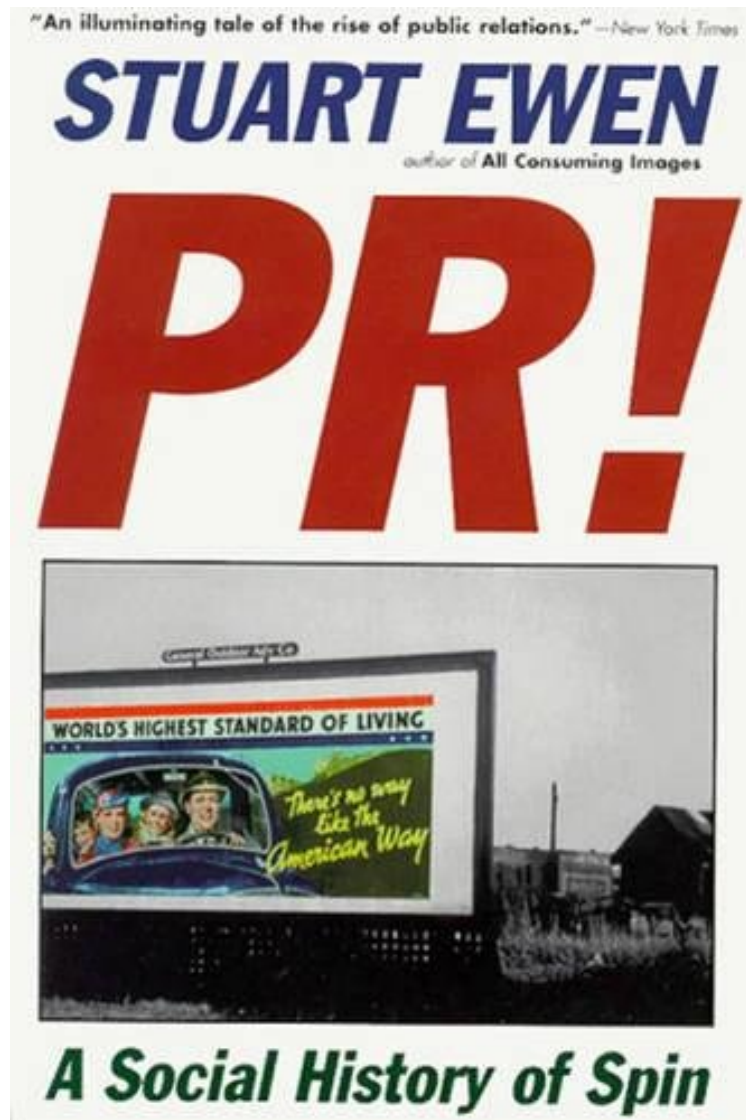


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PR! - A Social History of Spin

Stuart Ewen

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Stuart Ewen : PR! - A Social History of Spin before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised PR! - A Social History of Spin:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Public Relations: To inform or persuade? By ewomack Public relations (PR) has become so pervasive that its very existence almost goes undetected. Some of it remains on such a level of subtlety that many observers would never notice. Seeing PR requires knowing what to look for. It lurks in obvious places such as advertising and political dialogue. But it can also appear in less obvious places such as photography, movies, television shows and news stories. Once it makes itself known the realization that the modern

world is literally covered with PR hits home like a flail to the torso. This realization can dig so deep that one's own identity can even come into question. How much of who we are, what we believe in, and our framework of the world has come from public relations offices? Probably a fair amount. Decoding this miasma of stratified information would encumber a lifetime. Stuart Ewen, the author of this very ambitious history of public relations, struggles with this same question in chapter two. After all, Where is the objective frame of reference for studying something as *ber alles* as PR? Perhaps such a perspective exemplifies philosopher Thomas Nagel's "view from nowhere." "PR! A Social History of Spin" covers a lot of infrequently covered ground. How many have heard of the now defunct United States Committee of Public Relations (CPI)? Or the philosophy of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)? It's all here. Roughly, the book covers attitudes towards and potential controlling of "the crowd" or "the public" from 1907 to the 1980s. The definition of "public relations" remains elusive throughout, but it takes on various meanings through the delineation of its history over some 400 pages. In the end, "public relations" involves a mosaic of multifarious concepts, attitudes and methodologies. All involve projecting specific ideas of reality to "the public" at large. As this book shows, voluminous creativity has gone into this idea. The book opens with the author's visit to arguably one of the most influential, and least known publicly, practitioners of public relations: Edward Bernays. Some think he was even more influential than his uncle Sigmund Freud. Bernays applied many of Freud's psychoanalytic ideas to mass persuasion. He created an industry and, arguably, a way of life still in effect today. His endless list of PR accomplishments includes breaking the social taboo against women smoking and providing a framework for public relations. This framework, from the 1947 essay "The Engineering of Consent" includes three main elements: 1. Study the public as "raw materials"; 2. sway the public through emotional, not intellectual, appeals; 3. Create news via stagecraft. These elements, according to the author, still guide PR today. Bernays' thought represents one major branch of public relations. The book covers both perspectives in depth. On one side sit those who believe that those in power should sway "the masses" with methodologies of persuasion. In other words, they should create a reality to keep the public "in check." Bernays exemplifies this position (perhaps "Bernaysians" would serve as a fitting moniker?). On the other side sit those who think public relations should inform, not persuade the public. The "Progressive Publicists" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries propounded this idea. To such thinkers, information provides the panacea for social ills. An informed public is an empowered public. The swing between these nearly opposing poles pervades the history of public relations, though the book suggests that the followers of Bernays have triumphed. Conceding this, a short concluding chapter asks what implications Bernaysianism carries for modern democracy. An interesting chapter explores the public relations of the Roosevelt New Deal administration. As frustration towards business practices skyrocketed throughout the 1930s, public relations was used fervently against Wall Street. The New Deal even utilized both branches of public relations to create support for social welfare programs. Using both emotional and intellectual appeals, FDR kept the New Deal alive until a massive business backlash following the war. During the late 1940s and 1950s, business borrowed New Deal tactics for their own ends. Social programs, taxation, and communism fell under the axe of this era's PR. Looking at today's landscape, this approach proved extremely successful. By appropriating New Deal rhetoric of "the greater good," late 20th century business practitioners were able to undermine many of FDR's social programs. As television entered the public sphere, the public relations industry saw a golden opportunity. And they took it. As early as 1955 a book entitled "Telephone News on Television" provided guidance for mass persuasion via television. The book's bulk deals mainly with post-war public relations. Not until the book's fifth and final part does television enter the discussion. The post 1950s era gets largely sequestered to chapters 15 and 16. Those looking for contemporary perspectives on PR will only find nibbles here. Though the book nonetheless remains incredibly relevant today. Also, its publication date of 1996 pretty much precludes any discussion of the now most pervasive PR tool: the internet. And though the author's political stance stands out like neon, the book provides a fascinating, potentially life-altering, perspective on modern media and modern life. The thick pages of "PR! A social history of spin" carry massive implications for anyone living in a modern democracy. People from any political persuasion will benefit. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Can't go wrong reading this book! By Shaunessy I first bought/read this book over a dozen years ago. It was an enlightening read providing a lot of insight into the world of public relations and advertising. I've recommended this book to friends as a great primer and most agree this is a great read. I've read several works since on the subject matter and while this was my "first" it's hard to compare them as this one did such a great job. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great depth and understanding of the field which is represents By Customer Just what I was looking for. Full of information. Great depth and understanding of the field which is represents. I highly recommend for anyone looking to understanding the public marketing of items.

The early years of the twentieth century were a difficult period for Big Business. Corporate monopolies, the brutal exploitation of labor, and unscrupulous business practices were the target of blistering attacks from a muckraking press and an increasingly resentful public. Corporate giants were no longer able to operate free from the scrutiny of the masses. The crowd is now in the saddle, warned Ivy Lee, one of America's first corporate public relations men. The people now rule. We have substituted for the divine right of kings, the divine right of the multitude. Unless

corporations developed means for counteracting public disapproval, he cautioned, their future would be in peril. Lee's words heralded the dawn of an era in which corporate image management was to become a paramount feature of American society. Some corporations, such as ATT, responded inventively to the emergency. Others, like Standard Oil of New Jersey (known today as Exxon), continued to fumble the PR ball for decades. The Age of Public Relations had begun. In this long-awaited, pathbreaking book, Stuart Ewen tells the story of the Age unfolding: the social conditions that brought it about; the ideas that inspired the strategies of public relations specialists; the growing use of images as tools of persuasion; and, finally, the ways that the rise of public relations interacted with the changing dynamics of public life itself. He takes us on a vivid journey into the thinking of PR practitioners from Edward Bernays to George Gallup exploring some of the most significant campaigns to mold the public mind, and revealing disturbing trends that have persisted to the present day. Using previously confidential sources, and with the aid of dozens of illustrations from the past hundred years, Ewen sheds unsparing light on the contours and contradictions of American democracy on the threshold of a new millennium.

.com As "spin" assumes an omnipresent role in contemporary discourse, chasing out frank or direct speech with buzzwords and carefully weighted terminology, the time is ripe for a study of the industry that started it all. Stuart Ewen has written an exhaustive study of public relations that traces the evolution of PR throughout the 20th century, from the history of early advertising to its role in politics and "corporate communications." PR! is a book not just for industry types or communications majors, it contains thoughtful reflections on the impact of manufactured media on our culture and democracy, topics relevant to all. From Publishers Weekly Is there any difference between PR and propaganda? Ewen (All Consuming Images), a professor of media studies at Hunter College in Manhattan, doesn't think so. Accordingly, his account of the rise of the public relations industry begins with the U.S. Committee on Public Information, a government-sponsored organization dedicated to maintaining domestic morale during WWI. In the aftermath of the war, Ewen argues, public relations developed largely out of a corporate fear that genuine democracy would obstruct the workings of big business, with PR pioneer Edward Bernays offering, as he phrased it, lessons in "the engineering of consent." As corporations like ATT began to perceive the importance of utilizing public relations in the face of a public increasingly suspicious of monolithic companies, the PR industry hit its stride by learning to incorporate many of the tactics and iconography of the New Deal while simultaneously opposing its progressive politics. Ewen's book trails off after the 1940s; he doesn't substantially probe the colossal impact of television or the incursion of PR methods into politics in more recent times. And although he presents a convincing portrait of a business elite attempting to use techniques of persuasion to distort and mold public opinion, he doesn't fully address the question of PR's effectiveness. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal A social critic and historian concerned with images and the power they have on society, Ewen (Channels of Desire, Univ. of Minnesota, 1992) presents here a social history of public relations in the United States. Modern PR rose as an attempt to explain the turmoil and confusion that occurred in the country from the end of the Civil War to the first decade of the 20th century. Public reaction to the excesses of industrialization and the growing immigrant classes caused many in power to fear that the "American way of life" was being destroyed. Ewen reviews the ongoing conflict in public relations between those who think the public is rational and want to present the facts and let people make up their minds, and those who think that opinion can be shaped by appeals to unconscious urges. Ewen gives fascinating examples of the communication similarities between FDR and Reagan, and why ATT was loved by the public and Standard Oil hated. This provocative book should be purchased by all public and academic libraries. William W. Sannwald, San Diego P. L. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.