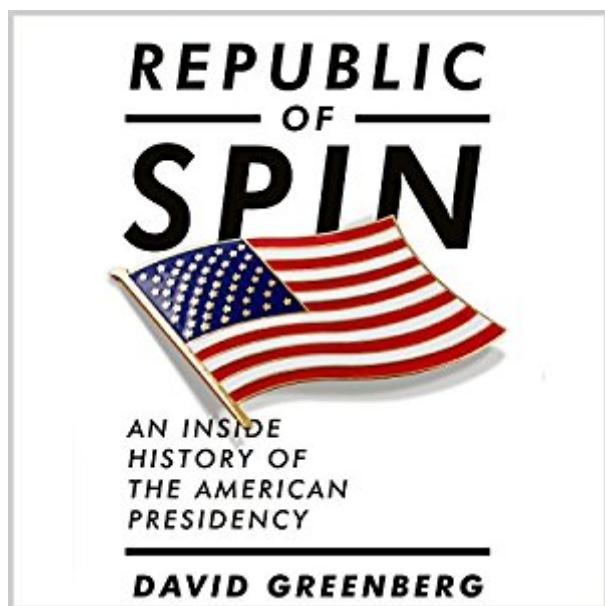


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# Republic Of Spin: An Inside History Of The American Presidency



## Synopsis

The most powerful political tool of the modern presidency is control of the message and the image. In *Republic of Spin* - a vibrant history covering more than 100 years of politics - presidential historian David Greenberg recounts the rise of the White House spin machine, from Teddy Roosevelt to Barack Obama. His sweeping, startling narrative takes us behind the scenes to see how the tools and techniques of image making and message craft work. We meet Woodrow Wilson convening the first White House press conference, Franklin Roosevelt huddling with his private pollsters, Ronald Reagan's aides crafting his nightly news sound bites, and George W. Bush staging his "Mission Accomplished" photo-op. We meet, too, the backstage visionaries who pioneered new ways of gauging public opinion and mastering the media - figures like George Cortelyou, TR's brilliantly efficient press manager; 1920s ad whiz Bruce Barton; Robert Montgomery, Dwight Eisenhower's canny TV coach; and of course the key spinmeisters of our own times, from Roger Ailes to David Axelrod. Greenberg also examines the profound debates Americans have waged over the effect of spin on our politics. Does spin help our leaders manipulate the citizenry? Or does it allow them to engage us more fully in the democratic project? Exploring the ideas of the century's most incisive political critics, from Walter Lippmann and H. L. Mencken to Hannah Arendt and Stephen Colbert, *Republic of Spin* illuminates both the power of spin and its limitations - its capacity not only to mislead but also to lead.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an interesting book, tracing the history of political information from its origins as "news" through its devolution to publicity to propaganda to the current spin. It covers the expected subjects beginning with TR through Woodrow Wilson, FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon, JFK, Johnson, Reagan, Bush 2 and Obama, and traces their efforts - with varying degrees of success - to set up "official" news outlets. But where the book excels is its discussion of a large number of lesser-known cast of characters, both inside and outside of government, who either assisted their respective presidents in their election campaigns or to frame the news in the best light once elected. The book concludes with a brief discussion of whether or not spin is a good thing: "Large-scale deception, perpetrated without countervailing arguments, could erode the standards by which we establish truth and falsehood and undermine democracy. But politics would be sterile if it didn't allow a wide berth for claims that were partial, rhetorical, aligned with particular visions and interests, or less than fully truthful by philosophical standards."

What is the correct role of the media in national politics? Does government propagandize the electorate or enlighten them? Will it allow us to scale up traditional New England town democracy to a national level, or create a society of conformists, eventually marching in lock step to disaster? Historically, how malleable has the public been? What was the media's role in advancing Vietnam and the civil rights movement? When does taking advantage of and playing the media cross the line into misuse? And what of the media in society? Could it empower the lowest common denominator and institute the "tyranny of the majority" through demagoguery? Is it even possible to be objective?, since no single person can know all (even reasonable) points of view on a major issue. Starting at a certain level of abstraction, is truth simply a matter of spin and bias? And when the media has what one regards as biased reporting "tyranny of the majority" through demagoguery? Is it due to an honest bias?, or does it come from the dictates of the outlet owner on which positions their writers should be hired for or favor? Given the role of the internet in articulately advancing so many opinions at odds with each other "tyranny of the majority" in the future will it be possible to even produce consensus about anything meaningful? I have previously purchased and tried to make my way through several books featuring Edward Bernays (Propaganda, Crystallizing Public Opinion, The Father of Spin). Past the first few chapters of nicely summarized insight I found them to become so full of routine minutia and pontification that they lost my interest. "The Republic of Spin" traces the role of the media (newspapers, radio, TV), starting with Teddy Roosevelt's administration. The vast majority of the book held me spellbound, with

well thought out prose - ways of explaining and summing up. Only towards the end with the George W Bush and Obama administrations did it (sort of) start skimming and falling short of other books (like Frank Rich's "The Great Story Ever Sold" - "The Great Story Ever Sold" - in light of statistics on social pathology (our present day elephant in the room, our third rail of politics) is also missing. None-the-less, this book presents a culled set of history that is hard to find summarized anywhere else. Five stars.

Sweeping, authoritative, and chock-full of terrific stories, *Republic of Spin* should be required reading for any politician, press consultant, or citizen interested in how image-making and public communications play into the ways U.S. presidents run, win, and govern. Greenberg's fast-paced and engrossing narrative shows how media and political spin shaped politics long before the age of the 24-hour news cycle. He also introduces a vivid cast of communications wizards behind the curtain, whose words and actions redefined the relationship that the media--and the voters--had with the occupants of the Oval Office. A definitive and important book.

Bought this book for a college class on American Presidency, had to do a presentation on one of the chapters. It was very informative and interesting to the roles the media played throughout different presidencies.

This was interesting. It provides historical perspective on not only spin but also insight into an era of politics, the early 1900's, that I feel has been neglected. I feel that the book was unbiased as well. Overall, it was long, somewhat challenging to read, but does provide unique and insightful information into Presidential politics and history as well as the history of the media and spin.

Think that political spin by presidents just started recently? This book says "No"! The volume goes back to the beginning of the American Republic under our Constitution. George Washington, for example, would ask James Madison to provide a draft of an important message. Madison would do so--and then present a response from the House of Representatives to the draft that he gave Washington! Over time, we see early presidents "spinning" their perspective. Over time, the spin aspect of a presidency became more sophisticated and the use of media more fine grained. By the early 20th century, presidents such as Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and others became adept at getting their word out. And--over time--practitioners became more skilled. FDR,

Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, Bush (2), and Obama. Polls became more scientific and were used to assess public opinion and suggest ways of speaking to the public's concerns. This is a well written work, accessible to readers, and addressing an issue of some importance.

The subject of this book covers a lot of information in a relatively short number of pages. It could have gone much deeper but the reader would probably have been overwhelmed. It is a good read to serve as a good starting point for further study.

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