

Wag the dog – film study essay sample

[Politics](#), [President](#)



1. Brief plotline of the main events in the film.

Less than 2 weeks before the Presidential re-election campaign, the president is accused of having a fling with a Firefly (scout) girl. One of the president's advisors - Robert De Niro's character Conrad Brean is brought in to extinguish the fire. He hires a Hollywood producer Stanley Motss (Dustin Hoffman) to manufacture a fake war to divert the media's attention away from the sex scandal. This fake war would heroically be ended by the President right before the electoral campaign.

2. Character study -

* Stanley Motss: Played by Dustin Hoffman - Stanley Motss, well known Hollywood producer with no well renowned titles to his name. All he seeks is recognition. Hoffman plays a very optimistic character that never sees anything as a challenge. 'This is nothing', Hoffman's character famously says this after every dilemma they are hit with. After Election Day has come and gone, the President winning successfully, they show re-caps of the electoral campaign and credit the win to the President's slogan 'Don't change the horses in mid-stream'. Yet again Motss isn't credited, he then states that he wants to 'set them straight' (the media).

He says that, forgetting that he can never speak of anything that has happened but he refuses to back down. Brean very reluctantly calls a secret service agent to get the job done. The very next morning Motss is in the newspaper. He died at his Hollywood home from a 'heart attack'. Like I said before, all he ever wanted was to be recognized by the media and the general public for his work. * Conrad Brean: Played by Robert De Niro -

Brean is one of those characters who are very strong willed and determined to complete a job. He knows his job, he is one of the best, and hence why he was called in to help. When called in to the scene, he immediately knows what needs to be done and gives out orders straight away. He is a born leader.

* Winifred Ames: Played by Anne Heche - Winifred Ames is what's called a PR advisor to the president. She conducts herself with great confidence. She wears skirts and blazers in every single shot she has been. Throughout the film she is always organising something but then again, that is her job. She clearly does her job very well as a PR to impress the President this is shown when she passes on the message that the president insist on a white calico kitty. She doesn't except no for an answer, everything has a solution and she will do whatever it takes to achieve it even of that means putting her total trust into Motss and Brean. During the movie her character doesn't change.

3. What role do the media play in the film? Are they the cause of the trouble or are they simply manipulated too? Who is to blame?

Media plays the role of delivering whatever information they collect get to the general public. Who is to blame, frankly I' m not too sure. I think they have been manipulated by the white house staff, but who knows in real life whether they twist stories around and report nothing but lies?

4. Look up astrosurfing in Wikipedia - does this apply to Wag the Dog?

According to the definition provided by Wikipedia astroturfing is -political, advertising, or public relations campaigns that are designed to mask the

sponsors of the message to give the appearance of coming from a disinterested participant. Astroturfing is intended to give the statements the credibility of an independent entity by withholding information about the source's financial connection. Some studies suggest astroturfing can alter public viewpoints and create enough doubt to inhibit action.

I think this definitely applies to Wag the Dog. They have astroturfed the socks of the American public.

5. Do you think this happens in real life? Why or why not?

I am convinced that this media manipulation does happen in real life. Of course I have no proof of such thing, but when you are living in a diverse world with so many people and opinions, who do you really trust? Who do you really believe is telling the truth?

6. Review the film. Out of 10?

It's a very smart political film. It's incredibly relevant, not only to the 1990's but for many generations to come. It's a timeless movie. It's a very genuine film and displays perfectly just how gullible people can be. For this satire I would give it a 7 ½ out of 10.