

Wednesday, May 23, 1984

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Sire of the Big Sell

By Michael Kernan

It is easy to say that Edward L. Bernays is the Father of Public Relations. People have been calling him that for years, and they don't get much argument.

What they really want to say, but don't quite dare, is that Edward L. Bernays is the Father of Us All.

Edward L. Bernays: The Father of PR

He is certainly old enough. He is 92½, as he points out with some glee, and he doesn't miss a trick, or a name, or a date. He doesn't even wear glasses.

Yesterday he flew down from Cambridge to lecture at the National Portrait Gallery. He does this all the time. In the last few weeks he has been to Florida and

Puerto Rico to speak. It is less a lecture than a marvelous outpouring of anecdotes. It is a form of memoir, the memoir he doesn't

have time to write.

"I started to write one at 72," he told an interviewer, "but someone said, 'Why don't you wait 'til you're dead?'"

That may be some time.

This is the man who took the colorful but sleazy trade of the press agent and turned it into a profession, complete with code of

ethics. America has never been the same since.

• In 1913 people didn't take many baths. You had to heat the water yourself and pour it by the kettleful into the tin tub. Besides, the soap stung your eyes. Bernays, straight out of Cornell with a degree in agriculture (his father had insisted; it had something to do with Teddy Roosevelt's back-to-the-land movement), was editor of the Dietetic and Hygienic Gazette at \$25 a week. He ran a campaign promoting the joys of showering, and a few years later he followed up with the Procter and Gamble Ivory Soap carving contest.

Within a year, 22 million American kids were making friends with soap by sculpting cats, bears and snails. The Saturday Night Bath passed into history.

• Actor Richard Bennett, father of Joan and Constance, wanted to put on an avant-garde play, "Damaged Goods," about venereal disease. He knew he'd never get it past Anthony

Comstock, a sort of moral dictator of the time. Bernays set up a committee that produced the play as a sociological study. Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were among those who bought memberships at \$4 apiece.

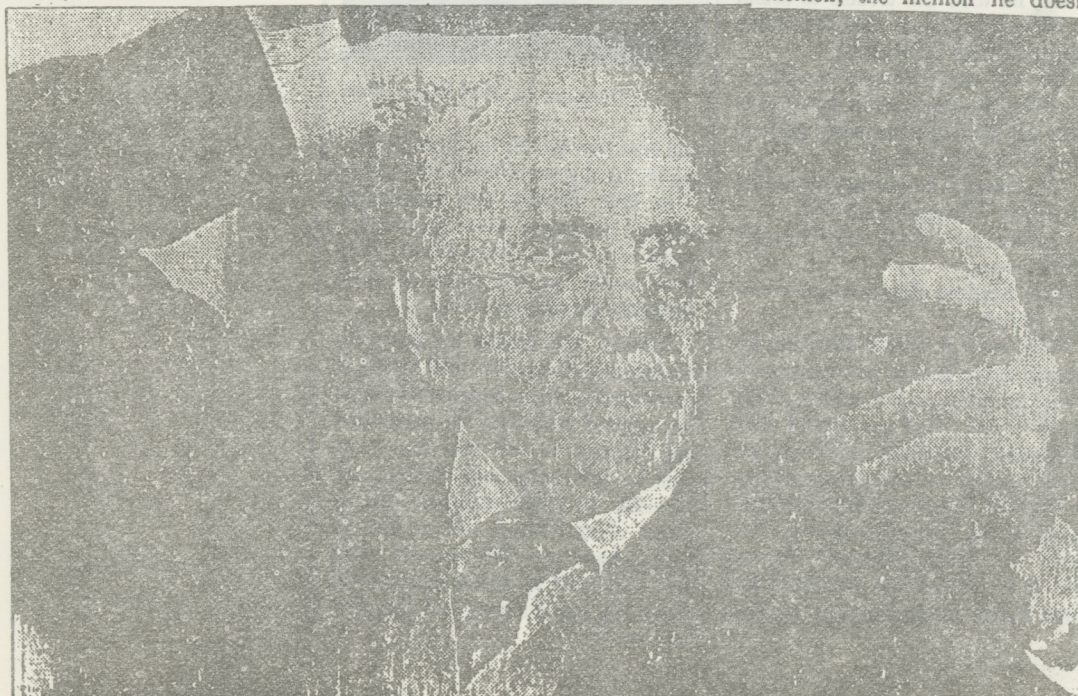
The play was a hit. The social hygiene movement was launched, and Americans began to hear about something called sex education.

• 1915. Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, with Nijinsky and Karsovinia, was coming to the Metropolitan. But the American public knew next to nothing about ballet. What to do? Call in Bernays.

"We treated it as an art form combining many others: dance, music, drama, scene painting, costumes—with men in it, too," he said. "People could understand that."

He tried to get Edward Bok, editor of the Ladies Home Journal, to run a photo of the dancers. "Our public wouldn't stand for women with their skirts above their knees," said the grandfather of the Derek Bok, president of Harvard. "Not to worry," said Bernays. "We'll retouch 'em." And he did. And the picture ran in the January 1916 issue. America's love affair with ballet had just been ignited.

• Caruso. Oh yes, in his Metropolitan Opera days, Bernays promoted the great tenor. "He called me Bernaysie. Once we were at a hotel and he said he absolutely had to have 23 pillows. It was 2 in the morning, but we woke up some people and eventually got him 23 pillows. He arranged them all around his bed and lay down



Bernays: "It all comes down to planning and research."

By Joel Richardson—The Washington Post