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Origins of the epithet 'government by public relations': Revisiting Bruce Catton's *War Lords of Washington*, 1948

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Abstract

While it might make public relations professionals and faculty cringe, the term 'government by public relations' is a negative one, implying that governmental decision-making is guided by appearances rather than on the merits. This tag line is a relatively common American put-down of politicians and senior civil servants. This article examines the origins of the term, locating its usage in the WWII memoirs of Bruce Catton, then a government public information officer and later a renowned popular historian of the American Civil War. Catton's use of the term, his 1948 book *War Lords of Washington*, and his philosophy of government public information are examined in more detail to give context to the phrase 'government by public relations'.



Keywords

Government public relations; History; World War II; Federal government; Public information officer

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