

Open Up the Textbook (OUT)

The Role of Mass Media In Government

Enlarge

Complicate

Contest

Vivify

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12th Grade US Government

In this OUT analysis, 12th grade students will study the role of media in order to better understand their role in government. This OUT analysis provides students with documents that are meant to deliberately complicate the textbook.

This strategy is implemented most effectively when students collaborate to analyze the texts in small, heterogeneous groups. The texts that accompany the textbook are complex and often include difficult vocabulary and syntax. (For a few words that are likely unknown to students and unidentifiable based upon context clues, helpful synonyms are provided in the footnotes.) Students should first annotate each text and then collaborate to answer the text dependent and specific questions that follow. Questions will highlight sourcing and perspective of the author, close reading of key details from the document that enlarge, complicate, contest, or vivify the textbook, as well as questions that help students corroborate (or not) the accuracy of individual documents. The writing task that follows is an independent activity wherein students will employ evidence from multiple sources to justify their analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Source A: The textbook- *American Government*, William A. McClenghan, (2006). Page 223

The Role of Mass Media

A medium is a means of communication; it transmits some kind of information. *Media* is the plural of medium. As you have read, the mass media include those means of communication that can reach large, widely dispersed audiences simultaneously.

Four major mass media are particularly important in American politics. Ranked in terms of impact, they are television, newspapers, radio, and magazines. Other media—books, films, and audio- and videocassettes, for example—play a lesser role. So, too, does the Internet, though its communicating capabilities are becoming increasingly important.

The mass media are not a part of government. Unlike political parties and interest groups, they do not exist primarily to influence government. They are, nonetheless, an important force in politics.

Besides providing entertainment, the media present people with political information. They do so directly when they report the news, in a newscast or in the news columns of a newspaper, for example. The media also provide a large amount of political information less directly—for example, in radio and television programs, newspaper stories, and magazine articles. These venues often deal with such public topics as crime, health care, or some aspect of American foreign policy. Either way, people acquire most of the information they know about government and politics from the various forms of media.

Source A Questions for Consideration

1. According to the text, what is the role of media? Give examples from the text to support your answer.
2. According to the text, why does mass media exist?
3. When was your textbook published? How much time has passed? What has changed in the Mass Media since publication?
4. Reorder the importance of types of media as if your text was being written today.

Source B: Secondary Source- *Media as the "Fourth Estate."* Reading from Politics (2003) p.326 Cynthia Boaz

Access to information is essential to the health of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a "checking function" by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them.

In the United States, the media is often called the fourth branch of government (or "fourth estate"). That's because it monitors the political process in order to ensure that political players don't abuse the democratic process.

Others call the media the fourth branch of government because it plays such an important role in the fortunes of political candidates and issues. This is where the role of the media can become controversial. News reporting is supposed to be objective, but journalists are people, with feelings, opinions and preconceived ideas.

Source B Questions for Consideration

1. Why is the media referred to as the "Fourth Estate"? What does this mean?
2. What evidence does the author provide to argue that the media functions as a fourth branch of government?
3. The author argues that "Access to information is essential to the health of democracy." What reasons and evidence does she provide to support this claim?
4. Does the author support or refute the idea that mass media is controversial. Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

Source C: MEDIA: THE FOURTH BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT- 2008, Uriah J. Fields

Note: Uriah J Fields, an African American man born in the south during the Great Depression became a Christian Minister and Civil Rights activist. He went on to teach in Los Angeles public school and continues to advocate for social justice in the United States.

What is the government? Abraham Lincoln described the nature of the government in the Gettysburg Address in these words, "government of the people, by the people and for the people." In a word government is law. Law is basic and may be sublime, especially when it is based on natural law or derived from the Higher Law. Law is about relationships and the rights of individuals...that one person's rights end where another person's rights begin.

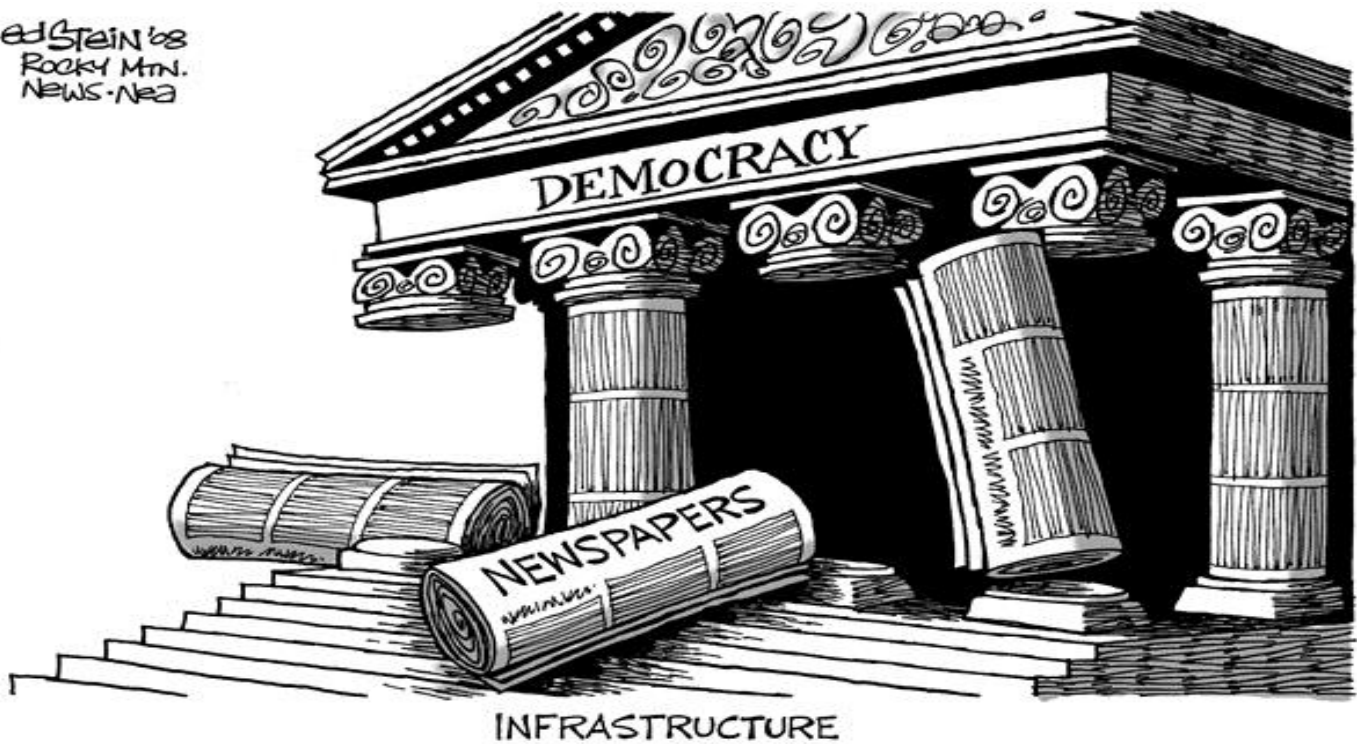
This writer does not intend to give a detailed discussion of the government but rather to show that the media is not less powerful than the three branches of government and the important role it plays in a democratic society. The media is people communicating...with their government. Oftentimes the media provides the people with information about their government and the things that the government should be concerned about that otherwise would not be available to them or their government. The media is a conduit for people to listen to and communicate with their governmental officials, inform, praise and criticize them.

As indicated earlier, even though the media is not included in the U. S. Constitution as a branch of the government, noticeably, the First Amendment to the Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." This is to say the media is free, no less than the people. "Who are the people if not their words?" Pause and think for a moment about the things that would not be known, the abusers who would not be brought to justice and the services that would not be provided for "we the people" if it were not for the media.

Source C Questions for Consideration

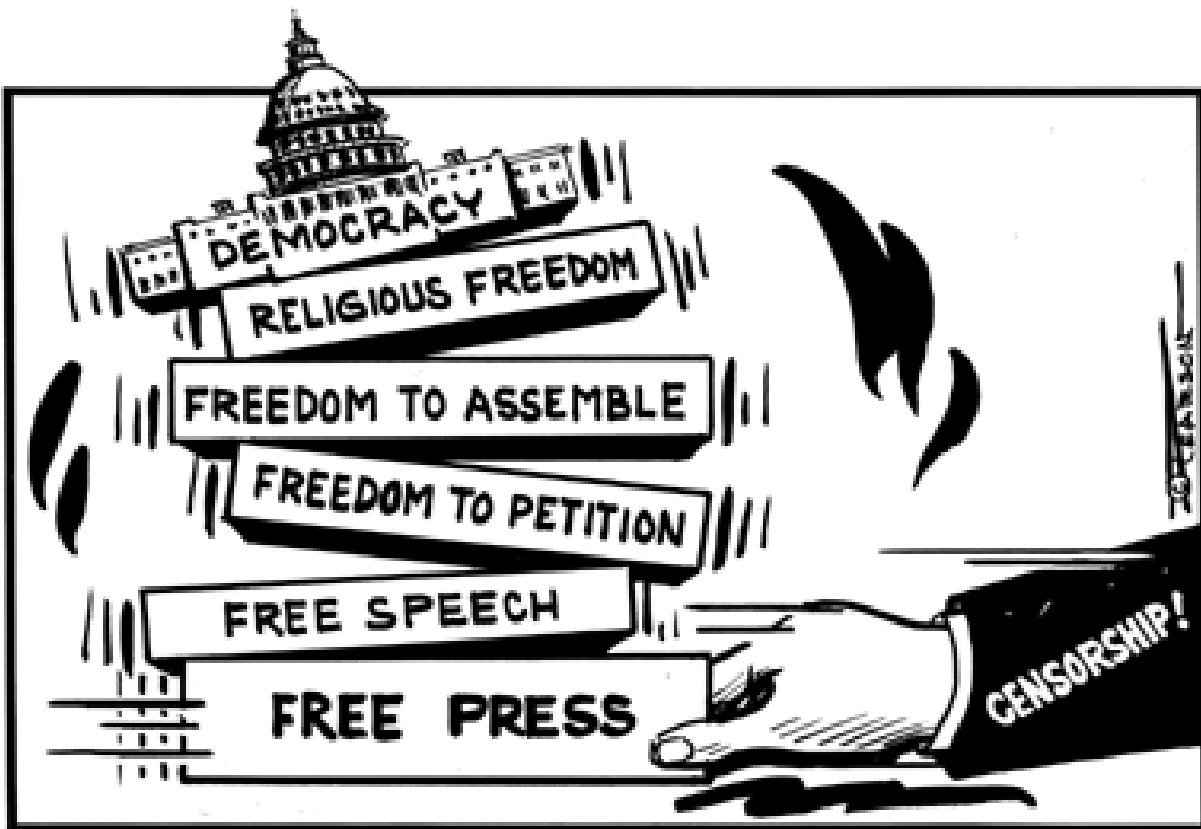
1. What do you learn about the author from the "note" above the text?
2. Using evidence from the text, describe how the Mass Media fits into Lincoln's idea of "government of the people, by the people and for the people"?
3. In what ways is media a linking mechanism between government and the people?
4. What examples from the text does the author provide for the claim that the media being the fourth branch of government?

ed Stein '08
Rocky Mtn.
News-Net



Source D Questions for Consideration

1. Make a list of the details that you notice from this cartoon.
2. What is the author saying about the relationship between Democracy, newspapers, and the country's infrastructure?
3. According to this author, is the media (newspaper) part of the government? Use reasoning (your explanation of the evidence in the cartoon to your claim).



Questions for Consideration

1. Make a list of the details that you notice from this cartoon.

2. Write a sentence summarizing the meaning of this cartoon.

3. What is the author saying about the relationship between Democracy, first amendment freedoms, and censorship?

4. According to this author, is the media (free press) part of the government? Support your claim.

Writing Task

This is an argumentative writing task based on NVACS standards W.12.1a, W.1b, W.1c. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the texts as well as the ways in which the textbook was complicated.

Is the media the unofficial fourth branch of the United States government?

- Answer the above question in approximately ½ page using evidence from at least three of the texts provided.
- Write a clear claim for your argument and provide 3 pieces of evidence to support your idea. After each piece of evidence cited in a direct quote or paraphrase (your own words), please add the source letter in parentheses, for example (Source B).
- For each piece of evidence, clearly reason (explain) why this piece of evidence helps support your claim. Underline your reasoning. Reasoning can be in the same sentence or the evidence or come before or after the sentence that includes the evidence.
- Choose at least 2 of the important vocabulary terms from the box below to include in your writing. Add at least two context clues for each term to demonstrate your understanding. Circle your context clues for each term.

Vocabulary

Media

First Amendment

Free Press

Watch Dog