

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 6 (2020). Number 4

Historiography in Mass Communication

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Essays

This journal invites historians to submit essays. They may be original ones written specifically for this journal, or they may be from material that the authors already have (such as classroom lectures, AJHA presidential addresses, etc.).

Essay length may vary from 500 to 5,000 words.

To submit an essay for consideration, email a Word file to the editor at historiography.jmc@gmail.com

We place importance on the credentials of authors and normally expect an author to have published at least one history book. As you consider submitting an essay, please note that *Historiography* does not go through multiple “revise-and-resubmit” stages. In essence, we expect authors to have an expertise and to “get it right” from the beginning.

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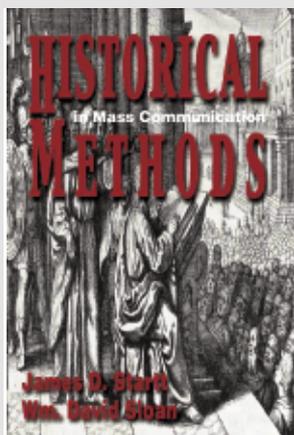
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A Simple Philosophy

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

In 1887 Lafcadio Hearn wrote an editorial in the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* titled “The Fascination of Crime.” He dealt with the peculiar phenomenon of people showering offers of affection on convicted criminals.

As an illustration he mentioned Henri Pranzini. He was convicted of the murders of three people in a Paris apartment in the early morning hours of March 17. *The Times* of London described the scene. “[A] courtesan named Monty, or Regnault,” it reported, “lay dead at the foot of her bed, with two gashes on her throat, while her servant-maid and her [maid’s] daughter, a girl of 12, had been murdered in their bed.” In fact, the throats of the three were so deeply slashed that they were nearly decapitated. Police arrested Pranzini three days later. Following his conviction on July 13, he was executed by guillotine on August 31.

In his editorial, Hearn reported that, during the seven weeks Pranzini sat in his cell, he “received at least fifty impassioned love-letters,

David Sloan, a professor emeritus from the University of Alabama, is the author/editor of more than fifty books and is a recipient of the American Journalism Historians Association’s Kobre Award for lifetime achievement and of a variety of other awards.

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many addressing him as ‘Unhappy persecuted one.’ One of the fair scribes promised to follow him to New Caledonia, and marry him.”

Something similar occasionally happens with historians.

It may seem odd to propose a connection between the vicious and the virtuous — between criminals and historians. But, like admirers of murderers, whenever a new “theory” of history appears, a few or many inamoratas and inamoratos latch onto it. Some even become its passionate paramours.

Many approaches have appeared and appealed throughout history. Spengler’s and Toynbee’s cyclical approach, Hegel’s dialectic theory, Marx’s theory of historical materialism, British historians’ Whig theory, psychohistory, Cliometrics, Critical Theory — these and many others have had their adherents on the world stage.

American historians, besides adopting some of the European approaches, have contributed their own. The earliest was the Puritan interpretation, and it was followed by such ones as the Nationalist, Turner’s frontier thesis, Progressive, Consensus, and, most recently, New Left.

JMC historiography also has seen its share of interpretative structures. While borrowing approaches from both European and American history, it has had its distinctive ones — Developmental, Sociological, and Cultural Studies, to name a few.

The informed JMC historian should be familiar with all these interpretations — for most of them offer ideas that can help one think about the nature of the past.

Of course, “all that glitters is not gold,” and historians must be cautious not to assume that all interpretations are created equal. In fact, some of their ideas can be discarded as simplistic or impractical. That includes some that have been popular with JMC historians, even a few

that are current today.

So when we hear calls for “new theories” or “new philosophies,” we should be careful about lavishing on them our affection. Often in JMC history, those who issue the calls are the least qualified as historians. They don’t understand historical thinking in the first place. They want “new approaches” because they haven’t mastered the ones that already exist. The rigor that traditional methods require is challenging, and it’s easier to call for new approaches than to spend the time needed to learn and apply what we already have.

In place of charming conjectures and alluring ideas, the best historians in our field live by a simple philosophy: Do rigorous research and then let its yields guide one’s narrative and explanation.

If you examine the ideas of, for example, those historians who have received the Kobre Award for lifetime achievement from the American Journalism Historians Association, you’ll find that all but a few have been guided by established approaches to historiography. If you read the books that have won awards in JMC history, you’ll find the same thing is true.

The purpose of these historians is simple to state: Using the most complete information they can gather, they try to explain the past as accurately as possible.

Of course, as they know, any explanation they offer cannot be pre-determined. Good historians do not set out with a theory and marshal facts to fit it. As facts are gathered to find the truest explanation, they may lead to a theory, but theory, no matter how enticing, never should be used to determine facts. Explanation arises instead from the gathered facts.

Spurious historians ask how they might select and interpret facts to fit their theory. The result is, at best, didactic history. It offers little ben-

efit except to those historians who have a particular view to propound.

Historians should gather all the relevant material and then ask what conclusions may be drawn from it. A simple approach — but it remains the one that guides good history.

We're pleased to offer in this issue of *Historiography* works by some of our field's leading historians. We begin with with an essay by Erin Coyle of Temple University that explores the use of legal documents in historical research. In our roundtable, Bruce Evensen, David Copeland, John Ferré, and Mike Murray discuss how historians search for significance in their research. Our historian Q&A is with Terry Lueck, professor emerita from the University of Akron, an authority on the history of women in mass communication. Finally, the subject of our feature on the winner of a national book award is Vincent Fitzpatrick, author of *Gerald W. Johnson: From Southern Liberal to National Conscience*.

As always, we hope you find that this issue of our journal offers a lot of enticing material to consider.

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Journalism History and Transcripts of Legal Proceedings

By Erin Coyle ©



Coyle

Law informs history, history informs law, and both inform our studies of journalism history. In recent years, communication scholars and legal historians — including Patrick File and Aimee Edmonson — have studied legal documents and journalists’ records to reveal ways people have used laws and legal systems to influence notions of order, power, and inequality. Many journalism historians have reviewed and cited court opinions and news coverage of legal proceedings to contextualize specific cases or controversies. In some cases, scholars also have used verbatim recordings of what judges, prospective jurors, lawyers, plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses said during legal proceedings. Those transcripts — or the lack of complete transcripts — have provided journalism historians with valuable information about institutional practices, individual beliefs, and political context.

*Erin Coyle is an associate professor at Temple University. A former journalist, she is the author of the book *The Press and Rights to Privacy: First Amendment Freedoms Vs. Invasion of Privacy Claims*. She also has published scholarly articles on First Amendment, privacy, and access issues.*

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When available, transcripts of hearings or trials have served as important sources for interdisciplinary research. Marianne Constable, a scholar in rhetoric, has compared trials to performances and court reporters' verbatim recordings of trials to play scripts ready for analysis. Constable's analysis considers what was and was not said — or reflected — in a transcript and compares the content from a transcript to the content of news coverage. Reviewing what was included in transcripts that was not included in news coverage, as well as the inverse, could reveal signs about institutional practices and political context.

Reading transcripts of legal proceedings for my recent research, I found information that was not readily available from other sources at the time of the legal proceedings. For instance, transcripts addressing whether Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, a Jordanian citizen, ought to be convicted on charges of killing U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy indicate Sirhan's attorneys proposed the exclusion of specific people from the list of potential jury members, which undermined the defendant's federal constitutional rights. The attorneys also proposed jurors could be biased by news coverage about one of Sirhan's attorneys. At the time, journalists could not report some information included in the transcripts, such as conversations held in a judge's chambers where the press and public were not permitted. Those transcripts thus provided more information than news coverage alone could provide.

Aimee Edmonson's important narrative on libel suits filed during the civil rights era, *In Sullivan's Shadow: The Use and Abuse of Libel Law During the Long Civil Rights Struggle*, shows contradictions between news coverage and an editor's testimony by recounting details from a trial transcript. Edmonson quoted Fred Taylor, a *Birmingham News* editor whose testimony supported a plaintiff in a 1964 libel trial. Taylor indicated to the court that the *New York Times* inaccurately conveyed

racial unrest in Birmingham: “I don’t think we had any strife among the races.” A defense attorney then presented stories the *Birmingham News* had published about white supremacists’ violence against African Americans. That contrast between the editor’s assertions and his newspaper’s coverage inspires important questions about institutional expectations and individuals’ beliefs.

Legal scholar Eric P. Robinson’s book *Reckless Disregard: St. Amant v. Thompson and the Transformation of Libel Law* gleaned important historical and political context for a Louisiana libel case from a trial transcript and news coverage. That transcript includes a verbatim record of the 1962 broadcast at issue in the libel trial, which the U.S. Supreme Court subsequently addressed. The televised appearance, which the defendant presented as a political exposé on U.S. Senator Russell Long, attempted to connect the defendant’s opponent in a democratic primary to corrupt union officials. The defendant also attempted to connect allegations of nefarious union activities to an East Baton Rouge Parish deputy sheriff. That deputy subsequently filed a defamation suit the U.S. Supreme Court addressed in 1968. Robinson’s explanation of Louisiana’s history related to slavery and segregation, crime, labor relations, and the Long family legacy in Louisiana politics enriched his historical narrative of *St. Amant v. Thompson*.

Sometimes we need to look at other documents to gain greater understanding of transcripts and why transcription of parts of specific proceedings might not be available. Wilbert Rideau’s memoir, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance*, explains that his attorney requested a court reporter type questions posed to potential jurors and the potential jurors’ responses during *voir dire* proceedings for a 1961 trial. Rideau, later known as a Black Louisiana prison journalist charged with killing a white woman, recalled that a rationale for not

recording the entire court proceeding was the state did not have to provide a transcript unless the defendant could pay for transcription. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart later summarized an existing part of the transcript when concluding Rideau was deprived of his right to a fair trial. Three jurors had watched KPLC-TV's broadcast of Rideau telling the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff about robbing a bank, kidnapping three people, and killing one person. Two deputy sheriffs also were on the jury. Rideau's memoir suggests racial discrimination contributed to the deprivation of his constitutional rights. A grand jury had supported charging Rideau at a time when civil rights leaders were fighting the state's history of segregation and calling upon Louisiana to desegregate schools. After two subsequent retrials, a Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals opinion explains the court overturned his conviction in 2000 due to evidence of discrimination in the selection of grand jurors and remanded his case for a fourth trial.

We also might have to review other documents because transcripts of legal proceedings can be difficult, even impossible, to find. Courts do not always keep old transcripts for public viewing. Questioning why entire transcripts or specific parts of transcripts cannot be found, we might learn about a fire that destroyed a courthouse or a clerk's tendencies to destroy specific records after years pass. Fortunately, some organizations are working to save transcripts of legal proceedings and to make the documents more accessible. For instance, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Lloyd Sealy Library provides public access to New York County criminal trial transcripts from 1883-1927. More than 500 transcripts now are available as digital files.

Reviewing legal transcripts can help us learn valuable information about institutions, individuals, and culture. Transcripts of trials and hearings can help us learn whether journalists have excluded informa-

Journalism History and Transcripts of Legal Proceedings

tion from their records or addressed information in a different way than the original source did. Asking why those journalists and courts' records convey information in different ways or do not address certain topics can help us understand more about institutional practices, individual beliefs, and political context.

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The Professional



If you want your students to excel at writing *and publishing* feature articles, *Writing for Magazines* will be your perfect textbook.

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Historical Roundtable: The Search for Significance

By Bruce J. Evensen, David A. Copeland,
John P. Ferré, and Michael D. Murray ©



Evensen

In September 1932, Lincoln Steffens wrote fellow muckraker Upton Sinclair a distress letter. Edmund Wilson was about to publish a piece analyzing the social significance of the muckrakers. Steffens fretted: “The fact that he lumps us is a bad sign.”

Picking up on his concern, the work of a great deal of good writing is the search for significance. Finding that significance can be a challenge for historians.

To analyze how historians search for significance in their research and how they know it when they’ve found it, our roundtable includes David A. Copeland, John P. Ferré, and Michael D. Murray. Our moderator is Bruce J. Evensen.

Bruce J. Evensen is an Emeritus Professor of Journalism at DePaul University. He’s written eight books and 38 chapters and articles. His latest book is Journalism and the American Experience. He received his Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For 10 years he was a broadcast journalist in Washington and Jerusalem.

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***Evensen:** How does a historian discover the significance of the media or the difference media make in the research area he or she is examining. How has your own research informed your answer?*

Copeland: The newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets and almanacs of the 1700s carried tremendous significance. I found, for example, that much information in the colonial era would appear in one newspaper and then in others. At times, you could track its movement up and down the colonies by the dates it appeared in the papers. Often, this information would be rewritten. The basic facts were there, but the wording would change, and sometimes elements of the original story would be



Copeland

David Copeland is the A. J. Fletcher Professor, Distinguished University Professor, and Professor of Journalism at Elon University. He is the author of 12 books, more than 40 journal articles and chapters, and series editor for 37 volumes on media history. He was recipient of the Sidney Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Journalism History in 2010 from the American Journalism Historians Association. He earned his Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Ferré

John P. Ferré is professor of communication at the University of Louisville. His latest book is Journalism's Ethical Progression: A Twentieth-Century Journey, which he co-edited with Gwyneth Mellinger. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.



Murray

Michael D. Murray is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Missouri's St. Louis Campus. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Prior to that, he worked for CBS News and the News Election Service. He is a founding member and former president of the American Journalism Historians Association.

omitted.

An example of a story about slaves that would have been of interest everywhere in British America was one in 1755 about a disgruntled slave in Kittery, Maine, part of Massachusetts at the time. The slave, after having been punished by the owner, took the owner's son that night, as retribution, and threw him down a well, drowning the boy. The story could be followed as it moved down the coast from Boston, one paper to the next, presented verbatim.

The story, however, did not appear in the *South-Carolina Gazette* because of the Stono Rebellion of 1739, which claimed the lives of nearly two dozen whites. South Carolina's population included more slaves than free; so slave revolts were a constant possibility. Following the rebellion, the *South-Carolina Gazette* never mentioned the strict slave codes the colony passed, nor did it publish any news of slave revolts or crimes. This speaks volumes to how slavery operated in colonial America and to colonists' treatment and fears of Africans in servitude.

In 1750, New York printer James Parker commented that news was something colonials could not live without. The way the information about the French and Indian War in the 1750s consumed the columns of colonial papers and how papers were begun to provide coverage speaks to media significance.

As the colonies grew increasingly agitated at British rule, Samuel Adams did not turn to public lectures or speeches to sow seeds of rebellion; he turned to newspapers where he used about 27 different pseudonyms to write. As his cousin John Adams pointed out after the Revolution, Samuel and the printers of the *Boston Gazette* spent their time "cooking up paragraphs, articles, occurrences, &c." These were published in the *Gazette* and elsewhere, the most famous of all being the "Journal of Occurrences" that would ultimately appear in nearly every

American paper before the Declaration of Independence. John Adams said that the “real revolution” did not occur with cannon and muskets but with newspapers and pamphlets.

Ferré: Given their diversity, it’s not surprising that historians find significance in a wide range of media. The last ten winners of the Best Journalism and Mass Communication History Book Award from the History Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication have examined copyright, environmentalism, Lincoln Steffens, networks, public relations, race, and values. Four of the ten focused on race: Chris Lamb’s *Conspiracy of Silence: Sportswriters and the Long Campaign to Desegregate Baseball*, Jinx Coleman Broussard’s *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History*, Robert G. Parkinson’s *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution*, and Fred Carroll’s *Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century*.

For my own research, significance tends to be a matter of ethics and belief. Why do we believe what we believe? How should we communicate with one another? These two questions have everything to do with media. After all, Americans spend at least 12 hours a day with print, wired, and wireless media expressing themselves, learning, persuading, and being entertained. In *Ethics for Public Communications: Defining Moments in Media History*, Cliff Christians, Mark Fackler, and I examined decisive twentieth-century media experiences such as the publication of Rachel Carson’s watershed book about ecology, *Silent Spring*, the government’s response to racism on WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi, and the media activism of American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means in order to tease out principles for ethical decision-making.

Murray: I've always felt one of the important aspects of verifying claims from research was in discovering all available evidence from primary sources. A lot of the time, this was initially the result of having spoken to someone who might have been involved in either starting-up programs or functioning in a prominent “on-air” or production role. Depending on the nature of the program, someone on the production side, working in support of a project and “behind the scenes” might have quite a lot to share.

Once, I put together a corporate history for the first Pulitzer television station, NBC in St. Louis. It had the added distinction of being the first television station in the State of Missouri. In the course of conducting more than three dozen interviews with pioneers who put the station on the air, it was easy to uncover innovations in their early news coverage and how developing stations from other places sent representatives to study their broadcast operations

If you had access and knew what you were looking for, you could verify claims by examining internal station documents. Interviews with two of the station's foundational leaders — the first person hired to work there, Keith Gunther, and John Roedel, the first reporter employed to develop news there — provided quite a treasure trove of information.

The fact that this particular station was part of the first wave of local TV development also helped the verification process, especially since so many pioneer stations made claims about being first with something, which were sometimes very hard to verify. This situation was aided by the fact the station was owned by a respected newspaper. You could establish how and why the station became successful so fast, and what methods it used to maintain market position once the competition started. You could see how the station gained free publicity and its “on-

air” talent pool got added exposure because of ownership by a nationally prominent but locally owned news company.

Evensen: *What are some of the primary sources or collections you’ve used when searching for the impact or significance of media in the research you’ve done?*

Ferré: For my doctoral dissertation on the best-selling religious books in the early 20th century, I read the papers of Harold Bell Wright, which the University of Arizona Library houses in its special collections. Wright’s novels included *The Shepherd of the Hills*, which was later made into multiple Hollywood films, one with John Wayne, and an outdoor drama dinner show that is still performed today in Branson, Missouri. This was my introduction to archival research. Years later I spent time at the New Jersey Historical Society reading the papers of Rachel McDowell, the first religion editor of the *New York Times*, a position she held for 28 years. More recently I used the University of Louisville Photographic Archives to find pictures for the cover of *Journalism’s Ethical Progression*, which I co-edited earlier this year with Gwyneth Mellinger.

My most memorable experience using archives was at what is now the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum at The Ohio State University. After the AJHA meeting in Tulsa, the library’s administrator, Lucy Shelton Caswell, told me about a collection that I just had to see: several hundred letters that cartoonist Lynn Johnston received from readers in 1995 after Farley the sheepdog died in the comic strip *For Better or For Worse*. Raw, emotional, and moving, the letters revealed how readers felt about Farley and about their own pets both present and past. I ended up writing “Death and Dying in ‘For Better or For

Worse” for *Media Development*, which led to another article, “Animals are People, Too: Pet Heaven in Popular Books,” which I published in the magazine *Horizons*.

Murray: In examining media texts in particular — at least in my case — and especially with national documentary television programs, the first challenge would be in gaining access to a copy of the broadcast itself. Today you could consider looking for such documents at the Museum of Television and Radio, Library of Congress, National Archives, Museum of Broadcast Communication, and the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. This approach would obviously include going directly to the source — the company airing the program — assuming they documented what they were doing and were willing to make it available.

Since many broadcast companies did not retain documents or keep copies of news programs, in some early cases, you could seek-out cooperation of broadcast executives or prominent on-air talent for their assistance. I did this with people at CBS News: Fred Friendly, Walter Cronkite, Don Hewitt, Bill Leonard, Bill Small and Dr. Frank Stanton.

As a high school kid, I once asked David Brinkley for information about a piece of commentary he had done about Alabama Governor George C. Wallace. In response, Brinkley sent me his actual “on air” script. In the old days, they used what were called “speedy sets.” They were all color-coated and he sent me his copy. It clearly showed how he had divided up his story into segments; very strategically underlying certain words in the copy for special emphasis. I ended-up sharing that piece of copy with generations of students enrolled in my “Broadcast Writing and Reporting” classes for many decades because it reflected how much effort someone who really respected words had put into

writing, and then rewriting.

Some of those people with whom Edward R. Murrow worked kept material because they appreciated that some of what they did with him was important. The first time I visited the CBS Archive, I was sent off to the home of biographer Ann Sperber, who was using documents others in the Murrow unit retained up to that time.

Many of Murrow's most controversial broadcasts were also included as part of major publications, written both by him and also others he knew well. You will recall that of the books published by Murrow, *This I Believe* was very important as an index of his thinking as well as books by his partner, Fred Friendly, also about the *See It Now* series. This included Fred's *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control...* Later as a CBS News president, Fred also was the subject of an excellent biography, *Friendlyvision*, by Ralph Engelman. Murrow's celebrated news writer Ed Bliss, who also wrote for Walter Cronkite and later became a distinguished professor at American University, published a book of historic Murrow broadcasts titled *In Search of Light* and much later a summary history of the field of TV journalism, *Now the News*. I published some interviews with Ed Bliss, Walter Cronkite and Fred Friendly, and they appear in the Appendix of the book *Political Performers*.

Copeland: There are sources that are available to all because they're digitized. Your university will have to have subscriptions, though. I use *Accessible Archives*, which has a number of sources included. For me, access to Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* and to the *Virginia Gazette* of the eighteenth century have been important. There's also access to African-American newspapers from the nineteenth century.

America's Newspaper Archive from Readex is essential for studying the eighteenth-century American press. The collection is much larger

and broader than just the eighteenth century, but this collection has nearly all of the papers of the colonial era.

Nineteenth Century Newspapers from Gale contains more than 1.8 million pages from newspapers in every state and territory of the nation from every decade of the century. This is a database that I helped put together with other media historians. The idea was to provide a strong cross section of newspapers that would have been available to the public. Party newspapers, newspapers from the Black press, Native American newspapers, labor papers, suffrage publications, and newspapers from the Confederacy are included. One item that I particularly like is that the collection has extended runs of some of the huge dailies from the last quarter of the century. I think these give researchers a good way of seeing just how encompassing the news was for the public from post-Reconstruction on.

The *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* collection is important, too, because it contains the principal newspapers that continue to provide us with information, specifically the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. The Library of Congress' *Chronicling America* is also a good source because it has lots of newspapers from many of America's small towns. I like going to this source just for the serendipity of what can be found.

Evensen: *So many factors influence human conduct and the course of public policy or social movements. How can the journalism historian be confident he or she has captured the media's impact on that conduct or policy or movement?*

Murray: The approach is always based on doing your best to examine all of the available evidence and employing any additional, discoverable criteria for evaluation — especially if it is critical of a work. In my own

case, the emergence of television coincided with newspaper criticism of what was being offered to the public via the old style, legacy network news operations in America, and those old news formats. A number of the early programs, including documentaries, gained attention and were also subject to some scathing criticism. So, there's also those to review.

Both Edward R. Murrow and his partner Fred Friendly were applauded for taking tough topics like challenges faced by migratory farm laborers and most of the criticism tended to rest on editorial content and the way the programs were constructed. Even more telling in some ways was how some Murrow scholars were later scrutinized as examples of potential bias. You may recall that the so-called "Murrow Boys" included a large number of news writers and reporters who became published authors and even professors. They owed so much to Murrow. The first biography of Murrow, *Prime Time*, was written by Alexander Kendrick, another Murrow protégé. CBS's Eric Sevareid said: "Murrow didn't really HELP my career. He practically INVENTED IT." Sevareid was just one of Murrow's many friends and former colleagues to write about his work and the standard of excellence he set for the field in articles, books, on-air commentary and in follow-up documentaries made about Murrow.

I believe we haven't seen the last research about Murrow and Friendly.

Copeland: The very nature of media in America makes this a tough question. I believe that media became the lens through which almost all Americans, especially those who were of European descent, received their understanding of what was happening in the United States and the world. Because media, especially from the Penny Press onward, permeated most of society, how media presented and framed news — and

acted as the gatekeeper of information — they had an impact on all aspects of life.

The inoculation controversy in 1721 is an example. Before Cotton Mather and others who were like-minded about using inoculation to battle smallpox had a media outlet to justify the practice, hardly anyone in the American colonies would have thought it sensible to give someone smallpox intentionally to save that person's life. The fact that this debate raged on well past the 1720s within the press and ultimately became the norm in America speaks to media impact.

In 1829, in his inaugural address, Andrew Jackson noted that “The recent demonstration of public sentiment inscribes on the list of Executive duties, in characters too legible to be overlooked, the task of reform.” Jackson was referring to the constant voicing of opinions in newspapers about how the 1824 election had been “stolen” by politicians rather than acquiescing to the will of the people, which was to create change in Washington. The constant haranguing in the press led Jackson to tailor his policies toward the sentiments being espoused in the press. Jeffrey Paisley called this “The Tyranny of Printers,” meaning that the newspaper in the early republic became the driving force in America. This is exactly what Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs pointed out in their seminal research publication, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media” that appeared in *Public Opinion Quarterly* about news and the 1968 presidential election.

Knowing with certainty that media have an impact cannot always be discerned. We can draw conclusions and say media did effect change or make an impact when we look at certain subjects — like inoculation — and see how society's thoughts and/or actions changed following the constant treatment of a subject by media.

Ferré: Causation can be hard to prove because social life is complex. Can we know the effects of even one memorable news broadcast? I'm thinking of the evening in 1968 when CBS anchor Walter Cronkite editorialized about the Vietnam War. He said, "It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate." After that broadcast, President Lyndon Johnson was reported saying, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America." A month later, Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president," Johnson said. Clearly Cronkite's broadcast convinced Johnson to throw in the towel.

Or did it?

We know that Johnson was in poor health and that his wife, Lady Bird Johnson, wanted him to retire to their ranch in Texas. Also, polls at the time showed Johnson's approval rate was just 36%. We also know that Johnson did not want the Vietnam War to overshadow his Great Society legacy, which included the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Medicare, and Medicaid.

So did Walter Cronkite's critical broadcast lead Lyndon Johnson to forego the chance of a second term as President of the United States? Probably not. Other important factors were at play. But did Walter Cronkite's broadcast matter? Certainly. Whether he actually said "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America," Johnson understood that Cronkite represented Middle America. It was to this audience that Johnson pledged to reduce hostilities and "move immediately to peace through negotiations."

Evensen: *To many, the term "media effects" implies a quantitative effect of mass media on behavior that can be exactly measured. But is it that easy?*

Can it be measured? What does your own research tell you about how mass media may influence human conduct in journalism history?

Copeland: Measurement is difficult and probably impossible in many cases. On the first page of *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman said, “The mass media serve as a system of communicating messages and symbols to the general populace.” Therefore, media work to “inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society.”

From my role as a journalism historian who’s looked at media’s effect on society and culture, I believe that media have influenced human conduct. Reporters, editors, politicians, as well as those who have led social movements — and even those who would be considered “ordinary” members of society — have used media to achieve a goal or make changes to society. Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Horace Greeley, Ida B. Wells, Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, Franklin Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, and so many others have turned to media to spread a message, to sway opinion, and to set the nation’s agenda. A federal judge, Alexander Addison, prior to the 1800 election, stated that if you “Give to any set of men the command of the press ... you give them the command of the country, for you give them the command of public opinion, which commands everything.”

We cannot measure the effects of Walter Cronkite’s “unwinnable war” editorial in 1968, but we know the immensely popular anchor of the nightly news on CBS affected the nation’s view of the war in Vietnam. Presidential aide Tom Johnson reported that after the broadcast President Lyndon Johnson said, “If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost the war.”

Likewise, I am certain that each of us has been influenced by the media in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the proliferation of the Black Lives Matter movement, no matter what platform is delivering us information. I think that when we see changes within society that we are seeing the effect of media because media so permeate America that they affect everything because media are our source for almost every bit of knowledge and information we possess. This cannot be quantified.

Ferré: Social scientists measure ways that media affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. News coverage of the science-vs.-religion Scopes trial in the early twentieth century is a case in point. After Tennessee outlawed the teaching of evolution in public schools in March 1925, the American Civil Liberties Union challenged the law in court through the case of biology teacher John Scopes, who admitted to teaching evolution to high school students. The trial, with former Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan representing Christian fundamentalists and famed lawyer Clarence Darrow representing modernists, became a national media sensation. Newspaper and wire service reporters descended on Dayton, Tennessee, accompanied by radio and newsreels.

Scopes lost the case in the mountains of Tennessee, but won the case in the media. Fundamentalists gained a reputation for being close-minded and backwards, and biology textbooks gradually incorporated the science of evolution. National coverage of the Scopes trial influenced people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It also inspired the popular 1960 movie *Inherit the Wind*, which also depicted fundamentalists as narrow and anti-intellectual.

Murray: Yes, I think it can be measured, and if the research we are doing is important it examines important people and their work. I think

the subjects of our research will likely be revisited, reevaluated, and measured again and again with the premise and conclusions periodically revisited and retested. We appreciate that serious scholars are always on the lookout for important topics and opportunities to share information, and interaction with other scholars helps determine a subject's potential.

For some of the early projects and follow-up studies I worked on as a doctoral student, the late Professor William Stephenson of the Missouri Journalism School offered encouragement. He was known for the development of Q-sort Methodology. His method consists of presenting subjects with various messages and having the messages rated according to their acceptability. He used this method to evaluate ad content, his primary area.

He wanted to find a way to examine the visual aspects of broadcast news programs from the *See It Now* series and received kinescopes of the Murrow-McCarthy broadcasts from CBS News right after they were broadcast in the mid-fifties. When I later told Dr. Stephenson about my interest in those programs, he let me borrow the kinescopes. I transferred them to videotape and then transcribed the contents. One of my major interests was in the visual impact of those programs; so I examined that dimension within the context of a persuasive campaign, taking a number of the programs from the *See It Now* series of that era into account. At the urging of my dissertation committee, the transcriptions ended-up appearing as an Appendix to my dissertation. That was the first time they were available for scholarly consumption — with permission of CBS Law and the Murrow Estate. Years later, I got to thank Mrs. Murrow for letting me publish them.

Among many others, Dr. Frank Stanton of CBS also helped me get a hold of other programs and so did Walter Cronkite, with respect to

other news stories in which he participated as anchor or leading coverage in instances where there was special interest. In looking at the lives of those responsible for the key programs, I would always try to conduct personal interviews whenever I could connect with someone, and then try to examine their personal collections. I was able to extract information about programs airing decades earlier.

***Evensen:** Looking to the future, what do you see as fertile fields of inquiry into the impact and influence of mass media?*

Ferré: Given the central importance of media in our lives individually and socially, and given the richness of media history, the study of media impact and influence is wide open and promising. Today's headlines are enough to spark the imagination. Are there connections between media consumption and gun ownership? How have racial patterns of media use affected American social life? In what ways have media promoted risky health behaviors? Has the legitimacy of conspiracy theories changed? How has the internet changed beliefs about democracy? How effective has social media propaganda been? The list could go on and on.

From an ethical point of view, it's always important to see how media treat vulnerable populations and how vulnerable populations use media for their empowerment. Linda Lumsden's recent book *Social Justice Journalism: A Cultural History of Social Movement Media from Abolition to #womensmarch* is exceptionally helpful here. By explaining how race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and disability have inspired journalism that mobilized collective action to effect social change, Lumsden has provided an agenda for an entire generation of research on the history, effects, and ethics of media representations of vulnerable populations.

Murray: The most dominant and growing influence on news in our current day is cable news. Cable has become almost overwhelming in terms of continuous coverage and their tremendous reach in terms of influencing audiences. It has also become dominant and influential, in some cases as highly symbolic representations of the sometimes radical variations in political commitment along with what passes for news today. From the perspective of the journalism historian, this returns scholars to an earlier era of partisan news. It is interesting to see how this plays out in terms of scholarship and academic opportunity.

In my own experience, and going back in time just twenty years, while being recruited to edit the *Encyclopedia of Television News*, these now dominant cable channels were just getting off-the-ground. One of my former students from the University of Louisville, Tom Mintier, was covering the White House for Ted Turner and CNN at the time but some of the most controversial folks associated with cable news development, including Roger Ailes, received scant attention, really not much beyond a short biography. As a reference work, the *Encyclopedia* contained more than 300 entries by 100 contributing authors. Considering the proliferation and influence of the cable news organizations or purveyors of what is represented as “Fair and Balanced” today — even if you just consider the coverage of politics, social justice, the environment or the economy — those would require a major multiplier of attention to do justice to them.

So I suspect that some of the historians of the future with an interest in broadcast news will undoubtedly want to focus on cable news outlets and their coverage of special areas of concern and interest. This will be complicated by the fact that the cable companies are constantly reporting, updating and re-framing stories as “Breaking” at breakneck

pace. They are now also quickly editing news segments and interviews from news programs and placing them on the web within hours of broadcast. They often focus on a particular issue or based on stories attracting the greatest number of eyeballs or in the parlance of our day, the most “clicks” on the computer.

Almost every network political reporter, including all of those with the White House or the U.S. Congress as their beat, has written a “behind the scenes” look about what has been going on lately in our national government. And if my experience is any index at all, that interest is likely to grow exponentially.

Copeland: I think that there’s more to be learned about media influence from every part of America’s history. I think that the research that has already been published provides a great resource foundation for current scholars. Looking at previous research combined with the reading of primary documents is going to tell us something new from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries and into the twenty-first.

The idea of qualitative versus quantitative research has been a focus in this discussion. I think the growth of media analytics is going to begin to provide quantitative support for qualitative hypotheses for future historians. That will also make all eras open for more research and new discoveries as well as new interpretations of events and issues. As we move farther from the beginning of the digital revolution in information, online sources are going to be where many turn for groundbreaking research on media. It will be exciting.

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Historian Interview

Thérèse Lueck ©



Lueck

Terry Lueck, a professor emerita of communication from the University of Akron, is a former president of the American Journalism Historians Association. She is co-editor of the two-volume *Women's Periodicals in the United States* and has published a number of articles and book chapters. She has been awarded a number of fellowships, including a Fulbright Fellowship in Journalism to teach and lecture in China. Her interest in the China Fulbright was fostered through an earlier award of a Bowling

Green State University-Xi'an (China) International Studies University faculty exchange. At the University of Akron, students selected her for the university's Pioneer Award for dedication to the advancement of women. When the university launched an Inclusive Excellence Award, students recognized her for excellence in teaching students with disabilities. After serving as chair of the Commission on the Status of Women in the AEJMC, she wrote a history of the commission. As president of the local chapter of Zonta International (a nonprofit dedicated to the advancement of women) she arranged for the local group's records to be housed at the University of Akron archives. She received her Ph.D. in American Culture Studies from Bowling Green State University.

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Q: Tell us a little about your family background — where you were born and grew up, your education, and so forth.

Lueck: I was the first of the four children who were born in Wilmington, Delaware, while my father was establishing his career with DuPont as a polymer chemist. My mother had quit her job as a dietician at Detroit's Ford Hospital when they married. Later, she again worked as a dietician to launch a Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program in an underserved region of eastern North Carolina. I spent most of my childhood in the South, where my two youngest brothers were born.

My undergraduate degrees in English and fine arts are from Thomas More College in Kentucky. I received my master's degree in English and my Ph.D. in American Culture Studies from Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where I taught in the School of Journalism.

Q: What did you do professionally before going into teaching?

Lueck: I began my professional career at the *Tennessean*, which at the time was Nashville's morning daily newspaper. The paper was still family owned, and John Seigenthaler was the publisher. It provided a rich learning environment as I worked my way from "copyboy" to the editor of a Sunday features section.

When I was studying for my master's degree at BGSU, I worked on the copy desk of *The (Toledo) Blade* during the early stages of its transition from an evening newspaper to a morning publication.

Q: Where, and what courses, have you taught?

Lueck: Working with the Northern Kentucky Community Action

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Commission the last two years of my undergraduate work, I taught GED courses for community residents.

The School of Journalism at BGSU offered me an assistantship to teach journalism. The assistantship was through the English department since the school did not house a graduate program. My assignment was to develop and teach the course *Journalistic Techniques for Non-Majors*. During my graduate work, I also taught the school's in-sequence journalism courses *Journalistic Writing* and *Feature Writing*.

At the University of Akron, where I spent my academic career, I taught *Newswriting* on the undergraduate level, along with *Advanced Newswriting*, *Editing*, *Feature Writing*, and *Survey of Mass Communication*. On the graduate level, I was the instructor of record for the *Mass Communication Theory* course. I also developed and taught two interdisciplinary graduate/undergraduate diversity courses, *Women, Minorities & Media* and *Women, Minorities & News*. At the University of Toledo, I taught several writing and media courses, and at both BGSU and UA I taught the *Introduction to Women's Studies* course.

I also taught at two universities in China. On the BGSU faculty exchange, I taught literature and writing courses for the senior class and literary criticism for the graduate students and teachers at XISU. As a Fulbright fellow, I taught *Newswriting* on the undergraduate level and *Women, Minorities & Media* for the graduate students at Jinan University.

Q: *Tell us about your background in history: When did you first get interested in historical research? How did your education prepare you to be a historian? etc.*

Lueck: I came to history from American literature. As an undergradu-

ate, I was drawn to the stories told by Kentucky writers and writers from the South and how much the stories revealed about the culture. As a graduate student, I broadened my window into understanding culture from literature to include other media and to feed my growing interest in how media defined 20th-century America. In studying the relationships between media and culture, I became aware that historical context was essential, and that it was not always available in the scholarly literature.

During my Ph.D. studies, a media history class with Kathleen Endres introduced me to journalism history. Her class, a media law class taught by John Huffman and Denise Trauth, and my study in American Culture provided my orientation to JMC history. Through my focus on women and journalism, I became aware that many contemporary questions could not be answered without understanding the history, where I once again found compelling, and often untold, stories.

Q: Who or what have been the major influences on your historical outlook and work?

Lueck: Since I came to JMC history from literature via American Culture Studies, my approach to historical research found a home in Henry Nash Smith's myth-symbol school of American Studies. The impact of the myth of the West on the American identity, which he traced back to Frederick Jackson Turner's formative thesis, introduced me to the dynamic tension between myth and social progress. I tempered Smith's idealism with more sobering conceptions of cultural development such as Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence*. Smith's examination of the impact of the myth on literature and social thought in *Virgin Land* also, through its titular phrasing, provided a

link to feminist cultural critique, particularly Annette Kolodny's analysis of the analogy of fertile, uncharted territory as women's bodies in *The Lay of the Land*.

Given that dialectic tension operates on levels from culture to language, my influences ranged from the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss to the semiotics of Roland Barthes. I adopted the post-Hegelian dialectic of Julia Kristeva in my work. With *Roll Jordan Roll*, Eugene Genovese opened the door to my understanding of culture as built on the backs of those who are nevertheless excluded from the historical narrative. The concept of paradigm shift that Thomas Kuhn developed in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* informed my perspective on media disruption and cultural innovation. The dialectic tension in my own scholarship is that between theorizing history and telling the story of history.

JMC colleagues continue to influence my research. I am inspired by the elegant expression of their scholarship and the thoroughness of their research processes, as well as their creative approaches and their enthusiasm for new ideas. I am particularly indebted to those who have always been willing to provide "fresh eyes" for my work, especially Kitty Endres, Maurine Beasley, and Linda Steiner.

Q: *What are the main areas or ideas on which you concentrate your historical work?*

Lueck: Using media as windows into 20th-century American culture, my work focuses on print media and on women. I examine media in the decades bookending the American century that frame a national identity of mass culture that was forged alongside its mass media.

I have studied newspaper women's sections of the early 20th centu-

ry and their reemergence in the late 20th century and considered relationships between the sections and women's magazines. I have documented the flow and ebb of mass magazines in the 20th century, including women's consumer magazines. I have profiled women's specialized publications of the 19th and 20th centuries and examined media representation of women and women's issues in other media. I have also charted how the status of women was advanced in the late 20th century through the interplay of women's journalistic work and academic research.

Q: Summarize for us the body of work — books, journal articles, and so forth — that you have done related to history.

Lueck: The historical research that I have published has been the product of lone ventures as well as collaborative endeavors. My articles and essays have appeared in scholarly journals, including *American Journalism: A Journal of Media History*. I have written numerous chapters for books and entries for encyclopedias. I co-edited and co-authored the two influential reference volumes *Women's Periodicals in the United States*. My scholarship has also appeared in other formats, including a *Journalism & Communication Monograph*.

My approach to historical research has been honed through my review of others' historical scholarship, from books to internet resources. Although not commonly considered in this context, I have also found that my appreciation of historical research has been enhanced through the outside reviews that I have written for university tenure and promotion decisions after reviewing the body of scholarly work that colleagues have produced over their careers.

Q: *Of the books you have written, from which ones did you get the most satisfaction?*

Lueck: The process involved with *Women's Periodicals in the United States* was a very satisfying experience. I worked closely with my colleague Kitty Endres, wrote a number of the chapters, and edited the research of scholars who contributed chapters. I was also gratified that the book received recognition both in and out of academia, including a link on the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press website to the political and social issues volume. One of my fondest memories with regard to that volume is how our colleague, the late David Spencer, would seek me out at AJHA conventions to tell me how much his graduate students enjoyed using the book.

In conceptualizing and presenting my historical scholarship, I grapple with a tension between theory and storytelling. Therefore, I was perhaps most satisfied by the *Journalism & Communication Monograph* in which I defined a conservative feminist editorial voice in the re-emergence of newspaper women's sections. Publication of this perspective enabled me to engage in robust discussion with media historians and debate with feminist media theorists.

Q: *We realize that it is difficult to judge one's own work — and that the most accomplished people are often the most modest — but if you had to summarize your most important contributions to the field of JMC history, what would they be?*

Lueck: I was able to broaden the audience for JMC history among students, scholars, and media professionals. I created a panel addressing history in the curriculum and successfully lobbied for it to become the

first American Journalism Historians Association panel to be presented at a conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. As president of AJHA, I helped facilitate the move of the association's journal *American Journalism* to the professional publisher Taylor & Francis, which gave the journal wider exposure. I spearheaded the organization of the AJHA convention in Cleveland, which involved a number of area professionals and media venues.

At the University of Akron, I designed two popular interdisciplinary graduate/undergraduate courses that addressed media diversity, into which I incorporated a substantial amount of JMC history about white women and people of color.

On a more informal level, I have tried to make those with an interest in JMC history feel welcome in the more established groups of scholars.

Q: As you look back over your career, if you could do anything differently, what would it be?

Lueck: In that alternate reality, my ideal self pursues a long-term strategy for mining the fertile ground of my dissertation research, designating realistic steps for transforming the research I perform and the materials I incorporate in the classroom into scholarly publication. Along the way, I recognize institutional stability as an illusion and do not spend precious time developing policies and practices that prove ephemeral. And I am not distracted away from the value of my own research focus, even when I am overcome by the enormous amount of scholarship that is yet to be done in the field. I apply emotional intelligence and the consistency of my vision to establish a personal brand.

Historian Interview

Q: Tell us about your “philosophy of history” (of historical study in general or of JMC history in particular) or what you think are the most important principles for studying history.

Lueck: History is our never-ending story. Through historical research, we recover fragments of the cultural backstory, giving meaning to the ever-present yet ever-shifting backdrop to contemporary action. Our shared history continuously shapes the future of society through an inherited orientation that informs our cultural decision-making. Ideally, each generation inherits a richer and more complete historical portrait to build its experiences into and pass down to succeeding generations.

Q: How would you evaluate the quality of work being done today in JMC history — its strengths and weaknesses?

Lueck: Today’s best scholarship in JMC history is an exciting blend of the traditional with cutting-edge creativity. Studies that explore new perspectives on traditional subject matter, bring historical context to contemporary media and social issues, incorporate interdisciplinary approaches, and examine transnational relationships are strengthening the research base. Intersections of race, class, and gender that have too long been buried are being retrieved and woven into episodes of the historical narrative for a richer story and a clearer depiction of our history. Research that bridges media history with contemporary situations and problems is providing much-needed perspective in rapidly shifting media and social environments. The accessibility of JMC history is being enhanced by its being shared across numerous media platforms.

These strengths are maintaining the vitality of the field and defining directions for future research. By remaining vigilant, kind, and genuine

in their review of the scholarship, scholars can help guarantee that the quality of the research, its production, and its influence continue to advance the field.

Q: What do you think we in JMC history need to be doing to improve the status of JMC history in (1) JMC education and (2) the wider field of history in general?

Lueck: Supporting professional media and claiming ownership of our field of study are two strategies that JMC historians can make use of to create visibility for history, value for historiography, and an appreciation of the expertise of JMC history scholars. Supporting legitimate media, i.e., legacy and new media that are performing with integrity, enhances by association the reputation of JMC scholars, including those who answer the JMC history calling. JMC history scholars should claim ownership of our field in both pedagogical and scholarly communities.

JMC historians claiming ownership of the scholarship of JMC history can enable other scholars to recognize that media do not merely provide a collection of historical artifacts for their use. Maintaining the integrity of our journals and the quality of the scholarship that is published in them is key to advancing the status of JMC history in the field of history at large.

In the classroom, examining media credibility and teaching media literacy can demonstrate a need for JMC history in the profession and job potential for students. Claiming ownership of the field by teaching the JMC history classes promotes the recognition of JMC history as a distinct endeavor, not an appendage to other disciplines.

Another strategy for advancing the status of JMC history in academia is to secure a berth for a course in university electives or require-

ments in order to gain wider exposure and create greater student demand for the course. This measure can provide a more enduring future for the course, particularly if it is used as a springboard to a network outside the home university. Many universities have transfer agreements with the other colleges and universities across the state. These agreements guarantee that certain courses taken at one university automatically transfer to the other institutions with full credit. However, those who make decisions about the list of courses may not see the value of including a stand-alone JMC history course. To establish an appeal for inclusion on the university or state level, JMC historians may want to rely on their other specialties or interests such as diversity or law to frame the history course.

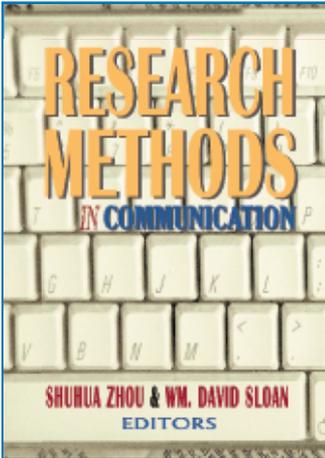
Q: *What challenges do you think JMC history faces in the future?*

Lueck: JMC history faces the significant challenges of being excluded from a streamlined, reprioritized university curriculum and of being dismissed in the national conversation.

The public nature of media fosters an ownership in all those who share the media experience. Therefore, the study of media does not tend to be viewed as a distinct field, and the study of media history is often entirely invisible. Those who participate through viewing, reading, listening, or contributing to media — i.e., everyone — can claim a qualification to teach contemporary media and include history as far as their memories reach. They can also claim an expertise in performing scholarship that relies on JMC history while at the same time relegating the field to artifacts, tools, and footnotes.

Thank you for the opportunity to do this interview.

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Vincent Fitzpatrick won the 2003 Frank Luther Mott-Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for his biography *Gerald W. Johnson: From Southern Liberal to National Conscience* (Louisiana State University Press, 2002). The curator of the H. L. Mencken Collection at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Fitzpatrick received his Ph.D. at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In the following essay, he discusses the genesis of the book and the research it entailed.

In 1997, on a steamy July afternoon in southeastern North Carolina, an afternoon marked by memories and mosquitoes, my family and I wandered among the dead and searched for the marker of Gerald Johnson. A number of our vacations have gone like this — searching for Gerald Johnson among his ancestors, his family and his friends, and his papers.

The writing of Gerald White Johnson (1890-1980) entranced me when I was a child. It has also informed and delighted me, and challenged my beliefs, as an adult. Back in 1960, when I was a ten-year-old boy in Baltimore, my parents gave me Johnson's *America Is Born*, the

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first volume of his *History for Peter* trilogy. I read this riveting tale far into the night, long after my parents were convinced that I was asleep. It was far more interesting, I decided, than anything that my teachers made me read for school. I had no idea then, of course, that I would ever write professionally, or that I would have the good fortune to write the first biography of this remarkable man.

The process of researching and writing literary biography poses its own set of challenges. The biographer's subject becomes, for all intents and purposes, a member of the family — with a seat at the table for every meal, a place in the car for every trip, and an invitation to every party. (It helps immensely if the subject and the biographer can remain congenial.) Unfortunately, the more intently the biographer examines time past, the less attention is paid to time present. During one especially unfortunate week several years ago, I left our son stranded at basketball practice while I sat alone at the computer and wrote about the deceased, and I managed to put the milk jug into the freezer. My family has proven remarkably tolerant.

This book began during the summer of 1988, after I had completed the biography of H. L. Mencken that would appear the following year. Fred Hobson, the distinguished biographer and literary critic, suggested that I consider writing a life of Johnson. I began the voluminous research then and continued with it through the publication of two other books. At times during this literary marathon, that proverbial finish line seemed far away indeed.

Johnson's productivity was staggering. This North Carolinian's career spanned seventy-five years, from 1905 until 1980. He wrote more than forty books, and his canon runs to over fifteen million words — the output of several lifetimes for ordinary writers. As a journalist, he saw his columns grace several newspapers, among them the Balti-

Book Award Interview

more *Evening Sun* and the New York *Herald Tribune*. His articles and essays distinguished magazines as diverse as *Look* and the *American Scholar*, and his books included biographies and histories, novels and two multi-volume series for children. In addition, he served as the first professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was an award-winning television commentator.

In a graceful style accessible to the general reader, he spoke for those incapable of speaking for themselves. He feared no one. On a number of occasions when many of his fellow Americans crept away — during the tumultuous time of Senator Joseph McCarthy, for example — Johnson elected to stand and fight. Adlai Stevenson celebrated him as “the critic and conscience of our time.”

Johnson generalized that “writers don’t have interesting lives” and that “it is far more difficult to write an interesting biography of a man of ideas rather than a man of action.” For the most part, Johnson was such a man of ideas. When he chose to dissent, it was from ideas rather than from decorum. There were no embarrassing public spectacles, no breakdowns, no problems with drugs or alcohol; he was happily married for nearly fifty-eight years and left behind no skeletons to be rattled by posterity. He was fortunate, and he knew it.

Kathryn Hayward Johnson, Gerald’s wife, was a very skillful keeper of his flame. She organized his papers and donated a sizable amount of material to Wake Forest University, from which Johnson had graduated in 1911 (the school was then Wake Forest College). This material includes, among other things, an extensive correspondence, newspaper and magazine clippings, manuscripts, books, and an impressive collection of photographs taken during various stages of Johnson’s career. I spent several productive and enjoyable weeks at Wake Forest’s Baptist Historical Collection with its very able curator, Mr. John Woodard. To

my delight, I found that Johnson had kept a diary (some of it written retrospectively because of matters of military security) detailing his service in France during and right after World War I. This diary proved invaluable; without it, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to trace Johnson's movements and write the chapter titled "Over There." To my further delight, I found the manuscript on which he had been working for a book on America's bi-centennial in 1976, a manuscript never completed. I had the good fortune to edit it for publication in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1992.

In addition to the Johnson papers at Wake Forest, I examined more than thirty other manuscript collections at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Virginia, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Princeton University, and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York. I also examined the archives of the newspapers for which Johnson had written. All of this material helped, in various ways, to determine the facts about Johnson's long and controversial career. Without fail, the curators of these collections were facilitators rather than obstructionists, and I am grateful to the numerous kind people who went out of their way to expedite my research.

Johnson's letters proved lively and informative. Among his many correspondents were Howard Odum, with whom he collaborated on *The Wasted Land*; Adlai Stevenson, whom he assisted during the presidential campaigns of 1952 and 1956; and H. L. Mencken, the controversial Baltimorean who was by long odds the greatest personal influence on Johnson's career. Unlike a number of other writers, Johnson was not superstitious about discussing a work-in-progress, and he used these letters to set forth his intent and his methodology.

One of the first tasks that I faced in writing this first biography was

constructing a chronology, and the correspondence helped immensely here. Where did he live; when and why did he move from one domicile to another, from one job to another; whom did he meet personally and professionally; what other writers did he read, and what did he think of them; why did he choose to leave his career in daily journalism in 1943 and concentrate on book and magazine writing? The answers lay in his correspondence, so carefully preserved and accessible. I have wondered more than once about the fate of future biographers who deal with subjects using e-mail rather than conventional correspondence.

The research entailed more than thirty interviews, and Johnson's family could not have proven more helpful or co-operative. I also met with Johnson's friends, his fellow writers, and one of his editors. No one refused a request for an interview, and the sessions all proved amiable and informative. Interviewing proves an acquired skill, and I have learned over the decades that the tape recorder is not necessarily superior to the notepad, that interviews can go in very different directions than what the interviewer had intended, that silence can serve as one of the interviewer's most valuable tools, and that sessions can prove rewarding in ways that the interviewer cannot foresee. For example, when I was interviewing Harold A. Williams, the distinguished historian of the Baltimore *Sunpapers*, he suggested an avenue of research that had entirely escaped me, an avenue which provided salient information that I could not have acquired elsewhere.

The life of Gerald White Johnson was a remarkable journey — a journey that took him from his native North Carolina to the red fields of France, back to North Carolina and then up the road to Baltimore for the final fifty-four years of his life. One of his cousins had ridden with Confederate General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry; Johnson lived to see a man walk on the moon. As a regional writer, he played a signifi-

cant part in the Southern Literary Renaissance, engaged in a long literary combat with the Southern Agrarians, lambasted those Southerners who themselves attacked the New Deal, and excoriated the Dixiecrats in 1948. As a commentator on the national scene, he lionized FDR, scoffed at Eisenhower and Nixon, and became one of the earliest and most vocal critics of the war in Vietnam. He was a bold man, a voyager to the end of his days, who learned by going where he had to go, and his career proves an important part of the American record during the twentieth century.

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