



"Our morale
as a people
and as a profession
depends on
a common belief
in a common past,
a common present
and a common future."

The Bicentennial Lecture
by Edward L. Bernays

On April 22, 1976, during Patriots' Week in America's Bicentennial year, New England Chapter, Public Relations Society of America, invited the father of the public relations profession to deliver a Bicentennial Lecture keyed to the role & status of public relations in the free society.

Edward L. Bernays and Doris Fleischman Bernays, his wife & lifetime professional partner, have practiced public relations for more than half the Bicentennial years.

The zeal, the spirit and the confidence with which we as citizens and members of a profession attack our problems depends on our morale. And our morale in turn, as a people and as a profession, depends on common belief in a common past, a common present and a common future.

Our morale as a people has suffered due to a number of reasons: the recession, Watergate, CIA, FBI and other scandals. We Americans have lost confidence in our institutions and leaders as shown by all of the polls. The morale of public relations professionals has suffered, too, from unjustified blame for activities misnamed public relations carried out by Nixon's henchmen.

Now let me discuss first U.S. **Bicentennial** celebrations and our morale as a people. Primitive tribes lifted their morale at seed time and harvest time with merrymaking. As civilization developed, nations celebrated anniversaries emphasizing past and present accomplishments. Regrettably, until now, emphasis in our Bicentennial celebrations has centered on the past: guns and trumpets, marching, mock mayhem and overdone playacting of the past. To this was added presentday crass commercialism and oratorical nonsense. Our Bicentennial celebrations, it seems to me, need also to look forward and to stress the fulfillment of the unfinished revolution defined 200 years ago in terms of freedom, equality and orderly justice for all. And yet many ills plague the nation: unemployed millions; millions suffer from hunger and poverty; from racial—and all we have to do is look at Boston—and religious, and sex discrimination; unequal justice under the law; and unequal economic opportunity.

"Birthdays are feathers in the broad wing of time," said author Jean Paul Richter. Our national Bicentennial celebrations should serve both a useful and an enjoyable purpose. The National Education Association, the great religious denominations, many group leaders and opinion leaders, in letters to me, have supported this concept of looking forward. And here I offer a suggestion. Voluntary associations of varied group interests and interest groups that make up America should initiate meetings, conferences, seminars, symposia and other events to plan for the fulfilling of unfulfilled promises of the Revolution. Our ideals would come closer to realization. Public relations

experts, men and women, can offer their expertise to these groups and carry out an important public service and lift the morale of the American people and coincidentally their own. So much for the morale of the nation in this Bicentennial year.

Now, as to **the morale of our profession**, its belief in a common past, a common present and future obviously plays an important role in its effectiveness. Let's review for a moment these three time periods. The words public relations in juxtaposition were first used to mean relations for the general good in lawyer Dorman Eaton's address to the Yale Law School graduating class in 1882. The profession was named and its ethics, scope and functions defined years later in a book I wrote called *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923. But here's the interesting point. Actually public relations activities, without specific designation, were carried on long before.

With pride, we can all celebrate the vital role **public relations played** in bringing about the American Revolution and the birth of the nation. Books of eminent historians and other writers give insight into such activities by many Revolutionary heroes. Let me name them: Samuel Adams, John Dickinson, Patrick Henry, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Here is a short reading list. (I find it's always sound to validate everything and anything.) Alfred McClung Lee's *The Daily Newspaper in America*; Vernon Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*; Charles Beard's *The Rise of American Civilization*, Philip Davidson's *Propaganda in the American Revolution*; and don't forget that the word propaganda stemmed from the *Collegio de Propaganda Fide* initiated by Pope Urban VIII in the 16th century; J.C. Miller's *Sam Adams, Pioneer in Propaganda* and M.C. Tyler's *Patrick Henry*.

The men I refer to used public relations strategies and tactics to rally the people to the Revolutionary cause. They created what I call overt acts or created circumstances, like the Boston Tea Party; or they organized committees of correspondence; and they wrote and publicized the Declaration of Independence. The printing press and its output—newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, tracts—played an important role in informing and persuading the Colonists on revolution. Charles Beard, a very distinguished historian, says that the political and cultural signifi-

cance of **newspapers in the Revolution** (and I'm quoting him) "can hardly be over-estimated". They developed a national consciousness among the Colonists. Despite transportation difficulties, articles advocating revolution in one paper were reprinted throughout the Colonies. Colonial newspaper editors encouraged the protests of leaders . . . and their public relations activities.

As a matter of fact, the first printing press in the Colonies arrived in Cambridge in 1638. The first newspaper, *The Boston Newsletter*, was published in 1704. An interesting point: the arrest, the trial and the freeing of John Peter Zenger in the mid 1730's dramatized the fight for freedom of expression. He had criticized the British authorities, was arrested and then was acquitted after a trial. He became a dynamic symbol for freedom and often was recalled later by the Colonies' newspapers. After 1750 politics, reporting of local events, letters from prominent people and political cartoons took the place of poetry, correspondence and reports from Britain in the newspapers.

As the **spirit for Independence** grew, British authorities tried licensing, censorship and taxation to control the press. Actually, by 1765 every colony except New Jersey and Delaware had at least one newspaper and these two used the newspapers of neighboring states. And here is a footnote that I found in my reading which is devastatingly interesting. Most of the written activity and spoken activity stemmed from the philosophy of John Locke who, after England's 1688 Revolution, had affirmed the right of citizens to overthrow governments that confiscated money or property. Publicists and editors paraphrased Locke, expanded his concepts, repeated them in newspapers, at meetings, in resolutions, in proclamations, in declarations and in constitutions. That may teach a lesson to all of us.

Now let me comment on the activities of some of these men—not to give you a historical treatise, but to indicate that the strategies and techniques you're using found great potency even then. The public relations men of the Revolution and their activities conform to my definition of public relations: relations with the public in which adjustment, information, persuasion and leadership play important roles and in which the primary consideration and objective is the public interest.

Alfred McClung Lee calls **Samuel Adams** the father of the American Revolution "because he was a press agent who could dim the feats of many successors". His thesis for his Harvard M.A. in 1743 foreshadowed his future and was titled, "Whether it be lawful to resist the Supreme Magistrate, if the Commonwealth cannot be otherwise preserved". He disseminated material for American independence from 1748-1776 thru newspapers and pamphlets. He set up Committees of Correspondence in eight towns (political parties do that today) to which he sent copies of his paper, *The Independent Advertiser and Gazette*. His committees publicized the Boston Massacre of 1770 and the Boston Tea Party 1773 throughout the colonies. Authorities say that he did more to mold and direct public opinion in his community than any other man. Vernon Parrington, in his *Main Currents in American Thought*, states that Adams occupies a distinguished place in the history of the rise of political democracy and that he became "a master political strategist, the first of our great popular leaders." So much for Samuel Adams.

Let me discuss another revolutionary public relations man, **John Dickinson**. He is called the penman of the Revolution. As a member of the 1765 Stamp Act Congress, he wrote its Declaration of Rights and Petition to the King. He authored the Articles of Confederation of the Continental Congress of 1777. He attacked British coercion and appealed to the common man with simple legal arguments. That's a good lesson if you're dealing with a legal question, I would say. *The Letters of a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, which he wrote and published in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* in 1766-67, were reprinted in 21 of the 25 colonial newspapers and went through numerous pamphlet editions. (I think many of us may not be using the reprint method as much as we might. I personally have found it a most effective way of building public visibility and getting public support.) Dickinson College, which he helped to found, bears his name.

Thomas Paine, another public relations man of the Revolution, was the son of a Quaker staymaker in Britain. He had only a meager grammar school education. He arrived in America in 1774, fortunately with letters from Benjamin Franklin who was in London at the time. These

letters were to independence movement leaders. Paine became the most effective spokesman for the Revolution. He founded the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. His famous *Common Sense*, written in simple persuasive language, published in January 1776, asked for an independent American republic. (I try never to use sentences over 16 words, sentences that have low obfuscation index, monosyllabic if possible, with one idea to a sentence.) Colonial newspapers reprinted it, authorities say it was read everywhere, and the open movement for independence stemmed from its publication date. The pamphlet's circulation was 120,000 in a population of 2 million, so you can work out by higher geometrics what the circulation would be today. George Washington said, "It worked a powerful change in the minds of men." And later, when the conflict went against the Colonists, Paine's tract *The Crisis*, with its opening line "These are the times that try men's souls," became the rallying cry for the embattled patriots.

And now we get to **Patrick Henry**. His oratory helped mold public opinion and support for the Revolution, but only after early difficulties. He had made slow progress in reading, writing and mathematics in a small country school and failed twice as a storekeeper and once as a farmer. (Never discount anybody when he's young.) His reading of Greek, Roman and English history, after his experience at failures, gave him the impetus to become a lawyer. In three years he had 1185 cases, was the idol of the people. He became a member of the Colonial Legislature in 1765 and his "give me liberty or give me death" speech rallied the Colonists to revolution's banner. His Virginia Resolutions, written when he was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses to resist the Stamp Act, asserted the right of the people to legislate for themselves. The resolutions were also widely circulated thru the Colonies, though the British tried to suppress them.

The most effective and most famous document written by the public relations minded heroes of the Revolution was the Declaration of Independence by **Thomas Jefferson**. We may well owe the strength of this document to Jefferson's weakness of voice which made it impossible for him to speak continuously. He had neither the temperament nor the ability to orate. He hated what he

called "the morbid rage of debate". (Do not debate; blank your opposition.) He believed people were not convinced by argumentation (argumentation is simply an attack on the other fellow's ego if you disagree with him) but believed that by reading and unprovocative conversation converts might be made. An interesting fact: in 1774 he wrote a Summary of the Rights of Americans for the Continental Congress, which received so much public visibility here and in England that the honor of drafting the Declaration of Independence naturally was passed to him. Later, in his own words, Jefferson explained the public relations reasons for the Declaration of Independence. (And I'm quoting this because it applies so well to any statements you may make.) "When forced, therefore, to resort to arms for redress, an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification. This was the object of our Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles or arguments never before thought of, not merely to say things that never had been said; but also to place before mankind the common sense of the subject in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind and to give that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion."

These are some significant contributions public relations made to the birth of our nation. These facts may strengthen our morale as public relations people both for the present and the future. And the American people, once they know these facts, may have a more balanced view about public relations.

As for today, 200 years later, speeded-up communication, transportation, and greater literacy have increased people power. Society has become increasingly complex. It is vital to the continued existence of all society's institutions that a societal technician of moral integrity be available to interpret the public to the institution and the institution to the public. That is why the profession of public relations by and large is accepted by all facets of society today. The latest bibliographies list over 10,000 references and at-

test to its professional status. U.S. university academic courses and higher degrees attest to its professionalism. Weekly, monthly and quarterly periodicals keep the estimated (and the estimate varies) 60,000 men and women engaged in its practice informed of what goes on and what is to be. Voluntary associations like the Public Relations Society of America in the U.S. and in many countries of the free world (I counted 31 such countries) provide additional evidence of professional advice given clients or employers on relations with the public on which they are dependent for their visibility.

Now, as to the planning by the public relations profession for the fulfillment of its own **unfinished goals** for the future. Universities, it seems to me, should be urged to give greater concern to providing education for men and women intending to enter public relations, that will enable them to meet the challenges of the unfinished revolution of the larger country they live in. This will mean, it seems to me, intensive study of the social sciences with particular reference to the study of public opinion. (I might add, for instance, that Harvard's Kennedy School of Politics has no courses in depth on public opinion—an indication of the sort of thing that would need to be done.) Crucially important also are social psychology and the history of ideas.

The state I am sure will need to register and **license public relations** men and women to ensure practice of the highest moral integrity, knowledge and experience. This will avoid having the profession submit to men like those in Nixon's circle calling themselves public relations practitioners. Public relations will need to play an increasingly important leadership role (and I use the words "leadership role") by its enlightened socially sound policy advice (and I stress the word "policy" because I don't regard information as anything but a corollary and a sequence of policy, based on the public and private coincidence).

In this Bicentennial year, and for years after, public relations can speed peaceful realization of a society based on freedom, equality and orderly justice envisioned by the Founding Fathers.