

## Gutenberg's Printing Press

### Central Historical Question:

How can historians argue Gutenberg's Printing Press "created a new and wonderful earth" while they admit it also created a "new hell"?

#### **Document #1 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 1833**

He who first shortened the labor of copyists by device of movable types was disbanding hired armies, and cashiering most kings and senates, and creating a whole new democratic world: he had invented the art of printing.

#### **Document #2 Mark Twain "The Work of Gutenberg" 1900**

Gutenberg's invention of the Printing Press is the greatest event in history. Gutenberg's printing press created a new and wonderful earth, but at the same time also a new hell. During the past 500 years his invention has supplied us with new events, wonders and phases.

It found truth and gave it wings. It gave Science freedom and made it available to all people. Arts and industries received new life. The tyrannical form of Religion from the Middle Ages transformed into a friend and helper of mankind.

On the other hand, war, which had been comparatively small, became almost universal due to the press. Gutenberg's invention, while giving some freedom, brought slavery to others. It became the founder and protector of human liberty, and yet it made despotism possible where formerly it was impossible.

What the world is today, good and bad, it owes to Gutenberg. Everything can be traced to him and his Printing Press. The bad that his invention has brought about is overshadowed a thousand times by the good with which it gave man.

*Hartford Daily Courant*, June 27, 1900.

### **Document # 3 The Printing Press and its Effects on Book Production – Revolution or Evolution?**

The most important consequence of Gutenberg's invention was the spread of printed books in medieval and early modern Europe. Classical, religious and scientific literature was printed in the languages of common people and spread across Europe. This increased the level of literacy by providing readable texts to a growing reading public. These printed texts were sources of information for people of all political, social and economic strata [groups].

More and more, print became associated with the freedom of speech, religion, learning and the fight against old superstitions. One consequence of the printing press is that it allowed for the quick reproduction and spread of religious and classical texts and ideas across Europe. By making book-production less expensive, the printed word spread far and wide to people across Europe, creating a larger reading public.

Would the literature of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution have been spread as far and wide without the multiplying powers of the Printing Press? Probably not.

Would these movements have been as significant without their large audience? No.