



NEW YORK archives

Educator Guide

Fall 2020

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The President and the Media

In his article, "*Media Management*," Harold Holzer highlights the relationship between the press and two of the most influential U.S. presidents of the 20th century, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. The article is a small snapshot of Holzer's most recent book, *The Presidents vs. the Press: The Endless Battle between the White House and the Media--from the Founding Fathers to Fake News*. This educator guide provides students with guiding questions for the article and two photographs to analyze. Ultimately, students should be able to answer the compelling question below after reading the article and analyzing the documents.

Compelling Question

How does the media influence presidential leadership and power?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- create meaningful and persuasive understandings of the past by fusing disparate and relevant evidence from primary and secondary sources and drawing connections to the present

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Selection

Media Management

By Harold Holzer



Courtesy: Library of Congress

This guide includes supporting questions to aid students in the reading of the article and analysis questions for understanding the primary sources. All educational materials are aligned to the New York State Social Studies Framework. The learning objectives are taken directly from the Social Studies Practices and the content fits within the framework.

Link to the full article:

<https://www.nysarchivestrust.org/new-york-archives-magazine/magazine-highlights/fall-2020-volume-20-number-2>

MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Setting the Stage

Show this video from pbslearningmedia.org to introduce students to Franklin Roosevelt's first Fireside Chat. Discuss the tone and feeling of the chat and what impact that might have had on listeners.

<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/the-great-depression-fdr-first-fireside-chat-video/ken-burns-the-roosevelts/>

10

11

MEDIA MANAGEMENT

BY
HAROLD
HOLZER

The modern relationship between presidents and the press was made in New York by the Roosevelt cousins.

The endless battles between Donald Trump and the journalists he often derides as “enemies of the people” might strike many observers as a sudden change in a long-respectful relationship. In truth, presidents have always feuded publicly with the press, or routinely turned to alternative media (in Trump’s case, Twitter) to get their messaging out unfettered.

But presidents and journalists have been at odds since the days of the Founders. George Washington complained bitterly (but privately) about newspaper attacks. John Adams signed a federal law making it a crime to criticize the president in print.

But it took two twentieth century presidents to bring the inherently disputatious relationship to new levels: befriending press admirers on the one hand and punishing critics on the other, while using alternative means to reach their constituents. Although one was a Republican, the other a Democrat, they otherwise had much in common: they were not only distant cousins, but each served first as state legislators and governors of New York. Both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt found new ways to court journalists, new excuses to contain them, and new media to skirt traditional coverage.

“The Barber’s Hour”

Teddy Roosevelt honed his talent for courting journalists during his 1899–1901 term as governor. As an assemblyman, he had earned reporters’ gratitude by condemning “a bill for gagging journalists.” While governor, he regularly held not one but two daily press conferences, further building on relationships he had established years earlier as a crusading New York City Police commissioner who often took reporters along on his nighttime raids.

TR became the first president to allow journalists to cover him routinely and informally, inviting them to pose questions during daily shaves at the White House. The sessions became known as “the barber’s hour.” Near 1 p.m., reporters would enter his office to find Roosevelt seated in an “arm chair... his face covered with lather.” Whenever an inquiry aroused him, the “writhing” president would leap up and hold forth until he calmed down. “Steady, Mr. President,” his barber would plead, blade in hand, struggling to hold Roosevelt down. One correspondent called the sessions “more fun to see than a circus.”

TR proved the right man for the time. By 1900, presidents no longer secured positive coverage by giving loyal publishers government printing contracts or naming friendly journalists



Friendly reporters secured a place in TR’s “barber’s hour.”

NEW YORK ARCHIVES • FALL 2020

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Guided Reading Questions

1. How does the author describe the relationship between presidents and the press?
2. What was the “Barber’s Hour?”
3. How did Theodore Roosevelt win the attention of reporters?
4. How did Theodore Roosevelt limit the press?
5. What was Theodore Roosevelt’s opinion of the Muckrakers?
6. What secret did Franklin Roosevelt have the press keep from the public?
7. How did Franklin Roosevelt make up for the restrictions he placed on the press?
8. How did FDR hold the advantage over the reporters in the press conferences?
9. What was FDR’s greatest media innovation?
10. What was the new form of presidential power that Teddy Roosevelt and FDR brought about?

Document Analysis



Courtesy: Roosevelt House

Analysis Questions

1. Who do you see in this photograph?

2. What do you notice about the man on the stairs?

3. How does the position of the man on the stairs influence your perception of him?

4. Do you think this photograph had a positive or negative impact on the man's reputation? Explain your answer.

Document Analysis



Courtesy: Library of Congress

Analysis Questions

1. Who do you see in this photograph?

2. What do you notice about the man in the middle?

3. Sagamore Hill was the home of the man standing in the middle. Why do you think he was there with all these other people?

4. What do you think is the mood of the people in the photograph? Use evidence from the photograph to support your answer.
