

THE "PHENOMENON OF LINDBERGH"

FOLLOW-UP ASSIGNMENT

In 1927 Fitzhugh Green, in his essay "[A Little of What the World Thought of Lindbergh](#)," analyzed what he termed "the phenomenon of Lindbergh," the unique response of enthralled millions to Lindbergh's feat—and to his response to instant fame. How is the "phenomenon of Lindbergh" exhibited in these newspaper selections published during Lindbergh's homecoming tour? The selections (presented in chronological order) were published in three big city general circulation newspapers, two African American newspapers, a Midwest agrarian newspaper, and a business/finance journal. Distribute the seven excerpts among student groups to analyze, using the questions below. Groups may present their analyses for class discussion.

- How is the "phenomenon of Lindbergh" displayed in the selection? That is, how does the writer exhibit the "phenomenon" even if he/she doesn't restate or evaluate it?
- Does the writer present a different perspective on the "phenomenon of Lindbergh," e.g., a different opinion, emphasis, or consequence? If so, summarize the writer's perspective. Why did he or she find it important to offer the different perspective?

■ "Luck and Chance," editorial, *The Wall Street Journal* (business newspaper), May 24, 1927, exc.

There is a profound lesson to be learned from the Lindbergh flight to Paris, in the newspaper comments which it has excited. The writers of those comments completely fail to understand what Lindbergh did and how he did it. A Brooklyn afternoon paper, for instance, says that "he put out to sea and followed his nose." If he had merely done that, trusting to chance and luck, he might have finished up on the barren African coast and was much more likely to end his trip at the bottom of the sea. . . .

. . . So far from "following his nose," Lindbergh knew exactly what he was doing, and was never in doubt, even in a thousand miles of rain and fog. His course was mapped out for him, obviously, by a navigator who understood great circle sailing. He was guided by one of the most remarkable inventions of modern times, the "earth inductor compass." . . .

Why the matter is discussed in this place is that the great achievements of true captains of industry are regarded, and really belittled, in the same way. Before a congressional committee, Samuel Untermyer asked E. H. Harriman if he had not bought Union Pacific [Railroad] for himself in anticipation of a ten percent dividend and the advance of the stock to over \$200 a share.

Harriman replied, "Yes." Untermyer triumphantly asked, "At what price did you buy it?" With perfect simplicity, and the truth which fools never understand, Harriman replied, "At \$8 a share on reorganization." He did not "follow his nose." He knew where Union Pacific was going, and why.

■ "Lindy Did It," editorial, *The Chicago Defender* (black newspaper), May 28, 1927, excerpt

What Captain Lindbergh has done, while spectacular and daring, merely represents the fact that it can be done. There are many things in our lives that appear more impossible of accomplishment than did that flight across the ocean—but they can be accomplished if attacked properly. Where Lindbergh had encouragement and backing, being white, we have ridicule and discouragements. But we have had them so long that we now should expect them and devise means of overcoming them just as the aviator flew to the water's level and then rose to the height of 10,000 feet trying to dodge a sleet storm over the Atlantic. He couldn't dodge it, therefore he flew his plane through it. The same conditions face us.

Instead of sleet and rain we have hatreds and prejudice. We have discrimination and injustice. We have discouragements and disappointments. All factors which we must overcome. We should take heart that Lindy did it. It can serve as a lesson to us as well as an inspiration to the rest of the world.

■ "Well—Here WE Are," in regular feature "From a Woman's Viewpoint" by Lilian Lottier, *The Afro-American* [Baltimore], June 4, 1927, excerpt

Weren't you glad last week that the newspapers of our land could feature on their front pages something inspiring as well as spectacular? Something heroic and worthwhile as well as sensational? Didn't it rejoice your heart that the biggest thing in the public's mind was not a vicious murder or a sordid scandal but the finest bit of sheer daring and intrepid courage that this jaded old world has known for many a year?

A perfect news story! One which interested the largest possible number of readers. One with dramatic appeal, firing the imagination and arousing the emotions. One whose psychological effect and moral influence were on a high plane. It is indeed with whole-hearted enthusiasm that the world gives three cheers for Captain Charles Lindbergh.

■ **“From Columbus to Lindbergh,” in regular feature “Text and Pretext” by M. Ashby Jones, *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 12, 1927, excerpt**

We shall find, as time goes on, that this daring young American not only matched the heroism of Columbus, but that he, too, discovered a new world. It is a new world of thought, and sympathy, and interest. Europe will never be so far away from Americans again. That means that the life of European peoples, with their interests and problems, their aspirations and achievements, will become more and more familiar in the thought and sympathy and interest of the people of this country. And we shall become increasingly conscious of the vital dependence of each upon the other.

■ **“‘Main Street’ Has Its Inning with Lindbergh and Chamberlin,” editorial, *Omaha World Herald*, as reprinted in the *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], June 12, 1927, excerpts**

We may be rough and coarse and stupid folk, but we did give to the welcoming arms of an admiring world a Lindbergh, son of a radical Minnesota farmer. He came hot from Main Street to become one of the foremost heroes of all time. And we followed him with a Chamberlin, son of an Iowa small town druggist, no less a hero, who, with equal unconcern, with equal cool courage and hardihood, duplicated his feat.

It is not alone what these young men have accomplished, dazzling as was the performance, that thrills us with a peculiar pride in them, and, if we may say so, renews and strengthens our confidence in the plain people of plain ways from whose loins they sprang. It is, even more, the kind of boys they are. They represent America’s young manhood at its highest and best. . . .

The pragmatic test is simple and conclusive. The thing works. The Middle West is producing something more than wheat and corn and beef and pork. It is producing fine manhood and womanhood. It is a land of encouragement and opportunity for every boy and girl. Its broad horizons are a stimulus to courage and vision and ambition. There are no barriers of caste or class reared against their progress and development. Here, if nowhere else in the world, democracy is functioning and flowering.

■ **“New York’s Welcome,” editorial, *The New York Times*, June 13, 1927, excerpt** (quoted in Fitzhugh Green, “A Little of What the World Thought of Lindbergh,” appendix in Lindbergh’s “We,” 1927)

Such a man is one in a host. In treating of the psychology of those who adore LINDBERGH it must first be set down that he has the qualities of heart and head that all of us would like to possess. When he left Newfoundland behind, the dauntless fellow seemed to have a rendezvous with Death, but his point of view was that he had an engagement in Paris. Two gallant Frenchmen had lost their lives, it was believed, in an attempt to fly across the Atlantic to the United States. An American, unknown to fame, in whom no one but himself believed, made the passage smoothly, swiftly, and surely, traveling alone and almost unheralded. From New York to Paris, without a hand to clasp or a face to look into, was a deed to lose one’s head over. And that’s what everybody in France, Belgium, and England proceeded to do.

After all, the greater was behind—the young fellow’s keeping his own head when millions hailed him as hero, when all the women lost their hearts to him, and when decorations were pinned on his coat by admiring Governments. LINDBERGH had the world at his feet, and he blushed like a girl! A more modest bearing, a more unaffected presence, a manlier, kindlier, simpler character no idol of the multitude ever displayed. Never was America prouder of a son.

■ **“A Modest Hero,” editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1927, excerpt**

By his example Lindbergh has given such a jolt to complacent snobs, people of silly pomp and pride, upholders of bunk and blah, of formality and artificiality . . . as they have not had for years. Looking at Lindbergh they saw no pose, no swagger, no strut—just a natural coming and going, a natural smile and nod, accompanying a few modest, informal words.

And the best part of his whole homecoming is that his modest acts and speech have been accepted by the people as the best expression of heroic character that possibly could have been made. For, after all that has been said of plutocracy, aristocracy, and caste distinction in this country, Americans are intensely democratic at heart. To them a quiet, undemonstrative hero is more a hero than any other type. And, indeed, one wonders if a chesty, strutting hero is a hero, after all.

