

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 3 (2017). Number 4

Historiography in Mass Communication

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Predicting the Future at Fort Missoula

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

During a recent vacation in Montana, I was part of a small group touring Fort Missoula. A conversation during the visit illustrated again how historians and people untrained in history look at the past differently.

First, some background about the fort. The U.S. Army established it in 1877 at the request of local residents for fear of Native American tribes in western Montana, particularly the Nez Perce. One of the notable events at the fort occurred in 1896 when twenty African-American members of the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps (some of the famous “Buffalo Soldiers”) made an experimental trip of 1,400 miles to St. Louis, Missouri. The object was to determine if bicycles could be an effective means of moving military personnel. The troops did complete the entire distance, taking forty-one days to do so, but it had been such an ordeal that the Army transported the men back to Missoula by train. The fort was used for military training during World War I but by the 1930s was almost abandoned. The Civilian Conservation Corps then used it as a regional headquarters for several years.

With the outbreak of World War II, the federal Department of Im-

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 and of a variety of other awards.

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migration and Naturalization took over the fort in 1941 for use as an alien detention center. Through 1944, the fort housed approximately 1,200 non-military Italians, along with German and Japanese men residing in America. The Italians, mostly merchant seamen, spent the war working as paid laborers in the surrounding area. They called the fort “Bella Vista” (“beautiful view”). After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, the FBI arrested as potential security risks perhaps as many as 1,000 prominent Japanese men living on the West Coast, along with a handful of German resident aliens, and sent them to Fort Missoula for interrogation. The Japanese were aliens barred by law from American citizenship, but none of them were charged with any act of disloyalty. They remained at Fort Missoula or other camps until near war’s end. Fort Missoula, now a historic site, is the largest intact WWII internment center in the United States and, though retaining few original buildings from its early years, is deserving of a visit for the range of eras that its history covers.

It was the internment of the Japanese that provoked the tour conversation that pointed out the difference in the way historians and non-historians understand the past. One of the members of our group became incensed about what he called the “horrible treatment” of the Japanese. “How could anyone,” he demanded, “be put in prison just because they weren’t Americans? We’re so suspicious of anyone not like us! I can’t believe that anyone would have been so prejudiced that they locked up people just because they weren’t Americans!” (I add the exclamation marks not because I saw them as the man talked, but because he did raise his voice as if he were exclaiming :) .)

A member of the fort museum staff replied, “We have to remember what the situation was. America had been attacked, and people were worried about sabotage and other acts, particularly on the West Coast. And, besides, back then the views about tolerance and about treatment of aliens were not the same as they are now. If we had been living in

1941, we probably would have felt the same way.”

“I wouldn’t,” the tourist replied confidently. “I can tell you that I would have opposed any efforts to intern Japanese — just like I would today.”

Of course, anyone reading this account recognizes the fallacy in the upset tourist’s argument. In applying his view today to judge the past, he was committing the error of present-mindedness.

As members of the human race, we may be concerned about mistreatment that we see today, but as historians we would not apply the norms of our own time in judging the values and views of people of another era. Yes, we recognize that there are certain universals by which we may judge some standards and actions from times past (such as murder, child abuse, dishonesty, and theft), but historians are careful not to judge historical people by values that are simply biases of our own time that did not exist in the past.

One of the signs that the field of JMC history has matured even over just the last few years is our historians’ recognition that present-mindedness presents a problem. Not so long ago, it was not uncommon at conferences of the AJHA and the History Division of the AEJMC for audience members to moan or snicker when speakers described the “quaint” views of people in the past. That was particularly evident when the subjects involved social issues such as attitudes about women. Today, the scene is different. The majority of our historians realize that ridiculing what today may seem the quaintness of people in the past leads to a misunderstanding of the past.

To judge the views generally held by people of seventy-five years ago by the views of today’s culture — as the tourist did — would be the same as for people in 2092 to judge our views by theirs. Surely, at the end of this century, they will consider us quaint. We cannot predict what the biases of the future may be (as the tourist implied that he would do) and thus cannot mold our values to conform to the biases of

a future generation — and would not do so even if we knew what those biases will be. Historians know that it is unfair to judge people by values that did not exist.

Even though historians agree on the problem of present-mindedness, this issue of *Historiography* includes articles that emphasize some of the different approaches that historians do use in studying the past. We begin with an essay by Prof. Yong Volz of the University of Missouri explaining a new direction that JMC historiography has taken over the last several years: the study of journalism history within an international context. As she points out, the effort has “drawn considerable attention among historians who are beginning to place news, news people and news organizations under the new rubric of international journalism history.” We follow her essay with a roundtable conducted by Prof. Erika Pribanic-Smith (University of Texas at Arlington) dealing with the importance of biographies as part of the study of history. The members of the roundtable are Marilyn Greenwald of Ohio University, Tracy Lucht of Iowa State University, and Pete Smith of Mississippi State University. For our interview with a historian, we asked Prof. John Ferré of the University of Louisville, and he graciously agreed to answer our questions. Finally, for our interview with the author of an award-winning book, Prof. John Maxwell Hamilton of Louisiana State University shares insights about his *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*. It won the AJHA's award in 2010 as the outstanding book of the year. As always, we hope you will find this issue of *Historiography* both provocative and valuable.

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Beyond the Euro-American Sphere: Internationalizing Journalism History

By Yong Volz ©



Volz

Since 2000, discussions about the study of journalism history have heard a growing call among American historians to “internationalize” journalism history. Mitchell Stephens, for example, expressed the concern that “our narrowly nationalistic journalism histories” largely ignore cross-national connections and comparisons and thus “leave us unable to approach fundamental questions.”¹ Hazel Dicken-Garcia and Kasisomayajula Viswanath argued that the increasing globalization

at the beginning of the 21st century is “particularly auspicious” for the frontier of international communication history.² John Nerone, and later Giovanna Dell’Orto, called for special attention to a history of news systems, especially the production, circulation and audiences of international news, which, they argue, can shed light on the political agency of journalism especially in international affairs.³

Concerted institutional efforts have also been made to promote international journalism history not only as a legitimate subfield of journalism history but also as a critical opportunity to revitalize the agenda of journalism and communication research. At the 2013 AJHA

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conference, a panel on “Internationalizing Journalism History” was presented, engaging the question of how to write journalism history that matters to international affairs and is relevant in the era of globalization. A new AJHA’s Jean Palmegiano Award for outstanding international/transnational journalism history research paper was recently established to incentivize and encourage research in the fledgling field. Last year, the ICA Communication History Division successfully organized a full-day preconference titled “Cross-Borders: Researching Transnational Media History.” More than thirty papers were presented, topics ranging from BBC’s global dominance to Portuguese media in Africa, from Japanese animation’s influence to China’s international fashion magazines, from creating propaganda on the airwaves to producing global media memories, and from logics of cross-border media use to Facebook as transnational digital archives. During the same year, Debbie van Tuyl, working with Mark O’Brien from Dublin City University in Ireland, inaugurated the Transnational Journalism History Conference. In addition, a two-day symposium was organized by CUNY on “Across Borders: Print and Periodical Studies in Motion,” inviting papers that “explicitly go beyond local, regional, and national frameworks to discuss the circulatory and network aspects of magazine and print culture from the beginnings of the periodical press to the digital age.”

These efforts have drawn considerable attention among historians who are beginning to place news, news people and news organizations under the new rubric of international journalism history. The growing body of scholarship as a result will certainly help us rethink some of the theoretical and historical questions in a new light. I would argue, however, the current forays into international journalism history have yet to constitute anything that might be considered an “international turn,” and, as an area of exploration, are still largely under-conceptualized and underdeveloped. More problematically, in the current English-lan-

guage scholarship, international journalism history seems to heavily gravitate toward topics on Euro-American histories but few studies have examined journalism history in and across non-Western settings nor have they challenged the dominant western perspectives and narratives.

To start off, “international journalism history” has been used rather loosely without clearly and coherently defined objects of inquiry, theories, methods or discourse. There are three different ways the term can be understood, which, in turn, leads to the implication of three distinctive branches of research. First, to many American journalism historians, international journalism history conventionally refers to the study of journalism in a “foreign” country during a particular historical period. Studies published in the UK-based journal, *Media History*, provide an important entrance for American journalism historians to keep abreast of the trends in the field of international journalism history (e.g. the *Daily Mirror* during World War II, the 19th century women’s magazines in Finland). Partly due to the abundant research centering around European topics and partly due to the cultural roots and political and economic ties between Europe and the U.S., European journalism history has constituted a significant part of what American journalism historians are interested in (and occasionally write about) in the field of international journalism history.⁴ There are, of course, studies on non-European journalism history, but they are typically produced by scholars from history departments — thanks to the development of area studies during the cold war. James Huffman, for example, a history professor at Wittenberg University, has published several important books on the politics of the press in Meiji Japan. Barbara Mittler and her colleagues at Heidelberg University have also written extensively on the history of Chinese newspapers in the early Republican era. But in general, we media historians seem to have little knowledge of — and have barely investigated — journalism histories in Asia, Africa, South

America and the Middle East, and thus lack an empirical foundation from which to address important historical questions concerning the role of media in the process of modernization in non-Western countries.

Second, international journalism history can also refer to cross-national comparative history. Such studies compare and contrast how certain forms of media, media ideology, or media practices, emerged in countries with different economic structures, political arrangements, and cultural and linguistic traditions. For example, Jean Chalaby at the London School of Economics and Political Science wrote an insightful article comparing the development of French journalism and Anglo-American journalism in the 19th century.⁵ Through the comparison, she made a convincing argument that journalism could develop more rapidly in the United States and Britain, because of the independence of the press from the literary tradition, a strong two party political system, and the ability of the press to derive substantial revenues from sales and advertising. Recent years have seen further development in this stream of research, including Murdock Wieten and P. Dahlgren's *Television Across Europe* (2000), Dan Hallion and Paolo Mancini's *Comparative Media Systems* (2004), Jane Chapman's *Comparative Media History* (2005), Geraldine Muhlmann's *A Political History of Journalism* (2007) and Asa Briggs and Peter Burke's *A Social History of the Media* (2009). This kind of comparative journalism history, however, is not an easy practice. One must engage in extensive and expensive archival research, master two or more historiographies, and sometimes it means mastering two or more languages. One must also avoid the temptation of writing parallel stories rather than a genuinely comparative analysis and narrative. And again, existing literature primarily compares media systems and journalism practices within Europe or use the U.S. as the point of comparison. Very few studies draw comparisons between countries beyond the Euro-American sphere.

Comparative research, though challenging, has great potential to contribute to theory building in the field of journalism history. It will enable us to rethink some of the major theoretical issues in journalism history: What are the differentiated roles of media in the modernization process? Is it true, as Habermas argues, that the rise of commercial media necessarily lowered the boom of public sphere? And is it a fully justified conclusion that the notion of objectivity was always economically motivated or technologically determined, regardless of political and cultural variations? There are other questions for which this line of research could bring new insights: How did the conditions, notions and practices of modern journalism vary across national traditions? Comparative research can help address these issues and thus expand scholarly discourses on the rise and limits of professional journalism.

The third branch of international journalism history focuses on the transcultural and transnational dimensions of journalism history. Rather than simply being comparative, it looks at how journalism, both as an idea, a practice and an institution, was transmitted from one culture to the other, and in the process, how journalism was constituted in and by the ongoing relationships between the exporting culture and the receiving culture. In a way, this line of research looks at the so-called “contact zone,”⁶ a place where journalists and media institutions, who were historically and geographically separated, came together to form a journalistic social network, oftentimes involving conditions of colonialism, imperialism or other asymmetrical relations. As a result, the local formation of journalism is always a product of negotiation, adaptation and hybridization between the two cultures.

This transnational/transcultural line of research can be further delineated into two sub-areas. The first sub-area focuses on foreign correspondents, who have been generally considered as “elite professionals” but have also been mystified as “dreamers and misfits,” “prima donnas and workaholics,” and “a happy, crappy, crazy, intellectual, fool-

ish, endangered band of brothers.”⁷ John Hamilton, Stephen Hess and Giovanna Dell’Orto have published extensively in this area, examining in particular the role of foreign correspondents in international relations.⁸ Taking a quantitative collective biography approach, I myself have tried to identify patterns in the backgrounds and career paths of foreign correspondents who won the Pulitzer Prize from 1910 to 2010.⁹ However, at the center of these studies are the American and European correspondents who reported on the “others” to their home audience; few studies have looked at the foreign correspondents from non-Western nations and how their discourses on the West sharpened historical understandings for their local audiences.

The second sub-area addresses transnational media and examines its production and content across national borders. A considerable amount of research is devoted to transnational television programs, including, for example, Jean Chalaby’s *Transnational Television in Europe: Reconfiguring Global Communications Networks* (2009), and Andreas Fickers and Catherine Johnson’s *Transnational Television History* (2012). These studies provide both rich details and theoretical insights regarding the changes in the media structure, ownership and policies in the European geo-political reconfigurations, yet except for a few cases,¹⁰ we have little knowledge of the historical formation of transnational media outside the European and North American continents. Additionally, little empirical research has explored the local reception of transnational media content from a historical perspective. Moreover, the potentially fruitful area of diaspora media has been largely neglected in media history research.

I would concur with many others that the transnational and transcultural research, by focusing on the flow and interactions of different journalistic models and ideologies, can help us understand the dynamics and power struggles that resulted in the global influence of particular journalistic models. In addition, this kind of research, perhaps even

more so than the other two strands that fall under the category of international journalism history, is especially relevant for us to understand the contemporary media landscape in the globalization process. For example, should we, or could we, transplant the American model of journalism to Iraq or other democratizing countries? How to understand local resistance to Western media or Western culture? These questions can be informed by transcultural and transnational analysis in journalism history.

In order for international journalism history to fully realize its potential in this regard, however, it needs to do more to incorporate media practices and experiences beyond the Euro-American sphere. International journalism history as such, is not just a subcategory of journalism history, but can serve as a vital site to de-Westernize journalism history. It also can provide a means of examining history from a cosmopolitan and dynamic perspective, which not only has great potential to lead to new theoretical developments but can also help us better understand the relevance of journalism history to contemporary trends and variations in the globalization process.

Take the history of Chinese journalism as an example, an area that I have been working on since my doctoral program.¹¹ China has probably the longest history of print culture, but an indigenous press, in its modern form, was not developed until the turn of the twentieth century. It is widely assumed that the rise of modern journalism in the third world is “almost exclusively the result of Western influence,”¹² but few empirical studies have been conducted to examine how the Western models of journalism were transmitted, negotiated, and (un)successfully carried out in the receiving cultures through influences of formal colonialism or other forms of domination. Nor, with rare exceptions, have studies focused on how modern journalism was developed in the third world where capitalism was underdeveloped, or how journalism was justified as a profession in their aspirations for modernization.

Scholarship on third world journalism, consequently, continues to be characterized by ahistorical, anecdotal generalizations that fail to consider the transnational context or to recognize historical contingency. Exploring the historical formation of modern journalism in China in the early 20th century, therefore, can be fruitful in addressing such theoretical questions. In my own research, I considered how the Chinese nationalist modernists, as architects of discourse, constructed the meaning of journalism and how their encounters with the West shaped their visions and discourses. I especially focused on how the ideas of journalistic professionalism, introduced by American educators and manifested by their newspapers, were linked to the broader modernity discourse of early-20th-century China.

Journalistic professionalism, generally defined as a set of assumptions valued in journalistic practice such as objectivity and press freedom, is a cardinal principle of modern journalism. It was developed in the United States as a response to the expansion of bourgeois middle-class and the democratization of politics in the late 19th century. Given the historical conditions of third world countries where both capitalist economy and democratic institutions were underdeveloped, the diffusion of Western ideas of journalistic professionalism is not unproblematic. More pointedly, considering the inherent tension between Western thoughts and indigenous ethos as well as the contextual tension between Western colonialism and local resistance, the process of cultural diffusion of journalism is more complex and contradictory than usually assumed. Research on the development of Chinese journalism, for example, would be most fruitful if it takes a transcultural approach which foregrounds an interactive, improvisational dimension of colonial encounters that is so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A transcultural approach treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking

understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. In other words, the “transculturation” proposition represents an attempt to capture the complications of global cultural encounters but at the same time highlights the forceful and directional nature of cultural formation.

Within the transcultural/transnational framework, my study explored how the subjects, the Chinese and the Americans, were “constituted *in* and *by* their relations to each other”¹³ in a particular situation. I proposed a simple argument: China’s semi-colonial condition in the early 20th century bound this collective of journalistic practitioners and educators in the same discursive community; the “networking” process and their interactions shaped the Chinese notion and discourse of modern journalism. It was also an intertwining and hybridizing process of negotiation between western thought and indigenous ethos, and the Chinese discourse on journalism was reconstituted ultimately in relation to the national project of modernization. As an empirical study in international communication history, my research was an attempt to draw attention of journalism historians to the international/transcultural dimension, which I consider the nature and long-lasting value of communication. The historical legacy of the Republican period in early 20th-century China is profound: Many issues regarding journalistic professionalism and Western models of journalism have been revisited and contested during the post-Mao People’s Republic. With the increasing globalization trend in the 1990s and the approved WTO pact in 2002, how to respond to the intrusion of Western journalism has been hotly debated among Chinese journalists, media researchers, and press-policy makers.

The Chinese case, moving beyond the conventional focus of international journalism history on Euro-American connections and comparisons, serves as a demonstration of how the transcultural and transnational perspective may yield unique understandings of the historical-

ly varied formation of professional journalism. This essay, while joining the call to internationalize journalism history, further points to the need to de-westernize journalism history, demystify meta-narratives, and especially to encourage scholarship that places non-Western journalism at the locus of transnational development of the modern enterprise of journalism. To pursue theoretical and methodological advances in the field of journalism history, more substantial studies on non-Western journalism are in order. It is, after all, the historian's ethical and moral responsibility to challenge the dominant imperial history and to foster critical thinking regarding global processes.

NOTES

¹ Mitchell Stephens, "A Call for an International History of Journalism," *American Journalism* 17:2 (2000): 97-100.

² Hazel Dicken-Garcia & K. Viswanath, "An Idea Whose Time Has Come: International Communication History," *Mass Communication and Society* 5:1 (2002): 1-6.

³ John Nerone, "Does Journalism History Matter?" *American Journalism* 28:4 (2011): 7-27. Giovanna Dell'Orto, "Go Big or Stay Home: Why Journalism Historians Matter to Understanding International Affairs," *American Journalism*, 30:3 (2013): 301-07.

⁴ Hardt, Hanno, "Comparative Media Research: The Third World According to America," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5 (1988): 129-46.

⁵ Jean Chalaby, "Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention," *European Journal of Communication* 11:3 (1996): 303-326.

⁶ Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁷ Peter Rand, *China hands: The Adventures and Ordeals of the American Journalists Who Joined Forces with the Great Chinese Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Peter Gross and Gerd Kopper, *Understanding Foreign Correspondence: A Euro-American Perspective of Concepts, Methodologies and Theories* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Georgie Anne Geyer, *Buying the Night*

Internationalizing Journalism History

Flight: The Autobiography of a Woman Foreign Correspondent (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁸ Stephen Hess, *International News & Foreign Correspondents* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1996); John Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2011); Giovanna Dell'Orto, *American Journalism and International Relations: Foreign Correspondence from the Early Republic to the Digital Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Giovanna Dell'Orto, *AP Foreign Correspondents in Action: World War II to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁹ Yong Z. Volz and Francis Lee, "Who Wins the Pulitzer Prize in International Reporting? Cumulative Advantage and Social Stratification in Journalism," *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* 14 (2013): 587-605.

¹⁰ Melissa Butcher, *Transnational Television, Cultural Identity and Change* (Sage, 2004).

¹¹ Yong Volz, *Transplanting Modernity: Cross-Cultural Networks and the Rise of Modern Journalism in China, 1890s-1930s*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2006,

¹² Herbert Passin, "Writer and Journalist in the Transitional Society," in *Communications and Political Development*, ed., Lucian Pye (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 97.

¹³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 3.

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Historical Roundtable: Telling History's Untold Stories through Biography

By Erika Pribanic-Smith, Marilyn Greenwald,
Tracy Lucht, and Pete Smith ©



Pribanic-Smith

Searches for the best-selling history books of 2016 repeatedly turn up the following titles — *Hitler: Ascent, Valiant Ambition, Hero of the Empire, The Invisibles*, and *Louisa: The Extraordinary Life of Mrs. Adams*. Though they span time periods from the Revolutionary War to World War II, these successful tomes have one important common thread: They are biographical studies, some enlightening readers on the hidden sides of famous figures such as Benedict

Arnold and Winston Churchill; one revealing the untold stories of hidden figures — slaves in the American White House. Biographies are popular because people have an innate curiosity about their fellow humans. They are informative as works of history because — as writers from Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson have stated — the human experience goes hand in hand with the story of any given era. In other words, one cannot understand history without understanding the people who lived it.

Biographical research and writing are special skills, comparable in many ways to other forms of historical scholarship but also distinct. In this roundtable, three experts on historical biography discuss the methods, challenges, and rewards unique to the genre. Each has written biograph-

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Historical Roundtable: Telling History through Biography



Greenwald

ical books and articles on figures in media history, helping to draw conclusions about the general circumstances of different eras and media forms through the particular experiences of the individuals they studied. The historians are Marilyn Greenwald, Ohio University; Tracy Lucht, Iowa State University; and Pete Smith, Mississippi State University.



Lucht

Pribanic-Smith: *What is the value of focusing research on one individual?*

Greenwald: When we focus on people, we get facts as well as emotions and motivations, and we get a deeper understanding of an era, an event, a culture. The subjects of my biographies shaped events as well as having



Smith

Erika Pribanic-Smith, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Arlington, has written about southern journalists Virginius Dabney and John Forsyth as well as Kansas editor Jason Clarke Swayze.

Marilyn Greenwald is a professor in the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University, where biographical writing is among her teaching specialties. She is the author of multiple biographies, most recently Pauline Frederick Reporting: A Pioneering Broadcaster Covers the Cold War and Cleveland Amory: Media Curmudgeon and Animal Rights Crusader.

Tracy Lucht is an assistant professor in the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication at Iowa State University. She is the author of Sylvia Porter: America's Original Personal Finance Columnist as well as articles on public affairs broadcaster Mary Jane Odell and journalist Dorothy Ashby Pownall.

Pete Smith is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at Mississippi State University. He has written biographical articles and books on broadcasting producer/performer Gertrude Berg, labor leader Philip Loeb, Mississippi politician Evelyn Gandy, and journalist/editor Carolyn Bennett Patterson.

events shape them. It's this latter idea — that events shape a person — that is not always studied extensively. In keeping with this idea, the primary sources associated with a person give us a bird's-eye view of history and often capture subtleties we miss in some historical research. Furthermore, the details of a person's life serve as the prism to illustrate a broader subject. Also, from a reader's point of view, biography, with its emphasis on real people and their behavior and activities, might seem more accessible than "history," which some people think of as dry and others think of as emphasizing people with power or status.

Focusing on an individual is particularly helpful when examining the lives of women, minorities, and other overlooked or marginalized groups because their views often aren't part of any official record. Sometimes it appears the same people are written about repeatedly while the public is ignorant about true pioneers in many fields. Sadly, the lack of detailed stories about many women and minorities builds on itself; this leads to a lack of secondary sources and, consequently, the failure of writers and scholars to cultivate an interest in marginalized groups of people. The only way we can get to them is through private or personal artifacts. Primary sources form the backbone of historical research, and many resources are available that help us understand the lives of "hidden figures" who made great contributions to society. It is through letters, rough drafts, and other similar sources that these groups may have expressed their true feelings, ambitions, and intellect. This also is why oral histories can be so valuable — we are often getting the voices, views, and opinions of people whose lives have not been chronicled in other ways.

Lucht: There is always the issue of justifying why you're spending so much time and attention focused on one individual, but the reason I find it so valuable is because it's a really good way to examine the relationship between historical actors and their environment. You can dig

into the context of someone's life and historical moment in a depth that's difficult to do in other types of historical research. History is always the story of individuals acting in certain ways but within the context of their time. What better way is there to look at that relationship between the context and the individual agency or decisions people make? It's fun and challenging to pull meaning out of the particular — looking at what this one person's life can show us about an historical period and how people lived.

Smith: In my work as a biographer, I've considered personalities and people whose circumstances can shed light on larger historical events. The life of the individual can serve as a microcosm for large issues of historical importance. A few years ago, I wrote a piece on Carolyn Bennett Patterson, the first woman senior editor at *National Geographic* magazine and the magazine's first woman travel journalist. She worked there for over three decades, but it took years for Patterson's name to appear on the masthead and even longer for her to convince the powers-that-be that she, or any woman for that matter, could fulfill the role of travel journalist. She succeeded in that endeavor eventually, but she failed in others — such as her attempt to establish an in-house daycare for working mothers. Patterson's professional experiences serve as a case study into the struggles that most women journalists and editors battled during the early and mid-20th century. Individual stories like Patterson's add another level of interest — an emotional appeal — to an already interesting set of circumstances.

Pribanic-Smith: *When studying a person, how do you identify an appropriate and meaningful focus (as opposed to writing the person's whole life story)?*

Greenwald: This is a key question. It's sometimes very difficult to write

— and to read — a “cradle to grave” biography that focuses on a person’s entire life, and this type of biography may end up as a personality profile rather than a true biography that offers analysis and interpretation. This is particularly true today, when publishers want shorter books and readers’ attention spans are shorter. It can be worthwhile to investigate a portion of a person’s life. Here are some ideas we talk about in my graduate biography writing class: You can focus on a specific period or a compelling event in a life. For instance, some researchers have focused on a specific period in a writer’s life when he or she was writing an iconic book — they can ask what earlier factors led to this point in the life. Another example is Hampton Sides’ *Hellhound on His Trail*, an almost hour-by-hour account of James Earl Ray’s thoughts and activities from a few weeks before his assassination of Martin Luther King until he was captured.

Another idea is to write about the intersection of two lives. This linking of two subjects has become especially popular in the last few years. A recent example of this is Susan Quinn’s *Eleanor and Hick*, about First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and her relationship with reporter Lorena Hickock. An older example is Steve Weinberg’s *Taking on the Trust* about investigative journalist Ida Tarbell and industrialist John D. Rockefeller. (Interestingly, Steve once told me that this book began as a biography of Tarbell alone, but after he wrote the manuscript, his editor told him the most interesting part of it was the intersection of Tarbell’s and Rockefeller’s lives.)

Lucht: There are a couple ways to find a focus. One way is starting with the literature and the theory. That would depend on the historian’s particular area of interest. If you’re interested in women’s history or gender discourse like I am, then you look at what this person can tell us about the bigger picture. So one way in is to start big and find a lens through the life of one person. Another way in is to ask what one per-

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son's impact is and focus on that: What changes did that person make in their environment, to journalism, to the trajectory of U.S. media?

Smith: This can be a challenge. Anyone worth writing about likely has made more than a few important contributions. I always start by making a broad timeline of the person's life and then narrow my focus to a topic that is meaningful and interesting — something that can be tied, for instance, to a contemporary issue or problem. I may look for an angle that I think will be of most interest to readers — one that I think will add something of note to the scholarly debate and has not been discussed yet in the literature. For instance, Philip Loeb is rarely mentioned in the scholarly literature about the history of the theatre or the broadcasting industry, despite his longtime contributions to both as a union leader and organizer. I found his passion for many of the labor issues affecting his profession interesting and timely and his impact significant. So, Loeb's union work and the political troubles he ran into because of it became the focus for an article I wrote several years ago. Along the way, I saw threads connecting his career — including his blacklisting during the 1950s Cold War era — to longstanding political debates, issues of freedom of expression and due process, that still resonate in today's volatile political climate.

Pribanic-Smith: *What are the challenges you've encountered conducting biographical research, and how did you overcome them?*

Greenwald: There are many challenges of writing biographies. Some are practical, such as the expense and time of going to archives and traveling to the places where your source lived and worked. Sometimes there is no substitute for traveling to a place that was of importance to your subject — just ask Robert Caro, who spent considerable time in the Texas Hill Country, where his subject Lyndon Baines Johnson lived

and worked. Caro thinks Johnson's years there had an enormous effect on his outlook and his life and career. He spent much of that time absorbing the atmosphere. If you cannot travel to work on a project, archives posting some of their content online is a godsend. I would also suggest taking advantage of helpful librarians and archivists to help you access material remotely. (Of course, I have found archivists and librarians to be enormously helpful on the premises as well.) One more tip: If you are seeking a relatively small amount of material from an archive, and if you know specifically what you want, you can often hire a researcher or graduate student who lives near the archive to conduct a few hours of research for you. Usually librarians at the archive can suggest names; I know most of the presidential libraries have lists of people available to do this.

I always worry that despite my extensive research, I will fail to "get" the person — what makes her tick, what was she really like, what are her quirks and weaknesses? I like to think that after I do years of research on someone, it's like knowing a friend or relative for many years — I have them "figured out," as it were. But that's not always the case.

Lucht: A challenge I'm facing right now studying the history of women in broadcasting in the Midwest is finding subjects who left enough material. Obviously as historians we're interested in telling the stories that haven't yet been told, but sometimes there's a reason: There's not enough evidence to go on. I usually do 20th-century research, so I try to supplement archival material with interviews with people who knew my subject or at least understand the context, people who can help make sense of what I'm seeing and fill in gaps.

Another challenge is maintaining objectivity. I've heard it said biographers tend to fall in love with their subjects, and that's certainly true, but you also can become disillusioned or disappointed in your subjects as you learn more about the things they did. That certainly was the case

when I looked at Sylvia Porter, the subject of my first book. Some things she did I would not consider ethical by my own standards. I had to be honest about her while not imposing my own judgments on her. I had to make understanding the goal rather than my own judgment.

There's also the challenge of making the argument about the significance of a person you're studying. Sometimes there's a tendency for people reviewing our work to think that if someone was really significant then he or she has been written about already, or to hold new subjects to standards of prominent journalists we already know about and say, "This person isn't that." It's a challenge to keep making that argument to get past people's biases, which can be regional, gendered, raced — all these things are in play. Something I've found about studying the Midwest in particular is that a lot of media history has focused on large organizations on the east or west coast or in large metropolitan areas. I think it's important to consider our dominant narratives through a different lens.

Smith: In my experience, there are at least two challenges that biographers may face: (1) the challenge of establishing and maintaining relationships with the family members of the person in question while navigating the relationships among those family members and the whole family dynamic, and (2) resisting the urge to fall too much in love with your subject — or at least not allowing that affection to cloud your interpretations of the subject.

For my book on radio and television producer/performer Gertrude Berg, I relied on interviews with her son and daughter to help provide information about her that otherwise was difficult to glean from my other primary sources. What I was not aware of at the time, though, was the rift between the two sides of the Berg family — tension that ended up spilling over into my project. I had to carefully navigate this feud as I worked on my book. Interviews with immediate family members are

important in helping flesh the subject out, but that experience was much more stressful than I anticipated.

One of the reasons I was attracted to Berg's story was due to the hard stance she took against the 1950s broadcasting industry blacklist. She refused to fire one of her co-stars even after CBS and her sponsor, General Foods, ordered her to do so. That decision cost her professionally, but I found her stance courageous. At the same time, however, I had to make sure my admiration for her politics did not cloud my evaluation of other aspects of her career. To be honest, I'm not sure how well I succeeded in that task — it was perhaps the most difficult challenge I faced as a young scholar.

Pribanic-Smith: *How would you compare the writing of biography to the writing of other genres of history?*

Greenwald: In some ways the writing is more difficult than many other genres of history, but it can be more rewarding. Because subjects are/were human, you find yourself liking or disliking them, so you have to force yourself to be as objective as possible. But after you've accessed primary resources — especially artifacts like letters — you feel a strange personal kinship to your subject that you may not get examining other historical genres.

All historians have to tell interesting and readable stories that contain valuable information, but that's particularly difficult in biography because of the nuances in people's characters; it can be difficult to make them come to life on the page. It can also be challenging to "slip in" historical background while telling the story. That background needn't overtake the main story, but the writer needs to set the stage for the reader. I also find that biographers have to be generalists when it comes to knowledge, whereas historians often can focus on one era or event. For instance, when I began my biography of NBC correspondent

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Pauline Frederick, my knowledge of the history of broadcast journalism was slight, but I had to become somewhat of an expert on it because she spent much of her life in that field. Add that to the fact that she worked during World War II, during the Cold War, and she covered many pivotal events of the mid- and late 20th century. So, I had to gain a thorough knowledge of those events, too, to understand who she was.

Lucht: I find biographical writing can be easier because there's a built-in narrative: It's a life story. However, it's important to distinguish between biography — the story of someone's life — and biographical study — using a person's life to answer larger questions. When we talk about drawing meaning from the particular, biography is a fun framework to work with. One thing I think can be challenging is there's more of an emotional component to a person's life or story. I think biography invites readers to identify with a subject. It's tricky to balance the tone between the personal and the analytical — wanting to do justice to both. But that's sort of a dance that might be special to biography.

Smith: I think one key difference in writing biography as opposed to other genres comes in *how* and *what* the author has to describe. In exploring a human subject, the focus is on describing both the private and public aspects of a singular life and then weaving in broader historical contexts as it relates to that life. The challenge comes in making sure that the contextual narrative doesn't take over the story or that the writer doesn't stray too far from the subject for the sake of interesting background information, no matter how important the latter may be to the overall story.

I also think there's an intimacy in writing biography that may not be as obvious in other historical genres. One of my graduate school professors once told me that the key to writing biography is to “get in the skin” of the subject and try to see the world through his or her eyes.

From there, it's the writer's job to describe that perspective as accurately and with as much detail as the historical record will allow. I consider that advice to be among the most valuable and, certainly, the most interesting I've received.

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Interview: John Ferré



Ferré

In each of its previous issues, this journal has published a Q&A interview with recipients of the Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement given annually by the American Journalism Historians Association.

We now are beginning a continuing series of Q&A's with senior historians in the JMC field. Our purpose is two-fold. First, we wish to provide, for the historical record, biographical information about JMC historians. We think that it is fair to say that there are only a few published accounts of historians in the field. The journals *Journalism History* and *American Journalism* have printed occasional profiles, and a handful of books have done the same — but the body of work is far from extensive. Second, the interviews will provide a means by which historians may share their views about the study of history. Some individuals who have been doing history for many years have given considerable thought to the discipline of JMC history, and we are pleased to be able to provide a way for them to explain their ideas.

For the interview in this issue, Prof. John Ferré of the University of Louisville graciously agreed to answer our questions. He has been a professor for more than thirty years, since he received his Ph.D. in communications from the University of Illinois in 1986. In 1996 the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication gave him its Krieghbaum Under-40 Award, which recognizes young professors for “outstanding achievement in research, teaching, and public service.” In 2001 the University of Louisville recognized him with its Distinguished

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Teaching Professor Award, which honors “career teaching excellence.” He has written on history primarily in the contexts of media ethics and religion and the media. For a book on ethics — *Good News: Social Ethics & the Press* — he and his co-authors (Cliff Christians and Mark Fackler) received the Religious Speech Communication Association’s award in 1993 for the year’s outstanding book.

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

Ferré: I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, and was raised with my sister and two brothers in Virginia and Florida. My father was an orthopedic surgeon, and my mother was a kindergarten aide. They divorced as I was beginning high school in Ocala, Florida. Dad stayed in Florida, my older brother went away to college, and Mom took my younger sister, my younger brother, and me to live near her family in Northern Virginia.

My years in high school were uninspired, but that changed when I went to college. Everywhere I went I encountered extraordinary mentors. At Mars Hill College, where I studied religion, Page Lee helped me develop an historical, critical, and inquisitive approach to the world that liberated me from the Christian fundamentalism I carried to college, and Joseph Schubert encouraged me to read widely, learn journalism, and go to a Big Ten university. At Purdue, where I earned an M.A. in communication, Joseph Turow taught the logic and methods of communication research so well that I was inspired to conduct an independent project that became my first refereed article. At Chicago, where I earned an M.A. in Divinity, Larry Greenfield grilled my classmate and me so thoroughly on the 24 books he required us to read in one quarter that I am now hardwired to approach research in terms of

thesis and evidence. And at Illinois, where I earned my doctorate, Cliff Christians modeled the life of the humane scholar, one driven by the highest of academic standards in service to the improvement of community.

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

Ferré: Many media historians spent years working as news reporters before deciding to teach. Not me. As an undergraduate religion major, I came to believe that my professors had the perfect job: They were paid to research, teach, and write about what they cared about the most. What a deal! So I decided to go to graduate school so that I could become a professor of theological ethics.

But not right away. During my senior year at Mars Hill College in North Carolina, I wrote a story a week for the *Marshall News-Record* — sometimes features, sometimes news, usually with a photograph that I developed and printed myself. Afterwards I studied journalism at Purdue University to round out my education. Before I left, I had written my first journal article, “Denominational Biases in the American Press,” which was published in *Review of Religious Research*.

By the time I started my M.A. work at the University of Chicago Divinity School, my thinking had changed. I kept trying to apply what I learned there to the study of media. For an independent study with Robin Lovin, I’d written “Contemporary Approaches to Journalistic Ethics,” which *Communication Quarterly* published, but a course on the Reformation was my undoing. When I was halfway through reading John Calvin’s *The Institutes of Christian Religion* I recall thinking, “Who cares? What does any of this have to do with news, popular culture, or public opinion?” It wasn’t long before I decided to finish my degree at Chicago and earn my doctorate at the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois.

Lest you think that I have done only academic work, you should know that I worked as a rodman for my grandfather's land surveying business in Northern Virginia and that I spent a summer as an apprentice for the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers grinding and sandblasting a scrubber for a power plant in Maryland. I also painted houses, worked as a laborer at building sites, cooked fast food at Jack in the Box, and worked retail at Sears. All of my training for the academy wasn't academic.

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

Ferré: The very first course I taught was as a senior at Mars Hill College. I was working for a French professor who for some reason had been assigned to teach a section of a remedial writing course. The professor wasn't interested in teaching this course. So he gave the class to me. My assignment was to prepare the students for the course-wide test at the end of the semester, but because it was a one-credit-hour class that met on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, I was not allowed to assign homework.

The students weren't much interested in paragraph development and subject-verb agreement, but they really weren't interested in going to class on Fridays because they wanted to go home. So I made a deal with them. We would not meet on Fridays, but they would have a few hours of homework. They were pleased.

So was the French professor at the end of the semester when he learned that his students had the highest scores on the course-wide test.

I wish I could say that all of the classes I have taught in the intervening decades were as successful. But whether they were the speech or composition courses I taught as a teaching assistant at Purdue and Illinois, the writing courses I taught as a term faculty member at what

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is now Purdue University Northwest, or the courses in the historical, ethical, or religious dimensions of media that I teach at the University of Louisville, my concern is still on learning outcomes. Only now the credit or the blame is on me!

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?*

Ferré: I studied history throughout college and graduate school, but not until my doctoral work at the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois did I do historical research with primary sources. My first attempt was in Willard Rowland's seminar on legal and policy issues in broadcasting, when I wrote a history of the National Association of Broadcasters Code of Ethics. That effort of tracking down and making sense of original sources hooked me. Later when I studied media effects research with Ellen Wartella, I read every book published between 1950 and 1984 that evaluated commercial television from a religious perspective, and ended up publishing that paper in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. My dissertation on the meaning of best-selling religious books in the early 20th century grew out of a paper that I wrote for Cliff Christians' course on popular culture.

At the time, I had been reading David Hackett Fisher's *Historians' Fallacies* about how to write and how not to write history and *Historical Sociology* by the British sociologist Philip Abrams, who made the sensible point that history and sociology were both empirical disciplines that sought generalization. These books seemed intended for a budding scholar who always wanted to find out how we got to where we were.

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

and work?

Ferré: The college course that first captured my historical imagination used James C. Livingston's *Modern Christian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Vatican II*. It was pure intellectual history and showed how Immanuel Kant led to John Locke who led to David Hume — all the way to Gabriel Vahanian and Harvey Cox. As I read each chapter, I thought, "This approach makes a lot of sense," only to read the devastating critique of the subsequent generation. By the time I finished this book, I learned to appreciate both the rationales for various paradigms and the inevitable critiques that dismantled them. Livingston made this organic process vivid.

I wanted the same experience in my study of journalism at Purdue. So I asked my advisor, George Stevens, to supervise an independent study because no journalism history course was offered there. Stevens agreed, and required me to master Edwin Emery's classic textbook, *The Press and America*. That independent study, together with John Webster's First Amendment history in his course, *The Press in a Democratic Society*, established the basis for my understanding of journalism history.

My understanding took flight during James Carey's lectures at Illinois. Listening to Carey was an experience of imagination. He'd begin, say, with the Enlightenment philosopher Giambattista Vico, tie in observations from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and Harold Innis's *The Bias of Communication*, discuss the logics of trade routes and telegraph roads, and then.... I could never remember. I would have put down my pen and spent a half hour or more wondering about connections and possibilities that I had not understood or imagined before. I left Carey's seminar on communications systems understanding the importance of broad intellectual engagement and the value of playful questioning.

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

Ferré: Two questions motivate my research and teaching. The first is epistemological: Why do we believe what we believe? The second is normative: How ought we to express ourselves? And because thought is experiential, both questions require answers that are historical.

This fall, for instance, I'll teach a course on faith and film. The course will explore religious ideas decade by decade from the silent era to Hollywood features today and it will explore film criticism and regulation. After all, it was a religious film that led to the Legion of Decency in 1933 and it was another religious film that led the Supreme Court to grant First Amendment protections to film in 1952. The course will concern historical dimensions of belief and expression, of religion and ethics, the two subjects that been my focus of communication study for my career.

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

Ferré: The threads that run through my publications are the importance of religion in media and the importance of ethics to media decision-making — then and now. These ideas are hardly profound, but they don't seem to be commonly accepted, either. Take media and society textbooks, for instance. Except for a nod to Gutenberg, they explain the history of media as if religion did not exist. On the contrary: Religion has always been involved in media, whether it was the Bible Society of Philadelphia importing the first stereotype printing plates to the United States, the Christian Broadcasting Network being at the forefront of delivering programming by means of a satellite, or ISIS using the internet to recruit terrorists. You don't have to be a believer to acknowledge

the involvement of religion in media. But to ignore the role that religion has always played in media production and consumption is to distort the history of media.

Media ethics, on the other hand, tends to be episodic and ahistorical — probably because it so much wants to relate to today's issues. But without the long view, it's hard to know the extent to which problems are recurrent and maybe structural in nature.

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

Ferré: When I was in graduate school, I read an article in the *Chicago Tribune* that quoted a Yale professor who said that professors should always write about what they were teaching. This idea made good sense to me because it keeps one's professional life from being compartmentalized. Many of the first courses I taught were in composition. So my first book was a co-edited composition reader titled *Rhetorical Patterns*, which I followed two years later with the *Merrill Guide to the Research Paper*. I then revised my dissertation and published *A Social Gospel for Millions*. Two years later I published *Channels of Belief*. I then turned my attention to media ethics and co-edited *Public Relations and Ethics: A Bibliography* and coauthored *Good News*. Nineteen years intervened before we followed *Good News*, which was more theoretical, with *Ethics for Public Communication*, which was more historical. Each project was highly satisfying in its own way, and the research and writing kept my classroom teaching vital.

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?

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Ferré: I wish I could say that I have contributed a book about JMC history that kept company with *Faith in Reading* by David Paul Nord or *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* by Hazel Dickengarcia, but I haven't, at least not yet. My contributions have had far less reach. However, I have tried to keep the historical dimensions of media ethics and religion and media on the minds of scholars in those areas. Several years ago, I wrote "A Short History of Media Ethics in the United States" for *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics* that Lee Wilkins and Clifford G. Christians edited. That chapter traces the history of self-conscious media ethics from its beginnings in the Progressive Era through the nascent professionalism of the 1920s to the theory of social responsibility that was predominant from the 1940s through the 1970s to the growth of thinking about global humanitarianism that characterizes much of the theorizing about media ethics today. It ends with a series of historical questions that I think still hold up well.

For the history of religion and media, I wrote a cluster of articles about public relations that I hoped would add a missing dimension to scholarship in that area. The first, "Protestant Press Relations in the United States, 1900-1930," came out in the journal *Church History*. The second, "Protestant Press Relations, 1930-1970," was included in David Sloan's anthology, *Media and Religion in American History*. The third, "The Bishops Meant Business: Lessons from a Controversy over Public Relations," was a case study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*. The only other person I know who has thought seriously about the history of religious public relations is Meg Lamme, who wrote *Public Relations and Religion in American History*.

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

Ferré: That's a tough question. My career has been rewarding. My men-

tors from my undergraduate days through my doctorate were top flight. My scholarship has been an ongoing source of stimulation for me, and my teaching has given me opportunities to challenge students to see the world in new ways. And serving eight years as associate dean for faculty affairs and two years as interim dean of arts and sciences gave me a chance to work with talented staff and faculty to improve my college. I would change none of that.

If I could change anything, I would have been more disciplined and more enterprising. I would have read more, written more, and found more opportunities to teach and research. But as I say this, I realize that I'm simply wishing I had more time to do what I love to do. My long-term fantasy is to have an insert button that would give me extra weeks, months, and years. To paraphrase Nathan Hale, "I only regret that I've had but one 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.*

Ferré: I'll opt for the second question because I have no philosophy of history to share beyond acknowledging that history is interpretive and partial, like all knowledge. Historians do their best to give true accounts of the past, realizing all the while that they are limited by their perspectives and by the resources available to them.

That being said, here are what I consider the 10 Commandments of Researching Media History:

1. *Read widely.* I have always admired the work of John Pauly, and I remember what he said at the AJHA meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota 30 years ago: "There is a lot of discussion about research methods in history. My method is simple. I read everything that's ever been written about a subject." That's terrible advice for scholars who want to be pro-

lific, but it's great advice for those who seek depth of understanding.

2. *Ask questions.* Articulating what we want to know clarifies our thinking, leads to answers, and launches subsequent research projects.

3. *Identify appropriate primary sources.* My study of bestselling religious books was concerned with what those books had to say. So the bestsellers themselves were my primary sources. But in *What Would Jesus Read?* Erin Smith wanted to know how readers interpreted popular religious books. So she turned to letters that readers wrote to authors of older books, online responses to more recent books, and participant-observation in a church book club for current titles. Knowing where to look is just as important as knowing what to ask.

4. *Triangulate.* The best studies draw from complementary sources. Cecelia Hunt's recent master's thesis on how American news media framed refugees from the 1956 Hungarian Revolution examined articles from *The New York Times*, the Associated Press and United Press wire services, and *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report*.

5. *Approach sources with flexibility.* Messages, as they say in the trade, are polysemic. They often mean more than one thing. That principle applies to research, too. Sources useful for one project can inspire different projects.

Let me give you an example. A number of years ago, I went to Ohio State University's Cartoon Research Library to read the letters that cartoonist Lynn Johnston received after the sheepdog Farley died in her cartoon strip, "For Better or For Worse." Several of the letters referred to the rainbow bridge or some other concept of heaven where people will be reunited with the pets they have loved. Some of the letters were written on pet bereavement cards. I began to wonder, why do many people believe in pet heaven? So down the rabbit hole I went. I read every book I could find that took up the idea of animal afterlife, books with titles like *Cold Noses at the Pearly Gates*, *God's Covenant with Animals*, and *Will I See Him Again?* The result was an article I published

in *Horizons* magazine titled “Animals are People, Too: Pet Heaven in Popular Books.”

6. *Don't expect facts to speak for themselves.* To make sense of the 650 letters Lynn Johnston received after Farley died in her cartoon strip, I applied Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief for an article titled “Death and Dying in ‘For Better or For Worse.’” No doubt others could use this same source material in other equally legitimate ways.

7. *Be open-minded.* For my doctoral dissertation, I intended to write a history of 20th-century religious bestsellers. However, after months of research, I was still researching the first period, from 1897 to World War I. So I approached Cliff Christians, my advisor, sheepishly, and asked if him if I could refocus my study on these two decades. Not only did he agree, but he even called this change a sign of “scholarly maturity.” Relieved, I wrote *A Social Gospel for Millions: The Religious Best-sellers of Charles Sheldon, Charles Gordon, and Harold Bell Wright*. Many years later, I was asked to contribute an entry on religious best-sellers in America to *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*. When I finished, I sent a note to Cliff telling him that whereas I had been unable to write a history of twentieth-century religious bestsellers in a couple hundred pages, I had written a four-century history of religious bestsellers in a dozen pages!

8. *Write clearly.* The competition for attention is intense. Few readers will spend time with an article or a book that isn't engaging. So write to be read.

9. *Find a good critic.* I've had the good fortune to work with keen, but kind critics. These colleagues have pointed out problems that I didn't see and thus helped me produce better scholarship.

10. *Participate in professional associations.* I can't say enough about the value of belonging to the American Journalism Historians Association. AJHA has been a source of intellectual stimulation, professional opportunity, and friendship. My best advice is to go to the annual meet-

ings and to pitch in. For me that meant hosting one of the meetings, serving on committees and on the Board of Directors, and evaluating dissertations and papers. Mostly that meant hearing papers and panels from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., going on the field trips, and joining new friends and old friends for meals and drinks. The meetings feel like family reunions, and I always come home thinking new thoughts.

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

Ferré: As the coordinator of AEJMC History Division's annual best book award for the past eight years, I find little fault with the quality of work being done today in JMC history. The field is vibrant. Consider the breadth of the most recent award winners. They cover technology (*Network Nation* by Richard R. John), biography (Peter Hartshorn's life of Lincoln Steffens), race (Chris Lamb's *Conspiracy of Silence*, Jinx Coleman Broussard's *African American Foreign Correspondents*, and Robert G. Parkinson's *The Common Cause*), law enforcement (*Hoover's FBI and the Fourth Estate* by Matthew Cecil) and the environment (Finis Dunaway's *Seeing Green*). There's also a steady stream of JMC history books. For each of the past eight years, an average of 25 nominations have been submitted for the AEJMC history book award. Moreover, JMC history is being published by the best academic presses, including Harvard, Chicago, Oxford, Illinois, and California. Add in the two established quarterly journals in the field, *American Journalism* and *Journalism History*, and you have a snapshot of ongoing quality scholarship.

JMC historians are not only writing, but they're being read. According to Google Scholar, the AEJMC History Division book award winners are being cited at a median rate of three times per year, which adds up to 68 citations for the first award winner, Patricia Johnston's

1997 book, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Photography*. Jeffrey Pasley's *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* has been cited an average of 20 times a year since it was published in 2001, and John Hartsock's *History of American Literary Journalism* has been cited an average of 14 times a year since it was published in 2000. All of the award-winning books are still in print.

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?*

Ferré: There's a perfect storm of threats to JMC as a field of study. As tuition has increased, so have efforts to support STEM education at the expense of the liberal arts. This rising preference corresponds with the common belief that the value of higher education lies more in economics than in civics, so that many students are far more interested in learning marketable skills than in courses in hermeneutics or history. These biases have hit journalism education particularly hard at a time when platforms for news reporting are uncertain and a sizeable voting bloc doubts the trustworthiness of research, education, and news reporting. Not surprisingly, JMC enrollment is declining.

However, media — especially electronic media — are more integral than ever before to individuals and to communities. So JMC historians have ample opportunities to apply their expertise. JMC historians are ideal candidates for teaching survey courses and relevant electives, and when they do, they can require readings in JMC history. They can reach out to students and the public with their own articles, books, and documentaries that explain historical dimensions of our preoccupations: cell phones, social media, videos, citizen reporting, media hoaxes, public relations, propaganda, news bias, advertising — the list goes on. As universities turn to responsibility-based budgeting, funding pro-

Historian Interview

grams according to their enrollments, historians can help their departments by designing courses in the major and for elective credit that explain how we got the media system that we have.

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

Ferré: My guess is that JMC history will continue to face the challenges it has always faced. The toughest ones are cultural. Many students prefer skills courses to studies of history because skills make their résumés stand out in a way that knowledge of history doesn't. I worry that skills courses will crowd history courses out of JMC curricula.

To complicate matters, administrators are increasingly thinking of research in terms of external funding. If the academy continues on its present course, then research will be increasingly performed by professors who buy out time in the classroom with large research grants. Faculty who cannot bring in external funding will be required to teach more, thus reducing the time they have for research. Few historians attract large grants. So they will likely be assigned more classes to teach and thus have less time for research.

The combination of curricular and budget pressures will likely test the will and the ingenuity of the next generation of JMC historians.

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Book Award Interview: John Maxwell Hamilton



Hamilton

Jack Hamilton won the American Journalism Historians Association's award for the year's outstanding book in 2010 for *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*. He is the Hopkins P. Breazeale Professor of Journalism at Louisiana State University and a Global Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars

Q: Give us a brief summary of your book.

Hamilton: This is a book about the evolution of foreign news. The use of the word “roving eye” is meant to suggest that correspondents spanned the world, and also that their attention was often episodic. My goal was to broaden our sense of foreign news. I wanted to include correspondents who are overlooked, and I wanted to go beyond their stories to show how owners and editors, government officials, and readers and viewers shape the news. Finally, I wanted to touch on the various issues that come up in foreign reporting, such as the way that news shapes government policy (or on the other hand conforms to policy, say, in times of war).

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

Hamilton: My initial idea was to create an anthology of foreign reporting, with short introductions to put them in context. It seemed an inter-

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esting project, and one I could do fairly quickly. But I changed my mind almost immediately.

Very little has been written about foreign news coverage during the 18th century, other than to note that foreign news was acquired by lifting stories from newspapers that arrived from Europe by ship or printing letters — you could call this, literally, “foreign correspondence” — sent from abroad. With the help of one of my students, I started to explore this and found interesting news accounts from that time period. What was supposed to be a brief introduction to a representative story became a chapter. The representative story was included.

That became the model for the rest of the book. The sample story proved to be an effective technique because the reader could get a better sense of what news actually looked like. This is much preferable to describing the method used for news stories.

***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?*

Hamilton: First of all, I had been doing research on this topic for years.

One of my first books was a biography of Edgar Snow, whose coverage of Communist China is an important source for historians and was at the time highly influential. Afterward, I toyed with the idea of writing biographies of several other foreign correspondents — Vincent Sheean, Jack Belden, and Richard Halliburton. In the case of the first two, I did interviews with people who knew them and unearthed useful primary material. In the case of Halliburton, I thought of using him as a vehicle to write about travel. In his time, Halliburton was a bestselling highly romantic writer. I did some of his adventures — climbed Mt. Olympus, tried to swim the Panama Canal from deep water to deep water (the authorities blocked some of that), climbed Cerro Pierre on

the Columbia border, and tried to emulate Halliburton's trip through Andorra by horse (of course, there are no horses to ride there now except at a riding stable that lets you trot around a small track).

I had other original material like this to draw from and conducted a number of other interviews. I had written about contemporary foreign news coverage for several decades, and that time period was covered in the book. So I had that research.

I had a fellowship at the Shorenstein Center at Harvard's Kennedy School that I used to think about the future of foreign news, which is the last part of the book. (I might add here that I had for some time thought that our definitions of foreign correspondents were too narrow, confined to correspondents with, for instance, CBS News or the *New York Times*. Halliburton was a foreign correspondent, to my mind, because he informed Americans about the world. He had an enormous impact on thinking. Edgar Snow, for instance, went abroad as a young man in large part because of reading Halliburton's jejune tales.)

But this is not all that went into researching the book. I visited a number of archives to look at papers. Some were very rich. It became clear to me that systematic coverage of events abroad by *American* correspondents (as opposed to news sent by "native" local reporters) originated with the *Chicago Daily News*. I developed this point of view by digging through the Newberry Library archives, which have collections from that newspaper and from individuals who were part of the paper. To give you a sense of how valuable these materials were, I found in the collection belonging to Edward Price Bell an unpublished memoir he wrote at the end of his life. I published it with LSU Press, adding extensive annotations. Bell was one of the first correspondents to go abroad fulltime for the *Daily News*. He was considered the dean of American correspondents in London. (Several other books like his came out of the research and were published.)

I don't need to mention here all of the collections I used. They can

be found in the source list at the end of the book, of course.

Finally, at various points, I would enlist colleagues — professors or students — to research with me on a related topic, which would be published as a journal article. These gave me insights for the book. I chose colleagues who had expertise that I did not have, for example in quantitative research. To cite one study, Renita Coleman, two students, and I did a content analysis of coverage of the Spanish-American War. I had a hunch that sensational coverage was not confined to yellow papers the likes of Hearst's. This turned out to be the case. Thanks to that help from Renita and the students, we were able to offer a richer picture of reporting during that time. That informed my chapter on the Spanish-American War. My talented doctoral student Raluca Cozma and I collaborated on several projects that were similarly productive. The inestimable Jinx Broussard and I did work on race and foreign news — which I used in a chapter and which she developed into her exceptional book on the subject.

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

Hamilton: There are always sources you wish you had used. It works the same way it does when you are a reporter: Nearing deadline, you say, "I have enough. I don't need to make any more calls." But you do make another call, and you are glad you did. I am working on a new book right now, on American propaganda during World War I, and I have found collections that would have enriched my foreign correspondents book as much as they do the one I am writing. But eventually you have to stop.

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

Hamilton

Hamilton: I think the above comments speak to this. But I will underscore one point. I think historians can make better use of quantitative research. (And, I might add, I think quantitative researchers limit the value of their work by not informing it adequately with qualitative understanding.)

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

Hamilton: I was not adequately informed on all the periods I wrote about, or all the issues. So, I had to read a good deal.

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?

Hamilton: Historians have tended to glorify foreign correspondents. This is an easy trap to fall into, since correspondents have tended to be colorful. But it is much more complex than that. One of the best places to be a fake news reporter, if I may use the phrase that is in vogue right now, is in foreign news, where it is harder for editors to check their work.

Q: What new insights does your book provide?

Hamilton : I hope the book gives us a different perspective on foreign news. I offered one example of that, to wit, people who might not generally fall into the category of foreign correspondent. To give another example, I tried to legitimize the idea of parachute journalism. Parachute journalists are not good substitutes for having fulltime correspondents on the ground for substantial periods of time. But they can add value either by supplementing what is being done or by allowing

small newspapers and television to do *some* foreign reporting on their own, which they could not do before travel improved to the extent it has. I tried to give a more nuanced picture of the work of foreign correspondents. We think of correspondents as highly independent. In fact they often work very closely with each other, a point to which I devote a chapter. I argue that the high point in foreign reporting was in the 1930s. This was due to the large number of outlets and the high degree of autonomy that reporters had; the fact that so many developed deep expertise; and the fact that Americans then were liked abroad, which gave them greater access. I hope in ways like this I added to our understanding of foreign news.

Q: *What findings most surprised you?*

Hamilton: There is so much I could say here. But to mention one point, I gained a better understanding of the role of technology in the development of foreign coverage. I have come to see the ability to annihilate time and distance, as journalists in the 19th century aspired to do, as a liability as much as a plus.

Also I have come to believe the *Daily News*, more than any other newspaper, laid the basis for modern journalism, not only in foreign news but in general. It was principled and innovative — and of a very high quality. It was an extremely profitable newspaper. It has never had the treatment it deserves. We have multiple histories of some newspapers, but nothing really on the *Daily News*. It could be written as a joint history with the *Chicago Tribune* as a way to show the development of the modern newspaper — and modern newspaper company.

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

Hamilton

Hamilton: Foreign news coverage deserves much more attention than it gets. The reservoirs of primary research are barely tapped.

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