

ABSTRACT

WORLD WAR II NEWSREELS: THE LEGACY OF YELLOW JOURNALISM

From its introduction to the American people in the 1900s to its demise in the 1950s, the American newsreel was a staple of American life. These ten-minute presentations with around eight subjects of newsworthy or interesting footage played in theaters twice a week before a feature film. Five major newsreel companies capitalized on the success of showing a lineup of headlines, human-interest stories, and sports. The subjects varied from week to week until the 1940s, when the newsreel began to focus on one subject – World War II. In order to satisfy all of its audiences – cinema critics, journalists, and the public – the newsreel soon came to mirror another earlier form of wartime journalism that presented sensationalized news – yellow journalism. World War II-era American newsreels and turn-of-the century yellow journalism newspapers display similarities in their sensationalized war content, and the presentation techniques utilized to present that content. In this thesis, I show how yellow journalism lived on in World War II-era American newsreels by analyzing the newsreels of one of the major producers of the films, Universal Newsreels. The content and format of yellow journalism never left the journalism field, but rather, was adopted by a different and developing medium. The legacy of yellow journalism lived on in World War II newsreels as the American people willingly accepted the news from the war front presented to them in a new and exciting film format.

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