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

publicizing those awards "by posters and other internal communication media."[333] Perhaps thinking it more trouble than it was worth, Dodge never signed off.[334]

Project #7 was not the only plan that failed to make it past the drawing board. Bernays' idea to award 50 truckers with the top driving records with their very own bulldog (Mack's mascot) didn't make the cut, nor did registering "pure-bred English bulldogs in the name of Mack Trucks" for exhibition at kennel shows. The other components of Project #5 ("Publicizing Mack Trucks through the Symbol of Living Bulldogs") fared better, like the plan to commission Mack-engraved toy bulldogs and to stock Mack sales caravans "with a suitable-looking bulldog" to "provide human interest material for reporters and photographers" at each stop along the way.[335] And I found no evidence that Project #23 – which recommended "the creation of a club of men who drive Mack Trucks" called "The League of American Mackmen" – ever came to fruition.[336]

It is unclear whether each of the 27 projects were carried out to the full extent of Bernays' intention, even for those that were "signed off" by Dodge on May 13, 1950. Nonetheless, the series provides an invaluable look into the methodological approach that characterized Bernays' work for Mack. Other aspects of the 1950 chapter of the campaign took similar approaches in seeking to harness the

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[333] "Project #7," Folder Projects #7: Mack Trucks, Inc. Stimulating the Interest of Mack Personnel in the Company's P.R. Program, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[334] Instead, he sent Bernays a note that read, "hold in abeyance." June 7, 1950. Folder Projects #7: Mack Trucks, Inc. Stimulating the Interest of Mack Personnel in the Company's P.R. Program, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[335] "Project #5," Folder Project #5: Mack Trucks, Inc. Publicizing Mack Trucks Through the Symbol of Living Bulldogs 1950, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[336] "Index," "Bernays Plan for Mack: 27 Projects." Folder Miscellany 1950 #2, Box I: 236.

credibility of "group leaders" and steer news coverage in Mack's favor. As I have mentioned, highway engineers in state and federal associations (the AASHO and BPR, respectively) had worked alongside the trucking industry in the highway lobby since the 1920s.

Unsurprisingly, then, Bernays turned to a state highway engineer to help do damage control in response to unfavorable news coverage linking trucks to highway destruction. Bernays wrote to H. W. Dodge on May 8, 1950, to propose a solution: to find a road engineer who "could answer an article like this with great authority."[337] With Dodge's approval, Bernays reached out to William S. Housel, a civil engineering professor at the University of Michigan and Research Consultant for the Michigan State Highway Department.[338] Bernays invited Housel to New York on the company's budget for a two-pronged meeting. First, they would "discuss cooperation on Maryland road tests"; and second, they'd explore "possible cooperation with Mack Trucks, Inc. in furthering motor trucking throughout the USA, to blanket and meet antagonisms against trucking," as Bernays reported in a memo to his boss following the conversation.[339] The Maryland road tests were a series of experiments conducted by the National Academy of Sciences' Highway Research Board to determine the effect of heavily loaded trucks on road quality. Fourteen states took part, including Michigan's Highway Department, giving Housel insider access that he offered to

[337] Letter from Bernays to Dodge, May 8, 1950. Folder Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[338] Letter from Dodge to Bernays, May 17, 1950. Folder Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[339] "Report of Visit of W. S. Housel, Saturday, May 27, 1950." Folder Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

extend to Mack.[340] On his upcoming trip to Maryland, Professor Housel offered to evaluate "the road construction and the potentiality of road destruction from tests" and report back before the official results were out. If the preliminary findings bode poorly – that is, if heavy axle loadings were found to be destroying highways – Mack could strike first by "deflating the tests in advance."[341]

His willingness to assist Mack in this way was no doubt influenced by the rest of his agreement with Bernays: for a salary of $75 per day, Housel would provide a variety of services aimed at "furthering motor trucking throughout the USA."[342] These included:

1. "Give talks before trucking or other bodies" on "the future of motor transport in the USA," which Bernays clarified to mean "that roads should be built with sound foundation and drainage to take care of America's transport job; rather than transport should be built to take care of obsolete roads";

2. Give talks to colleges, universities and non-profit organizations;

3. Present "his point of view" at various conferences by assignment;

4. "Supervise and direct any such studies as we might want to have done at the Engineering Research Institute of the University of Michigan at cost."

[340] Michigan State Highway Department, *Report on Maryland Road Tests One-MD*, Charles M. Ziegler and E. A. Finney. 159, Grand Rapids: Michigan State Highway Department, 1951. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/R-159_440221_7.pdf.
[341] "Report of Visit of W. S. Housel, Saturday, May 27, 1950." Folder Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[342] Adjusted for inflation, $75 in 1950 is roughly equivalent to $899 in 2022.

5. Conduct research at the University's transportation library, "the best library in the country in that field."[343]

Housel was the ideal expert for Mack to hire for several reasons. His connections to the Michigan Highway Department and the University of Michigan granted Mack access to the road tests in the short term and opened opportunities for company-directed research in the future. Furthermore, Housel's views on "obsolete" versus "practical" road building aligned with Mack's efforts to promote the building of highways to "fit the traffic," rather than limiting traffic to the capacity of the roads. Of course, that Housel's theories coincided with Mack's objectives was strictly by chance, something that Housel himself would be sure to remind the engineers in Maryland: "…as they know, his point of view is coincidental to those who have retained him for his interpretation and…he is working not against [the engineers], but in the interests of better road construction."[344] Taken together, we see that Bernays hired a civil engineer to conduct research and espouse Mack Truck's viewpoint to a variety of audiences while continuing to present his views and work as independent from his corporate sponsor. Housel would also provide the company prior knowledge of unpublished tests that might harm the company's reputation or economic interests so that Mack could preemptively undermine them if needed.

[343] "Report of Visit of W. S. Housel, Saturday, May 27, 1950," 2. Folder Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[344] "Report of Visit of W. S. Housel, Saturday, May 27, 1950," 2. Folder Miscellany Mack Trucks May 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, the formation of the three information bureaus facilitated a flood of news releases, pamphlets, and other "informational material" to trucking industry businessmen, trade magazines, news media, and other "group leaders and opinion moulders" (e.g., the leaders of volunteer associations). The "overt acts," like speeches or anniversary celebrations, fed into the bureaus' activities. The aim of these overlapping methods was to ensure that continuous, targeted publicity reached the client's many publics and hammered home Mack Truck's carefully selected themes.

Five months into the campaign, however, Bernays reported that the "climate of public opinion" facing Mack and the trucking industry remained overwhelmingly negative. The public continued to blame trucks for damaging highways and skirting taxes while railroads stoked the fires; the "loosely knit," leaderless trucking industry was relegated to "rearguard actions." Mack could try to "organize the truckers into a cohesive and well-knit unit" with a platform and strategy; or, as Bernays recommended, the company could take charge and "put the industry in a position of aggressive offense."[345]

Naturally, PR was the key to meeting this challenge. In keeping with the theory of engineering consent – whereby PR counsels must continually adjust their plans, methods, and objectives to changing circumstances – Bernays recommended intensifying Mack's overall PR activities while differentiating their plans of attack by state. For states that had no "unduly restrictive legislation" on the books, Bernays advised making a pamphlet that advocated building highways

[345] "Plans for Mack Leadership," 4. Folder Reports Mack Trucks 1950-1951, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

to fit the predicted traffic needs of 1965-1970; widely distributing the pamphlet via the information bureaus; and "[dramatizing] these plans" by continuing to book Bransome and Dodge for speeches that linked highway construction to modernization.[346][347] For any of those states whose legislatures planned to meet in the coming year, Bernays advised the same methods while "greatly [intensifying] the speaking schedules" of Mack officials, who should "emphasize over and over again…the scientific background…the benefits…and also the theme of modern roads for modern transport." Direct-by-mail campaigns would be used vigorously to "enlist statewide support of" everyone dependent in some way on trucking.[348] And for the rest of the country, especially those states with restrictive legislation on the books, Bernays prescribed distributing yet another "modern roads for modern transport"-type pamphlet;[349] nationwide direct-by-mail campaigns; more speeches by Bransome and Dodge; and generally "[keeping] up continual flow of releases" to Mack's various publics.[350]

Within a few months, Bernays recommended shifting course once again. Perhaps indicative of the pressure he was under, Bernays' January 1951 report ("A

[346] "Plans for Mack Leadership," 5-7. Folder Reports Mack Trucks 1950-1951, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[347] Bernays echoes language used in "The Engineering of Consent": "The developing of events and circumstances that are not routine is one of the basic functions of the engineer of consent. Events so planned can be projected over the communication systems to infinitely more people than those actually participating, and such events vividly dramatize ideas for those who do not witness the events." Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 119.
[348] "Plans for Mack Leadership," 7-8. Folder Reports Mack Trucks 1950-1951, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[349] He defined the threshold for "unduly restrictive legislation" as load limits of 18,000 lb or less.
[350] "Plans for Mack Leadership," 8-10. Folder Reports Mack Trucks 1950-1951, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951") opened with an extended explanation and defense of PR. He wrote:

"We know today that public acceptance of any product or idea depends not only on a logical reason for a purchase wanting the product…but for a number of other reasons…Many are in his subconscious mind…Thus [people] reflect in their purchase, impressions they received about a product from sources other than the direct effort of a company to sell its product through advertising or other direct means. The recognized and scientifically proven proposition that indirect influences play a part in the sale and purchase of specific products is one reason for the psychological warfare – public relations and other publicity activities used today by organizations to gain public goodwill and acceptance of ideas and products."[351]

For Mack, then, the essential objective – "[building] goodwill for and selling Mack trucks" – must be arrived at by "[developing] a climate of favorable public opinion." To do so, Mack Trucks had to "establish leadership," not only among other trucking companies, but for the trucking industry as a whole as it went up against its opponents.[352] After all, when the fate of the industry hinges on the actions of railroads, state legislatures, and angry taxpayers, undercutting other trucking companies doesn't help.

[351] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 1-2. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[352] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 2. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Some progress had been made, Bernays reported. Since the campaign began nine months earlier, the information bureaus had distributed 60,000 pieces of material to "wire services, syndicates, daily papers, general publications, radio stations…specialized audience media outlets…group opinion moulders," and organizations like farm bureaus and service clubs. 1,000 media outlets received photographs taken of the Golden Anniversary and "goodwill caravan"; a pamphlet on the cost-cutting effects of truck transportation was a hit; and Bransome and Dodge's speeches had received "nationwide publicity," ensuring "that the various desirable themes were given accelerated projection."[353] But the themes weren't gaining enough traction with the public.

Themes and Symbols

Up until this point, the primary narrative of Mack's public relations was "modern roads for modern living": roads should be built to foster a growing economy and populace; to restrict either traffic or trucking according to the limitations of current infrastructure was outdated, even unnatural. Modernization required unfettered expansion, technological progress, and the proliferation of luxury goods. In this narrative, railroads were symbols of the past, embittered anachronisms waging a dirty propaganda war against their natural successors. Trucks, meanwhile, were the symbolic and literal vehicles of economic growth. Events like the Golden Luncheon in June 1950 spotlighted these themes.

[353] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 5-6. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Professor Housel spoke about the need to build "Highways of the Future," while Bransome argued that "competition is what has made this national prosper…When and if airplanes take over longdistance [sic] hauling, we won't stand in the way of progress."[354] Why should Americans accept any limits on free enterprise?

Other themes directly related to the Cold War were present but not yet central to the campaign's overall messaging. But in the January 1951 report, Bernays recommended that the campaign more explicitly emphasize the utility of trucks and highways to prepare for possible nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Leaders of the armed forces had expressed how important trucking had been to U.S. victory in WWII and to the current crisis. "This opinion by the authorities," Bernays wrote, "must be developed into a general climate of public opinion until the truck becomes a symbol of our defense effort and a symbol of our very security."[355] The older narrative of the campaign – economic prosperity hindered by regressive restrictions – would be retained and brought into the context of the "national crisis." The campaign "must and will stress" that "our roads and highways are weapons of defense and offense…our roads and highways are an integral part of the assembly lines of our arsenal of democracy…the emergency highlights the bottlenecks and unnecessary restrictions brought about by conflicting and prejudicial state highway laws…civil defense demands necessary

[354] "Allentown Mayor Launches New Model "A" Mack: Professor Housel Urges Highways Adequate for Modern Traffic," 4. News release. Folder Miscellany June 1950, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[355] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 8. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

priorities for the adequate maintenance and necessary expansion of our trucking fleets in order to insure a trucking industry and a highway system prepared to shoulder the full burden of transportation, in the event of attack or sabotage crippling the railroads."[356] The new theme would be encapsulated in the phrase: "national security rides on trucks."

Over the course of the next two years, the PR campaign pivoted to these themes while largely relying on the same methods as before. The three information bureaus would disseminate the pamphlets, news releases, and speeches that embodied these overlapping themes, while the company would continue to orchestrate news events like caravans and luncheons, work with trucking and other groups to resist restrictive legislation, and sell these new developments to Mack's workforce via internal PR. Through these efforts, "the problems of the trucking industry can be identified sympathetically with the problems of our entire economy…[and] the anxieties and hopes of the citizen for a stronger America."[357]

Why the shift? As Bernays wrote, "themes must appeal to the motives of the public."[358] It had been less than two years since the Soviet Union conducted their first atomic test, and Americans were both fascinated and terrified by atomic weapons. Bernays may have reasoned that much of the public were unmoved by the trucking industry's claims of economic necessity and complaints of railroad

[356] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 8-9. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[357] "A Public Relations Plan for Mack Trucks, Inc.: A Review of 1950 and Plans for 1951," 9. Box I: 242, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[358] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 118.

propaganda. Touting "better living through increased highway transportation" wasn't going to cut it. For the PR campaign to succeed, highways had to become a matter of life and death.

Impact Report

Writing about PR, whether as an historian pondering its effects or as a PR counsel reporting to the boss, poses a dilemma. How do you measure the impact of activities that are intentionally indirect and seek to influence something as intangible as "the climate of public opinion"? As I have mentioned, even by the 1950s, public relations counsels struggled to "[sell] the boss" on the validity of their work.[359] For ambitious PR counsels like Bernays, that meant not only convincing the boss to the renew one's contract but selling him on the entire project of public relations. One sees the difficulty of measuring the impact of PR in Bernays' efforts to sell his bosses on the benefits of his work for them. In the "Budget" section of his October 1950 "Plans for Mack Leadership," for example, Bernays refrained from making any quantifiable guarantees, but promised that "favorable results…would be almost in direct ratio to the sums extended."[360] The introduction to his 1951 "Public Relations Plan" was another instance of PR for PR; after all, if the public's consumer behavior is largely irrational and

[359] Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, 160.
[360] The Report included in Bernays' archives was likely an unfinished one; the requested budget amount had not yet been filled in. "Plans for Mack Leadership," 11. Folder Reports Mack Trucks 1950-1951, Box I: 236, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

conditioned by "indirect influences," then shaping this behavior requires Bernays' indirect methods.

Based on the dates in Bernays' archives, he does not appear to have worked for Mack after 1952. Bernays' career reflects larger trends occurring in the early postwar period regarding the dynamic between PR and their corporate clients. Businessmen were increasingly likely to agree that PR was a necessary component of corporate strategy, but old habits die hard. Even the most PR-conscious businessmen could balk at the cost of hiring PR firms and at implementing projects that must have seemed impossibly indirect. Perhaps Bernays' employers at Mack eventually tired of his roundabout approach, the high cost of retaining his services, his self-aggrandizing personality, or some combination thereof. Or perhaps they decided he had accomplished enough of what they hired him to do: improve the "climate of public opinion" for the trucking industry and push state and federal lawmakers toward Mack's vision of the future of infrastructure.

Once Bernays left Mack Trucks, he no longer had to provide his bosses with quantifiable impact reports. In the decades following his campaign for Mack, Bernays consistently claimed that his work had been a primary contributor to the eventual passage of the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act which built the interstate highway system. In his unpublished memoirs, for example, he wrote that "today's network of highways that crisscross Americas, built at a cost of billions on the basis of state and federal cooperation, is the result of Macadam's idea, via

Bransome's talk at the Waldorf-Astoria."[361] He would repeat such claims in *The New York Times* profile in 1991. As I have shown, these claims were clearly an overstatement. It is true that Congress approved record sums to finance road and highway construction in the early 1950s, culminating in the $26 billion Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956.[362] But while the momentum for highway construction clearly accelerated in the early 1950s, tracing exactly when and how that momentum began to build leads far beyond Bernays' work for Mack. Highway lobbying in the early postwar period was a broad-based if unruly effort, in which Mack actively participated but did not, despite Bernays' intentions, lead.[363] Moreover, Mack's PR campaign was not the only one of its kind during this period. Project Adequate Roads (PAR), a multiyear lobbying campaign led by a coalition of trucking interests, automobile associations, road contractors, highway engineers, and organized labor, began in 1951. PAR's "'propaganda front'" involved the use of some of the methods Bernays employed at Mack, including "industry-wide conferences" and "an information dispensing service." According to Rose and Mohl, however, all this "public relations gimmickry…had failed to bridge fundamental differences" in the coalition, which was internally divided on

[361] Bernays, "Public Relations: A Personal History," 85. Folder #6 Public Relations Counsel: A Personal History, (unpublished), n.d., Box III: 68, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[362] In 1950, Congress approved $1.18 million to finance road construction for the next two years, and then increased that funding by another $1.78 million in 1952. In 1954, Congress authorized $1 billion in road and highway expenditures, explicitly earmarking $10 million for highways deemed significant to civil and/or military defense. "Federal Highway Aid," in *CQ Almanac 1954*, Volume 10, CQ Almanac Online Edition (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1955). http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal54-1359702.

[363] Archival records indicate that Bernays accurately assessed the disunified nature of the highway lobby in the early 1950s. But his 1950 proposal that Mack Trucks "let the internal conflicts within the trucking industry work themselves out" and take the lead themselves does not seem to have succeeded. Mack is never mentioned by Rose and Mohl or Kenneth Jackson in the books I consulted. See Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*; and Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

how to finance the highways they wanted.[364] Rose and Mohl attributed the eventual passage of the 1956 bill to the resolution of those disputes – "the decision of truckers and leaders of motorist associations, however reluctant, to sponsor the entire federal aid highway program" – and not to the campaign's propaganda efforts.[365]

Yet dismissing the impact of these public relations campaigns entirely would be a mistake. Walter Lippmann wrote in 1925 that "the ideal of public opinion is to align men during the crisis of a problem in such a way as to favor the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis." Bernays' PR campaign for United Fruit did not directly depose Arbenz, but it helped create the "climate of opinion" in the United States that then permitted the American government, Guatemalan opposition forces, and United Fruit to engineer a coup without fearing public backlash.[366] Likewise, under Bernays' direction Mack Trucks flooded the country with tens of thousands of news releases and articles; coaxed wide-ranging groups to support the highway lobby, including service clubs and fraternal organizations; and helped link roadbuilding to modernization, economic growth and national defense from atomic warfare. By shifting public opinion in Mack's favor, the campaign sought to build momentum for legislative action at the state and federal level. Public relations campaigns work through public opinion to influence those in power. Exactly how much Mack's PR campaign contributed to federal lawmakers' decisions to fund highway construction is

[364] Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 46.
[365] Rose and Mohl, *Interstate*, 92.
[366] McCann, *An American Company*, 47.

perhaps impossible to say, but it nonetheless played a role in "[changing] the road map of the country."[367]

The interstate highway system radically transformed American life in innumerable ways that resonate today.[368] Highways created vast economic opportunities, connecting small towns to big cities and facilitating travel and fast shipping. It also facilitated white flight to the suburbs and disinvestment in public transit; the destruction of poor Black and brown neighborhoods, designated as "urban blight," to make way for new highways; and the growth of cities built for driving, not walking or taking the train.[369] You can get just about anywhere in a car (or truck) in America. Driving is both a convenient, popular form of transportation and a leading cause of death every year.[370] Cars and trucks, moreover, account for 20% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions.[371] Economic expansion has its downsides.

Ethical Questions

Bernays may have been brilliant, but even he could not have foreseen all the benefits and adverse effects of American roadbuilding back in 1951.[372] To fully

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[367] Bernays, "Public Relations: A Personal History," 85. Folder #6 Public Relations Counsel: A Personal History, (unpublished), n.d., Box III: 68, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[368] Bernays, "Public Relations: A Personal History," 85. Folder #6 Public Relations Counsel: A Personal History, (unpublished), n.d., Box III: 68, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[369] Kevin Kruse, "How Segregation Caused Your Traffic Jam," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/traffic-atlanta-segregation.html.
[370] Marina Bolotnikova, "America's Car Crash Epidemic," *Vox*, September 19, 2021, https://www.vox.com/22675358/us-car-deaths-year-traffic-covid-pandemic.
[371] "Car Emissions & Global Warming," *Union of Concerned Scientists*, July 18, 2014. https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/car-emissions-global-warming.
[372] By 1991, though, he remained evidently proud of that work.

reckon with the ethical dimensions of his work, one must examine it in the context of his ethical commitments at the time. In his 1947 essay, Bernays wrote, "The public relations counsel has a professional responsibility to push only those ideas he can respect, and not to promote causes or accept assignments for clients he considers antisocial."[373] As an ethical rule, it is wide open to interpretation, bound only by what the individual deems "respectable" or "antisocial." Nonetheless Bernays insisted that PR counsels were different from the "bought and paid for" corporate spokesperson because of their commitment to uphold their values in their work.[374]

The causes promoted and assignments carried out by Bernays on Mack Truck's behalf do not conflict with his stated values so blatantly as did his work for United Fruit. In that case, the self-proclaimed liberal supporter of organized labor, racial tolerance, and feminism lent his efforts to a discriminatory, union-breaking company hell-bent on deposing an egalitarian president. Promoting highway construction for economic development and civil defense seem practically angelic by comparison. Bernays was careful to insist that the campaign was genuinely motivated by Mack's sincere interest in these causes, toeing the party line even in his private communications with his employers. Occasionally, though, he would acknowledge the potential for Mack to be seen as a cynical self-promoter. For example, in his "Plans for Mack Leadership," he wrote:

[373] Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 116.
[374] Thomas H. Bivins quotes Bernays on page 498 of his article, "A Golden Opportunity? Edward Bernays and the Dilemma of Ethics," *American Journalism* 30, no. 4 (January 2013).

"Admittedly there will be a recognizable element of self-interest in Mack's advocacy of modern roads for modern motor transport. However, such self-interest will be swallowed up in the obvious fact that the concept also states the self-interest of consumers and producers everywhere…Consequently, it will be exceedingly difficult for the opponents of trucking to make any effective counter campaign…"[375]

Beyond the ethicality of the causes Bernays helped promote, some of the methods Bernays employed for United Fruit and Mack Trucks demand closer ethical scrutiny. There is no evidence that Bernays sought to distort journalists' understanding of Mack through elaborately staged press junkets, like he did in Guatemala. Nonetheless, Bernays' press strategy relied on being able to send pro-Mack news releases to news media and have them published, sometimes verbatim, without revealing the source of the information. However, according to historian Thomas H. Bivins, Bernays had an ethical justification for that strategy, too. In 1928, a journalist wrote to Bernays to ask whether the PR counsel felt it was "'quite proper to send out material prepared by you in the interest of some organization without making clear to the editor that the source of the material is the organization itself?'"[376] In the decade following WWI, revelations of the extent of the government's domestic propaganda machine had left many wary of unseen manipulators of public opinion. During that period, Bernays sought to defend both the term "propaganda" and the practice of PR as pro-social forces

[375] "Plans for Mack Leadership 1950-51," October 10, 1950, 4. Folder Reports Mack Trucks 1950-1951, Box I: 237, Edward L. Bernays Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[376] Bivins, "A Golden Opportunity," 510.

that could bolster democracy rather than undermine it. In his response to the journalist, Bernays explained that it was entirely permissible for PR counsels to "enlist the interest" of a third party in the client's perspective. Then, if that third party chooses to "propagandize it through its own channels," the third party becomes the source of the information and the PR counsel "no longer need figure in the resulting expression to the public."[377] Once the editor of a newspaper has accepted the corporate news release, the PR counsel who provided it fades from the public's view.

If pressed, Bernays may have justified the hiring of Professor Housel along these lines, too. Enlisting the support of academic experts in the client's perspective is a basic component of engineering consent. Sure, paying him $75 a day may have turned Housel into a "bought and paid for" corporate spokesperson, but Housel insisted that his and Mack's viewpoints on highway construction were merely coincidental. Besides, he was merely exercising his "freedom of persuasion."[378] Bernays knew how to cover his bases.

Finally, Bernays claimed that the entire project of public relations was devoted to the public interest. As Bernays explained in his 1951 PR report, the masses may believe that they make choices based on a rational consideration of costs and benefits, but that is rarely true. "Indirect influences" are always at work on public opinion, inspiring emotional reactions – jealousy, desire, vanity, fear – that sway the masses far more than conscious deliberation. The engineers of

[377] Bivins, "A Golden Opportunity," 511-512.
[378] In the introduction to "The Engineering of Consent," Bernays argues that the "freedom of persuasion" is inherently guaranteed through the constitutional right to free speech.

consent merely provide a set of tools that bring order to the chaos, amassing public opinion behind the causes and leaders who know the public's interest better than they know it themselves.[379] How fortunate for the masses that, when Big Business wins, so do we all.

[379] See John Price Jones' essay "Organization" in *The Engineering of Consent* (1955).

Conclusion: On People and Profit

Proponents of public relations may argue that the tools of consent engineering may be equally utilized in service of noble and ignoble causes. To focus only on its more infamous applications, they might say, holds PR to an unfair standard and obscures all the good that PR can accomplish. Perhaps these proponents have a point. The tools of mass persuasion may certainly be used to engineer support for causes that you or I may consider just and necessary. As I stated in the introduction, PR has become a global industry worth billions of dollars; PR firms and counsels are hired by small businesses and multinational corporations alike, as well as by nonprofits and philanthropic organizations, and politicians across the ideological spectrum. Perhaps Bernays was right to argue that propaganda is merely a tool that can be used for good and bad ends, and that pro-social propaganda is a necessary foil to the anti-social. As Louis Brandeis famously said, the remedy for harmful or untruthful speech "is more speech, not enforced silence."[380]

Yet as other scholars have pointed out, the counterspeech doctrine falters under the weight of political and economic inequality.[381] The "freedom to persuade" may be implicitly guaranteed by our right to free speech, as Bernays argued in "The Engineering of Consent," but the ability to persuade is not an

[380] Mary Welek Atwell, "Louis Brandeis," *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, 2009, https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1316/louis-brandeis.
[381] David L. Hudson, Jr., "Counterspeech Doctrine, *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, December 2017, https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/940/counterspeech-doctrine#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20remedy%20for%20speech%20that,lie%2C%20the%20simple%20truth.%E2%80%9D.

equally distributed phenomenon: access to the tools of mass persuasion is guaranteed not by the Constitution but by money and power. The private interests with the funds and connections to propagandize their point of view will be the most successful in persuading the masses. This is especially true in a country that has defined money as speech and extended the right to free expression to corporations.[382] Legal permission, therefore, is not a sufficient justification for harmful conduct. Just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you should.

Nor must we accept ethical standards that justify manipulative means by appealing to the supposed righteousness of the ends they serve, especially when the arbiter of righteousness is none other than the practitioner himself. Nicholas Samstag, of all people, said it best in his essay for *The Engineering of Consent*: "It may be said that to take advantage of a man's credulity, to exploit his misapprehensions, to capitalize on his ignorance is morally reprehensible – and this may well be the case. Nor can the situation be made more palatable by emphasizing that the purpose for which the strategy is employed (the end) far transcends the importance of the means…How, we ask ourselves, can a house built upon injustice stand…unless the world…be also dedicated to injustice?"[383] How indeed?

Ethical gymnastics aside, at its core PR seeks to apply techniques of mass persuasion to convince the target audience that their interests coincide with the private interest of the client. These techniques may be applied to "sound" causes

[382] Tim Lau, "Citizens United Explained," *Brennan Center for Justice*, December 12, 2019, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/citizens-united-explained.
[383] Nicholas Samstag, "Strategy," in *The Engineering of Consent* (1955), ed. Edward L. Bernays (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 137.

(though that designation depends, of course, on the eye of the beholder); and sometimes the private interest of the client may genuinely coincide with that of the publics they seek to influence (though many times, of course, it clearly does not). However, as we have seen, the historical roots of public relations' ethical and methodological approaches emerge from two assumptions: first, that people are manipulable; and second, that we should seek ever more advanced ways of manipulating them.

The first assumption is clearly true. People are not exclusively rational actors constantly appraising the costs and benefits of the different moves we might make. Instead, we are susceptible both to emotional appeals that try to sidestep logical thinking, and to persuasive methods that target our rational sides – whether by introducing alternative information, imposing false dichotomies on our thinking, or restricting the range of outcomes we believe are possible. But the upshot of that assumption – that it is ethically permissible, even desirable, to take advantage of the human susceptibility to persuasion to accomplish some private interest – is an argument that we need not accept. In particular, we ought to reject outright the claim that some elite group of "invisible governors" knows what causes or courses of action are in the public interest.[384] As we have seen with United Fruit Company and Mack Trucks, what is advocated by PR counsels and their clients as the "public interest" is more often than not a cover for inducing the government to enact policies that favor their interests.

[384] Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1928), 9.

The 21st century incarnations of the engineering of consent mindset are all around us. Consent engineering treats the public as a means to an end, applying persuasive methods to elicit beliefs and behavior that will serve the client. It hijacks democratic rhetoric and legitimacy to justify its methods and causes: see, for example, Bernays' "freedom to persuade"; or the use of "information bureaus" that created the illusion that many voices were clamoring for more highways or concerned about Guatemalan communism when, in fact, the information originated from one place. Today, we are reckoning with the consequences of our own communications technology revolution. The public relations industry, by and large, continues to present itself as neutral technicians applying tried-and-true techniques to what the client wishes to promote. Russian botnets manufacture the illusion of many voices by posing as ordinary American voters, harnessing social media platforms to carry out misinformation campaigns.[385] Like Bernays' campaigns, botnets seek to create a "climate of opinion" while obscuring the identities of the speakers in order to engineer some political outcome. Tech companies, which have long championed their services as safeguards for democracy, respond to these campaigns by becoming the arbiters of acceptable online discourse.[386][387] Surveillance capitalism, which Shoshanna Zuboff has

[385] Gabe O'Connor and Avie Schneider, "How Russian Twitter Bots Pumped Out Fake News During The 2016 Election," *NPR*, April 3, 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2017/04/03/522503844/how-russian-twitter-bots-pumped-out-fake-news-during-the-2016-election.
[386] For a discussion of tech companies' portrayal of themselves, see Haythem Guesmi's "The social media myth about the Arab Spring," *Al Jazeera*, January 27, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/27/the-social-media-myth-about-the-arab-spring.
[387] Ahiza García-Hodges, "Big Tech has big power over online speech. Should it be reined in?" *NBC News*, January 21, 2021, https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/big-tech-has-big-power-over-online-speech-should-it-n1255164.

defined as "a new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales," treats the public as both consumers and products, collecting data ("behavioral surplus") to create incredibly sophisticated behavioral predictions.[388] These predictions then allow whichever third party buys them to anticipate and direct people's actions without their knowledge or consent. Inasmuch as people understand that they are being manipulated, the mechanisms by which this occurs are deliberately rendered obscure and thus seem intractable.[389]

What might be effective ways to counter these newer iterations of the logic of consent engineering? As we saw in Chapter 2, liberal academics and journalists of the 1950s articulated their critiques of PR in the language of individual freedoms and rights. Vance Packard, for example, wrote in 1957 that "it is this right to privacy in our minds – privacy to be either rational or irrational – that I believe we must strive to protect."[390] For these critics, education was both the foil and the solution to propaganda: if we can teach people to identify and analyze propaganda, we will create generations of free thinkers who will defend democratic norms and institutions. That had been John Dewey's answer to Walter

[388] Zuboff also defines surveillance capitalism as "a parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification," calling it "as significant a threat to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth." Shoshanna Zuboff, "The Definition" in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).
[389] This list of contemporary examples of mass persuasion is far from exhaustive, and I do not pretend to have concrete solutions to current debates about how much and what kinds of speech and persuasion are permissible, or who should get to decide. Nor do I mean to suggest that the roots of these present-day crises are directly traceable to Bernays and *The Engineering of Consent*. Rather, I aim to show that the approaches and problems that characterized midcentury PR are still with us.
[390] Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: David McKay Company, 1957), 266.

Lippmann in the 1920s, too, and it is a line of thinking that has continued in more recent scholarship. In the coda to his 1997 book *PR! A Social History of Spin*, Stuart Ewen argued that we must counter mass persuasion with education that cultivates "media and visual literacy," thereby "democratizing the tools of public expression" and "[enlarging] the circle of who is permitted – and who is able – to interpret and make sense of the world."[391]

The history of propaganda analysis and education indicates some of the challenges that the educational approach may face today. Tracing the full extent of that history is beyond the scope of my thesis, but the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA) offers one instructive example. The IPA, founded in 1937 by social scientists, aimed to analyze all forms of propaganda with a value-neutral lens and provide educational resources to teachers and academics to help them do the same.[392] As WWII began, however, it became politically unviable to continue analyzing Nazi propaganda in the same breath as the propaganda of PR counsels or American radio personalities. By 1940, the IPA's funding dried up; many of its staffers, moreover, switched from propaganda analysis to propaganda itself, applying their skills to the Office of War Information and other federal

[391] Ewen notes also that one of the primary issues is that "the circulation of ideas is governed by enormous concentrations of wealth that have, as their underlying purpose, the perpetuation of their own power." As one solution to that problem, Ewen suggests the creation of a fund for noncommercial forms of expression and education, sponsored by commercial entities that profit from using public property (e.g., broadcasting services). See *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 411-14.

[392] The IPA is best known today for having coined the "seven propaganda devices:" name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card stacking, and bandwagon. Each IPA article was followed by "Suggested Activities and Discussion Notes" for their readers. See "How to Detect Propaganda," *Propaganda Analysis* 1, no.2 (November 1937): 5.

propaganda agencies during WWII.[393] The trajectory of the IPA illuminates the kinds of problems that value-neutral propaganda analysis is up against, especially during a period of crisis. In raising these concerns, however, I am not proposing that we abandon efforts to teach people how to recognize and resist mass persuasion. Education that teaches students to analyze all sources of information with a healthy mix of curiosity and skepticism is a necessary component of a healthy democracy. But education without structural change is not enough.

The history of PR in the 20th century points to the kinds of structural issues in mass media, communications technology, and the legal system that we must address in the present. We must identify and denounce the use of democratic rhetoric to mask undemocratic substance, and we must not restrict the scope of our denunciation to the realm of philosophical or moral arguments. Debates about social media content moderation are too limited if they do not address the algorithms that purposefully amplify the most inflammatory forms of speech. To effectively counter the manipulative logic of surveillance capitalism, we must strengthen digital privacy laws while also targeting the tech monopolies that make alternatives to that business model unworkable. In short, we must take aim at the economic and technological structures that incentivize and facilitate mass persuasion, and in doing so, overcome the forces that seek to reduce people to profit.

[393] For an extended discussion of the IPA, see Chapter 5: Propaganda Analysis, Incorporated, of J. Michael Sproule's *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129-167.

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