



# FDR's Use Of The Radio

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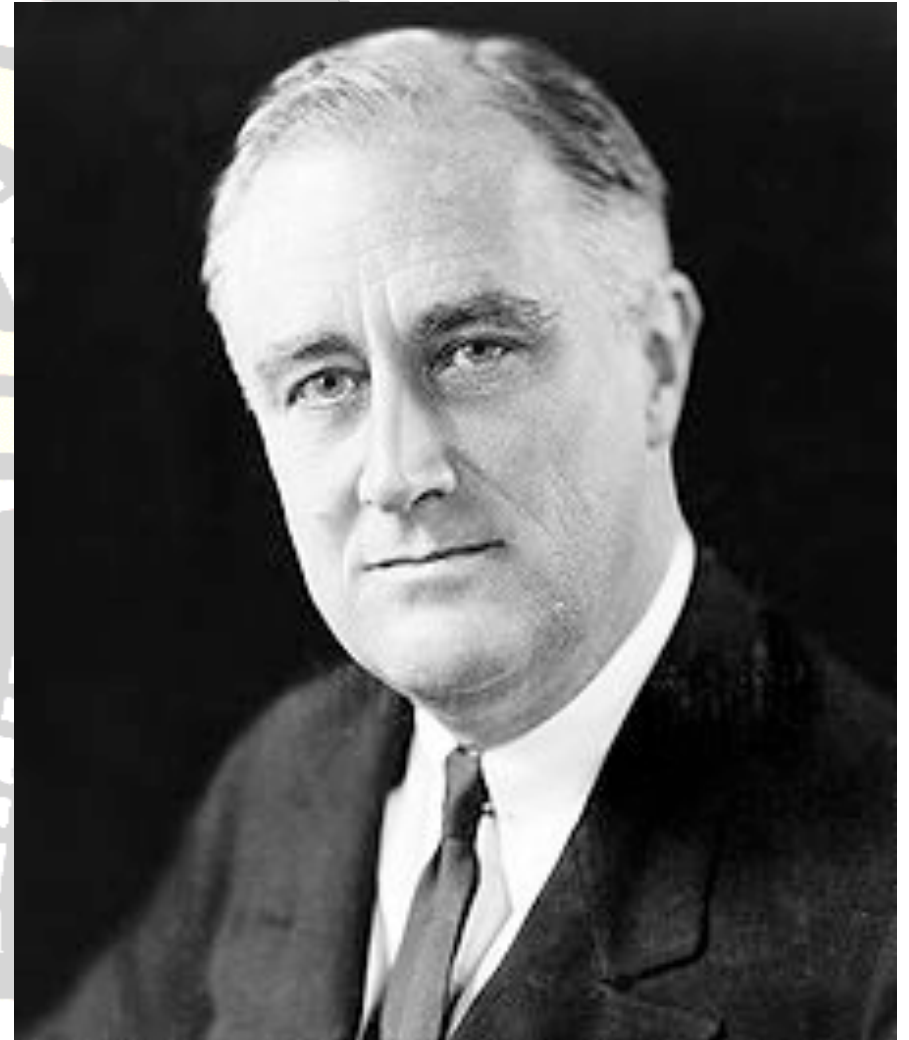


# Background

- by 1910-- modern newspapers firmly developed
- 1920s-- commercial radio gets going
- 1929-- Beginning of the Great Depression
- 1932-- Roosevelt's first Presidential Campaign

# FDR

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt
- January 30, 1882 – April 12, 1945
- 32nd President of the United States
- Elected to four terms in office, 1933 - 1945
- Harvard grad
- Fireside Chats



# Radio

- Powerful media for mass communication
- Broadcast
- Wide coverage






# FDR's Use of the Radio

- Radio media facilitates “An Imagined Community”



# Imagined Community

- “definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community”
- It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet **in the minds of each lives the image of their communion** (Anderson, 1991: 6)

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- it is imagined as a **community**, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal **comradeship**. (Anderson, 1991: 7)

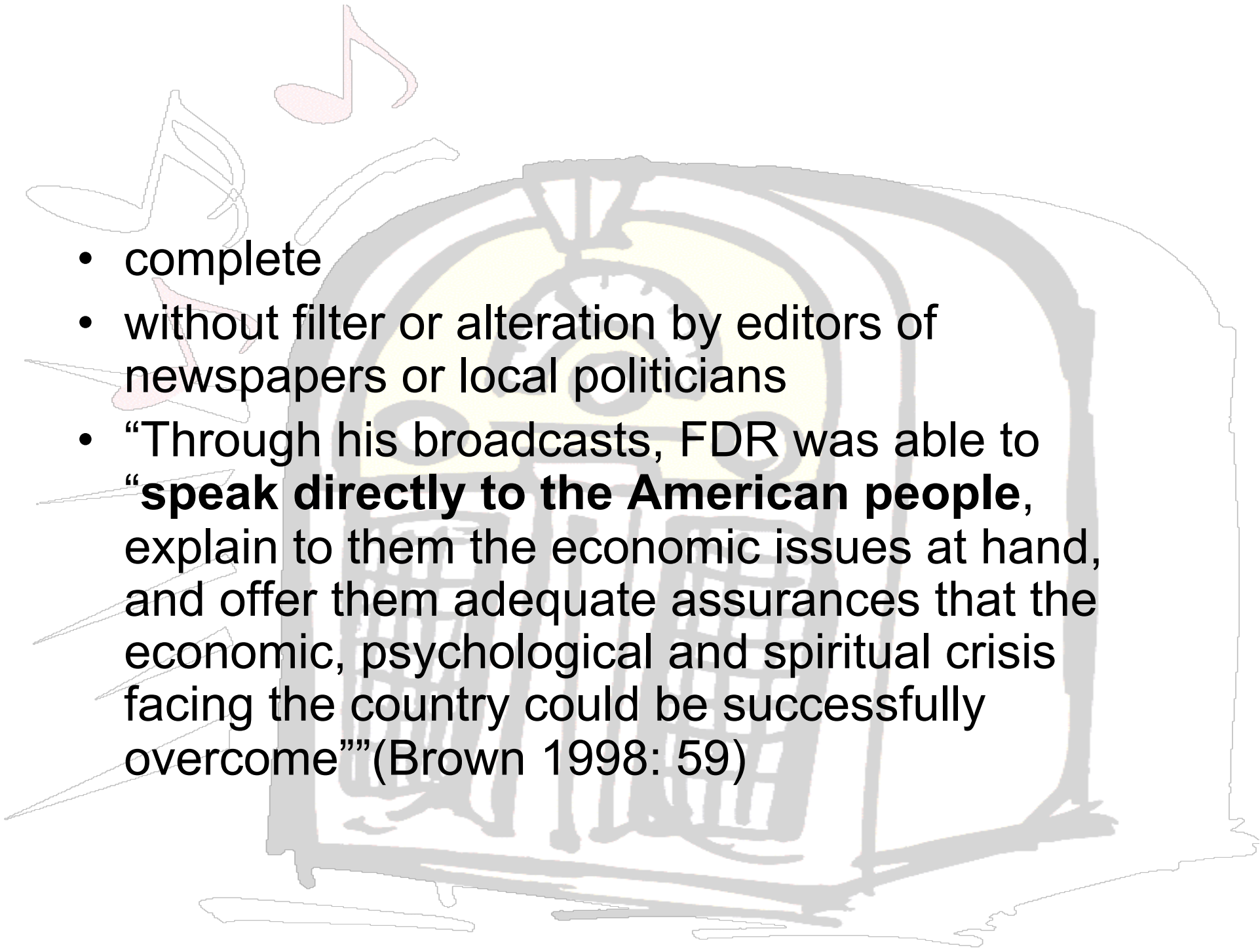


# Directly to the Mass

- scale

- “Through the airwaves, FDR could enjoy direct access to the people on a scale that the public speaker **addressing a crowd could never match**” (Brown, 1998: 11)



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- complete
  - without filter or alteration by editors of newspapers or local politicians
  - “Through his broadcasts, FDR was able to **“speak directly to the American people,** explain to them the economic issues at hand, and offer them adequate assurances that the economic, psychological and spiritual crisis facing the country could be successfully overcome””(Brown 1998: 59)

# More effective than the newspaper

- Illiterate people
- Corners which the newspaper didn't serve
- “By means of a nationwide network hookup, the president could simultaneously reach millions of Americans, many of whom were unable to read or lived in areas not served by newspapers” (Brown 1998: 11)
- Supplementary effect

# Subjective dimension: Rhetorical power

- New media have allowed presidents to go directly to the people with their agendas, and this capability helped them to **redefine their roles**, in particular their leadership roles. Tulis calls this “rhetorical power.”
- **Rhetorical power** is not only a form of “communication,” it is also a way of constituting the people to whom it is addressed by furnishing them with the very equipment they need to assess its use—the metaphors, categories, and concepts of **political discourse**. (Alexander, 2005: 2)

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# Rhetorical Power :National language

- Cross national and class—universal standard of English speech
- “A good part of the success of the fireside chat was due to Roosevelt’s ability to “project himself to any listener’s economic or social level, and thus **appeal to all Americans regardless of class**”” (Brown, 1998: 19)

# Rhetorical Power: Tone

- “FDR also toned down the rate at which he delivered these words. While most radio orators were accustomed to speaking at 175 and 200 words per minute, the president consistently addressed the American people at a **much slower 120 words.**” (Brown, 1998: 19)

# Rhetorical Power: links with everyday life

- “FDR also increased public understanding of his speeches by relating his issues to individual situations and **using everyday analogies** to illustrate his points” (Brown, 1998: 19)
- “The simplest way for each of you to judge recovery lies in the plain facts of your on economic situation. Are you better off than you were last year?” (Brown, 1998: 20)
- Stories and anecdote

# Rhetorical Power: Confidence and Proximity

- FDR spoke in a such a confident tone that gave hope
- A rhetorical voice as if he were a member of the ordinary family
- “FDR spoke in intimate, confidential tones to a traumatized public that was in desperate need of consolidation.” (Ryfe, 2001: 771)
- “The use of pronouns has been appreciated for the way in which it figured a new, more intimate relationship between the president and the public” (Ryfe, 1999: 93)



# Power of the Media

- “clear preference for hearing and seeing the president—face-to-face, via radio and television—as compared to reading what he had to say.” (Alexander, 2005: 22)



# Feedback: Reinforcing the role of FDR

- “plain” “simple” “honest straight-from-the-shoulder message”
- “Letter writers referred to Roosevelt variously as a gift from God and a friend next door, a supreme being and a real fellow who did not talk down to the public” (Ryfe, 1999: 99)

IMAGINED

COMMUNITY

LETTERS(FEEDBACK)

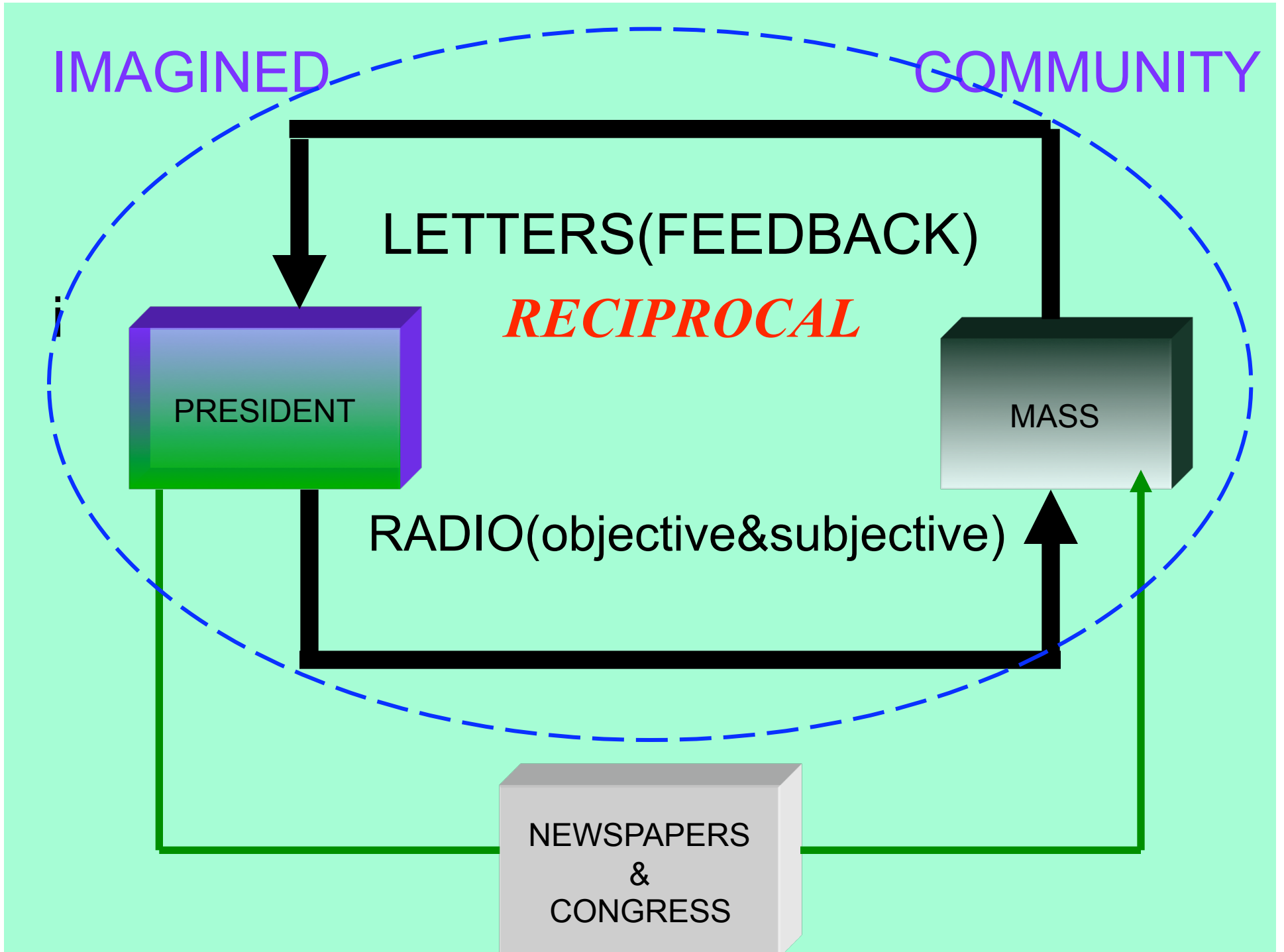
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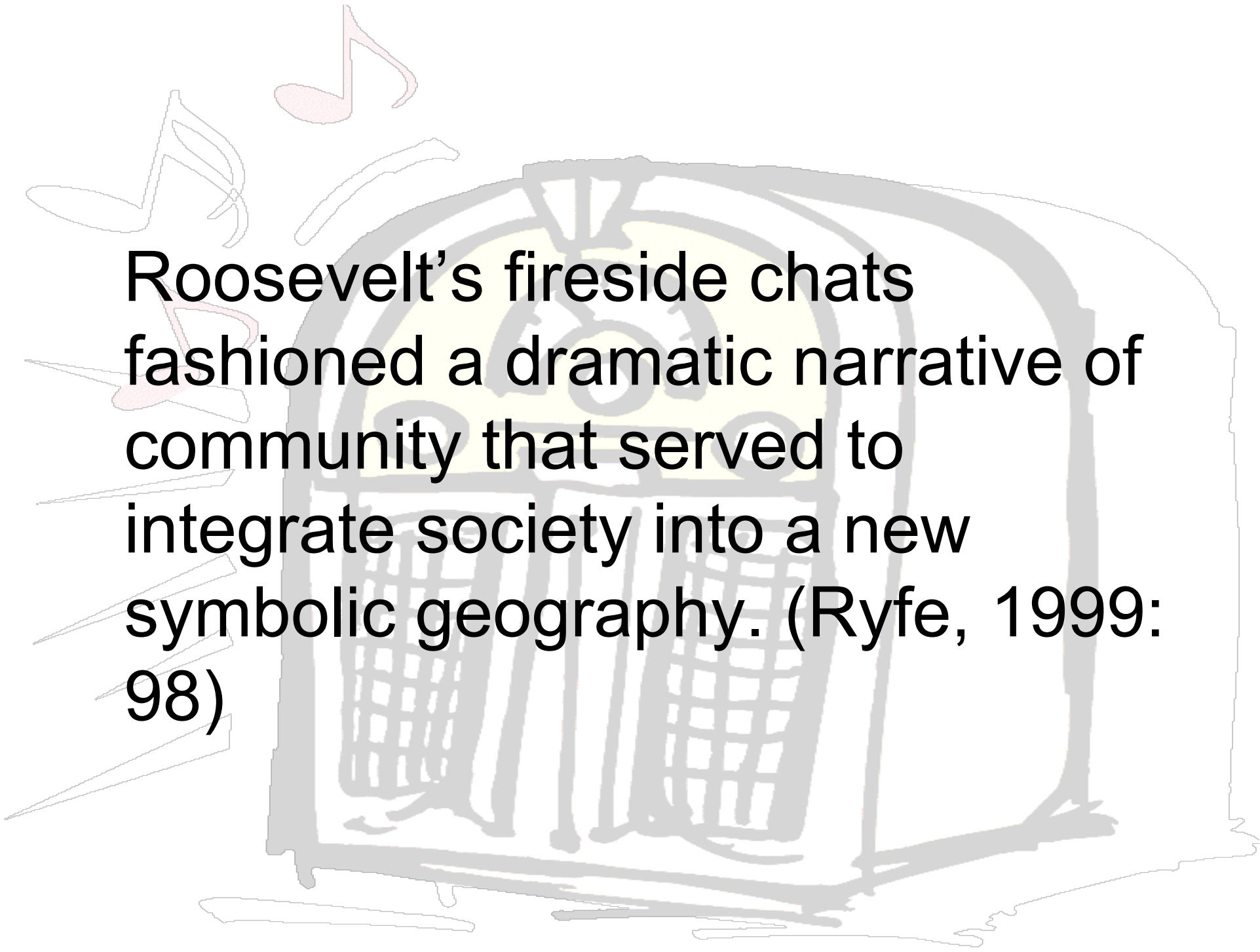
PRESIDENT

MASS

RADIO(objective&subjective)

NEWSPAPERS  
&  
CONGRESS





Roosevelt's fireside chats  
fashioned a dramatic narrative of  
community that served to  
integrate society into a new  
symbolic geography. (Ryfe, 1999:  
98)

# *Barack Obama and the Internet*



# Whats the big deal?



- "Barack Obama built the biggest network of supporters we've seen, using the Internet to do it."-Joe Trippi
- First president to really take advantage of the new form of mass media
- Many attribute his winning the election to using the Internet effectively.

# How'd he do it?

- Blogs (Day-by-day campaign stories)
- Social Networking sites (My.BarackObama.com)
- SMS (Reminders and flash meeting info)
- Emails (Weekly campaign information)
- Mobile Applications (Barack 08 iPhone app)



# Why it worked

- Obama's staff targetted specific demographics as well as deployed methods particular to each one (Email to older voters, SMS to younger ones)
- His staff read voter responses and analyzed them, changing Obama's tactics as the campaign went on.
- Used the 'Be the Hero' program to send more targeted and cost-effective messages

# But was he just another FDR?

- Both siphoned voter responses to their radio/internet media.
- Both created “Media Events” (Fireside Chats and SMS'ing pick for Vice President)
- Both adopted techniques/mannerisms to make the public feel included and a part of the 'solution'



# But what does this all mean?

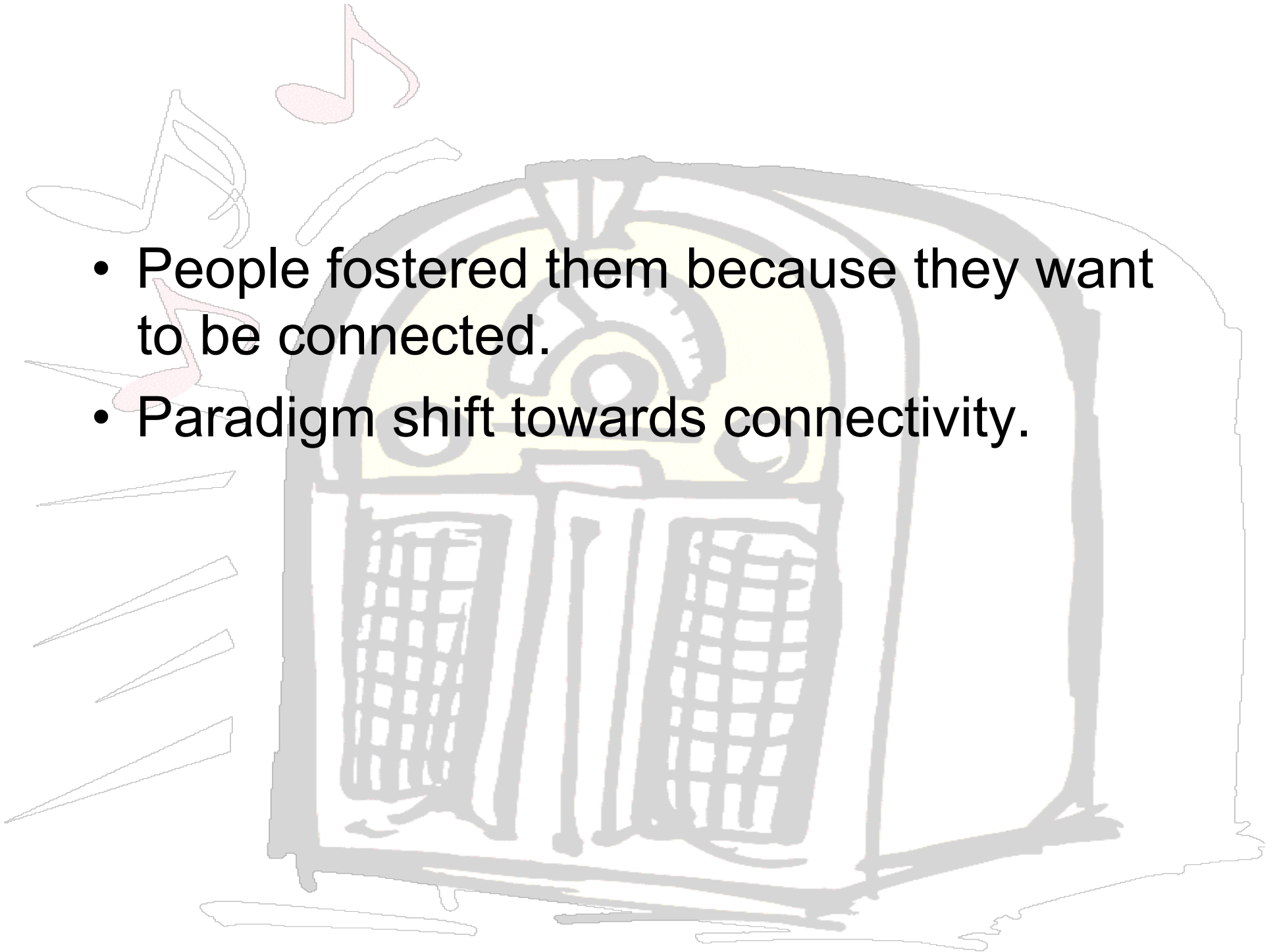
- New forms of information as well as new methods of disseminating it.
- Nature of new technology is invasive, it can get to you no matter where you are or what you're doing
- Information Inundation?

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# Big Idea: Imagined Communities

- The concept is simple: Lots of people all receiving texts, emails, podcasts, etc.
- Every person knows this and feels like part of a community, they all know the same things and conduct the same 'rituals'.
- Obama and FDR both fostered these 'communities' because all communities need authority figures.

- People fostered them because they want to be connected.
- Paradigm shift towards connectivity.





# Conclusion

- Media change not only has impact on the effectiveness, but also on how people imagine their social world. It changes people's social life fundamentally.



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