United States History Since 1877
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A DOCUMENT-BASED ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIA

This question is based on the accompanying documents. The question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document. Use the Guidelines for Source Analysis to help you analyze the reliability, credibility, and objectivity of your sources.

Directions: Write a well-organized essay that includes: (1) an introduction, (2) a body consisting of *at least **five*** paragraphs which contain a thesis statement (main idea) and supporting arguments, and (3) a conclusion.

Historical Context: Since 1900, the mass media (newspapers, books, magazines, posters, photographs, newsreels, radio, films, and television) have had a significant influence on United States history and American society.

Task: Using information from the documents and your knowledge of United States history, analyze the role that the mass media has played in influencing United States history and American society since 1900. Use historical examples to support your discussion.

Guidelines: In your essay, be sure to:

- Develop all aspects of the task (i.e., the influence of mass media on U.S. history and on American society)
- Incorporate information from *at least **five*** documents
- Incorporate relevant outside information
- Support your thesis (main idea) with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Use a logical and clear plan of organization, including an introduction and conclusion

DOCUMENT 1A

. . . Meanwhile, radio network officials had agreed that the announcer of the presidential broadcast would be Robert Trout of the Columbia Broadcasting System's Washington station, whose manager was Harry C. Butcher. Two introductions were prepared; a formal one by Trout; a folksy one by Butcher. Both were submitted for review in the White House, whence word came promptly back that Roosevelt much preferred the folksy one. So it was that, at ten o'clock in the evening of March 12, Bob Trout's mellow voice told some 60 million people, seated before nearly 20 million radios, that "the President wants to come into your home and sit at your fireside for a little fireside chat."

And Roosevelt did so.

Riding his richly resonant tenor voice, he came as a smiling and reassuringly confident visitor into nearly 20 million homes to tell his friends there—a Buffalo shipping clerk, an elderly widow in Des Moines, a wheat farmer on the High Plains, a gas station operator in Birmingham, a secretary-typist in Memphis, an Oregon lumberman, a Chicago factory worker, a Kansas college professor, each in his or her own dwelling place—that they need have no fear. Everything that had gone wrong was being fixed up, and in a way that would keep things from going wrong again. . . .

Source: Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933–1937*, Random House, 1986 (adapted)

DOCUMENT 1B

On a Sunday night a week after my Inauguration I used the radio to tell you about the banking crisis and the measures we were taking to meet it. I think that in that way I made clear to the country various facts that might otherwise have been misunderstood and in general provided a means of understanding which did much to restore confidence.

Tonight, eight weeks later, I come for the second time to give you my report -- in the same spirit and by the same means to tell you about what we have been doing and what we are planning to do.

Two months ago we were facing serious problems. The country was dying by inches. It was dying because trade and commerce had declined to dangerously low levels; prices for basic commodities were such as to destroy the value of the assets of national institutions such as banks, savings banks, insurance companies, and others. These institutions, because of their great needs, were foreclosing mortgages, calling loans, refusing credit. . . .

Today we have reason to believe that things are a little better than they were two months ago. Industry has picked up, railroads are carrying more freight, farm prices are better, but I am not going to indulge in issuing proclamations of overenthusiastic assurance. We cannot bally-ho ourselves back to prosperity. . . . I do not want the people to believe that because of unjustified optimism we can resume the ruinous practice of increasing our crop output and our factory output in the hope that a kind providence will find buyers at high prices. Such a course may bring us immediate and false prosperity but it will be the kind of prosperity that will lead us into another tailspin. . . . It is wholly wrong to call the measures that we have taken Government control of farming, control of industry, and control of transportation. It is rather a partnership between Government and farming and industry and transportation, not partnership in profits, for the profits would still go to the citizens, but rather a partnership in planning and partnership to see that the plans are carried out.

Source: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fireside Chat, May 7, 1933

DOCUMENT 2

Veteran radio reporter, Robert Trout, speaking about radio news programs in the 1930s:

. . . It was a standard evening ritual in houses: people would gather round these rather large radio sets when the news came on, and nobody would talk very much until it was over. They listened to H. V. Kaltenborn bringing them coverage of the Spanish Civil War with the crackle of the rifles in the distance, and certainly nobody had ever heard real gunfire on the air before. Radio was bringing things right into people's homes, and it was beginning to affect the way people felt about what was going on in the world. So when something important happened in Europe, the country was prepared to listen. Americans had always been somewhat interested in Europe's affairs, but they just didn't feel that they were intimately affected by them. Now they were fascinated.

When Hitler annexed Austria, we did a full half hour of reports from Europe, with correspondents in Paris, Berlin, Washington, and London, and me in New York, acting as what would now be called an anchorman. Then in 1939 came the Czech crisis, which was a major radio event, and the country was enthralled by it all. They listened as much as they possibly could. We just took over the radio, doing minute-by-minute coverage, monopolizing the attention of the country. It was a great novelty then to be able to hear somebody like Hitler speaking, or to hear Neville Chamberlain coming back from Munich and waving the paper and saying, "This means peace in our time." To hear his actual words was amazing.

It's no exaggeration to say that radio brought the whole country together, all at the same instant, everyone listening to the same things. And the country liked being tied together that way. In the morning people would say, "Did you hear that last night? Did you hear Hitler speaking again? What was he talking about? Did you hear them all cheering, *'sieg heil'*? What did you think?" It was on the tip of everybody's tongue. People didn't quite see, just yet, exactly how all these things overseas were ever going to intimately affect their daily lives. But it was the greatest show they'd ever been offered. . . .

Source: Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster, *The Century*, Doubleday, 1998

DOCUMENT 3

Source: U. S. Army, Adolph Treidler, artist, 1943

DOCUMENT 4

Neal Shine, a reporter for *The Detroit Free Press*, writing of the newsreels shown in theaters during World War II:

. . . We watched the newsreels, the Hollywood version of World War II, with scenes from the battlefields where we were always winning. There was a lot of censorship, as we found out in later years, because nobody wanted anybody to know how bad it really was. If there were any dead bodies, they were Japanese bodies. But Hollywood's version of the war suited us kids just fine. We fought that war in the East End Theater, the Plaza Theater, and the Lakewood Theater. We were on Guadalcanal, we were in *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, we were carried away to these places. I remember something called *The Boy from Stalingrad*, an absolutely hyped propaganda film about a kid who stopped the entire German army by himself. We identified with him because he was a kid and we were kids, and we damned well would do what he did if we had to. If the Germans ever ended up on the east side of Detroit, we would draw the line somewhere around Market Street and defend our territory, just like the boy from Stalingrad. . . .

Source: Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster, *The Century*, Doubleday, 1998

DOCUMENT 5

. . . Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, of Wisconsin, could not play upon the human emotions with the same skill as his friend, Richard Nixon. The trail that he [McCarthy] left on the face of my country will not soon fade, and there may be others who will try to follow in his footsteps. His weapon was fear. He was a politically unsophisticated man with a flair for publicity; and he was powerfully aided by the silence of timid men who feared to be the subject of his unfounded accusations. He polluted the channels of communication, and every radio and television network, every newspaper and magazine publisher who did not speak out against him, contributed to his evil work and must share part of the responsibility for what he did, not only to our fellow citizens but to our self-respect. He was in a real sense the creature of the mass media. They made him. They gave nation-wide circulation to his mouthings [opinions]. They defended their actions on the grounds that what he said was news, when they knew he lied. His initial appearances on television were in the role of a man whose sole desire was to oust communists from government and all responsible positions. That was his announced objective. The overwhelming majority of people undoubtedly sympathized with him. It has been said repeatedly that television caused his downfall. This is not precisely true. His prolonged exposure [on television] during the so-called Army-McCarthy Hearings, certainly did something to diminish [reduce] his stature. He became something of a bore. But his downfall really stemmed from the fact that he broke the rules of the club, the United States Senate, when he began attacking the integrity, the loyalty of fellow Senators, he was censured by that body, and was finished. The timidity of television in dealing with this man when he was spreading fear throughout the land, is not something to which this art of communication can ever point with pride, nor should it be allowed to forget it. . . .

Source: Edward R. Murrow, Guildhall Speech, London, 1959; Edward R. Murrow Papers

DOCUMENT 6

. . . To keep things moving, Hewitt asked Kennedy: “Do you want makeup?” Kennedy had been campaigning in California and looked tanned, incredibly vigorous, and in full bloom. He promptly said, “No!” Nixon looked pale. He had made a vow to campaign in all fifty states and had been trying to carry it out. Besides, he had had a brief illness and has lost a few pounds; his collar looked loose around his neck. But after Kennedy’s “no” he replied with an equally firm “no.” Later his advisors, worried about his appearance, applied some Lazy-Shave, a product recommended for “five-o’clock shadow.”

The first debate was disastrous for Nixon. This had little to do with what was said, which on both sides consisted of almost ritualized campaign ploys and slogans. What television audiences noted chiefly was the air of confidence, the nimbleness of mind that exuded from the young Kennedy. It emerged not only from crisp statements emphasized by sparse gestures, but also from glimpses of Kennedy not talking. Don Hewitt used occasional “reaction shots” showing each candidate listening to the other. A glimpse of the listening Kennedy showed him attentive, alert, with a suggestion of a smile on his lips. A Nixon glimpse showed him haggard; the lines on his face seemed like gashes and gave a fearful look. Toward the end, perspiration streaked the Lazy-Shave.

Edward A. (“Ted”) Rogers, principal television adviser to Nixon, protested the reaction shots. But Hewitt said they were a normal television technique and that viewers would feel cheated without them. Such elements may have played a decisive part in the Nixon catastrophe. Among those who heard the first debate on radio, Nixon apparently held his own. Only on television had he seemed to lose. . . .

Source: Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, Oxford University Press, 1975

DOCUMENT 7

Martin Luther King, Jr., went to Birmingham in January 1963 to lead a campaign against segregation in public facilities, but his efforts there soon became a struggle against Jim Crow in all its insidious guises [subtle appearances]. In April King was arrested and jailed; on his release he and his aides began training children in techniques of nonviolent protest and sending them forth in orderly groups to be arrested. The strategy filled the city's jails with young blacks and provoked the city's pugnacious [combative] police commissioner, Bull Connor, into bringing police dogs and fire hoses into the fray. Charles Moore was there taking pictures for *Life* [magazine], and his unforgettable images of jets of water blasting demonstrators and of police dogs tearing into crowds helped put public opinion solidly behind the civil rights movement. Seldom, if ever, has a set of photographs had such an immediate impact on the course of history.

Source: Michael S. Durham, *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*

DOCUMENT 8

. . . A decade later, Vietnam was a different story. As journalist Arthur Lubow reminds us, "it was not a declared war and therefore the president could not impose military censorship." Also, it was the first war fought on television. In his book about American war correspondents, *Under Fire,* M. L. Stein sums up what that meant: "Television reporters and photographers brought the war in Vietnam home. . . . Night after night, in the comfort of their living rooms, Americans witnessed the agony of the wounded and dying, the physical destruction, and the unremitting brutality of war. There were complaints, some from the Pentagon, . . . [of] a distorted picture of the conflict. . . ."

Source: Ted Gottfried, The American Media, Grolier Publishing, 1997 (adapted)

DOCUMENT 9A

Woodward reports that just five days after Sept. 11, President Bush indicated to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice that while he had to do Afghanistan first, he was also determined to do something about Saddam Hussein. . . .

President Bush, after a National Security Council meeting, takes Don Rumsfeld aside, collars him physically, and takes him into a little cubbyhole room and closes the door and says, 'What have you got in terms of plans for Iraq? What is the status of the war plan? I want you to get on it. I want you to keep it secret.'"

Woodward says immediately after that, Rumsfeld told Gen. Tommy Franks to develop a war plan to invade Iraq and remove Saddam - and that Rumsfeld gave Franks a blank check.

"Rumsfeld and Franks work out a deal essentially where Franks can spend any money he needs. And so he starts building runways and pipelines and doing all the preparations in Kuwait, specifically to make war possible," says Woodward.

"Gets to a point where in July, the end of July 2002, they need $700 million, a large amount of money for all these tasks. And the president approves it. But Congress doesn't know and it is done. They get the money from a supplemental appropriation for the Afghan War, which Congress has approved. …Some people are gonna look at a document called the Constitution which says that no money will be drawn from the Treasury unless appropriated by Congress. Congress was totally in the dark on this."

Rebecca Leung, "Woodward Shares War Secrets: Journalist Describes Secret Details on White House's Plans for War," *60 Minutes*, CBS Broadcasting Inc, April 18, 2004

DOCUMENT 9B

Four years ago on May 1, President Bush landed on the aircraft carrier *USS Lincoln* wearing a flight suit and delivered a speech in front of a giant "Mission Accomplished" banner. He was hailed by media stars as a "breathtaking" example of presidential leadership in toppling Saddam Hussein. Despite profound questions over the failure to locate weapons of mass destruction and the increasing violence in Baghdad, many in the press confirmed the White House's claim that the war was won. . . .

How did the mainstream press get it so wrong? How did the evidence disputing the existence of weapons of mass destruction and the link between Saddam Hussein to 9-11 continue to go largely unreported? . . . "How the administration marketed the war to the American people has been well covered, but critical questions remain: How and why did the press buy it, and what does it say about the role of journalists in helping the public sort out fact from propaganda?" . . .

In "Buying the War" Bill Moyers and producer Kathleen Hughes document the reporting of Walcott, Landay and Strobel, the Knight Ridder team that burrowed deep into the intelligence agencies to try and determine whether there was any evidence for the Bush Administration's case for war. . . .

The program analyzes the stream of unchecked information from administration sources and Iraqi defectors to the mainstream print and broadcast press, which was then seized upon and amplified by an army of pundits. While almost all the claims would eventually prove to be false, the drumbeat of misinformation about WMDs went virtually unchallenged by the media. . . .

"Buying the War" examines the press coverage in the lead-up to the war as evidence of a paradigm shift in the role of journalists in democracy and asks, four years after the invasion, what's changed? "More and more the media became, I think, common carriers of administration statements and critics of the administration," says THE WASHINGTON POST's Walter Pincus. "We've sort of given up being independent on our own."

Bill Moyers, Comments on "Buying the War," video on the lead up to the war in Iraq, PBS, 2007