Historiography

in Mass Communication

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Historiography in Mass Communication

Editorial Purpose

This journal publishes essays dealing with the study of mass communication history and of history in general. (It does *not* publish articles about historical events, episodes, people, etc., as one finds in, for example, historical research papers.)

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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.).

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We Are Not Historians

By Wm. David Sloan ©

Sloan

NOTE: This essay is from a speech given to the Symposium on the 19th Century Press in 2011.

When David Sachsman invited me to give a talk at this Symposium, in a hasty reply I suggested the title you see on your program. But, as the Roman historian Titus Livius [Livy] said, "Haste is blind and improvident."

So at the outset I apologize for giving a title to this speech before thinking. I should have taken the advice of William Congreve, the English poet. "Married in haste," he said, "we repent at leisure." Or, as St. Jerome put it more succinctly, "Haste is of the Devil."

So I hope you won't be disappointed if what I have to say this evening is a little more modest than the title might lead you to think.

Years ago, before I had met Debbie van Tuyll, I saw her give a presentation at the AEJMC Southeast Colloquium. Her topic was southern reporters during the Civil War. As I listened, I thought to myself, "Now here is a person who is *serious* about history." It was apparent that she had investigated a wide range of sources and was thoughtful in trying to understand them. She seemed to have a true appreciation for the

Wm. David Sloan, a professor emeritus from the University of Alabama, is the author/editor of more than forty books and is a recipient of the American Journalism Historians Association's Kobre Award for lifetime achievement.

reporters and for the complex and dangerous conditions they worked in. In this field of JMC history, when so much of what we hear is glib and superficial, Debbie's whole presentation was utterly refreshing.

It has recently struck me that, as a general rule, most people who do history in our field don't take it seriously. I've had that nagging feeling for years — but only now (being retired) am I bold (or careless) enough to say it.

I don't want to sound as if I think *none* of our colleagues are doing any good work. Indeed, we have more really good historians today than at any other time in our history. Since I got involved in studying JMC history some thirty-five years ago, I've seen our field flower. In 1975, if you had said something about "present-mindedness" or even "primary sources," you likely would have gotten a blank stare. Since then, the study of JMC history has been like a seed that lay in rough ground for years, got some nourishment, and then suddenly sprang up and bloomed. Today, we have many people working in our field who are truly good historians.

However, at the recent convention of the American Journalism Historians Association in Kansas City, Jim McPherson (the AJHA president) and I were sitting together at the closing dinner. We noticed that, in the various conversations going on around us, the word "history" never came up. Instead, the subject was mostly politics — a subject that excites a number of partisan "historians" in our field much more than history does. Others were talking about TV shows or the day's news — but *no one was talking about history*.

If we wanted to defend our colleagues, we might argue that it isn't unusual for after-dinner conversation to be merely small talk. But let me ask you to try to remember the last time you went to a conference of JMC historians and heard — outside the formal sessions — some meaningful, substantive conversation about history.

The morning after Jim's and my visit, I was having breakfast with

an eminent historian in our field. (I won't reveal his name because I don't want to put him in a hot seat.) I mentioned this nagging feeling — that "we are not historians" — and asked him how many people in JMC history he considers to be historians first and foremost — not merely JMC professors who happen to do some history.

He paused. Thought for a moment. Counted silently. Answered: "Nineteen."

That's almost disheartening, isn't it? I can think of several excuses. Everyone in the JMC history field can, too.

But how would you characterize a person who is a *historian* — not someone who incidentally deals with history, but who is a historian in the fullest sense, someone who thinks about history first and for whom journalism or partisan politics or today's news is not the preeminent interest?

In answer to that question, wouldn't we say that, first, the person must be truly interested in *history*? And by "history," I mean the real past, not something that happened just a few years ago.

As an aside, I will mention that Erika Pribanic-Smith and I have been compiling a bibliography of works about JMC history that have been published in the last twenty-five years. Many of you know Erika. She is a historian of the Civil War press. Of the 2,500 or so works we've looked at, covering history since 1690, fully one-fourth deal with events of the last twenty-five years.

What else do we expect of *real* historians?

• Along with an interest in *history*, we would like for them to be familiar with the most basic practices that historians use in research — and then to employ them.

• We would like for them to be familiar with the works that other historians have written.

• We would like for them to be thorough and rigorous in their examination of both secondary and primary sources.

• We would like for them to be judicious in dealing with sources and with historical people.

• We would like for them to leave partisanship and today's biases at the gate when they enter history.

• And we would even like for them to be familiar with earlier historians and with the various interpretive approaches that those historians have used.

Now, with those comments as a background, let's consider for a few minutes the subject that is supposed to be the focus of my talk: how historians have explained American journalism before 1865.

I want to state the theme of my remarks this evening as the following:

Most historians after 1870 who wrote about journalism in the Civil War and earlier didn't understand the nature of that journalism. The cause of the problem was their interpretive perspectives. They tended to view the past in terms of the assumptions about professional journalism and the ideology of their own time.

In essence, the problem was the same one that all historians must deal with — that of present-mindedness.

As a consequence, most of the articles and books that they wrote over the next 100 years provided questionable explanations.

Today's historians who take the study of history seriously are aware of such problems — but unfortunately our field of JMC history still has people who claim to be historians but who seem unacquainted with some of the most elementary practices of good history. Thus, some of the same problems that plagued historians of the 1870s still haunt us today.

I want to talk mainly about two schools of interpretation: (1) the Developmental and (2) the Progressive.

As you know, a school of interpretation is a group of historians who share a common concept about how to explain history. Sometimes, the

interpretation is unconscious. At other times, it is intentional. Let me give you one example of an intentional interpretation in JMC history.

Sidney Kobre argued for fifty years that JMC historians need to tell history with a foremost concern for sociological factors. He was trained as a sociologist, and so his emphasis on sociological explanations came naturally to him. I first met him at the 1981 AEJMC national convention. A friend and I presented a paper on the ways historians had explained JMC history. Kobre was in the audience. Following the session, he approached me, and for about fifteen minutes we discussed — I might say "argued" — how each of us thought history should be explained. As I turned to leave, he declared, with finality, "But isn't it all sociological?"

Kobre knew exactly what his view was.

Most historians, though, adopt interpretations almost without realizing it. That is certainly the case with the Developmental interpretation and to a lesser extent with the Progressive interpretation.

It is because of these two interpretations that I am bold enough to claim that you can't believe anything historians have written about journalism, at least not before 1865.

The Developmental interpretation originated with Frederic Hudson's 1873 work, *Journalism in the United States, From 1690 to 1872*. The interpretation grew out of changes that had taken place in the newspaper industry. In 1833 Benjamin Day founded the *New York Sun*, America's first successful general-interest penny newspaper. It created a revolution in journalism, in attitudes about what the nature of newspapers should be, and in historians' views about JMC history.

Hudson worked for James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* for thirty years, beginning in 1836, the year after its founding. In 1840, when he was only 21 years old, he became managing editor, a position rarely heard of at the time. In 1866, he retired from the *Herald* and turned his attention to writing his voluminous history of journalism. He died in 1875 in Concord, Massachusetts, when a train hit the carriage in

which he was riding.

Hudson's book was greatly influenced by the practices of the penny press. The *Herald*, more than any other paper of the time, emphasized news over opinion as the proper function of newspapers. It had been the most successful mass newspaper up to that time.

Coming from a news-oriented background and assuming that the *Herald's* characteristics were the appropriate ones for newspapers, Hudson explained earlier journalism in terms of how it performed in accordance with the successful practices of the *Herald*. He was particularly interested in how those practices had originated and developed in the past.

For the next hundred years, the Developmental interpretation dominated. It began a quick decline in the 1970s and 1980s — but during the century after Hudson wrote his book, it provided the underlying assumptions of the vast majority of works on American media history.

Historians began to think that proper journalism was that type associated with the *Herald* and other penny newspapers. They then reasoned that the earlier history of journalism was essentially the story of how journalism had progressed to reach the point of development embodied in the penny press. Their primary concern, in other words, was how the press became a *journalistic* instrument.

In terms of Civil War history, for example, the Developmental interpretation places an emphasis on such things as professional practices like reporting and photography and timeliness, and it favors freedom to publish over concerns about military security.

Like other historians, Developmental historians tended to view the past in terms of the present. The best way to explain and evaluate journalism history, they reasoned, was by its contributions to present professional standards.

As journalism began to professionalize in the late 1800s, interest in its history began to grow. As a result, historical studies increased in

number. Although differing on a few particulars, they largely echoed Hudson's themes.

Most historians came out of the journalism profession, and many in the 20th century taught in professionally oriented college programs in journalism. They believed the professional standards that had developed over time were the appropriate and proper ones, and they began to apply even more universally the concept of professional progress to the study of journalism history.

The Developmental interpretation had a pervasive impact on historical assumptions because most textbooks for college courses in journalism history were cast in terms of the professional framework. With textbooks such as Frank Luther Mott's *American Journalism*, the Developmental interpretation became entrenched in historical thinking. Studied by generations of students and future historians, the textbooks tended to reinforce the explanation that the history of American mass communication was the story of how the media evolved in their professional characteristics.

Mott's book was the dominant textbook from the time it was first published in 1941 until the 1970s, a decade after he had died. The reason the book began to decline in use was simply that the publisher ran out of copies. Hardly anyone during that time questioned Mott's rank as the pre-eminent historian of American journalism.

Now let's turn for a few minutes to the Progressive interpretation.

It is essentially an ideological perspective. Progressive historians favor liberal causes and think of history as a conflict between liberals and conservatives. It is a black-and-white view of history — the heroes against the villains — and its ideological bias is readily evident.

In the explanation of JMC history, it shows up in such ways as these:

(1) Working journalists (who are on the side of the masses) opposing greedy media owners

(2) The press fighting for democracy, enlightenment, and liberty,

which conservative groups oppose

(3) Journalists fighting for freedom of the press against government officials who are trying to suppress it and — ideally, if they could — eliminate it altogether.

Let me take an example from the colonial press: Samuel Keimer and his paper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette.* He published it for a short time, from December 1728 to September 1729. Its main title was actually *The Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences*.

You will remember Keimer because of his plan to publish the contents of the encyclopedia, word by word, in his *Universal Instructor*.

Now how would you explain such a plan? How would a Progressive historian explain it?

Chester Jorgenson provides an example. He explained it as an attack against the narrow, backward views of the Puritans and other religious groups. He wrote one of the few articles that have ever taken Keimer as its topic, a 1935 piece in *Journalism Quarterly.* It was titled "A Brand Flung at Colonial Orthodoxy."

The article is an exceptionally bad piece of research, and I don't want to appear as if I think it is representative of Progressive history. Most of our Progressive historians today who have read the article probably wish *Journalism Quarterly* had never published it — even though some still share Jorgensen's views. Nevertheless, it illustrates how ideological bias can influence the explanation of history.

Jorgensen said Keimer was a deist who wanted to acquaint the public with all the knowledge of science and with rationalism. The paper, Jorgensen concluded, was the "dawn of the emergence of a liberal spirit" — of reason over religion.

If we wonder how accurate Jorgensen was, we might first look at his research. Sure enough, his article (consisting of six pages) does have footnotes … in fact, a grand total of eight. How many of them are primary sources? The total: Zero. Every one of his eight sources is a sec-

ondary one. And the earliest is from the 1870s — almost a century and a half after Keimer had died.

Before offering his analysis of Keimer's motives, Jorgensen provided a very brief summary of Keimer's biography. He seemed to find the details monotonous, for, as he explained, to understand Keimer's views we don't need to know much about his biography.

As today's slang goes, "*Duh?*"

In fact, if a historian wants to explain a person's motive, biography is exactly the type of thing we do need to know about.

As you might guess, it would have been hard for Jorgensen to get the story more wrong.

In reality, Keimer was not a deist, and he definitely did not oppose religion. In fact, he was a member of a group called the "French Prophets" — a faction within the Huguenots — and his sister was one of its leaders. We can get a sense of Keimer's views on religion from his autobiography. He gave it the title "A brand plucked from the burning…." That, in modern parlance, translates loosely as "God saved me from Hell." His purpose in reprinting the encyclopedia was clearly not, as Jorgensen claimed, to elevate rationalism over religion. It was, instead, to demonstrate the wonder of God's creation.

By the way, the first issue of Keimer's paper contained a discourse on the letter "A" that filled 1½ pages. The *Universal Instructor* continued to publish for ten months. When Benjamin Franklin bought it from Keimer, it had reached the word "Air."

As for the Progressive interpretation, clearly Keimer the deist never existed — but that caricature did fit the conclusion that Jorgensen wanted to draw.

Let me give one other quick example. I'll take it from a historian with whom most of you are familiar: Ed Emery. One of his students once told me that Emery "was an old-fashioned Progressive historian: There were the 'good guys' (us) and the 'bad guys' (everybody else),

and in the end the good guys always triumphed as we made progress toward a better world." By the way, that view was not Emery's alone. It is descriptive of Progressive historians.

My example will be from an early American newspaper, in fact, the first one: *Publick Occurrences*, which Benjamin Harris published for one issue in Boston in 1690.

Emery explains the episode this way:

The Puritan clergy had a stranglehold on the Boston populace. Harris' goal was to liberate the people from those narrow-minded bigots. Harris himself was a "troublemaker" with "progressive views." He published *Publick Occurrences* as a direct challenge to the Puritan clergy. The clergy, for their part, had taken to themselves the position of "licensers" of the press, and they were "scandalized" by *Publick Occurrences*. So they suppressed it after its first issue.

Emery provides one primary source for the clergy's attitude about the paper. It is a statement in Samuel Sewell's diary that Cotton Mather wrote a "very sharp" letter about it.

One of the most interesting things about Emery's account is that it is, like Jorgensen's account of Keimer, 180 degrees from the true story. I'll just hit the highlights:

Harris was a Protestant (an Anabaptist) who was opposed — just as the Puritans were — to the connection between the British crown and the Anglican church. He started *Publick Occurrences* to support the Puritan commonwealth of Massachusetts after it had overthrown the Anglican governor. The Puritan clergy exercised no licensing power over the press and had nothing to do with the suppression of *Publick Occurrences*. It was the governing council that held that power, and a strong faction on it was opposed to the Puritan clergy. As for the "sharp" letter that Mather wrote — and that Emery cites as Mather's opposition to *Publick Occurrences* — it was *not the newspaper* that Mather criticized but the fact that the governing council *had suppressed*

it!

Now, one must wonder, how is it that a historian could get things so mixed up? I'll leave you to figure that out yourselves.

Let me close by asking where such interpretations stand today.

The Progressive interpretation remains strong. In fact, even though few JMC historians would tag themselves with an old name like "Progressive," its ideology still shows up frequently in conference papers, journal articles, and books.

But the Developmental interpretation has virtually disappeared. The dominant interpretation in 1970, today it is hard to find.

Of course, there are other interpretations. They can be just as damaging to our understanding of history as is the Developmental or the Progressive interpretation.

Take Cultural and Critical Studies, for example. It works as a real danger to understanding history. In it:

1. Ideological theory is paramount
2. Researchers know what they will "find" before they begin
3. And it uses poor methodology (single sources, for example, and uncritical acceptance of what sources say — that is, if the researchers agree with them)

But I'm happy to know that many colleagues in our field are accomplished historians. They understand and are alert to such pitfalls as present-mindedness and ideological bias. They appreciate the need for thoroughness and rigor in examining primary sources.

I'm pleased to get to speak to a group of serious Civil War historians. You know what I mean.

I'm pleased also to be able to add an appendix to that talk — for the articles in this issue of *Historiography* will help bolster your faith in historians in our field. We begin with an essay by one of the field's best historians, Jean Palmegiano. She is an authority on British journalism of

the 19th century and in the following pages assesses the histories of British journalism that working journalists wrote. Following her essay, we have a roundtable that Pam Walck moderated with three of the field's most rigorous historians: Erika Pribanic-Smith, Bernell Tripp, and Mike Sweeney. They discuss the historian's search for answers to questions that seem unanswerable. For our Kobre Award interview, Dave Nord graciously consented to answer questions. Finally, Laurel Leff, who won the AJHA's book award in 2006, discusses her work.

All of the articles in this issue make me think that I should have titled my "From the Editor" essay "Yes, We Are Historians."

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Journalists as Journalism Historians in Victorian Britain … and After

By Eugenia M. Palmegiano ©

Palmegiano

In a recent article in *Historiography in Mass Communication*, David Sloan discussed "The 10 Books That Every JMC Historian Should Have Read."[1] This essay prompted me to revisit nineteenth-century British titles that purported to be histories of journalism.

The most cited primary sources did not make the cut. F. Knight Hunt, who went from printer's clerk to barrister and surgeon before succeeding Charles Dickens as *Daily News* editor, published *The Fourth Estate: Contributions Towards a History of Newspapers, and of the Liberty of the Press* in 1850. But he confessed that it was "not a satisfactory history" because material was "scattered in facts known one to this person and one to that."[2] Nine years later Alexander Andrews penned *The History of British Journalism from the Foundation of the Newspaper Press in England to the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855 with Sketches of Press Celebrities*. Andrews, subsequently inaugural editor of the monthly *Newspaper Press* launched in 1866 to network journalists, produced not a history but a two-volume survey of domestic, imperial, and colonial gazettes.

Eugenia Palmegiano is a professor of history at Saint Peter's University. She has written a number of books on British media during the Victorian age.

In 1871 James Grant, who started a provincial herald, then joined London's prestigious *Standard* and *Morning Chronicle*, and next edited the *Morning Advertiser*, gave it another try in *The Newspaper Press: Its Origin — Progress — and Present Position*. It offered facts, acres of facts, but Grant's premise, that a newspaper's purposes were "to Enlighten, to Civilize, and to Morally Transform the World," biased his study.[3] A decade after Grant, Charles Pebody, reporter for the capital's *Morning Post* prior to editing the northern *Yorkshire Post*, conceded in *English Journalism and the Men Who Made It* that the "history of English Journalism has yet to be written."[4] H.R. Fox Bourne, contributor to Dickens' *Household Words*, editor of London's popular *Weekly Dispatch*, and briefly owner of the city's *Examiner*, apparently agreed and tried his hand in 1887. His *English Newspapers: Chapters on the History of Journalism* criticized previous scribes. Bourne judged Hunt more trustworthy than Andrews but hardly a model and dismissed Grant's text as reminiscences, unfortunate for Pebody who borrowed from Grant, albeit adding fresh information.[5]

Alfred Baker, editor of the useful *Pitman's Practical Journalism*, came closest to the mark in his 1890 *Newspaper World: Essays on Press History and Work, Past and Present*. It covered such significant topics as government censorship and fiscal constraints, political partisanship, local press growth, and technology's effect on output and style. Baker's profiles of journalists, from editors to penny-a-liners, showed journalism's hierarchy. His comparisons of British papers to those in its Empire and the United States likewise revealed journalism's transnational dimensions. But neither he nor his peers authored histories because they failed to document their assertions. John Gross in 1992 implicitly excused this failure when he argued that a history of the press was impossible because journalism was an "elastic term."[6]

Not so. As proof I would add to Professor Sloan's "must-read" list *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-*

Century England. Appearing in 1996, this history by Aled Jones is important for three reasons, all applicable to any foray into journalism's past. First and foremost, Jones comments on how journalism could move from a peripheral to a central enterprise acting as a cultural reference point,[7] a shift that non-journalism historians have only slowly acknowledged Second, he calls attention to contrasting metaphors used by press and public alike to justify journalism's value, the most notable tropes regarding the press as an active pulpit influencing readers or as a passive mirror reflecting their views — alternatives still hotly debated.[8] Third, he examines at length subjects that have shaped and continue to shape journalism discourse, among them how the construct of anonymity functions in communal space and what mode of education best prepares future journalists.[9] Focusing on these fundamental themes, Jones provides a framework for research on any aspect of "before-now" journalism, a framework within which specific investigations can intersect to create a coherent whole.

NOTES

1 David Sloan, "From the Editor: The 10 Books That Every JMC Historian Should Have Read," *Historiography in Mass Communication* 2:4 (2016): 1-12.

2 F. Knight Hunt, *The Fourth Estate: Contributions Towards a History of Newspapers, and of the Liberty of the Press* (London: David Bogue, 1850), vi.

3 James Grant, *The Newspaper Press: Its Origin — Progress — and Present Position* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1871), vi.

4 Charles Pebody, *English Journalism and the Men Who Made It* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1882), iii.

5 H.R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters on the History of Journalism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1887), vii.

6 John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: English Literary Life Since 1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 48.

7 Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press: 1996), 2.

[8] Ibid., 89, 91.
[9] Ibid, 119-32.

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Historical Roundtable: Solving History's Mysteries

By Pamela E. Walck, Erika J. Pribanic-Smith, Michael Sweeney, and Bernell Tripp ©

Walck

Mysteries are peppered throughout the historical record. Historians are constantly trying to piece together these fractured images of the past in hopes of bringing greater meaning to what is known today about both individuals and moments in time. Often, researchers find missing links that provide greater meaning and understanding. Many times, the search becomes a body of work that lasts a lifetime.

This roundtable discussion began as a panel session during the 2016 convention of the American Journalism Historians Association in St. Petersburg, Florida. Here, the discussants have taken the original discussion thread and expanded it to look at lessons learned. And along the way they answer the haunting question of why historians hunt for clues.

Walck: *How do you know when you have stumbled across a historical mystery? In your case, was it something that was obvious right from the start? Or was it a slow build toward discovery?*

Sweeney: Goodness. I didn't realize I had it (a mystery), until I got it. I think one way you realize you've got a mystery is when you are a master of all the information on your topic, when you know it forward and

Pribanic-Smith

Sweeney

Tripp

backwards. I had comments from the National Archive on my topic and sent away for the transcript of the oral history of John Fester — simply because I didn't want to miss anything. I had no idea there would be this unfolding mystery. It was pure serendipity…. Just being able to put the two pieces together in my head was the spark that said, "There might be something here to follow up on." But to do that I had to have good command of what was in the archives.

With research, you go in with an idea of what you are looking for but not a certainty. If it was certain, it would not be worth doing the research, right? So, you have to be open to the possibility of it evolving as you are working, that the material is richer and deeper and stronger, as you go along.

Tripp: I usually notice that I have a historical mystery when pieces of info that *should* fit don't. So, I guess it's

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Erika J. Pribanic-Smith is an associate professor at the University of Texas-Arlington. Her research focuses on the 19th century press and politics. Pribanic-Smith is the author of a chapter in the forthcoming book, Oxford History of Popular Print Culture. Her chapter is titled "Newspapers from 1820 to 1860."

Michael Sweeney is the associate director for graduate studies at Ohio University. His research focuses on wartime censorship during World War II. He is the author of several books, including Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II.

Bernell Tripp is an associate professor at the University of Florida. Her research focuses on the African-American press. She is the author of Origins of the Black Press: New York, 1827-1847.

more of a slow build toward discovery. This is primarily because working in the 19th-century African-American press means that very few things are obvious. Contextual info is sketchy or often incorrect, and primary resources are scattered all over the place. No two research projects are ever the same, and it's almost like starting from scratch each time. Although this is a disadvantage, it's also an advantage because I'm able to notice more quickly when things don't add up or some "accepted" fact doesn't make sense, based on what I've compiled in my primary documents.

Pribanic-Smith: I would say it was a slow build. I knew Swayze had been shot, and the nature of why he was shot sort of came to light over a long time of reading different articles and all the back and forth between him and his competitors. I recognized a certain amount of animosity existed, but I never thought, "Oh, wow, I bet one of them killed him."

The conventional history was this guy shot him and that was that. The guy admitted it in court but claimed self-defense. So it seemed cut and dry, but it was not until several months later when I looked at the aftermath and how other newspapers responded that I started to see accusations from friends and allies saying there is a conspiracy here, that these competitors of his had put a hit out, and the fact that those accusations endured … (and I asked) was there something to it? But it took a long time to come to realize that there was a mystery here.

Walck: *How common is it to find historical mysteries in research? What drives you to find answers to these lurking questions?*

Tripp: Although delving into the "who" and "what" aspects of historical events is important, an even more critical component of the research process is answering the "why" question. However, when your research

topic is on an under-researched subject, such as non-mainstream or specialized publications, historical mysteries are commonplace.

In my research, there are always questions that have yet to be answered, and what drives me to pursue answers to those questions varies. Sometimes, the questions *must* be addressed before I can proceed with the main points of my research. Similarly, conflicting information from various sources necessitates that I dig further to ascertain the truth before I can advance my own research. However, in other cases, something piques my interest because info seems incorrect, based on existing supplemental info, or it is noticeably absent when I have reasoned that it *should* exist. The first instances are obviously things that need to be pursued as integral parts of the research project, while the last instance is pure curiosity on my part. In other words, I want to know because no one else knows, and it may or may not be pertinent to understanding African-American press development.

Pribanic-Smith: I would say every single research paper I have ever done has had a mystery to some extent. For example, there is an individual in my current research and the entire time I've been working on the paper, I kept asking myself why did he do this particular thing that he did. I kept going back into documents and letters and I still can't figure out what his motivation was.

Every research project has some element of mystery…. I have spent so much time hunting things that won't change the direction of the paper, or it becomes something that now I just want to know. Maybe it is a footnote in the paper once I finally find it. And sometimes I do. Some might see following a paper trail for seven hours for a footnote as a waste, but there is a satisfaction that comes with that.

Sweeney: I think it is very common because, how do we know about the past? We only have artifacts to inform us. Either they are incom-

plete or conflicting or they give us hints. They tease us or don't follow through in what they promise…. I feel like Indiana Jones (working in archives), and I know there is probably something here if I am smart enough to follow through and put the pieces together.

… I have come across several of these mysteries. You hate to leave them hanging, but when you have traveled every avenue, where else is there to go? Sometimes the only option you have is to leave it hanging. I don't like to do that. I don't know anybody who does.

Walck: *During our AJHA panel, the statement was made that perhaps historians make poor sleuths after all when it comes to mysteries in the historical record (especially since such undertakings often mean years of hunting for answers with little to show). What did you make of those comments? Has anything changed your mind about the value of continuing your line of research?*

Pribanic-Smith: Absolutely not. I don't think we make poor sleuths at all. The thing of it is, we have to rely on the evidence that's available. It would be great if I had unlimited resources to go to every archive where things may be, but I don't. Still, I love the thrill of the chase and making new knowledge. If everyone knew already, it wouldn't be a mystery. It is part of our job to reveal something new that people don't know, however small or large that contribution might be.

Tripp: I totally disagreed with the comments. I think historians, especially *media* historians, make some of the best sleuths because of their skill in finding and interpreting primary documents. Because they are focused on the "big picture" and making sure all the pieces fit together into a logical explanation, advanced researchers are not easily appeased by quick answers or easy evidence, and they are more likely to cross-verify information in several different sources. I don't think the

hours, months, or even years invested in the investigation really matter. Time invested seems to be directly proportional to the researcher's determination of the information's pertinence to historical research.

Also, other than with some dissertation research, historians realize that no one can afford to devote unlimited attention to the single-minded pursuit of one tidbit of information. Most historians are working several projects, and they revisit the elusive mystery only when they come across a resource for a current project that might be useful in searching for answers to the old project. For me, an added bonus in revisiting or continuing old investigations is the discovery of items that lead to new projects. This happens a lot with media historians who were formerly practicing journalists because they have already honed their skills for ferreting out obscure information from a plethora of different resources. The clever tricks of the trade allow them to be creative in compiling a list of available sources.

Walck: *How has conquering these obstacles or challenges driven other areas of your research? What sort of benefits do historians gain from pursuing these so-called mysteries?*

Sweeney: A benefit? Promotion and tenure, for one thing. The first draft of history is usually not very accurate. I think it is Barbara Tuchman who said we really can't do history on the fly about recent events because we are too close to them. All the information is the same size on the horizon. We don't know what is important and what's not. I am blinded by my prejudice, but over time you can say that such and such wasn't important. The point I am getting at is, if the first draft is incomplete, then the unravelling of the mystery may bring to light information that might enrich our understanding of how and why things happen the way they did.

Do I trust somebody is one of the biggest questions that comes up.

The way you figure this out is you spend time with the subject in the archive. If it's a person, you figure out what makes a person tick and anticipate what they may or may not have done and that points you in another direction of information that might help solve the mystery.

Tripp: The challenges have taught me to examine primary resources with a more critical eye, especially when dealing with items from the 19th century. Informational inaccuracies appeared regularly in newspapers and other primary documents, originating with the human source of the original info or with the publishing staff. This was something I didn't realize until I encountered several obstacles that forced me to develop alternate strategies to cross-verify information.

For example, when I first began researching African-American women, I realized quickly that not only background information, but also journalistic works were difficult to locate. For background info, I started working backwards through the backgrounds of spouses, brothers and fathers whose genealogical records were often easier to find and reconstructed a timeline of the women's lives based on their male relatives. From the background info, I discovered that most were teachers or church members whose activities were documented in a variety of different in-house publications. From those connections, I noted mentions of interactions with others who were either journalists or philanthropists who supported numerous black or abolitionist newspapers, and I had my leads to where they might have published their writings.

Another benefit is that sometimes a single piece of information can lead to revelations, if you choose to pursue them, about the valuable contributions of someone long forgotten (or never noted) in media history. A stop on one AJHA historical tour led me to Maggie Lena Walker, one of the first African-American women to become a millionaire and entrepreneur. I later noticed references to her writings that had been

reprinted in other black newspapers, and a quick follow-up revealed that she was not only a banker, church leader, fundraiser, and fraternal order officials, but also the editor of a newspaper. That newspaper had initially been a publication for fraternal organization members, but its columns, especially those produced by Walker on a wide range of topics, were reprinted scores of times in both black and mainstream publications. Yet, there was no mention of her contributions as a journalist, nor the respect that she had garnered for those writings from some of her better known peers, such as W.E.B. DuBois. "The Lame Lioness," as she was known by her peers, was one of the most powerful and wealthy black women at the turn of the 20th century, but few people had heard of her.

Walck: *How do you see technology making the chasing of these mysteries easier? Or, perhaps, harder?*

Tripp: In many ways, technology has made chasing these mysteries much easier, especially as librarians and archivists struggle to rescue and digitalize historical documents before they are lost. These digitalization projects mean that I can walk the streets of 19th-century New York and experience the lives of African Americans in that city in their own words without ever having to leave Florida. I've found databases I never knew existed and sources I never would have expected. I once found mention of a late 19th-century journalist's activities in a local firehouse's annual reports.

However, technology has also made it harder because a keyword search usually gives us ONLY the results of terms we input. The wrong words might mean you miss an entire batch of info, or we lose the opportunity to peruse the actual issues and discover something that might be as important (if not more important) than our original mystery questions.

Pribanic-Smith: Of course, the ability to archive things online, to digitize archives and have things online, that does make it easier to some extent. However, it is impossible for everything to be digital, and it might contribute to a little bit of laziness. Some online research I will use — but people get spoiled, and I hope historians don't get spoiled and will continue to go through archives and dig through files. It would be a real detriment to the craft if people only pursued topics they could easily find online.

There is definitely that benefit of going there and putting your hands on it and searching. I love listening to Dr. Sweeney talk about his "Ah-ha moment" when he came across a key piece to the puzzle that he was working on. And it was because he kept pursuing beyond what seemed reasonable and went looking in a place not expecting to find what he found. It takes a lot of energy and effort.

First you must know what archive to go to, so there's that — finding the right place. Most of us who are doing journalism history are also teaching, so trying to find time among our teaching schedules means using breaks or research leave to be able to go. And it always takes me longer than I think it's going to. The initial trip to Kansas to research Swayze, I thought I'd get everything I needed, but I was scrambling until the very last day. It takes a lot of time; it's hard.

On the other hand, I was doing some research at Mount Vernon and went there thinking it was going to take me a week and wound up having three days to goof around in D.C. I was there but I was done. You just never know. It depends on what's there.

Walck: *Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self about chasing down your particular mystery?*

Tripp: Based on what I know now, I probably would advise my younger self to start at the end of the mystery. My mystery was determining

whether founding father Alexander Hamilton had actually fathered [William Hamilton,] one of the most influential black activists of the early half of the 19th century. By starting at the "end," I could examine the work of William Hamilton's grandsons, who might have been more inclined (than Hamilton or his two sons) to discuss his parentage because the truth no longer held the potential to embarrass, since William Hamilton and Alexander Hamilton were both long dead.

Sweeney: I don't know what I would tell my younger self, other than you are not going to have nearly as much luxury of time to do research than you think. You will have other things competing for your attention, so know that going in and be very careful picking your projects because you won't have time to do them all. So pick the ones that matter most to you….

I guess that is a long way of saying, "Follow your bliss." If you do that, then you will bring such energy to the project that you will do it very well, you will be the best you can be if you chose the things that excite you. The other thing I would say is don't worry about the money, it will come.

Pribanic-Smith: Be patient. And I think that is good advice for any historian. It really frustrated me when I realized there was a mystery here and it frustrated me that I couldn't find anything, nothing in the legal documents or court documents. And I think if I could, I'd sit down with myself and say, "Know what? The Earth won't blow up if you don't find it. Don't get frustrated."

It's kind of cliché, but it's the journey and not the destination. It's those things I have loved and picked up, and new research I have found and other papers I have done. And that has helped me. It's more valuable.

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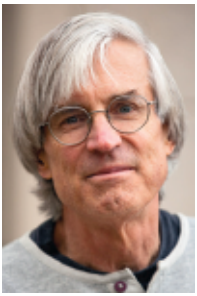
Kobre Award Interview: David Paul Nord



Nord

Dave Nord received the American Journalism Historians Association's Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2012. He is a professor emeritus in the Indiana University School of Journalism. Along with the Kobre Award, he won the AJHA's Book of the Year Award in 2005 for *Faith in Reading* and on three occasions won the AEJMC History Division's Covert Award for the year's best article, essay, or book chapter.

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

Nord: I was born in Indiana but grew up in Minnesota. I graduated from Hopkins High School outside Minneapolis in 1965. I did my undergraduate work at Valparaiso University, where I majored in history. I did an M.A. in history at the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in mass communication research at the University of Wisconsin. At Valparaiso in the 1960s I took a couple of classes from a young history professor that many readers of this journal have come to know in the decades since then: Jim Startt.

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

Nord: I always imagined that someday I would be an academic, but I did work briefly in journalism in the 1970s. I was a reporter for the *Vidette-Messenger* in Valparaiso, Indiana, and a "newsman," as they called us in those days, for the Associated Press in Minneapolis and in

Bismarck, North Dakota.

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

Nord: I taught classes in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota in the 1970s, but after finishing my Ph.D. in 1979 I spent my entire career at Indiana University. At the IU School of Journalism, each faculty member was expected to teach journalism skills courses as well as academic courses. So I taught news reporting and writing classes along with classes in history and in media and society. I also taught the qualitative research methods class for graduate students. Though I was hired by the school to be a historian, I gradually taught history less often. Toward the end of my time at IU, I rarely taught history at all. But teaching journalism skills, media and society, and research methods had a salutary influence on my thinking about journalism history. Sometimes I wished I could concentrate more on history, but I usually was glad that I had no choice but to be wedded to the social sciences and to the profession of journalism.

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?*

Nord: My interest in history was awakened at Valparaiso University in 1965. My assigned adviser was a history professor named Willis Boyd. Though I was just a new freshman, Professor Boyd encouraged me to enroll in his upper-division colloquium on the Civil War and Reconstruction. It was wonderful. It turned out to be less about the events themselves and more about the historiography: how the war and reconstruction played out in history writing over time. Professor Boyd also had us read some classic works on the nature of historical inquiry,

such as Carl Becker's "Everyman His Own Historian" and Charles Beard's "Written History As an Act of Faith." For the first time I saw history, not as description of what actually happened in the past, but as current debate and argument about the past. I was especially drawn to Becker's notion that each age must rewrite history in its own image. It was in that class that I decided that history was something I would like to do.

Also at Valparaiso in the 1960s, I was involved in the anti-war movement and left-leaning politics. So I wanted to understand the history of American radicalism, especially labor radicalism, socialism, and religious pacifism. For a senior thesis I wrote about the Trotskyist leaders of the Minneapolis truck drivers' strike of 1934. What did it mean when a revolutionary ideology intersected with the practical work of winning a strike and securing a labor contract? In another realm, I was intrigued by the role of religion in the political work of socialist politics and pacifism in the American past. My first published article, originally written as a paper for a religious ethics class at Valpo, emerged from these musings: "A.J. Muste and the Ethics of Christian Radicalism."

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

Nord: In my graduate studies at Minnesota, I concentrated on Progressive-era American history. It was an exciting time to study history. I had splendid professors who drew me into the emerging subfields of historiography that all had "new" attached to their names: the new social history, the new economic history, the new labor history, the new urban history. At Wisconsin I was a student of both history and mass communication research, and that mix strongly influenced my thinking and style of work. I studied social science methods in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and social science history in the His-

tory Department. Although I always expected that in the long run history would be my field, while I was in a mass comm program I wanted to learn as much as possible about social theory, experimental design, survey research methods, etc. My dissertation was an exercise in urban history titled "Newspapers and New Politics: Municipal Reform in Chicago and St. Louis, 1890-1900." Probably the major influence on my thinking for the dissertation was David Thelen's *The New Citizenship* (1972), which is a terrific study of progressive politics and participatory democracy. While I was at Wisconsin, I corresponded with Thelen, who was then at the University of Missouri. He was very helpful. Fortuitously, Thelen and I both later ended up at Indiana, became friends, and worked together at the *Journal of American History*.

After graduate school the most important influences on my thinking were "reader-response criticism" in literary studies and the interdisciplinary field "history of the book." In the mid-1980s, works by Janice Radway, Cathy Davidson, and Jane Tompkins helped me think about how a historian might do something like what my non-historian colleagues in the Journalism School were doing: media audience research. I discovered literary critics such as Stanley Fish and Norman Holland and cultural historians such as Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton. My most important mentor in the 1990s was David Hall, one of the founders of the "history of the book" field in America. Hall is a historian of religion as well as of books and reading. My own work on religious publishing and religious reading owes much to David's inspiration and encouragement. Within the guild of journalism and media studies, my most important mentor was James Carey. Even though I sometimes found Jim hard to follow, I profited immensely from our thirty years of sometimes contentious conversation.

Interestingly, perhaps the key influence on my historical perspective was neither a book nor a scholar but a library: the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Mass. I first visited the AAS in 1986 to

work on eighteenth-century urban history. I was quickly adopted into the AAS family, and thereafter I often played the role of the journalism-history specialist among folks interested in other forms of publishing. For many years, I was on the Board of Overseers of the AAS's Program in the History of the Book in American Culture. I was an author and volume editor in the society's multi-volume *History of the Book in America* project. This institutional influence was as important as any intellectual influence in drawing me beyond journalism and into a broader interest in the history of publishing and readership.

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

Nord: I started out as an urban historian. My big project in the early 1980s was supposed to be a broad, sweeping history of newspapers and cities. But I never wrote that "cities" book. As I did research on Chicago, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, I kept getting distracted. I found myself doing more specific articles on reading history and religion history. For example, my article "Teleology and News" grew from my Boston research; "Readership as Citizenship" grew from my Philadelphia work; "Reading the Newspaper" grew from my Chicago research; and all my work on religious publishing in the early 19th century grew from my work on New York City.

In short, I morphed from an urban historian into a historian of reading and of religious publishing. To some extent, this happened by chance. I simply stumbled upon evidence and ideas that intrigued me. I decided that historians of American media had underappreciated the importance of religion in publishing. Also I discovered that media historians, unlike their social science colleagues in schools of mass communication, had almost always focused on the production rather than the reception of media messages. Readers and reading had been ig-

nored. So, when I came across evidence of reading behavior in the past, I pursued it. But my movement into the history of readers and reading and the history of religious publishing was influenced not only by the chance discovery of interesting sources; it was influenced as well by the general movement of the profession in the 1980s into cultural history.

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

Nord: Most of my work falls into the three areas I have already suggested: cities, religion, and readership. During my *urban history* period in the 1980s, I published a book version of my dissertation, *Newspapers and New Politics* (1981), and several articles on Chicago newspapers and politics in the Progressive era. Two of those Chicago articles appear in my book of collected essays, *Communities of Journalism* (2001). Also in *Communities of Journalism* are two articles from the early days of my *religion history* period: one on religion and news in 17th-century Puritan New England and the other on religion and freedom of the press in the John Peter Zenger trial. Most of my work on religion and media, however, came together in the book *Faith in Reading* (2004), which is a study of the work of religious publishing societies in the early 19th century. My *reading history* period began with my discovery of reader-response literary criticism and the history of the book in the 1980s and continued throughout the rest of my career. This work, in both journalism history and religion history, was often shaped by the kind of evidence of reading behavior that I could find, which included 18th-century subscriber lists and city directories, 19th-century government statistics, published and manuscript letters to editors, reader diaries and letters, and the letters and reports of itinerant religious tract and book distributors. Versions of some of these studies appear in *Communities of Journalism* and *Faith in Reading*. One of my favorite sources for the

study of reader response to journalism is the archive of reports compiled by the Bureau of Accuracy and Fair Play at the *New York World*, preserved in the *World* Papers at Columbia University. I wrote about the revealing correspondence among readers, editors, and reporters in an article titled "Accuracy or Fair Play? Complaining about the Newspaper in Early Twentieth-Century New York," in *New Directions in American Reception Study*, edited by Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor (2008).

In addition to these three strands of empirical studies I also have written articles on historiography, historical methods, and philosophy of history, including an essay connecting the history of journalism with my other chief interest: the history of the book. That essay appears in *Explorations in Communication and History*, edited by Barbie Zelizer (2008).

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

Nord: I'm not a book writer. I'm an essayist. That's how I imagine projects, do research, and write. But I would like to believe that *Faith in Reading* did come together as a thematically cogent book, not just as a collection of essays. That actually surprised me — and gave me a good deal of satisfaction.

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?*

Nord: I hope that I have made some good points and told some interesting stories throughout my work. If I had to identify one important

theme from each of my three streams of research, I would choose these: (1) In my *urban* history research, I argue that the nature of community life in cities shaped the nature of the urban newspaper — and newspapers in turn shaped the city. The work of a newspaper is publication: making things public. Creating public life — that is, making private activities public — is what both cities and newspapers necessarily do. And they do it together. (2) In my *religious* publishing research, I argue that the first true mass media in America were religious tracts and books printed and distributed by nationally organized religious publishing societies. Thus, I argue that not-for-profit publishing was as important or even more important than commercial publishing in the creation of American mass media. (3) In my work on *reading*, I argue that the meaning of journalism and religious texts lies in the reader, not in the text. This is an axiom of all reader-response criticism and history. My contribution is an exploration of how the readers of journalism and religious publications have been guided in their reading by organized interest groups. In other words, I have tried to show that reading is a political (or religious) event, whose outcome is contested and managed by formal political (or religious) power.

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

Nord: I'm an inveterate second-guesser, so I could come up with a long list of answers to this question. But because "anything" and "it," are singular, I'll mention just one thing: I wish I had done more *comparative research*. Several years ago, I was invited to contribute a chapter to a book titled *Making News*, edited by Richard John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (2015). Each of the chapters in the book focuses on both Britain and America. My chapter, titled "The Victorian City and the Urban Newspaper," is based largely on a comparison of Manchester and

Chicago and of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Chicago Tribune* in the late 19th century. Doing the research for that essay was delightful. It was the first time I had made the effort to study the history of British politics and cities. It was a wonderful learning experience, and I was able to test some of my ideas about urban life and urban newspapers in a different national context. I did this work after I retired in 2012. I should have been doing this kind of research my entire academic life.

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.*

Nord: In my understanding of history as a discipline, I'm a neo-pragmatist, a follower of Richard Rorty, who drew his inspiration from John Dewey. I'm persuaded by postmodernist philosophy that there is a fundamental disjuncture between the past and writing about the past. History is our creation, not theirs. On the other hand, if postmodernism requires a rejection of any possibility of empirical research in history, then I'm not a postmodernist. Like other natural and social scientists, historians work with empirical materials that actually exist in the present: documents, artifacts, ruins, etc. They take these materials, ponder them, analyze them, and construct theories about them. Those theories are what we call history. I'm a relativist, but I do not believe that philosophical relativism necessarily leads to full-blown epistemological skepticism. Like one of my heroes from my undergraduate days, Carl Becker, I see the never-ending rewriting of history, not as a slippery slope into the Nietzschean abyss, but as a kind of democratic practice. As the ever-upbeat Becker put it nearly eighty years ago, "It should be a relief to us to renounce omniscience, to recognize that every generation, our own included, will, must inevitably, understand the past and anticipate the future in the light of its own restricted experience, must

inevitably play on the dead whatever tricks it finds necessary for its own peace of mind."

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

Nord: As a contented and distracted retiree, I should pass on this question. I have not kept up with the recent flow of scholarship in our field. I'm not even a JMC historian anymore — at least not at the moment. Currently, I'm doing some historical research for a reconstructed early 19th-century village in southern Indiana. My subjects are rivers, ferries, roads, and railroads. No newspapers, no religious tracts, no radio, no television, no Twitter.

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?*

Nord: Again, as a retiree, I probably should withhold comment. But I will say this: My sense is that the topics chosen by current scholars of JMC history are usually good ones. The journals in the field, *Journalism History* and *American Journalism*, brim with interesting articles on race, gender, technology, public policy, and other topics of vital importance to media studies. But sometimes missing is a sustained effort to make those studies open outward to broad themes in American history or world history. That phrase "open outward" is one we routinely recited to our authors at the *Journal of American History*. Almost all historians need to be reminded to explain what their narrow, tightly focused studies reveal about the broad historical sweep of politics, or economics, or social life.

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

Nord: I'll mention just one challenge that I believe is important. Historians in our field should engage with the emerging field of "digital humanities" — that is, the application of computer search, mapping, and analysis to the vast and growing archives of digitized texts. When I started in this business forty years ago, my method of choice was quantitative content analysis. This turned out to be a terrible choice, not because it was ineffective but because it was so tedious. I hated it. Everything had to be done by hand to create the data for computer analysis: searching, sampling, reading, coding, punching, etc. Although I never lost my appreciation for quantifiable data, I certainly lost my zest for creating those data. Now, with millions of OCR-scanned pages of historic publications available online, sheer dread of content analysis is no longer an excuse.

The readers of this journal probably already know much more about the digital humanities than I do. I'm the retired guy, after all. But if you don't know much and you'd like to learn more, especially about how digital network analysis can be used to do journalism history, you might take a look at two Web sites at Northeastern University:

NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks at http://www.northeastern.edu/nulab/

Viral Texts: Mapping Networks of Reprinting in 19th-Century Newspapers at https://viraltexts.org

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Book Award Interview: Laurel Leff

Leff

Laurel Leff won the American Journalism Historians Association's award for the year's outstanding book in 2006 for *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper*. It also received *ForeWord Magazine's* award for the year's best history book. Prof. Leff teaches journalism at Northeastern University.

Q: *Give us a brief summary of your book.*

Leff: *Buried by The Times* examines *The New York Times'* coverage of the Holocaust while it was happening, both in terms of what the newspaper published and why it took the approach it did. It explains that the *Times* published on average an article every other day on the events of the Holocaust, which were timely, accurate, and detailed. Yet almost all the articles appeared inside the newspaper. The newspaper also rarely editorialized or published week-in-review items on the ongoing tragedy. The book argues that the *Times* publisher, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, a Jew of German ancestry, largely shaped this coverage. As a philosophical matter, Sulzberger didn't think Jews should be singled out as Jews, and as a practical matter he didn't want it to look as if he and his newspaper were engaged in special pleading on behalf of Jews. The result was to chronicle the Holocaust but to do it a way that belied its importance.

Q: *How did you get the idea for your book?*

Leff: In the mid-1990s I was an editor at *The Hartford Courant* newspaper in Connecticut teaching a beginning journalism class as an adjunct professor. The class textbook included two paragraphs summarizing Deborah Lipstadt's book, *Beyond Belief*, which established that major American newspapers published many stories about the Holocaust during the war but tended to place them inside the paper. Lipstadt's findings surprised me. I had been taught growing up that Americans didn't know about the Holocaust until Americans liberated the camps at the end of the war. The Holocaust had been a deep, dark secret until then. But how big a secret could it have been if articles about it appeared regularly in American newspapers? As a journalist, I was also surprised that newspapers placed these stories on inside pages. Why wasn't the murder of six million people in the most horrible ways imaginable front-page news? So I read Lipstadt's book, as well as David Wyman's *Abandonment of the Jews*. Lipstadt did a masterful job of documenting the number and content of articles about the Holocaust that appeared in a broad range of American newspapers, but she didn't really explore why the journalists made the decisions they did. Wyman mentioned the press coverage but his focus was on government actors. I thought there was room for a book that explained why the media covered the Holocaust the way they did. I decided the best way to understand the press' decision-making was to examine one newspaper in depth. I chose *The New York Times* because, well, it's *The New York Times*, America's most important newspaper, as my subtitle says. The *Times* also was the American newspaper most dedicated to foreign coverage with correspondents throughout Europe, even in out-of-the way capitals such as Sofia and Bucharest. The fact that its owners were Jews of German ancestry made their placement decisions even more intriguing.

Q: *Tell us about the research you did for your book — What were your*

sources, how did you research your book, how long did you spend, and so forth?

Leff: I left my job at the *Courant* and joined the Northeastern journalism faculty in 1996. I immediately started a content analysis of the Times, beginning with the Jan. 1, 1939, edition and ending with Dec. 31, 1945, which covered all the years of World War II (Sept. 1939 to May 1945) with a few months without war news on each end for comparison. At the time, the *Times* wasn't digitized so I had to use microfilm, meaning I literally looked at every page of every newspaper for the time period, though I did fast forward through sports and business. Although it took me far more time, I think it actually helped my research that my experience was more like that of a *Times* reader in 1941, meaning I couldn't simply search for an article using a few key terms and have it pop up in front of me. I got more of a sense of what it meant for a story to be "buried." At the same time, I started the content analysis, I began reaching out to members of the Sulzberger/Ochs family (I got nowhere with that) and the few people who had lived through that era. Everyone who was a major player, even young reporters, were already dead by the time I began my research but I was able to interview a few people, mostly family members or those who were teenagers in the 1930s or 1940s. Instead of interviews, I had to rely on archival material. Although it would have been wonderful to pose questions directly to Sulzberger, for example, I developed a deep appreciation of the archival method. Having people recount what they did and why with lots of intervening knowledge and value judgments is very different than watching people struggling to make decisions with no knowledge of the outcome. I used probably 20 or so archives and several collections within each of them. The most important was the New York Times Company Archives, which were then housed in the basement of the *Times* building. (It's since been moved to the New York Public Library.) Using the

Times archive was a challenge; the rules were that researchers couldn't see an index, you had to ask for what you wanted. For example, I had to find the names of the reporters who had written articles about the Holocaust through my content analysis (which wasn't easy since most *Times* stories then didn't have bylines) and then ask for their folders, as well as the folders for the bureaus in which they worked. In addition, one of the most important collections, of managing editor Edwin James, had been copied onto microfilm sometime in the 1970s and then destroyed, and many of the documents were illegible. Still, the archivist couldn't have been nicer and I spent many days with her in the *Times* basement amidst huge, silent printing presses (the paper by then was printed off site). I also sought out the archival collections of groups and individuals who I thought might be inclined to pressure the *Times* to improve its coverage (the World Jewish Congress collection in the American Jewish Archives, was among the most important) and those who I thought might be inclined to want to minimize the coverage (mostly those in the U.S. government, which meant many pleasant trips to the FDR Library in Hyde Park and not such pleasant trips to the National Archives in Maryland). All in all it probably took about four years to research the book (teaching a full load of classes at Northeastern) and about a year to write it.

Q: *Besides the sources you used, were there any others you wish you had been able to examine?*

Leff: This is one of those questions that I feel I should say "yes" to and come up with something I overlooked, but even in retrospect, I think I tried every possible avenue that was available at the time. I would say, however, that much more information is available online now than was when I researched my book. There is much more about individual people who perished or suffered in the Holocaust, so I probably would have

been able to find out more about various members of the Sulzberber/Ochs family. That wouldn't have changed any conclusions but it would have been nice to fill in their story. I think there's probably more that could have been said about how individual reporters pushed back against the *Times* publisher/editor in covering the story. That might be in the personal letters of the reporters. Since I wrote the book I've heard from the descendants of some *Times* reporters whom I wasn't able to find then (posting on message boards, etc.). In fact, I'm hoping to look at the papers of one key reporter in the next month or so. His family reached out to me years after the book came out (oddly, they found a decades-old message) and we met. They didn't have any letters etc. then but have since found some material. Having said that, this approach might not add anything. At the time I researched the book, I found in an archive the diary and hundreds of letters of a *Times* London reporter. I had the entire collection copied, read every word, and found pretty much nothing.

Q. Based on your research for the book, what would you advise other historians in our field about working with sources?

Leff: My advice is about methodology rather than working with sources. I wish more historians of journalism would combine content analysis with archival work. I think we tend to emphasize one or the other. To me the most interesting work analyzes what's in a newspaper or on a broadcast and then tries to figure out how it ended up there in that form. That should be done, not through speculation, but through trying to re-create the decision-making. To make this happen, more news organizations need to maintain archives, as the *Times* has done, so journalism historians can look at their process, not just the results.

Q: *What were the challenges you faced in researching your book?*

Leff: Because the extermination of the Jews was not considered particularly important at the time — and wouldn't be for another 35 or so years — almost nothing contemporaneous I looked at was organized in a way that recognized the event. (The first stand-alone entry for "Holocaust" in the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, for example, appeared in 1979, and then it was for "Holocaust, Literature of.") That means I had to hunt through indexes of government archives, secondary sources, etc., looking for categories close to what I was interested in and hoping it would be relevant. The same problem manifested itself in looking at contemporaneous letters, memos etc. The *Times* editors and reporters weren't fretting about their lack of coverage (except on the rare occasion they were pushed by outside organizations); it didn't quite occur to them that they should be treating the story differently. In other words, it's hard to explain why people didn't consider something important because, well, they didn't consider it important.

Q: *Is it possible to get too close to a research subject? How do historians maintain their neutrality of viewpoint when conducting and interpreting research?*

Leff: I frankly didn't worry too much about this. I wanted to understand why the *Times* as an institution, and as individuals within the institution, didn't consider the Holocaust to be an important story. I didn't feel as if I had a subject to get close to. I probably spent more time with Arthur Sulzberger than anyone else in the course of my research, but he wasn't the type of person who one could get close to, I think, even if you actually knew him. It might be possible to argue that I wasn't neutral because I started with the premise that the Holocaust should have received more prominent coverage. I agree. I did start from there, but I think it's a completely defensible position.

Q: *What new insights does your book provide?*

Leff: I'd like to think there are many. The essential and most wide-ranging insight is how difficult it is for something that is not recognized as important — in this case primarily because it was happening to a relatively powerless minority — to become recognized as important. For example, because the *Times* didn't consider news about European Jews to be important, it never assigned any reporters to track regularly what was happening to them. So a reporter in France might write one story, another in Romania would write another, but no one person felt responsible for understanding and chronicling events. Similarly, the convention developed that reporters would write about an event — Germany invades Czechoslovakia, for example — and that would be the "big news," dominating the headlines, the bulk of the story, the editorials. And then somewhere deep in the story, they'd mention, "and this is what it means for the Jews in Czechoslovakia." It was very hard to switch frameworks and recognize that what was happening to the Jews might be an important story on its own. The dynamics that made the story less important to begin with, it was happening to a foreign minority, made it hard for Jewish groups in the United States to wield enough influence to convince opinion leaders, whether in government or in the press, to recognize its importance, even as persecution became annihilation. The final related insight is that events the media don't recognize as important — in the 1940s context by providing front-page display day after day reinforced by editorials, week-in-review items, and magazine articles — aren't recognized at all. Despite the 1,186 articles that appeared about the extermination of the Jews over nearly six years, most Americans probably didn't know about the Holocaust while it was happening because almost all those articles were buried inside newspapers.

Q: *What findings most surprised you?*

Leff: This might seem ridiculous but I still am shocked that American news organizations routinely covered the events of the Holocaust as they were occurring. To this day, I will re-read one of those stories that describe the round-up of Jews in Vienna, the trips on cattle cars, the conditions within the Polish ghetto, the uprising in Warsaw, the details of the Treblinka death camps, the mass deportation of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews to Birkenau, and be shocked that all that information was available in an American newspaper within days of the event. I am not sure I can explain my reaction; the specificity and accuracy of the reporting is an incontrovertible finding of my research. But there's still a part of me, either from my early education, the continuing cultural assumption that information wasn't available, or my own naïve morality, that I can't quite accept that all this information was available at the time and yet we did so little about it and, even more perversely, we've been able to persuade ourselves that the information wasn't there to begin with.

Q: *What advice would you give to people in our field who are considering doing a book in JMC history?*

Leff: Do it. As current events move faster than we as scholars can possibly keep up — even the beat reporters whose job it is can't track everything that is happening — it seems as if looking to the past provides a way to go deep and emerge with insights that might help to explain our current predicament as journalists and as citizens.

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