

News from Syracuse University

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James L. McCamy, author of books on government information policies and the quality of the environment, will discuss "government public relations" at Syracuse University at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 11, in the Founders Room, Maxwell Hall.

McCamy is a top expert in his area, according to Alan K. Campbell, dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, which is cosponsoring the address with the University's S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

Now a professor at the University of Wisconsin, McCamy has alternated between teaching and government service. He has been an assistant to two Secretaries of Agriculture, the executive director of the Foreign Economic Administration's Bureau of Areas and an economic adviser to U.S. forces in Austria.

"During the New Deal," he has written, "government information was neutral. However, today official news seems increasingly distorted and managed--and deliberately deceptive."

McCamy's special interests are public administration and American government, propaganda and public opinion, the conduct of American foreign affairs and the interaction of science and government.

Two of his books dealing with the government credibility gap are "Government Publicity, its Practice in Federal Administration" and "The Quality of the Environment."

-VWS-

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James L. McCamy

Government Publicity, 1972

"GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS"
LECTURE,
JAMES L. MCCAMY
OCT. 10, 1972
MAXWELL SCHOOL, SUNY
UNDERSTUDY, SUNY, N.Y.

There is no conceivable reason why anyone should be interested in the fact that I wrote a Ph. D. thesis in 1938. But I ~~must tell you~~ I did. ~~Otherwise there would be no excuse for my being here.~~

The thesis was on Government Publicity, and it was published as a book in 1939. Two things favored its author. First, it was printed from type, not plates, and the type was melted during the second world war when metal was scarce. This stopped any later criticism. Second, the federal bureaucracy grew so vast that no other political scientist could hope to examine the whole as I had done. This stopped any competition.

As a nation in 1938 we were pure or wicked, naive or stupid, depending on your point of view. We were certainly a lot happier. The threats of the Depression were not cured but they were held at bay. Out-right brutality by policemen who beat workers on strike had been publicized and was not approved. J. Edgar Hoover was not yet ~~Pope~~ on the way to sainthood. Jesse Owens had won four Olympic medals under the snoot of Adolf Hitler. Hitler's threats and badness were no concern of ours. We would be neutral forever and forever. College men all over the land had sworn they would never go to war. Let others have wars. We would never fight again.

When I collected data on the practice of government publicity, the American military was such an insignificant element in trying to get space in the media, that I made only a few references to it. ~~The military did not~~

~~have to try to get space. The media asked for stories. Movie producers asked for the use of ships, planes, tanks and cannon to use in films, scripts to be approved by the military.~~

Government publicity in 1938 was that news, information, propaganda, education that was issued by executive agencies of government. It was spread in all forms of media. Students of public administration discovered early that administrators dealt with publics. They had more to do than draw and redraw charts, make and remake budgets, keep accounts, make sure the work flowed. They worked in a representative system of government in which citizens had some rights too. Citizens had the right to facts about the work of the agencies. They had the right to know what public services were available to them.

To a few, citizens were entitled to considerate treatment by public servants because citizens were people and the very humanness of people entitled them to consideration by other people. [Those of us at Chicago who got his message had been introduced into such thinking by Harold D. Lasswell, who was our professor but only a few years older. (He had been born learned and wise -- and talking.) He said often in lecture or conversation that the fundamental needs of every person were safety, income, and deference. When anyone, including a public official, deprived any person of any degree of these wants, he had damaged to some degree that person's being. Earlier we had been brought up on a theory of democracy in which people had equal rights. I came away from Lasswell, in courses at Chicago in the 1930's and later in hours of talk for we became friends, with my own conclusion that in any kind of government some people have more power than

others and the people with power should be kind in their treatment of others.

Early in the first appearances of the kind of state we now live in, Lasswell came up with the term "Garrison State". He saw such a close tie to "National Security" that he wrote a book National Security and Individual Freedom.¹ As usual he was ahead of others. He had spotted the big change, and he had tried to tell the rest of us what was coming if we did not stop it.

Government publicity has changed ^{from what I found} It now condones secrecy. It aids deception. It allows much more room for propaganda. By propaganda I mean the use of selected facts and ideas to persuade an individual in the audience. Propaganda is not good or bad. It is a use of communication, and its end may be a church supper or a riot to burn the ghetto. Government publicity has adjusted to all the other changes in ^{the} trend toward the garrison state in America.

The practitioners of government publicity know more today because political science knows more now than it did in 1938. One of the greatest joys of being alive in this last third of the Twentieth Century is to be witness to the exponential growth of knowledge. We hear most about it in the natural sciences. For example, there are more physicists alive today, and they know more, than in all of human history before. The same is true of biology. The same is true also of political science.

What modern political science has done is to confirm or deny some important hypotheses suggested from experience.

Walter Lippman in 1922 had taken some of the psychology of that time and applied it to the way people interpret what they hear and see. He wrote in Public Opinion:

Each of us lives and works on a small part of the earth's surface, moves in a small circle, and of these acquaintances knows only a few intimately. Of any public event that has wide effects we see at best only a phase and an aspect. This is as true of the eminent insiders who draft treaties, make laws, and issue orders, as it is of those who have treaties framed for them, laws promulgated to them, orders given at them.... For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.²

Individuals carry in their minds stereotypes, pictures, images of events, and they see the events to fit these pictures.

All the publicist need do in 1972 is paint his event to fit the pictures in a culture. People who have never read Lippman, who do not even know that he is a social philosopher, have now introduced image into the slang of the day. Politicians, salesmen of commercial products, institutions, everyone who tries to persuade others tries to "improve the image". The aim is not to tell the truth but to present the most acceptable image to suit the images in the heads of individuals in the audience.

The early advertising men from experience had discovered the sad deep worries of troubled Americans. "If you want to sell a product," they said, "appeal to fear, sex, and vanity." Each mother's child was afraid, insecure. He or she worried about getting a job, a mate, about being accepted by other people, about conforming to what was expected in society.

(What fate could be worse than not to be liked? The way to be liked, to be "popular", was to wear the latest fashion, to smell right, to have the right hair, white teeth, and the latest eyebrows, lips, and lashes. The way to be liked was to smoke cigarettes, drink booze, use a popular detergent, live in the latest kind of house, which was the only kind of house that FHA would approve for a loan. The person who was liked had a rumpus room,

later a family room, and cooked in the backyard on a high cost fire placed on a ^{high cost} slab. If the slab was flagstone or red cement, it turned a backyard into a patio.

After the second war Vance Packard reported in The Hidden Persuaders that commercial psychologists had established by experiment that the old admen's hunches were correct.^{3/6} The psychologists added some deeper dimensions. Deeper fears and desires were found. A buyer's choices were deeper in the sub-conscious than a rule of thumb could exploit. Cigarettes, cars, gasolines, processed foods were chosen to satisfy unconscious fears and ambitions. The expression of oneself was a big factor in the choice of what brand to buy.

Ask not if you need a new car because the old one is too expensive, ask rather if it looks right. People who are liked have the cars that look right, that have the right names and prices to favor their owners' hidden desires. Ask not that all gasolines are much the same, ask rather if your gasoline's image is big, with authority, or friendly, or exciting, dramatic, all of which are in use for advertising gasoline. If you are young forever, indefatigable, so joyful that life is a manic romp at the edge of insanity, drink Pepsi Cola. If you are, or want others to think you are, a person of breadth, charity, international experience, drink Coca Cola. If you are free of fears and free of striving to be liked, drink water.

Government publicity men did not order such studies, but they could play the game without half trying. One overwhelming example was the shift to National Security as an appeal. From inside the Roosevelt Ad-

ministration I could watch this develop. Mr. Roosevelt decided to help Great Britain if Germany threatened to win. The United States ^{public} was still divided on American entry into the war. The big symbol at home in the late 1930's was Neutrality. When Roosevelt in 1940 put out word secretly to his top officials that, as he put it, "we would first put our toe in the water, then go up to our knees, then to our waist and then all over," if that was needed to save Great Britain, we changed the stress from Neutrality to Defense. The war ^{then} added Democracy and Freedom. After the war when Mr. Truman wanted to carry on a cold war with the Soviet Union and Communism anywhere, and later under President Eisenhower who felt the same way, the big symbol was National Security. Every act, every proposal, the welfare of children, the export of goods, the interstate highways, the draft, everything conceivable was argued in terms of National Security.

National Security also meant Defense and Democracy and Freedom. The symbols Freedom, A Free World, Free Men and Women, ^{Democracy} National Security ran through all the propaganda for World War II and the Cold War. They are still with us.

It matters little that no one defines what such words mean. They are OUR words.

Political science had learned more about the nature of propaganda. Propaganda has a definable source and a definable content. It is carried by symbols. The recipient need not define the symbols, only agree with them. In all the years that demagogues have used "the threat of Communism" to get attention, not one American has known what communism is unless he is

a diplomat to a Communist nation, a scholar of Communism, or a Communist. In the national hysterics of the 1950's a newspaper in my town asked a hundred people on the street to define Communism. Only five came anywhere near. They were graduate students in subjects where the ~~subject~~^{theory} was discussed with authority. Some other changes affected the nature of government publicity.

The strong executive, intended by the makers of the Constitution, continued to grow stronger. The Federal government continued to extend its regulation of social and economic affairs. It also continued to evolve so that the states became more dependent upon it for money. When the states did not perform the way the Supreme Court said the Constitution intended, the Federal Government moved in, sometimes with troops as in Little Rock to make sure that a few Negro children could attend a *white* public high school.

Of all the changes under the strong Federal Government led by a strong Executive, war brought the biggest wrench of older ways. Until 1940 war was something to be fought and lived through for the sake of the peace to follow. Each generation talked about peace for the next generation, and it made little difference that every generation since 1775 had been in or near a war; each person hoped for peace. When citizens of a nation with a free press are told by their leaders that war and "preparedness" will be the order instead of the exception, because National Security is in danger, those citizens have to be given strong propaganda. This is true in a dictatorship. It is true in our state. When a dictator fills the eye and the ear with his symbols of national danger and symbols of valor, we call it evil propaganda. When a president and his deputies, including

generals and admirals, appear before Congressional committees, make speeches, appear on television talk shows to argue questions, and relay their symbols of national danger, honor and valor, we call it discussing the issues. The effect is the same. Unskeptical listeners are persuaded.

I knew that Lyndon Johnson had won his early phase of enlarging the war in Viet Nam when a lady in Montrose, Colorado, a gentle woman whose hobby was collecting buttons, told me that if we "did not stop the communists in Viet Nam,, we would have to fight them in San Francisco."

I knew Mr. Johnson was losing when one night, watching him in the heartless penetration of a television closeup, my wife and I simultaneously exclaimed, "He's preaching!" We had both spent much time in Texas. There, when a speaker knows that he is lying or that he cannot support what he is saying and be convincing, he becomes extra earnest. He lays on the verbal hands. He hopes to make his listener believe from sheer faith without regard for evidence. In politics it is a signal that a speaker cannot prove what he is saying, and does not really make sense to a ~~rational~~ listener. His propaganda is no longer working.

So this is where we are in 1972. We have advanced into the garrison state steadily since 1940. War, or if you prefer, military preparedness for war, has become the major purpose of our national state. The evidence, as usual, is to be found in the budget. The Census of Governments, 1967 revealed the following distribution of public expenditures by purpose by all governments, federal, state and local.⁴

Military and foreign affairs	34.4%
Education	18.5
Highways and streets	6.5
Interest on general debts	6.2

Natural resources	4.7
Welfare	4.4
Hospitals	3.2
Postal services	2.9
Space research, technology, & exploration	2.5
Health	1.2
Housing and urban renewal	1.1
Air transportation	0.6
Social insurance administration	0.6
Other	13.3
	100.0%

Lasswell's garrison state was a nation in fear, or acting as if it were afraid. As a garrison, it built a high wall around its territory. In our case we built the land/ wall in Western Europe and Southeast Asia and we added bombers and missiles overhead and submarines beneath.

Inside the garrison, the lives of individuals had to be more regulated than before. National Security and individual freedom, in Lasswell's title, became inseparable, and in a showdown National Security won.

It always wins, just as the community's conventional and normal behavior always wins over the rebel who annoys too many people. National Security won over all the young men who did not choose to go to Viet Nam. It won over all the protesters who went to jail.

After the second world war there was much talk of a "police state." That was the kind of state the Nazi's had. We never seem to grasp that a police state is a matter of degree. When most of the people in a nation agree on a grand purpose, like National Security, they are willing for the police to persuade those who do not agree. The police become nasty only to the "enemies of the state." Those enemies are defined the way the leaders of the time define them. A majority opinion will approve of the definition.

cut Another event takes place inside the garrison state. Groups become

more dependent ^{upon} on one another. They help one another, too. Education becomes more identified with the interests of government and business. Before the student revolt nearly any university was glad to get a contract to work on secret research for the military. It was in the interests of National Security. College placement offices looked upon recruiters from the C.I.A., the military, the National Security Agency with favor, like buyers from out of town. Government and business were so close that the American economy became a partnership of the two. The government decided the purpose and business did the work. More often than not business set the price and government paid. When government regulates wages and prices, it does so with such mildness that business makes some of its best profits.

Inside the garrison state, on the argument that National Security will be in danger if the outsiders know what we are doing, the government makes more and more decisions in secret. Secrecy allows public officials to get the nation into situations that a ~~rational~~ majority of its citizens might not have chosen. But once we are engaged in war, we are told that National Security is at stake. An enemy is assaulting our wall in a place called Southeast Asia, and we learn that this part of Asia consists of dominos called South Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand and that we are spending enormous amounts of money and many dead and wounded to protect our garrison wall against a little nation called North Viet Nam which wants to push the other dominos down, and some local rebels called Viet Cong or "Charlie."

By now, 1972, it is as long a war, incomparably more expensive, and less successful than our own war of rebellion against the Britain of King George the Third. It also has less relevance to our true National Security. But officials made the decisions in secret then used their propaganda to persuade us. We were threatened by Communism anywhere in the world. We were Powerful. We had our Honor ^{and Creditability} at Stake. American Boys were Brave. We must protect Freedom and Democracy wherever they were threatened in the world.

Thanks to two men who were indicted, and to the few newspapers that printed large wordage from their material, we got The Pentagon Papers. In one collection the whole attitude of secrecy and lack of concern for the interests or desires of citizens and their representatives in Congress was revealed.

To read the Pentagon Papers in their vast detail, (says Neil Sheehan in his introduction to the Bantam paperback edition) is to step through the looking glass into a new and different world. This world has a set of values, a dynamic, a language and a perspective quite distinct from the public world of the ordinary citizen and of the other two branches of the Republic--Congress and the judiciary . . . The segments of the public world--Congress, the news media, the citizenry, even international opinion as a whole--are regarded from within the world of the government insider as elements to be influenced. The policy memorandums repeatedly discuss ways to move these outside "audiences" in the desired direction, through such techniques as the controlled release of information and appeals to patriotic stereotypes. The Pentagon Papers are replete with examples of the power the Executive Branch has acquired to make its influence felt in the public domain.⁵

The air was filled with new symbols to soften unpleasant facts. Escalation covered enlarging the war; Body-count stood for victory.

Pacification meant a village that would not shoot us in the back. Our Nation's Honor was a cause. Always Freedom was to be protected and our National Security must not be impaired. But Mr. Johnson and his civil aides lost their jobs and their reputations. They had cried wolf, wolf, and there was no wolf. Most of all, they had failed to win the war after telling us we had to win to save our National Security. They exposed how little the war was needed to protect America's National Security.

Mr. Nixon was elected. The symbols changed. An invasion of Cambodia was an Incursion. Bombing in the North became Protective Reaction. Vietnamization was born. It meant that the Nixon^W Administration would reduce the number of American ground troops in combat but step up the war in its total scope and force. The war in South Viet Nam became the war in Indo China under Mr. Nixon's policy. In the first three years of the Nixon Administration an additional fifteen thousand Americans were killed. South Viet Nam lost more men than it had lost in the preceding three years. In Mr. Nixon's first three years more civilians were killed, somewhere around a half million, than had been killed in the preceding three years. We had withdrawn ground troops but we had increased the other forms of warfare, and the South Vietnamese armed forces were still advised by Americans, some of whom got killed. Nixon, like Johnson, said it would be a blot on our National Honor and Courage to lose the war. He tries to get out of Viet Nam but win the war.

The war goes on. The voters will have their first chance in November to speak their mind on the war. They did not really have a chance in

1968. Both candidates, Nixon and Humphrey, mumbled when they discussed the war. Humphrey, as Johnson's Vice President and Johnson's choice of candidate, was identified with the war more than Nixon. But he was also a Democrat in a party broken apart ~~in blood~~ at the Chicago convention.

Propaganda to persuade voters and taxpayers to accept the continuing war became as loud and as dubious under Mr. Nixon as it had been under Mr. Johnson. Vietnamization was proclaimed as loudly as the PR men could think up ways to get it into all the media. The Secretary of Defense began preaching. Once he looked straight at the camera and said, "Oh no, we have not resumed the bombing of North Viet Nam. When our bombers drop bombs now, they are carrying out a policy of protective reaction. That is not the same thing as our former policy of bombing." He did not add that when a reconnaissance plane, accompanied by armed planes, flies over a military air base in another nation, it is almost certain to be shot at, and protective reaction can be argued at the drop of a hat. General LaVelle who bombed without each raid being approved was cutting through sham with realism. In a way he was a breath of fresh air in a campaign of sham.

The nation appears to be settled in a state of war or heavy preparedness for an indefinite future. "It seems to me," said Senator Fulbright in 1970, "that we have grown distressingly used to war. For more than fourteen of the past twenty-eight years we have been fighting somewhere, and we have been ready to fight almost anywhere for the other fourteen. War and the military have become a part of our environment, like pollution."⁶ Now, in 1972, he could say we have been fighting for sixteen of the past ^{thirty} ~~twenty-eight~~ years.

Government publicity in this new state hardly resembles the rather innocent and harmless occupation I found in 1938. Now it is mainly a chief instrument of the military wing of government, and that wing is by far the largest part and the largest function of the largest and dominant government in the United States.

It is conducted not mainly by new-minded, honest craftsmen but mainly by generals, admirals, industrialists and high politicians.

cut Have we become a garrison state? Again, the definition of a kind of state is a matter of degree. Certainly we have departed from the kind of state some of us remember before the continuing war--and before the continuing draft, electronic bugging, outrageous bail and costly trials for conspiracy, the heavy spending for war, before policemen had riot equipment, and before a standard question that reporters ask when soldiers are called out to control civilians is whether they have loaded weapons and can kill citizens. We are in a state quite different from the one where military propaganda was present but not so heavily practiced that it was a principal instrument used by Presidents to get our consent, if not our support.

We are getting to be old, those of us who remember a time before 1940. Senator Fulbright is sixty-seven. Is he perhaps dreaming of a time, long ago, that will not come back because it cannot come back? Any person who was eighteen in 1940 is now fifty years old. People of fifty or more do not, alas, manage the nation's affairs any more. At most, we provide dignified decoration as chairmen of the board, elder statesmen in the Senate, or shades of the past around universities. The work is done by those who have lived only in a state of war.

Among the people I read, the Editors of The New Yorker have been the most aware of the deep significance of what is happening to us. They

saw it first with indignation. When President Nixon moved into Cambodia, the "Talk of the Town" called the move an usurpation of power in violation of the Constitution. Others would have said the same in 1940. In that time President Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war against Germany and Japan after Japan had sunk a great part of the American fleet. But President Truman began a war in Korea in 1950 without asking Congress. President Kennedy threatened war against the Soviet Union in the Cuban missile crisis. President Johnson made the action in Vietnam a full scale war. And President Nixon made it a larger war by his inclusion of Cambodia and Laos.

Have we become used to war? The answer seems to be yes. In its issue of July 29, 1972, The New Yorker, noting that in one day we had dropped on Quang Tri Province, about the size of Rhode Island, twenty-five hundred tons of bombs with three or four times the blast damage force of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, concluded, "The country has been brought to the point of exhaustion by the war. It is an exhaustion of sensibility, however--not physical exhaustion. Most of us find it more tiring to think about the war than to wage the war.... the war has become part of America's business as usual."

Government publicity in the military, in this time of ^{the} ~~the~~ war ^{of} ~~of~~ business as usual, has become as routine as the work of an advertising agency in business. All the mass communication of the war has become routine: coverage by the media, the new and false justifications by government officials, even protests against the war, all have become routine. A quiet has settled, in which the military seems to do as it pleases.

What we will see in the election this year is whether there is enough remaining opposition to make the voters pay much attention any more. It is said on all sides that everyone wants to get out of Viet Nam and the only question is how to do it. If the past is any sign, the real question is still shall we get out of Viet Nam, not how. But I am not sure that many people see this or care enough any more to do much about it. Thank the Government Publicity staffs for our condition. They now include Presidents and all others in positions of authority.

FOOTNOTES

1 Harold D. Lasswell, "The Interrelations of World Organization and Society," Yale Law Journal, Vol. 55, p. 889, August 1946. National Security and Individual Freedom. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950.

2 New York: MacMillan, 1922; Penguin Books, 1946.

3 New York: David McKay, 1957.

4 Bureau of Census, Census of Governments, 1967. Washington: Government Printing Office, Volume 4, Number 5, Table 7, p. 29, "Compendium of Government Finances."

5 Neil Sheehan and associates of The New York Times, The Pentagon Papers, The Secret History of the Vietnam War. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

6 Senator J. W. Fulbright, The Pentagon Propaganda Machine. New York: Liveright 1970, pp. 11-12. Apparently the Senator includes military aid to a belligerent nation as "our" fighting.

Percentage of Expenditures by All Governments,
Federal, State, and Local for All Purposes, 1967

Military and Foreign Affairs	34.4%
Education	18.5
Highways and Streets	6.5
Interest on debts	6.2
Natural resources	4.7
Welfare	4.4
Hospitals	3.2
Postal services	2.9
Space research, technology, exploration	2.5
Health	1.2
Housing and urban renewal	1.1
Air transportation	0.6
Social insurance administration	0.6
Other	13.3
	100.0 (rounded)

Source: Bureau of Census, Census of Governments, 1967,
Vol. 4, Number 5, Table 7, p. 29, "Compendium
of Government Finances."