

British Soft Power and Public Diplomacy 1914-1956

Intitulé du cours / Course title

Discipline <i>Academic field</i>	International and British history, IR and Communication studies
Enseignant <i>Teacher</i>	Alice Byrne
Contact <i>E-mail address</i>	alice.byrne@univ-amu.fr
Niveau de formation <i>Academic level</i>	
Volume horaire <i>Hours</i>	20
Langue <i>Language</i>	English

Description du cours / Course outline

The concept **soft power** has gained considerable traction since Joseph Nye first developed it in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead* as a way to draw attention to a country's ability to co-opt rather than coerce other countries. However, what is often forgotten is that his initial objective was to counter Paul Kennedy's thesis that America was suffering from imperial overstretch and that its inevitable decline would mirror that of Britain's. According to Nye, it was America's soft power that would ensure it continued to play a key role in global affairs. This course will, firstly, explore the contours of Nye's concept by testing this hypothesis in relation to the UK. In the first half of the twentieth century Britain undoubtedly lost much of its hard power and lost its dominant position on the world stage. Yet, arguably, it retained a large degree of soft power, perhaps most notably thanks to the BBC, dubbed by Kofi Annan Britain's "greatest gift to the world". This example also indicates that successive British governments were aware of the importance of nurturing this soft power long before Nye coined the term. Britain's decline as a world power coincided with the rise of mass communications and what we now call globalisation, leading politicians, civil servants and various non-state actors to harness the potential of new media and increased global mobility to promote British culture, values and interests. Hence the decision to focus here on the various ways that Britain attempted to bolster its foreign policy and global presence by deliberately cultivating public opinion beyond its borders. It may be argued that the term used – **public diplomacy** – is more recent than the practices it refers to. Yet the conditions of the twentieth century provided both the need and the tools for its development on scale unknown in previous centuries.

At a time of intense debate about the impact of social media and disinformation on international relations, this course seeks to provide students with relevant historical knowledge to contextualise these discussions. But it also provides a novel approach to contemporary British history and in particular its changing position on the world stage.

Objectifs pédagogiques du cours / Course objectives

- Acquire historical knowledge of key aspects of British foreign policy in the period studied as well as of broader context
- develop familiarity with key concepts and terms (soft power and public diplomacy but also propaganda, media etc.)
- carry out case studies and critically assess specific examples
- enhance understanding of current issues and debates

Compétences acquises / Learning outcomes

- ability to analyse a variety of primary and secondary sources.
- Essay writing skills
- Identify and assess public diplomacy practices

Plan de cours par séance / Course content for each session

1. Introduction. Key concepts. Overview of British history and in particular its foreign policy, 1900-1960.
2. The advent of mass communication and World War One propaganda.
3. Sir Stephen Tallents, the Empire Marketing Board and Public Relations
4. Cultural internationalism and cultural propaganda: the creation of the British Council
5. International Broadcasting: the BBC from World War to Cold War
6. The Central Office of Information and official government communication
7. The Cultural Cold War and the Information Research Department
8. From Empire to Commonwealth: film and exhibitions
9. The Suez Crisis and the Media
10. Epilogue: The House of Lords' 2014 report on Soft Power and the UK's Influence

Références bibliographiques / Bibliography

Non-exhaustive list. Further articles / chapters may be indicated during course.

Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)

Nicholas Cull, *Public Diplomacy. Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019)

Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004)

Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (Basic Books, 1991)
- *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011)

Tony Shaw, *The British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001)

- *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion during the Suez Crisis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996).

Philip Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)

- with Nancy Snow (Ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009)

Alban Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

Employment

- 2015 – present Lecturer in British History & Politics (*maître de conférences en civilisation britannique*),
Department of Anglophone Studies (DEMA)
Aix-Marseille Université (AMU), France.
- 2013 – 2015 Lecturer in History & Politics of the Anglophone World (*maître de conférences en civilisation anglophone*),
Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Université Rennes 2, France.
- 2011 – 2013 Part-time instructor at AMU.
- 2005 – 2013 English teacher, Art School of Aix-en-Provence
(*École supérieure d'art d'Aix-en-Provence*), France.
- 1997 – 2005 Range of fixed-term teaching contracts (*lectrice, ATER, vacataire*)
Aix-Marseille Université and Université Montpellier 3.

Education

- 2010 PhD (*doctorat*) in Anglophone Studies - British History, Aix-Marseille Université,
France.
Supervisor: Prof. Pierre Lurbe.
Thesis title: “*Boosting Britain: démocratie et propagande culturelle - Britain To-day 1939–1954.*”
Obtained with distinction (mention très honorable avec les félicitations du jury).
[NB: Interruption of research activities in 2006-2007 and 2011-12 for the birth of my children]
- 2001 MA year 2 (*DEA*) in Anglophone Studies, Aix-Marseille Université.
- 2000 MA year 1 (*Maitrise*) in Contemporary History, Aix-Marseille Université.
- 1997 BA Joint Honours in French and History, University of Sheffield, UK.

Latest Publications

Ed. with Valérie André, “London-Paris 1918-2018: Revisiting Franco-British Relations”, *Revue française de civilisation britannique* XXV11-1 2022, <https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/8492>

A ‘Sound Investment’? British Cultural Diplomacy and Overseas Students: The British Council’s Students Committee, 1935-1939”, *Contemporary European History* 30(2): 265-283 (May 2021)
DOI:10.1017/S0960777321000072

“Propagande culturelle ou relations culturelles ? La mission ambiguë du British Council, 1934-1954”
Transatlantica (American Studies Journal), <https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/> (spring 2020).

“Britain To-day, Bulletins from Britain and Britain: some semi-official British periodicals in the USA during World War Two” in *Allied Communication to the Public During the Second World War. National and Transnational Networks* Eds. Simon Eliot and Marc Wiggam, Bloomsbury Academic, London & New York, 2019.