

Documents for In-Class Exam

HIST 118, Professor McDaniel

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Read through the following documents and use them to answer the questions on the In-Class Exam.

Document A

Newton N. Minow Addresses the National Association of Broadcasters (1961)

Governor Collins, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. . . . It's been a great pleasure and an honor for me to meet so many of you.

. . . I want you to know that you have my admiration and my respect. Yours is a most honorable profession. . . . but that doesn't mean that I would make life any easier for you. Your license lets you use the public's airwaves as trustees for 180 million Americans. The public is your beneficiary. If you want to stay on as trustees, you must deliver a decent return to the public—not only to your stockholders. . . .

Like everybody, I wear more than one hat. I am the chairman of the FCC [Federal Communications Commission]. But I am also a television viewer and the husband and father of other television viewers. . . .

I could list many . . . programs that I am sure everyone here felt enriched his own life and that of his family. When television is good, nothing— not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers—nothing is better.

But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there, for a day, without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland.

You will see a procession of game shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence, and cartoons. And endlessly, commercials—many screaming, cajoling, and offending. . . .

Is there one person in this room who claims that broadcasting can't do better? ... Gentlemen, your trust accounting with your beneficiaries is long overdue. Never have so few owed so much to so many. ...

The best estimates indicate that during the hours of 5 to 6 P.M. sixty per cent of your audience is composed of children under twelve. And most young children today, believe it or not, spend as much time watching television as they do in the schoolroom. I repeat—let that sink in, ladies and gentlemen—most young children today spend as much time watching television as they do in the schoolroom. It used to be said that there were three great influences on a child: home, school, and church. Today, there is a fourth great influence, and you ladies and gentlemen in this room control it. ...

As you may have gathered, I would like to see television improved. But how is this to be brought about? By voluntary action by the broadcasters themselves? By direct government intervention? Or how?

Let me address myself now to my role not as a viewer but as chairman of the FCC. ... I want to make clear some of the fundamental principles which guide me.

First: the people own the air. And they own it as much in prime evening time as they do at six o'clock Sunday morning. For every hour that the people give you—you owe them something. And I intend to see that your debt is paid with service. ...

I am unalterably opposed to governmental censorship. There will be no suppression of programming which does not meet with bureaucratic tastes. Censorship strikes at the tap root of our free society. ... [But] I did not come to Washington to idly observe the squandering of the public's airwaves. ... I intend to take the job of chairman of the FCC very seriously. ...

Now how will these principles be applied? Clearly at the heart of the FCC's authority lies its power to license, to renew or fail to renew, or to revoke a license. As you know, when your license comes up for renewal, your performance is compared with your promises. I understand that many people feel that in the past licenses were often renewed *pro forma*. I say to you now: renewal will not be *pro forma* in the future. There is nothing permanent or sacred about a broadcast license. ...

Document B

The Federal Trade Commission Proposes a Ban on Children's Ads (1978)

Washington Post, February 25, 1978

The staff of the Federal Trade Commission has proposed a ban on television commercials aimed at children "too young to understand the selling purpose" of advertising.

As tentatively proposed by the staff, all product advertising on programs whose audience are made up of a “significant proportion” of children under the age of eight would be prohibited.

Depending on how “significant proportion” is defined—a term purposely left open-ended—advertising on some Saturday morning kiddie shows could be eliminated altogether under the proposal.

The staff also proposed banning the television advertising of sugared products that pose “the most serious dental health risks” on programs directed at audience of children between 8 and 11 years old. In addition, the staff would require advertisers of other sugared foods aimed at children to contribute to a fund that would balance those ads with separate dental and nutritional messages. . . .

The FTC staff began its investigation of children’s television advertising in response to petitions filed last year by Action for Children’s Television and the Center for Science in the Public Interest, two nonprofit organizations.

Both petitions, directed at commercials for candy or snack foods with more than 10 percent of their calories from added sugar, suggested that such advertising is unfair and deceptive within the meaning of the Federal Trade Commission Act.

The FTC staff agreed, but went further. “It is both unfair and deceptive . . . to address televised advertising for any product to young children who are still too young to understand the selling purpose of or otherwise comprehend or evaluate, the advertising,” they told the commission. . . .

Legal principles also protect children against serious and lasting consequences of their own mistakes and against adult exploitation, the report continued. . . .

Document C

The Coalition for Better Television Plans a Boycott of NBC (1982)

New York Times, March 5, 1982

The Coalition for Better Television called today for a boycott of NBC-TV and its parent company, RCA Corporation, after charging that the television network had promoted sex, violence and scorn for Christian values.

The coalition, which claims that it represents 1,800 local groups, asked supporters, which include fundamentalist Christian churches, to stop buying RCA products, including television sets, videodisk players and electronic equipment.

...

Last June the coalition called off a similar boycott after the television networks agreed to review the content of their shows. No such review occurred, Mr. Wildmon said today. . . .

Mr. Wildmon, a United Methodist pastor in Tupelo, Miss., said NBC had been singled out for the boycott because he regarded its programs as slightly

more objectionable than those seen on ABC-TV and CBS-TV, the other two major networks.

“RCA-NBC has excluded Christian characters, Christian values and Christian culture from their programming,” Mr. Wildmon told a well attended news conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel here. He said that the boycott would continue until NBC agreed to eliminate programs and commercials that the coalition regarded as offensive, and he warned of further action.

Document D

The *Washington Post* Reports on FCC Chief Mark S. Fowler (1983)

Washington Post, February 6, 1983

Every time that Federal Communications Commission Chairman Mark S. Fowler meets with broadcasting industry officials, he talks about his yet-to-be born grandchildren and his fear that they may be deprived of “true freedom,” just as the Germans were under the Nazis and the Poles now are under Communism.

Fowler says that the reason for his fear is that, so long as the government continues to require owners of radio and television stations to broadcast all sides of a controversial issue and give equal time to political candidates for the same office, there is a great potential for some government official to manipulate these rules and restrain free speech. . . .

Fowler has stormier relations with Congress than any other recent chairman of the FCC, and the Hill has rebuked him repeatedly for not following its will. In fact, the strongest critics have been his Republican colleagues in the Senate who, instead of supporting his causes, have criticized him for failing to carry out the law. . . .

Fowler is . . . unrepentant about his all-consuming drive to get Congress to repeal the rules regulating program content on television and radio. . . .

“I don’t think that anyone who reads the First Amendment—and reads the language that ‘Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech and press’—and then looks at the whole gamut of content regulation that we have on the books right now can avoid the conclusion that what we do is unconstitutional and, I think, dangerous. I, therefore, feel it is worth the effort and time,” he says.

Fowler, a communications lawyer, came to the commission after serving as President Reagan’s communications adviser during Reagan’s 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns.

Even before he took over the chairmanship, Fowler made it clear that he intended to remove hundreds of regulations that television and radio station owners have complained about for years.

Television “is just another appliance—it’s a toaster with pictures,” he said in an interview just after taking office. Consequently, he argued, there is no reason for it to be regulated so tightly.

That view is clearly reflected in the agency's agenda. Over the past 20 months, the commission has been busy deregulating the broadcasting industry—moving to lift hundreds of paperwork requirements, dozens of rules limiting the financial interests of broadcasters and a handful of entry barriers for a host of new types of broadcasting stations.

Document E

President Clinton's State of the Union Address (1996)

All strong families begin with taking more responsibility for our children. I have heard Mrs. Gore say that it's hard to be a parent today, but it's even harder to be a child. So all of us, not just as parents, but all of us in our other roles—our media, our schools, our teachers, our communities, our churches and synagogues, our businesses, our governments—all of us have a responsibility to help our children to make it and to make the most of their lives and their God-given capacities.

To the media, I say you should create movies and CDs and television shows you'd want your own children and grandchildren to enjoy.

I call on Congress to pass the requirement for a V-chip in TV sets so that parents can screen out programs they believe are inappropriate for their children. When parents control what their young children see, that is not censorship; that is enabling parents to assume more personal responsibility for their children's upbringing. And I urge them to do it. The V-chip requirement is part of the important telecommunications bill now pending in this Congress. It has bipartisan support, and I urge you to pass it now.

To make the V-chip work, I challenge the broadcast industry to do what movies have done—to identify your programming in ways that help parents to protect their children. . . .

Document F

First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* Campaign Offers Advice to Parents (2013)

From <http://www.letsmove.gov/>

Parents and caregivers should set rules that reduce “screen time” by limiting the amount of time children spend on the computer, watching TV and playing video games. The time spent in front of the screen could be better spent being more physically active.

Talk to Your Family Explain to children that it's important to sit less and move more in order to stay healthy. Health experts suggest no more than two hours of computer or television time per day unless it's related to work

or homework. Children younger than two should be kept away from the TV entirely. Don't use TV time as reward or punishment; practices like this make TV seem even more important to children.

Set Screen Time Limits and a Good Example Create a house rule that limits screen time to one to two hours every day. More importantly, enforce the rule.

You need to be a good role model and limit your screen time to no more than two hours per day, too. If your kids see you following your own rules, they're more likely to do the same. . . .

Understand TV Ads Seeing snack foods, candy, soda and fast food on television affects all of us—especially children. Help children understand that just because it's on TV—or their favorite TV characters eat or drink it—doesn't mean it's good for you. . . .

Focus on Family Time During Meals Family meals are a great time to talk to each other. So, turn off the TV during meals. Better yet, if you have a TV in your eating area, remove it.

Read the packet of documents distributed in class. Then answer all of the following questions using the space provided. If you need more room to write, you may request more paper.

Question 1

Suppose another historian used Documents A and B to claim that children in the 1960s and 1970s were especially susceptible to the influence of television programming. Drawing from either document, describe **TWO** facts or pieces of information that you would want to research further before determining whether these sources support the historian's claims.

Question 2

Drawing on specific evidence from the documents provided, write an answer to the following question. Be as complete and specific as possible in your use of the documents.

Given that prominent Americans from 1990 to the present seem to have been as concerned as Newton Minow about the impact of television on children, how have ideas about what should be done to address these concerns changed since the 1960s?

Question 3

Write one new historical question generated by your examination of these documents. When relevant, use information from the documents themselves *or* from other readings in the class to ensure that your question is both specific and illustrative of historical thinking.