

Spinning the World

Spinning the World is the first book to examine the public relations (PR) industry's hidden hand of influence on American foreign relations. By working with groups of American citizens, domestic and overseas businesses, and US and foreign governments, PR firms influenced foreign policy debates and shaped how Americans thought about their place in the world in the twentieth century. Since World War I, the relationship between the PR industry and American foreign relations has been complex and controversial. The century saw recurring debates and investigations into PR's role in creating propaganda, as fears grew that PR might be used to undermine American democracy. Convincing the American people to buy products as consumers was one thing. Persuading them to think differently about the nation's place in the world as citizens was something else altogether. In this book, Andrew Johnstone shows how business interests helped shape the broader national interest, for better or worse.

Andrew Johnstone is an associate professor of history at the University of Leicester. He is the author and editor of five books, including *Against Immediate Evil* and *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy* (with Andrew Priest).

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*The Public Relations Industry and American
Foreign Relations*

ANDREW JOHNSTONE

University of Leicester



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Acknowledgments

In October 1949, public relations (PR) pioneer Arthur Page wrote that “history is written backward. The historians go on the basis of showing how the past leads up to their present. So if they dislike capital, history will provide the reasons. If they dislike a strong, central government they write about Thomas Jefferson. If they like a strong government they write a new life of Hamilton. Jefferson and Hamilton chase each other across our literature every fifteen or twenty years.”¹ Page may have been right about Hamilton, but not about the origins of *this* book. While I can forgive the casual reader for assuming this book was inspired by concerns about disinformation or some other contemporary incident, it actually evolved more directly out of my last book on the debate over US entry into World War II. My study of citizens’ groups that sought a more active global role for the United States in 1938–1941 revealed that all of them used PR firms in some form. This got me wondering whether PR firms engaged in other foreign relations related activity (the short answer: yes). That led first to an article in 2019 and ultimately to this much broader book.

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¹ Arthur Page to Frank Reagan, October 25, 1949, Folder Correspondence 1949 September–October, Box 22, Arthur Page Papers.

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Abbreviations

AAUN	American Association for the United Nations
ACC	American Chilean Council
ACNPJA	American Committee for Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression
AEF	American Expeditionary Force
AFC	America First Committee
AFV	American Friends of Vietnam
ARC	American Red Cross
ARCI	Aide Refugee Chinese Intellectuals
CCNA	Chilean Council of North America
CDAAA	Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMP	Committee for the Marshall Plan
CPI	Committee on Public Information
FARA	Foreign Agents Registration Act
FFF	Fight For Freedom
NCAOIP	National Committee for an Adequate Overseas U.S. Information Program
NCFE	National Committee for Free Europe
NPC	Non-Partisan Committee for Peace through Revision of the Neutrality Act
PR	public relations
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America
UFCO	United Fruit Company
USIA	United States Information Agency