

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 4 (2018). Number 5

Historiography in Mass Communication

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Journalism History and Law

By Erika J. Pribanic-Smith ©



Pribanic-Smith

During my Presidential Address at the American Journalism Historians Association conference in 2015, I recommended several ways that journalism historians could cross borders and bridge gaps between our discipline and others. One of my suggestions was to collaborate with legal scholars. Following my own advice, I forged a research partnership with Jared Schroeder, a media law scholar from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Our alliance has resulted in a paper presented at the 2017 AJHA conference and a forthcoming book.

Law and history go hand in hand. As attorney and public relations historian Cayce Myers told me at a recent convention, law relies on history. Every judicial decision cites precedents, which may be decades or even centuries old. Furthermore, the development of laws and the ways they are tried and enforced are intertwined with political, social, and cultural factors of interest to historians. Top law schools offer programs that provide historical context to the legal knowledge imparted upon law students. For example, the Program in Law and History at the Uni-

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versity of Minnesota Law School (<https://www.law.umn.edu/program-law-history>) offers interdisciplinary courses instructing students on the dynamics between law and social change, including courses on American Indian History, Citizenship and Human Rights, and Women's Legal History.

These course offerings align with what Marianne Constable and Sylvia Schafer recently wrote in their introduction to a special *History of the Present* issue on intersections among law, history, and theory. Legal history tends to trace the development of formal statutes and judicial opinions. Constable and Schafer explained that socio-legal scholars explore law in action, such as legal relations of oppression and resistance.¹ Historian Patricia Hagler Minter argued that such studies of legal and cultural history “tell the multiple stories of the legal and political actors and their interactions, to give voice and agency to their struggles.”² These stories increasingly have moved from the national to the local level while growing more diverse and inclusive of marginalized groups.³ Historical studies of law and journalism could fall into either the legal or socio-legal camp.

Journalism and law intersect largely in the realm of First Amendment issues. The Constitution states that Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, but as we have learned and taught in our journalism courses, some limitations do exist. Censorship, obscenity, libel, privacy, and copyright are paramount among legal issues journalists may encounter — and journalism historians may study. We also confront issues of access to government information and attempts to coerce journalists to reveal their sources, as well as regulations that affect media ownership and competition. Journalism historians have analyzed the development and application of many of these laws in the vein of legal histories. For instance, the winter 2009 issue of *American Journalism* contained a history of press protections at the state level.⁴ Similarly, a *Journalism History* article from

spring 1994 detailed the development of offensive speech regulations.⁵

Most journalism historians who explore legal issues do so from a socio-legal perspective. Ken Ward, a newly-minted Ph.D. from Ohio University, has completed such research under the tutelage of Aimee Edmondson. Ward told me that to fully appreciate journalism history, one must examine the way law has shaped its development. He compared comm law to the “social and cultural undercurrents that lead American journalism to bend this way and that.” At the same time, he asserted, “the law also acts as a conduit for those sociocultural forces to impact journalism.” As an example, Ward cited a study he conducted with Edmondson on Jacob Frohwerk, the editor of a German-language newspaper during World War I who was imprisoned under the Espionage Act.⁶ Frohwerk’s case, Ward said, is a good example of “the zeitgeist influencing the shape of the law, which in turn affected the press.”

Edmondson has done much to bring attention to marginalized groups through socio-legal studies. She specifically mentioned a panel she participated in at the 2017 Media & Civil Rights History Symposium with fellow journalism historians Gwyneth Mellinger and Sid Bedingfield about finding previously unheard voices. On the panel, Edmondson discussed digging up instances of police brutality in dusty court-houses, where she unearthed depositions, affidavits, and trial transcripts.

In fact, journalism historians have been crucial to exploring legal aspects of the civil rights movement for decades. A 1999 post on freedomforum.org that outlined the role of the First Amendment in civil rights struggles quotes journalism historians Linda Lumsden and the late Margaret Blanchard, noting that Lumsden also had written about the role of free assembly in the women’s suffrage movement.⁷ Blanchard had authored two books on the First Amendment, including one that tackled questions of free speech and press from the Civil War to the Bush administration.⁸

Plenty of legal topics in journalism history remain to be explored. Certainly any historian would be capable of tackling legal subjects on their own, but I highly recommend partnering with a legal scholar if possible. In my experience, Schroeder's depth of legal knowledge offered a different perspective, and we arrived at conclusions I likely would not have reached myself. At the same time, my depth of historical knowledge provided rich context to explain the laws and judicial decisions at the heart of our research, and we were able to tell a compelling, narrative story about the people those laws and decisions affected.

Following are additional tips and resources for conducting legal and socio-legal research:

- Read up on prior works by legal and socio-legal historians to study the various approaches. Simply searching the archival databases of *American Journalism* and *Journalism History* for the word "law" turns up dozens of articles to peruse. Articles in these and other journals by the journalism historians mentioned in this essay so far — as well as Erin Coyle, Patrick File, and Michael Martinez, to name a few — provide excellent models.

- If your university has a law library, get to know the librarians, and don't be afraid to ask them questions. Most have specialized training and can be a valuable resource.

- Make use of online resources. The Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov>) and National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/>), for instance, offer access to federal documents related to the legislative and judicial branches. The American Society for Legal History also has compiled an extensive list of resources for conducting legal history (<https://aslh.net/resources-for-doing-legal-history/>).

- Look for legal documents in your research subjects' personal papers. Edmondson noted that she has found legal files in the personal papers and collections of journalists such as Hodding Carter, Hazel Brannon Smith, Ralph McGill, Turner Cartledge, and Harrison Salisbury.

Furthermore, Edmondson said, “I find lots of good material in primary documents and archives to help place the law in context.”

¹ Marianne Constable and Sylvia Schafer, “Introduction: Law at the Intersection of History and Theory,” *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 8, 1 (Spring 2018): 1-3.

² Patricia Hagler Minter, “Law, Culture, and History: The State of the Field at the Intersections,” *American Journal of Legal History* 56, 1 (March 2016): 139.

³ *Ibid.*, 141-146.

⁴ Joe Mathewson, “The Long and Strong Tradition of State Protection of Freedom of the Press,” *American Journalism* 25, 4 (Winter 2009): 81-112.

⁵ Milagros Rivera-Sanchez, “Developing an Indecency Standard: The Federal Communications Commission and the Regulation of Offensive Speech,” *Journalism History* 20, 1 (Spring 1994): 3-14.

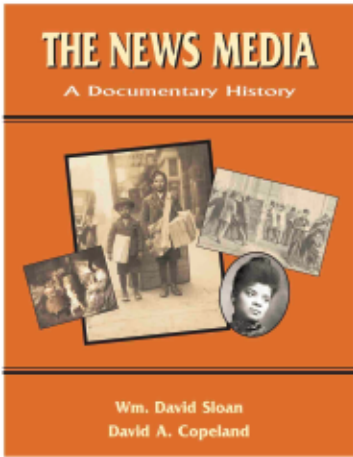
⁶ Kenneth Ward and Aimee Edmondson, “The Espionage Conviction of Kansas City Editor Jacob Frohwerk: ‘A Clear and Present Danger’ to the United States,” *Journal of Media Law & Ethics* 6, 1/2 (Summer/Fall 2017): 39-56.

⁷ David L. Hudson Jr., “First Amendment Freedoms Crucial to Success of Civil Rights Movement,” Freedom Forum Institute, <https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/1999/01/15/first-amendment-freedoms-crucial-to-success-of-civil-rights-movement/> (last accessed Aug. 14, 2018).

⁸ Margaret A. Blanchard, *Revolutionary Sparks: Freedom of Expression in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also Margaret A. Blanchard, *Exporting the First Amendment: The Press-Government Crusade of 1945-1952* (New York: Longman, 1986).

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Historical Roundtable: Historical Study of Television News

By Michael D. Murray, Katherine Bradshaw,
Mike Conway, and Bruce Evensen ©

As recently as 2016, Pew Studies showed that more than half of all Americans were getting their news from cable, local TV or the traditional network evening nightly newscasts. One-third now get news online; one in four from radio; and one in five from the traditional print sources. But among younger people, those 18-29 years of age, only 1 in 20 say that they “often” get their news from print. As JMC historians trying to discover what moves public opinion, shapes agenda-setting or helps to frame public policy, it is crucial to consider the influence of broadcast journalism. All of the panelists in this roundtable agree that the history of television news in particular, in spite of relative importance, is under-researched.

Q: Why do you consider the study of television news to be of importance?

Evensen: Because of a background in broadcast journalism — over a decade in the U.S. and also Israel — I always closely followed network and local news. This extended to cable with the launch of CNN in 1980. When I was doing doctoral work in mass communication at the University of Wisconsin, the State Historical Society was located across the street. It included NBC Archive material as well as scripts of leading radio commentators: H. V. Kaltenborn, Clifton Uteley and Cedric Brown.

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Murray, Bradshaw, Conway, and Evensen



Murray

I integrated their commentary into my first book's analysis of the uncertain course of American foreign relations in the Near East during the early part of the Cold War. I felt the field of journalism history could be enriched by attention to broadcast journalists.

Conway: TV news has been the most popular and trusted form of journalism in the U.S. for more than a half century. The format was embraced very early by some



Bradshaw

*Mike Murray is a University of Missouri Board of Curator's Distinguished Professor Emeritus. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He received a Goldsmith Research Award from Harvard University for his book *The Political Performers*. He is also the author of four other books, including *Television in America* and *Indelible Images*, and served as editor of *The TV News Encyclopedia*.*

*Kathy Bradshaw is an associate professor at Bowling Green State University. She worked in broadcast journalism in Denver and Kansas City before going into academia. She has served as the book review editor for the journal *Journalism History* and on the Board of Directors of the American Journalism Historians Association. Her research has appeared in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *Electronic News*, and *Journalism History*. She received her Ph.D. from Michigan State University.*



Conway

*Mike Conway is an associate professor of journalism at Indiana University. He is the author of the book *The Origins of Television News in America: The Visualizers of CBS in the 1940s*. His current book project is *Contested Ground: "The Tunnel" and the Struggle over Television News in Cold War America*. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas.*



Evensen

*Bruce Evensen directs the graduate program in journalism at DePaul University in Chicago. Before going into the academy, he worked a decade in journalism on both sides of the Atlantic. He has written and edited eight books. The latest is *Journalism and the American Experience*. It examines the impact that journalism has had in America's ongoing democratic experiment. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin.*

individuals who had never developed a print journalism habit. And once a person or a family invested in a television set (nine out of ten households possessed a TV by the early 1960s), watching TV news did not cost a viewer additional money, until the era of cable and satellite. Even with the broad acceptance and affordability of watching TV news, in my analysis of articles in the top two journalism history journals, “The Ghost of Television News in Media History Scholarship,” less than ten percent of the research has been devoted to that specialty.

Bradshaw: It is important to study the history of TV news because it played such an important part in creating assumptions about what is normal, acceptable, desirable, and valued — and what is not. In my own case, industry-incubated, pre-graduate school assumptions made it easy to laugh at suggestions that maybe there should be people on TV news or even entertainment programming who were old, fat, injured, or different from what had been always seen and what we expected to continue seeing. Ambitious budding scholars might consider selecting any major media market for an exploration of how and why broadcasting developed as it did. In doing so, it is unlikely that they would discover more than a handful of careful historical studies. In my own case, in graduate coursework, KUSA (TV), KCNC-TV, KOA Radio, *The Denver Post*, and the *Rocky Mountain News*, all in Denver, Colorado represent an excellent microcosm of what existed in local journalism everywhere in the U.S. There was limited recognition of the varieties of viewers and what might be most important to them.

At that time, Don Heider had not yet written *White News: Why Local News Programs Don't Cover People of Color*. In it, he reveals a set of news manager's assumptions embedded in journalistic practices that resulted in parts of the community and relevant issues not appearing at all on local TV news. Even while doing a good job at crafting local news, reporters' stories failed to reflect all of the facets of people living in

their stations' coverage areas. Journalism historians need to be aware of such studies because they reveal the blinders reporters wore at that time, even in good newsrooms, at the turn of the 21st century. This includes the serious lack of race consciousness that can easily be read backward to the Kerner Commission and earlier.

Murray: Many of us who teach television news would freely admit that broadcasters have never had the opportunity to offer the depth or degree of sophistication we would like in terms of covering important national stories at least by comparison to our print brethren. The traditions and “rules of the road” regarding the forms and the nature of coverage were different. These limitations are reflected in the scholarship conducted in the field. At the local level, newspapers set the agenda for broadcasters and limitations extended to use of general assignment reporters doing the bulk of TV newsgathering. But in spite of this, there have been instances in which television’s investigative units have excelled at the local level and some national organizations and their employees continue to distinguish themselves. I am asked from time to time about the growth of cable news voices and obvious biases. I try to remind people that those outlets offer additional opportunities for employment, training and development. Some of our best students have gravitated to TV news because of the exposure and opportunity it offers as print struggles against on-line competitors to keep their readership. When one of my former students from University of Louisville, Tom Mintier, covered the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion, he was the only national TV reporter covering that event “live.” It was a tragic story and the kind of expensive coverage that few print outlets could afford. So the research of the future is likely to reflect this fact.

Q: *Which major works on the history of television do you recommend?*

Conway: The best book written by someone involved in the advancement of American TV news in the post-World War II era is Reuven Frank's *Out of Thin Air: The Brief, Wonderful Life of Network Television News*. For an overview of the period ending in the 1990s, I still turn to Edward Bliss Jr.'s *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism*, which combines radio and TV news. The second half of Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson's *The Murrow Boys: Pioneers on the Front Lines of Broadcast Journalism* is a good look at the famous CBS radio war correspondents making the tough transition to television. Linda Ellerbee is one of the best writers in the history of television news and her memoir, *And So It Goes: Adventures in Television*, is an unflinching look at life for women in network news the 1970s and 1980s.

Very little work has been done on local TV news history. Craig Allen's *News is People: The Rise of Local TV News and the Fall of News from New York* looks at the role of news consultants and the changes they brought, especially to local TV news. And Michael Murray and Donald Godfrey's edited volume, *Television in America: Local Station Histories from Across the Nation*, is a good introduction for individual station histories.

Three of the classic books on the structure of news gathering and presentation from the 1960s and 1970s, Herbert Gans' *Deciding What's News*, Edward Jay Epstein's *News from Nowhere* and Gaye Tuchman's *Making News* are still relevant. James Baughman's *The Republic of Mass Culture* provides necessary context by combining newspapers, films, radio and TV in a period starting in 1941. Baughman later immersed himself in late 1940s and 1950s television with his book *Same Time, Same Station*.

Evensen: Certainly James Baughman's *Republic of Mass Culture* is excellent in its use of primary sources to examine how radio and newspapers adapted to the muscular challenge of TV in the 1950s and after-

ward. For consideration of stations at the local level *Television in America* captures the early adolescence of TV culture with sources from regional collections. And in *The Rise of the Image, the Fall of the Word*, Mitchell Stephens interrogates most of the many claims of television's incessant triviality.

Scholars in our specialty are also drawn to the meaning of broadcast journalism and how Americans use it in terms of making sense of the world. So I assign Dwight McDonald's "A Theory of Mass Culture"; extracts from *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* by Raymond Williams; *Deciding What's News* by Herbert Gans, particularly his "Values in the News"; and a chapter, "Messages for the Masses," in *News: The Politics of Illusion* by W. Lance Bennett; Peter Dahlgren and Sumitra Chakrapani's *The Third World on Television News*; Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch's "Television as a Cultural Forum"; Doris Graber's *Processing the News*; and "The Fourth Temptation" from Malcolm Muggeridge's book *Christ and the Media*.

For my classes, I like to combine targeted readings with video clips culled from various collections. For instance, if I want to get across the formative years of broadcast journalism, I might use Ann Sperber's study of Edward R. Murrow during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Clips from my video archive include Murrow's reporting and comments from correspondents he strongly influenced: Eric Sevareid, Richard C. Hottelet and Charles Kuralt. In the TV news era, I show students segments from the *CBS Reports'* "When America Trembled" that first aired in 1994, narrated by Dan Rather. It shows Murrow's *See It Now* 1954 take-down of Sen. Joe McCarthy. I find that seeing and hearing broadcast news rather than reading about it has a much stronger impact on students' understanding of the power of television news and the difference it makes.

Bradshaw: Aspiring TV news historians need to read multiple key

works before deciding to which of the poorly linked tributaries of TV news history they will contribute. Beginnings are slippery things; however, the case is made that the workable technology for delivering sound and pictures began in the 1920s and TV news began with newscasts produced by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) networks in the late 1940s. By the mid-1950s, half of U.S. American households had a television, and most of them were watching for the next half century. Regulations prompted stations to create local TV news programs, which people continue to watch. Historians have studied the people who created the news, the content of the news, laws and regulations affecting the news, and the effects of technological change. The technological aspects are certainly under-researched.

Murray: For people of some ancient vintage like me, a lot of the interest and the initial study of American broadcasting began with Erik Barnouw's book, *Tube of Plenty*, which was drawn from his three-volume history of broadcasting. Parts of those books were later critiqued for the liberties the author took based on his own experience at the network, and especially in terms of the parallels he made between commercial broadcasting content and the coverage of some major political stories. But the composite book focusing on TV still offers some real insights into key broadcasts and for my money is still worth a read. Of course an unusual number of books have been written about network news companies, news leaders and especially CBS News, with a lot of books written by American television news anchors and reporters, as well as national and international network reporters. Fred Friendly's *Due to Circumstances beyond Our Control* provides an overview of network practices and a number of biographies of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite are worth reading. There are some good books out there by national broadcasters turned academics, including those by Reuven Frank,

Marvin Kalb, Roger Mudd and Ed Bliss, who wrote for both Murrow and Cronkite. Ed Bliss very graciously wrote the foreword to my *Encyclopedia of Television News* with Walter Cronkite's urging.

It seems odd that people in broadcast news are not always appreciated for being good writers because so much of their work is considered written "on the fly." But many of them have produced well-written and well-researched books. Ed Bliss put together *In Search of Light: The Broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow* and later, when he became a professor, wrote *Now the News*, a history of television news. Of course a great deal of the writing is market-driven and if you name a prominent person still active at the network TV level who has handled serious assignments over time, you might consider for example the current crop of prominent women: Judy Woodruff, Andrea Mitchell, Christiane Amanpour or Leslie Stahl. They have all written books that might be helpful to a media history researcher, especially someone investigating media-related political stories. They usually carry the burden of participant authors in the sense that they are providing personal perspective having had the support of one major media company, but they can offer context and the kind of insight you cannot get in any other way.

Q: How can we show students how things have developed in broadcast journalism?

Conway: The belief that drives my broadcast news history research is that if we had a clearer idea of the successes and setbacks involved in the addition of radio and television to print journalism in the mid-twentieth century, we would have a better chance at grasping and managing the changes happening now as digital media upend more traditional formats.

Unfortunately, most histories of broadcast news ignore all of the other possibilities than what became familiar and gloss over the strug-

gles to adapt to new media. One example would be Edward R. Murrow's transition from radio to television's *See It Now*. Most accounts are written as if successes on the radio naturally lead to the same results on television. In reality, Murrow had to rely on a number of people with strong visual backgrounds to help him learn how to communicate on television.

Evenesen: In my days as a broadcast journalist we were always taught to illustrate what we were discussing. That's what a concise, contextualized video clip will do in showing the story of broadcast journalism with many remarkable scenes. I learned this during my first quarter at DePaul University in Chicago. I was reading from my script on the history of American journalism in conjunction with the agenda setting function of the press. As might have been expected, student's eyes glazed over. That night I taped the knock-down, drag out, verbal fist-cuffs between CBS News anchor Dan Rather and Vice President George Bush at the height of the Iran-Contra controversy. Rather was trying via live TV to pin down what Bush knew and when he knew it about the story that engulfed the Reagan Administration. Bush, seated in his Washington office, was trying to overcome what was viewed as "the Wimp Factor" spread in the media that he wasn't tough enough to be president. Many students were aware of the fiery faceoff and spoke freely about the strategy of each side, winner and loser, how you prepare for an interview, and what you do when someone is attempting to seize control of it.

Since that day in 1988 I have collected my own video clip library to show students significant shifts in journalism history, particularly in broadcast news, starting in Beta and transitioning to VHS. Relying on the Vanderbilt Archives to capture this material would have been expensive and self-limiting. So, let's say I'm showing students major developments in investigative reporting. On the 20-year anniversary of

the Watergate bugging and break-in, CBS produced a documentary discussing how the two source rule was used in uncovering that story. You could compare that to the breathless 24/7 cable coverage of the Clinton impeachment scandal and the almost nightly hits Trump is taking on CNN/MSNBC and to some extent ABC/CBS/NBC on the Russian collusion story. Students come to see that on the record sourcing patterns are very different on this side of the digital divide. Now, speculation by a reporter, often unattributed to any specific source, becomes the basis for on-air “coverage.” It enables students to understand better how the technology of being “first” in the age of internet wars with the caution of making sure you’ve got the story right.

Bradshaw: The history of the contributions of women to local and national TV news has just begun to be written. In addition to the books already mentioned, the beginning student of TV news history will also want to look over Marilyn Greenwald’s *Pauline Frederick Reporting: A Pioneering Broadcaster Covers the Cold War*. And also in addition to those mentioned earlier, an aspiring scholar might begin by reading Don Godfrey’s introduction, “Pioneering Women in Television,” in Mary Beadle and Michael D. Murray’s *Indelible Images: Women of Local Television*. And to understand how TV news has been thought about at different historical moments, aspiring historians need to read pertinent works by David Altheide, Warren Breed, Robert Entman, Herbert Gans, David Halberstam, Shanto Iyengar, Gaye Tuchman, and David Manning White. To understand the beginnings of TV news, one could start with Mike Conway’s book, mentioned earlier. Books about and by network founders and developers including those at CBS; especially important are those concerning: Edward R. Murrow, Fred Friendly, William Paley, and Ed Bliss.

Murray: Other major network news people with whom I conducted

and published interviews — Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather, for example — wrote or co-authored books worth considering with respect to the key stories they covered from what we might consider the dominant or “golden age” of over-air television news. In interviewing major network folks, they almost always reference parts of their own books detailing those kinds of stories and also sometimes the DVDs they have helped to author, host or appeared in — ones they feel are worth a look. Over the years, many of them have participated in projects memorializing particular stories, the political leaders they covered and got to know, issues they researched in depth or an entire era of inquiry.

Q: *Is there any new research or writing on the subject or any new approaches you use?*

Conway: In terms of major print sources, two books immediately come to mind. Anna McCarthy analyzed obscure 1950s public affairs and instructional programs in *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* to represent the dramatically different ways businesses and conservatives used early television versus those on the left side of the political spectrum. Thomas Doherty focused on specific 1950s news and entertainment programs to refute the common theme that television was a passive medium beholden to the anti-communists and government officials in *Cold War, Cool Medium*.

Evensen: In terms of what has appeared on air, I always urge colleagues to make themselves aware of fair-use requirements for content in the public domain and to begin collecting on their own brief segments of content from television and the internet that would have material educational benefits. Now logging and storing such content is easier than ever. Every day the trained eye will see material from a news-

cast or interview or breaking news event that will have teaching significance far beyond what any scholar could convincingly claim. The more recent and important the subject, the greater the likelihood that students will grasp the assertions you are illustrating.

I just completed three months work in preparing a new course to offer next spring when DePaul University rolls out a Sports Communication major. It's called "Bears, Bulls, Cubs, Sox, Hawks: A History of Sports Reporting." In creating the syllabus, I was able to identify 327 video clips and 99 articles that will be the basis of course content. The clips were culled from my own collection. They average less than two minutes apiece. I organized the course around clips — because most of us think visually and will remember what we saw more so than what any professor might say. Then I build around the clips research that deepens a student's understanding of what it is he or she is seeing. By privileging the video material — and keeping the cuts brief — I am recreating for the classroom what we did in television journalism every day. We're building stories. The clip is the actuality. It is our centerpiece. It is preceded and followed by what I've written in lecture notes drawing from available research and experience as a broadcast journalist. I seek to set up and subsequently explain the clip through an article or book chapter, but what students invariably remember is the clip and how it made them feel.

Five or seven years later, former students will see a certain story on network television or the internet that will remind them of the story we examined in class years before. They'll send me an email attaching the story. Now they are the instructors and I am the student. They are lifelong learners. They have a competency they can pass on to others. They are now part of the educated citizenry our republic requires for its own well-being and proper maintenance.

Murray: A couple of scholars have pointed out the mistake of overlook-

ing the important network documentaries. The best book integrating broadcast with documentary film is A. William Bluem's *Documentary in American Television*, which provides an overview of many of the most important early TV documentaries such as the *Harvest of Shame*, *Walk in My Shoes* and the important *See It Now* programs. Bruce mentions some of those dealing with civil liberties and McCarthyism. But a few are missing from Bluem's book, including *The Selling of the Pentagon* and the follow-up programs. There have been a number of recent documentaries offered by the networks, especially PBS and some recent screenings in motion picture theatres can be used to offer great insight. Two documentary films running right now, one about Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, aka *RBG*, and *Won't You Be My Neighbor*, about the legendary children's TV host Fred Rogers. Both are well done and might work in classes in which an instructor considers focusing on visual aspects and reporting methods.

Q: *What classic studies have you used in teaching the Civil Rights movement and Vietnam?*

Conway: For Civil Rights television coverage, I assign Aniko Bodroghkosky's *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* in my TV news history classes. She uses both news broadcasts and entertainment programs to chart the changes in civil rights issues for African Americans on television in the 1950s through 1970s.

For the Vietnam War, I still turn to Daniel Hallin's classic *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. Hallin put in the hard work of tracking down the broadcasts and doing analysis, instead of the usual reliance on those who covered the war. Tom Mascaro's *Into the Fray: How NBC's Washington Documentary Unit Reinvented the News* isn't solely devoted to Vietnam, but he provides a very detailed look at the work involved in producing network documentaries in war zones dur-

ing the golden years of network television news.

Evensen: The *American Experience* series on PBS from 2012 offers an excellent account of Civil Rights in terms of the Freedom Riders, the men and women who rode interstate buses into the segregated South in the summer of 1961 to arouse public opinion in the nation forcing the Kennedy administration and its Justice Department to enforce anti-segregation laws in interstate travel already on the books. The documentary shows the work of Howard K. Smith, then with CBS News, in reporting the story to the nation. Two significant studies include *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* by Raymond Arsenault and *Freedom's Main Line: The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Riders* by Derek Charles Catsam.

Daniel Lucks' *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* does a fine job of linking the civil rights movement and the war. Martin Luther King's *Why We Can't Wait*, published in 1964, combines a consideration of the Birmingham campaign and the March on Washington. *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* by S. Jonathan Bass and *Gospel of Freedom* by Jonathan Rieder both look at Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail."

Of course there are many excellent sources on Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech at the Washington Monument, given August 28, 1963, and telecast across the country. One of the better books is Drew Hansen's *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Speech that Inspired a Nation*. Two of the best articles are Alexandra Alvarez's "Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream': the Speech Event as Metaphor," which appeared in *Journal of Black Studies* in 1988 and Mark Vail's "The 'Integrative' Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream Speech,'" available in a 2006 edition of *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*.

Michael Arlen's *Living-Room War* is a 1969 examination of television's influence over public attitudes during the time of the widening

Vietnam War. Also useful here is Peter Braestrup's *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of TET 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, published in 1977; Kathleen Turner's *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*, appearing in 1985; Daniel Hallin's *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* in 1986; and William Prochnau's *Once Upon a Distant War* in 1995.

Bradshaw: I would especially recommend William Hammond's *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* and also Yasutsune Hirashiki, *On the Frontlines of the Television War: A Legendary War Cameraman in Vietnam*. Also very valuable is Liz Trotta's *Fighting for Air: In the Trenches with Television News*, Joyce Hoffmann's *On Their Own: Women Journalists and the American Experience in Vietnam* and, of course, Martha Gellhorn's *Vietnam: A New Kind of War*.

Murray: On the Civil Rights story, I would also add *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* by Aniko Bodroghkozy of the University of Virginia. In terms of available video material, CBS News produced the popular *Cronkite Remembers* series with special attention to Civil Rights and Vietnam. Walter Cronkite did a separate video celebrating space exploration titled the *Man on the Moon* and CBS produced another three-part series with Walter Cronkite called the *Vietnam War*. Unlike the major documentaries about the war by PBS and more recently the series by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, it offers personal insight. CBS also produced DVDs in conjunction with books like *Ronald Reagan Remembered*, Mike Wallace's *Between You and Me* and *What We Saw* on 9-11, also with Dan Rather. The instructor needs to remember that the content of these films is often controversial. PBS broadcast its initial 13-part series, *Vietnam: A Television History*, in 1983 and generated controversy in spite of the fact that it also received great critical acclaim and six Emmy Awards. Most people do not recall that in con-

junction with the airing of that series, like CBS and *The Selling of the Pentagon*, PBS for the first time in its history up to that time, provided two hours in prime time to let critics respond to it including Professor Bruce Loeb's charge that "the hero of the PBS documentary was clearly Ho Chi Minh."

Q: What new research might interest journalism historians and what are the major challenges?

Conway: The two main obstacles to more dispassionate research on the history of television news are access to historic broadcasts and the surprisingly stubborn resistance to television news in the academy and amongst print journalists.

If you are trying to study local television news or network news prior to 1968 (the start of the Vanderbilt Archives), in most cases, the broadcasts quite simply do not exist. They were either not recorded or not saved. For the newscasts, stories, or film snippets that were saved by the network, they are mostly reserved for the networks' use or for sale to filmmakers who can afford the license fees. Local stations often trashed old media when new formats took over. The need for storage space and the cost of transferring moving images from film to videotape to digital meant the dumpster was often the easiest solution for everyone at the station, except the news people and the audience.

The denigration of non-print journalism formats began with radio in the first half of the last century and transitioned to television after World War II. Many truly believed words on paper were superior to audio or pictures for journalistic communication while others were driven by the need to protect the newspaper and magazine business model. This hostility to moving picture journalism was (and is) strongest among the elite, which includes the academy. Words on paper (and now on a screen) are fact while images are less so.

Even for those people who don't consider television as a lesser form of journalism, the lack of access to historic broadcasts is reason enough to discourage research. Every semester in my journalism history class, several students begin on television news history projects and are usually forced to switch to print at some point because they realize how hard it is to track down primary sources, especially without traveling to archives. Newspapers and magazines are digitized and often easily available through university libraries, complete with searchable text.

Evensen: Since 9/11 there have been a number of useful studies showing the new digital relationship between public officials and broadcast media. Readers might consider the observations of George W. Bush counselor Karen Hughes in *Ten Minutes from Normal*, published in 2005; Bill Sammon's *Fighting Back: the War on Terrorism from Inside the Bush White House*, which came out in 2002; David Friend, *Watching the World Change: The Stories behind the Images of 9/11*, published in 2006; and Stephen Hayes and his biography *Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President*, published in 2007. Important targeted studies on broadcast journalism's role in reporting 9/11 include Amy Reynolds and Brooke Bennett, "This Just In ... Live Coverage of 9/11," which appeared in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* in 2003 and Michael Boyle's study of "Information Seeking and Emotional Reaction to 9/11 Terror Attacks," published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* in 2004.

Specialists should also consider Terence Smith's "The Real-Time War: Hard Lessons," in a 2003 edition of *Columbia Journalism Review*; Michael Griffin's "Picturing America's 'War on Terrorism' in Afghanistan and Iraq: Photographic Motifs as News Frames" in a 2004 issue of *Journalism*; and Michael Pfau, Elaine Wittenberg, Carolyn Jackson and Kristin Brockman, "Embedding Journalists in Military Combat Units:

How Embedding Alters Television News Stories,” in a 2005 edition of *Mass Communication & Society*.

Murray: Tom Mascaro’s book about NBC documentaries broke new ground and was considered an “instant classic” to some of us who reviewed it. There are a few more on that same subject being written right now. We used to view the commitment to extended documentaries as one measure of excellence and public affairs commitment by the national television news networks. Some of the cable companies, certainly CNN and PBS, are still engaged in, or at least in some cases purchasing, that kind of work to be aired over their news outlets.

Q: What about reporting on the Baby Boom Generation’s influence on network news?

Murray: As we all know, many of the so-called “Baby Boomers” were born in the late 1940s and early 1950s as television was just beginning in many major television markets. That makes it kind of a blessing and a curse for those of us who study it, since our generation literally grew up with television and observed some of what we regard as benchmark events in television news history first hand. As a group, “Baby Boomers” have sometimes been described in some very pejorative ways: as “space cadets,” “navel-gazers” or just “hippies” with an inflated sense of self-importance, which has been sometimes attributed to a preoccupation with television. But many stories emerging from the so-called “diaper days” of importance for television news have had some serious resonance for our contemporary era. Of course, most obviously, the coverage of the “Black Lives Matter” and “Me Too” movements inevitably compared to coverage of Civil Rights and the Women’s Movement from the nineteen sixties. As is often noted, those two stories in particular led to change about what and how stories are covered, nationally and

locally. The emergence of the issues forced attention and reevaluation of historic coverage we might now consider racist and or sexist, at least in terms of the television coverage.

Evensen: Download the report done by Steve Kroft for *60 Minutes*, first broadcast on October 3, 2004, and titled “Echo Boomers.” It was the second episode in that program’s 37th season, and it concentrates on the 80 million children born to Baby Boomers between the early 1980s and the early 1990s. These are individuals without unhappy obligations like health care costs and mortgages, who are increasingly dictating the stories selected and how they’re covered on the network nightly news. It is a demographic that advertisers desperately want, and a demographic desperate news directors, editors and producers increasingly target with stories aimed at their interests. The segment shows that this population receives not news they need to know but news they are likely to like. The result has not been altogether helpful in creating an engaged citizenry which is the life of the republic.

Q: *What do you consider the greatest challenges in studying the history of broadcast news?*

Evensen: Broadcast journalism is what we might term an orphan within an orphanage. First, journalism is situated in so many different kinds of programs and concentrations within colleges in the academy today, so that it is so rarely studied for itself — by itself. And further, the history of broadcast news has been neglected because print sources are readily available but broadcast stories have not been. Most good libraries have microform copies of the *New York Times*, and many also have similar copies of the *Washington Post*, plus regional newspapers. *Time* and *Newsweek* lead the weeklies, which are easy to study in hard copy and online. LexisNexis can be relied on to find nearly any article

worth finding. These resources are not nearly as helpful for historians of TV news because programs were invisible and unavailable, beyond broadcast.

What is a serious student of the history of broadcast journalism to do? In the old days he or she applied for a grant — got the grant — and had the money to pay prominent sources such as the Vanderbilt University Archive for a network nightly newscast or two. Such an investigation had to be limited in scope, which often made it less interesting. Leading up to and on this side of the digital divide, researchers can record programming and go to online sites that daily grow the amount of retrievable broadcast news. There has never been a better time to be an historian of broadcast journalism or to be someone interested with tracing its effects.

Murray: Access to material has always been an issue. With few exceptions, the big broadcast companies never invested in the history they covered because they could not figure out a way to monetize that subject. We have all heard stories about historical material being dumped in New Jersey landfills. And we have to admit university complicity in the sense that only a few archival resources appreciated the potential value of such material. And there have been only a few exceptions. In my own case, with subjects like Alistair Cooke and Dan Rather, I found the special collections in Mugar Library at Boston University to be valuable. When you look at the works themselves, it varies considerably based on public appreciation. Alistair Cooke's multi-part *America* series, which was shown over NBC in the U.S. during the American Bicentennial, for example, was purchased by almost every major American library with many school districts also invested in buying the complete collection. Those still remain available in some quarters but only in the old style VHS video format. Some of the network people and even local broadcasters with whom I have worked appreciated the value of

some of what they did with big stories and retained and donated material to local libraries and archives. And that brings us to the second big challenge for broadcast: translating old formatted material into digital. That costs, of course, and few companies are willing to invest in it.

Q: What are the benefits of studying broadcast journalism history, and what are added challenges?

Conway: The field of television news history is wide open, with few subjects having received the academic scrutiny the subject deserves. Also, the impact of local television news in a community starting in the 1950s is an area almost invisible so far in academic scholarship. The challenges are that most stations did not save their programming or other primary documents and we have lost most of the people who would have been involved in local television in the early years when there was a stronger commitment to local programming. So little academic research attention, relatively speaking, has been directed at the most popular form of journalism for the past half century. That offers a great opportunity. On the theoretical side, our understanding of how news was covered and presented and how the audience received and perceived the news is limited and mostly anecdotal. Once you begin digging into the history, you realize how much of our perceived history of TV news comes from memoirs, anecdotes, and perceptions or criticisms from print journalists. That's a challenge.

Evensen: Like glaciers retreating from the gaze of the sun, the day when print journalists decided for everyone else what the news of the day was, that era is well over. As the internet made its advances, some suspected that broadcast journalism would cease to exist separately and become just another stream on the web. That hasn't happened. Folks sitting in front of a screen all day usually do not want to lean into

more screens when they get home. So watching the news on a wide screen — local, national and international — remains a phenomenon. It is still — by a wide margin — the way Americans get their news and is likely to remain that way. It is true that half of all individuals between 18 and 49 prefer to get news online, at least according to a Pew Study of the “Modern News Consumer,” but it is also true that better than one in three of them indicate they “often” get their news from television as well. This indicates that studying images and the power of visual storytelling to persuade will be at the center of journalism study for this next generation of scholars beginning their careers.

While access to material has been a thorny issue for those doing historical research in broadcast news, we are obviously living through a period during which certain types of news, especially political coverage, is being widely reported and shared by reporters and editors. The people who are our closest “eyewitnesses to history” in broadcasting are now often available and communicating about their experiences via the new media — and I am talking mainly about Snapchat and Twitter — if someone takes the time to watch, listen and focus on those. They provide a different variety of access via personal accounts.

Bradshaw: The field is open, and there are few crannies where a complete history of the field of TV news has been written. Thus, there are many questions that still remain to be answered. For example, we have recovery histories of the role of women and people of color in particular, some biographies and some autobiographies. But the full story in such instances has not been told. There are many key research questions with respect to decision-making at local and network TV newsrooms, across time, such as how were changes in news content driven? Who initiated them? And did more women or people of color in those newsrooms help to make any difference in the coverage?

Murray: In addition to the lack of attention to newsroom bias and lack of diversity, access to material has been a thorny issue for those doing historical research in broadcast news. We are obviously living through a period during which certain types of news, especially political coverage is being widely reported and shared by reporters and editors. The people who are our closest “Eyewitnesses to History” in broadcasting are now often available and communicating about their experiences via the new media, and I am talking now about namely Snapchat and Twitter, if someone takes the time to watch, listen and focus on those. It provides a different variety of access via the personal account.

Q: What are some key stories told by broadcast journalists — and what challenges did they face?

Conway: I would say the size of the audience for network news with limited alternative viewing options during the early decades of the new visual medium (roughly 1950s through the 1980s) is a key to understanding this era. Before cable and satellite TV became affordable and available, TV viewers had few choices for their local and network news. Given the “pack” mentality of network news journalists and executives, the three networks tended to cover the same events and issues in the nightly newscasts. Therefore, a large section of the American public had a fairly uniform and limited list of important national and world issues presented to them, for good and for bad.

Nostalgia for the era of Walter Cronkite at CBS and Chet Huntley and David Brinkley at NBC is partly driven by the ease of watching a half-hour newscast and feeling informed versus today’s myriad of choices and credibility measures. Marginalized groups that were left out of network news during that period of time are less nostalgic for an era where they were invisible or poorly portrayed or reported on with limited alternative sources.

Evensen: When I was working through the latest chapters for my new book *Journalism and the American Experience*, I was struck by how much attention U.S. presidents since John F. Kennedy paid to television and its latent powers to persuade. Anyone interested in studying public policy should look into television texts during the Vietnam War or the War on Terror, and also the repositories of primary materials from successive presidencies to see the time spent on the care and feeding of the network news. The competition for dominance between media actors and the exercise of the presidency as performance art crystallizes when exploring television texts appearing on the nightly and cable news. The historian of broadcast news is able to see the connection between public policy and what Harry Truman called “the public relations part” of selling policy through media. On the eve of the era of TV news, Truman observed that a president can initiate any policy, but the capacity to sustain that policy is challenged if that president is unable to bring the public with him. As much as a president decries “fake news” media, there is broad appreciation of the importance of getting messages to millions of Americans, over the heads of the establishment through social media. That is why this is such a fertile field for the current and next generation of broadcast journalism historians.

Bradshaw: I am currently without daily access to TV news. Because I’ve watched daily since before I started school, and since every day since the election has given new meaning to “must-see TV,” it feels odd to have access to news only on a phone. We are obviously riding a tsunami of change. It is important for today’s broadcast historians to write with tomorrow’s historians in mind. Historians need to be writing evocative, compelling stories about what it was like to live for decades with three dominant networks, then have the development of a few cable stations before the advent of the World Wide Web. To understand the second half of the 20th century, news historians need to write about the relationship of news content (both network and local) with commu-

nities, politics, and dissent in mind.

Murray: I noted that CNN runs a contemporary history series almost continually in conjunction with American holidays like the Fourth of July. And there have been books and DVDs offered in connection with historical events and key anniversaries for particular programs like *Face the Nation* with Bob Schieffer and *60 Minutes* and for outstanding individuals. The *American Masters* series has offered profiles on both Edward R. Murrow and Don Hewitt. That series has one in the works right now about a print icon of “New Journalism,” Joseph Pulitzer, which used the Mercantile Library on our campus. It will air in 2019. CBS News has offered extended DVD coverage of Civil Rights and 9-11, published in conjunction with a book and hosted by Dan Rather. Network sources also provide stories in the current format from popular series including *48 Hours*. I purchased some of those and interviewed some of the reporters and producers on those stories and discuss them in class and detail some of them in some of my books.

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Historical Roundtable: The Use of Theory in History

By Paulette D. Kilmer, Carolyn Kitch,
Amy Mattson Lauters, and Jane Marcellus ©

In the field of mass communication history it is not unusual to hear calls for the use of theory or of “new theories.” In the broad academic area of mass communication, where social and behavioral science dominates, theory receives particular emphasis in university graduate programs. It is not surprising that historians trained in those programs should be particularly aware of theory and the special reverence for it. So when they hear calls for the use of theory in historical study, they may be prone to think that proponents are arguing for the use of theories such as agenda setting or others associated with social and behavioral science. Few advocates of making history more theoretical, however, have such theories in mind. In fact, to understand their concepts of theory, one needs to ignore the term “theory” as used in social and behavioral science. Theories in the sciences usually deal with direct cause-effect relationships and are required to be capable of precise formulation. Researchers in the sciences expect that studies need to be replicable. That is not the case with most theories used in JMC history. To apply such notions to theory in history, argue proponents of theoretical history, is at best misleading and at worst unfair. Instead, they think of theory in looser terms. “Theory” is closer to a general idea than a testable explanation. Most proponents of theory in JMC history work within a Cultural Studies school or with its cousin Critical Theory. Cultural and critical studies view “culture” as a

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Kilmer, Kitch, Lauters, and Marcellus



Kilmer

shared set of social values, and researchers tend to believe that media messages serve as agents of social control. With such perspectives as the background, this Roundtable will, we hope, help elucidate the main approaches that theory-oriented JMC historians use. Four historians volunteered to participate. They are Paulette Kilmer of the University of Toledo, Carolyn Kitch of Temple, Amy Lauters of Minnesota State at Mankato, and Jane Marcellus of Middle Tennessee State.

Q: *Within the context of historical study, how do you define the word “theory”?*

Kilmer: I define theory as the skeleton of ideas that shape my work. Therein, I like the *Webster’s New World*



Kitch

Paulette Kilmer has written three books, including The Fear of Sinking: The American Success Formula. A professor in the Communication Department at the University of Toledo, she received her Ph.D. in Media Studies at the University of Illinois.

Carolyn Kitch has written four books, including The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media. She received her Ph.D. in Mass Media and Communication from Temple University, where today she is a professor of journalism.

Amy Mattson Lauters has written three books, including More than a Farmer’s Wife: Voices of American Farm Women 1910-1960. She is a professor and chair of the Department of Mass Media at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She received her Ph.D. in Mass Communications from the University of Minnesota.

Jane Marcellus has written two books, including Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women. A professor at Middle Tennessee State University, she received her Ph.D. in Media Studies at the University of Oregon.



Lauters



Marcellus

Historical Roundtable: The Use of Theory in History

College Dictionary, 4th ed. (online *Your Dictionary*) definition: “an idea to explain something, or a set of guiding principles.”

To prevent the theory from limiting me to seeing only my *preconceived* notions, I gather potential evidence first. For example, I have worked intensely on how newspapers covered disasters between 1850 and 1910.

I do not answer the question until I have found most of my evidence. Usually, I divide the large concept into motifs or parts.

Then, I examine the narrative elements in newspaper clippings and other archival material according to how the information clusters to determine which specific storytelling principle/s (like Jungian archetypes, a Joseph Campbell hero’s journey, or another approach) pertain to the evidence. Sometimes I blend theories.

Unlike a McDonald’s Happy Meal where we always know exactly what is inside the sack, to me theory resembles a sumptuous banquet. Of course, the metaphor implies it’s all too possible to overeat or feel overwhelmed with too many choices!

Lauters: Paulette noted that she viewed history through a “narrative lens,” and the term “lens” is something that I think is useful for defining theory in an historical context. I define theory as a set of concepts that provide a framework for understanding and/or making sense of what we find in our historical research.

Marcellus: I also think the “lens” metaphor is useful (and one I use with beginning master’s students new to research of any kind). It is, in a way, a “theory” in itself — a way of conceptualizing a perspective. Theory is not the object of discovery but a way of examining it, investigating it, seeing it, interpreting it. The word “interpretive” is central to the way I work. That’s different from theory as a hypothetical that you prove or don’t prove. It’s more open-ended. It’s important to note that as schol-

ars, we not only use theory but we can build it.

Kitch: I define theory as a set of assumptions that the researcher brings to her work. While those assumptions may come from the researcher's own experiences (and therefore be part of her worldview or standpoint), they also are shaped by the norms and scholarly trends of the discipline in which she works; as James Carey frequently phrased it, the researcher "enters a conversation that is already in progress," and that conversation is theoretical in nature. I also want to echo a point made by Paulette here, which is that theory affects method, because it shapes the questions we ask and the ways we decide to go about answering them, how we choose and interpret evidence, etc. Indeed, like Paulette, I almost always work inductively, not assuming that I know the ending to my research story until the evidence has spoken to me. That approach — often called "grounded theory" — is theoretical in nature because it assumes that the evidence is more important than I am in "revealing" the past. Even the statement that historical research is atheoretical is a theoretical statement — a philosophy of what historical research is and should be.

Q: Give us a brief summary of your theoretical perspective and how you use theory in your historical work.

Kilmer: I view history through a narrative lens that emphasizes stories as carriers of values, usually embedded in motifs of myths. I define a "myth" as a sacred story people believe so intensely they live it. "Sacred" means revered to the individual and includes secular as well as religious texts, memes, or symbols. Belief does not guarantee integrity or honor.

Kitch: Like Paulette, I also am interested in how narrative theory can

help us understand history — how journalists characterize the past, and how we, as researchers, characterize the past of journalism. History is told, and is publicly understood, as a story. Over time, the shape of that narrative (e.g., the starting and ending points), its most important characters, and the key points of its plot change, as do the people who have greatest the authority to tell the story. That phenomenological process is central to memory studies, but it really is about narrative and storytelling, and it is important to keep in mind in historical research itself.

Lauters: The framework I use to look at history carries the understanding that narratives in historical context may only be imperfectly understood by contemporary researchers. Cultural theory acknowledges that media producers and audiences must share cultural experiences, ideology, and backgrounds to come to an understanding of a dominant narrative. This means that audience members and media producers that don't share those dominant experiences are left out of many a dominant narrative and forced to come up with their own narratives, meanings, and interpretations. I look to those alternate meanings in my research.

Marcellus: I was once told that there is “no theory in history” since history is about “documents” that historians examine to discover “what happened” or “the truth.” To me that involves the same fallacy as journalistic “objectivity” (at least in the purest sense). As writers, storytellers, researchers of any kind, we come to material at hand with, to use a word Paulette introduced, a “lens.” And just as interchangeable lenses on cameras filter our perspective on an object, so theory introduces and shapes a way of seeing material. Working with textual analysis (a broad term), I am interested in the way language constructs story, “myth,” and/or assumptions about “reality.” As a historian, I interro-

gate how language was used in the past to do so.

Q: *To follow-up the previous question with another that will help us to understand how you approach theory in history, briefly describe a specific historical study you have done and how you applied theory to it.*

Kilmer: Recently, I analyzed 1852 election symbols, emphasizing their connection to cultural sacred stories that reflect national values. In “The Goose, the Turkey, and the Cock: The Impact of Symbols on the 1852 Election,” I explained how the images emphasized character instead of issues. I studied cartoons from the Library of Congress, campaign documents, songs, and posters as well as newspaper items and secondary sources. The focus on folklore motifs related to the symbols revealed how pop culture created public perceptions of the candidates. The number of contenders (Democrats, Whigs, and third party candidates from the Free Soil, Liberty, Union, and Southern Rights parties) reflected the schisms in the nation. Thus, narrative, mythic theory attached meaning to descriptive history from the perspective of lived experience.

Kitch: Last year I co-authored a paper (later published in *Media Report to Women*) with one of my doctoral students, Urszula Pruchniewska, on a campaign in which about 40 women’s magazines, with all sorts of thematic focuses, published articles about the Equal Rights Amendment in their July 1976 issues, for the American Bicentennial. In reading and analyzing these articles, we looked for narrative structures and devices — patterns of word choice, rhetorical arguments, inclusion of personal anecdotes, and the “characters” of the women whose stories were told. Not one of the magazines was opposed to the amendment, and most urged passage. Some of the strongest pro-passage language appeared in the most “traditional” (i.e., presumably conservative) women’s mag-

azines. This event is forgotten in the history of media and feminism because it defies narrative sense: it doesn't fit within the abiding cultural narrative of feminism as a catfight of women with opposing values, it doesn't fit within the conventional narrative that "the media" are the enemy of feminism, and it doesn't fit within the cultural narrative of American history, and media history, as a story of progress. Thus narrative theory also informed our analysis in a broader way.

Marcellus: In a book chapter I recently co-authored with Tracy Lucht, we pair Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "symbolic violence" with Rosabeth Kanter's framework on women's corporate work roles to examine representation of violence against women on the TV show *Mad Men*. I choose to talk about *MM* in a history discussion because the show itself aims for historical realism, and because this is a clear use of how theory can be used to interpret and illuminate meaning in a media text.

Although physical violence on *MM* is rare, Bourdieu is particularly helpful in urging our readers to expand their understanding of gender/power relations. As we write, he "invites us to consider violence beyond its physical manifestations, as a set of social relations that confer power or capital on a dominant group through exploitation or manipulation." Examples are plentiful (so you'll have to read the chapter!). This pairs well with Kanter's more social-scientific research from the 1970s (not long after the era portrayed) showing female roles: the Secretary, the Corporate Wife, the Token High-Level Woman.

Lauters: In my book *More than a Farmer's Wife*, I examined the content of six different magazines over time to look for the dominant narrative of the time surrounding farm women. Understanding that a true dominant reading can only come from examination of material in which both media producers and audiences share cultural identity and experiences, I started with one particular magazine that was edited by a farm

woman for farm women, and to which farm women were regular contributors. I chose the other five magazines based on their relationship to the farm women's discourse, the farm community discourse, and the mainstream dominant narratives in women's and American discourse of the period (1910 to 1960). I wanted to explore, through comparison, the tensions among the narratives that rose during this timeframe. Because my own cultural identity of necessity differs from those who were producing this material at the time (I was born in 1972), I also interviewed as many women who lived on or worked on farms during this period as I could to check the veracity of my perceptions and the published content in the magazines.

Q: How does your theoretical perspective influence, if at all, your selection of a time period(s) to study?

Lauters: Because of my firm belief in triangulation with oral history whenever possible, I do tend to focus more on 20th century history. However, I also gravitate toward medieval British history, and when I work in that period, I look to other personal writings to satisfy that need when I can find them.

Kitch: Only in the broadest sense. I am especially influenced by theory about social memory, as well as theory that understands journalism as a cultural expression of its time and place (i.e., Raymond Williams's concept of a "structure of feeling"). Those theories remind me that history is continuous, that the present is a moment in history, and that the past — no matter what time period — was someone else's present. In studying past periods, then, I try to remember that (a) in their own time, the people of that period constructed ideas about the past (i.e., "memory") that were useful to them at that moment, and we inherited those ideas as "history"; and (b) those people did not have the same

sense of their own historic context that we do now (i.e., they did not know what would happen). That may be why I am especially interested in time periods when many different futures seemed possible, such as the 1910s.

Marcellus: I don't think it does for me. I've always gravitated toward the early 20th century, particularly the 1920s and 1930s. Even as an undergrad English major, I was drawn to the literature of those decades — Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Lawrence. (I realize that list is men; my feminist brain hadn't fully kicked in yet.) I think I'm drawn to those years because my older-than-most parents were young then. So my curiosity is tied to a creative urge to investigate what interests me personally.

Kilmer: I feel drawn to investigating the Gilded Age, the era roughly between the Civil War and World War I.

Sometimes my Jungian work in archetypes and myth pushes me into broader time ranges that defy neat division because the notion of “universality” and “all times and places” intrigues me although these concepts are difficult to illustrate. For example, in a study of sea captains as heroes in news narratives, I offered a parallel to Captain Sully of the Hudson River rescue fame. The exact same words appeared in headlines about him as nineteenth century editors chose for heroic sea captains. These similar headlines — one word for word — fascinated me; unfortunately, when the chapter was published in a book, the editorial staff there demanded the references to Captain Sully be removed. That editor said history should not refer directly to the present.

Q: *When using theory in history, should historians enter into the research with a theory in mind, or should they let their data suggest the theory or theories?*

Kilmer: I prefer to let the research determine my final course, but I am wired to see stories in what I read and savor the drama in ordinary life, and so I cannot start any research with a clean slate. Narrative, mythic, and archetypal theories offer many options, and my findings tell me where to go specifically once I have finished gathering stuff.

Marcellus: This question brings to mind John Pauly's explanation in a 1991 *Journalism Monographs* article titled "A Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research." He writes, "My approach may also prove unsatisfying to those who prefer to drink their theory neat." Basically, the idea is to avoid being too heavy-handed in "applying" theory, which may lead to narrow "findings." Keep in mind the goal is interpretation.

I think the answer to this question is not either/or but both/and. In approaching a media text, it's important to engage with an open mind and a question, but in reality, interest in a text is often spurred by interpretive insight. Stuart Hall's oft-cited "long preliminary soak" in the mass of material brings up patterns, which can then be worked with interpretively.

I've had editors of very good journals suggest a different theoretical approach at the revise-and-resubmit stage. Keeping in mind the "lens" metaphor we've been using in this discussion, it's like asking a writer to look at the material from a different angle. Whether that's a good idea in the situation at hand depends.

Kitch: I suspect that most people do both, whether consciously or not. "Theory" works at different levels. For instance, our answers to previous questions reveal that several of us take a theoretical view that journalism functions as a form of cultural narrative, with patterns in structure, characters, lessons, etc. That broad belief informs most of what we do and makes us more likely to pursue certain kinds of studies; therefore, we "start with it." Yet, as Jane said, sometimes theorizing rises

from the evidence, especially when we need help in making sense of unexpected findings. Several times I have begun a research project fairly certain of the general nature of the evidence and then found something else — something that, according to conventional wisdom, shouldn't exist. How could that be the case? Some answers may come from theories about our “common-sense” understandings of the past, or about how certain evidence survives and others disappear — questions having to do with both narrative and memory. These kinds of situations can even require the researcher to change the research question, a process that Mary Ann Yodelis Smith called “adduction” (a combination of alternating induction and deduction).

Lauters: I don't personally start with the theory first when I'm researching. To start with the theory seems to me to be a bit awkward when approaching an historical topic. This probably seems obvious, but we cannot operationalize concepts in the same way we might for contemporary media research, because we cannot survey the dead, and we cannot objectively code for meaning when we were not physically present to truly understand the original context. Those approaches invite presentism, which is something we should avoid. What we can do, however, is examine a theory in the context of our research question and see if it applies. For example, if I were interested in knowing the role the printing press played in London culture at its introduction, I would first need to gather as much source material as I could, examine it for the first inklings of an answer, then see what, if any, known theory might be at work to explain that role. If none seems applicable, then it might be time to develop a new theory to explain the results.

Q: *To help us understand the role of theory in the study of history, please select a specific theory and then formulate a historical research question using it.*

Kitch: Well, most researchers have a topic in mind, not just a theory, from which they formulate a research question — so, for instance, in my answer to Question #3, I describe a study I did with a doctoral student about a campaign for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment that appeared in 40 women’s magazines in July of 1976. I had to know about the existence of that campaign before coming up with a research question. The role of theory was to help us formulate the question in a way that guided our analysis — what we looked for as we read this media content. That theory was that media (and in my view, especially magazines) construct cultural narratives with certain kinds of characters, language, and plots in order to make sense of their subjects. A secondary theory was that magazine audiences (and their editors) are interpretive communities. Therefore, our question was: “What kinds of stories were told about the Equal Rights Amendment, what kinds of characters (women) were featured within what kinds of narratives, and in what kinds of language? How did this vary depending on the theme, or audience, of each magazine?”

Kilmer: I normally work the other direction and select specific theory after gathering evidence, but I can answer this question based on prior work.

Walter Fisher called people “storytelling animals.” He wrote a book explaining how we naturally formulate our experiences into narratives to glean meaning from what happens to us as well as to share with others.

I’ve written a sequence of papers (several later became book chapters) about disasters beginning with the basic research question: Do journalists report disasters as lived human tragedy as much as property loss and physical facts? Another research question I like considers the catastrophes in terms of plot. What types of stories emerge from factual coverage of calamities?

Lauters: If I started with Stuart Hall's suggestion of encoding and decoding, which deals primarily with how media audiences make sense of messages produced by media professionals, I would need to look to research questions that also address that interest. These could include questions such as: "How is American political ideology expressed in press coverage of the XYZ movement (as understood by the researcher)?" That would be followed up with "How do specific audiences understand those ideological expressions?" Underpinning Hall's work is the notion that no message is completely understood as a media producer intended it, unless the audience responding to it shares the same cultural and ideological values as the producer. Thus to address the theory with the research question, the researcher would need to a) examine the source material to address what is expressed and b) find unmediated primary sources to see what audiences thought of it. The latter is the most difficult part of this type of research.

Q: Compared with theories in physical science or the theories found in empirical research in social and behavioral science (such as, for example, selective perception or persuasiveness theory in mass communication), how systematically rigorous are the theories that historians are bringing to JMC history?

Marcellus: The punctum of this question seems to be the phrase "systematically rigorous" and the point of comparison social science theory and its methodologies. I question the question. To me, it implies that social scientific theories are somehow the standard by which we should measure ourselves — that with their focus on measurement, proof of a hypothesis, data, etc., they are somehow more valid. Although the word "theory" is common to both, the two are not the same thing, as we've said. Interpretive work is just that — interpretive. Proof is irrelevant.

Kilmer: Social and behavioral sciences rely on repetition of results and build their theories on the basis of research and experiments. JMC theoretical historians also construct and apply theories based on facts and evidence. Both strive to practice systematic rigor.

On the other hand, “rigorous” exists as a construct sometimes invoked to fog rather than illuminate discussion. Theoretical historians interpret their findings to move in new directions and explore the often hidden territory of the heart, which may differ from scientific experiments in process but achieves a similar goal of expanding human knowledge.

We should not confuse the tools with the substance of the inquiry.

Lauters: I agree completely with Jane and Paulette. Further, I’d add that application of theory and systematic rigor do not always go together. One can explore an historical question systematically without applying any sort of external framework to it. The goal, then, is understanding the question and seeking answers through exploration of history. So long as scholars are clear about how they arrived at their conclusions, one does not necessarily have to be tied to the other. Applying theory to this exploration only helps provide a framework for understanding it.

Kitch: Theories are not systematically rigorous; researchers are. Systematically rigorous researchers are those who can ask a clear and meaningful research question, identify and gain access to evidence that is representative of the phenomenon described in the research question, and then derive possible answers based on analysis of that evidence done through consistent use of an appropriate method. This is a matter of responsibility, it should not differ from one discipline to another (regardless of subject or method), and it is not diminished by the inclusion of a theoretical perspective. Indeed, theory informs the re-

searcher's definition of many of the words in my second sentence, and systematically acknowledging that is part of rigor.

Q: *Have you ever begun a historical study with your theory in mind and found that (during or after your research) the theory was invalid or inapplicable?*

Kitch: No, but I have had papers, articles, and in one case a book chapter rejected because my use of cultural theory wasn't critical (i.e., negative) enough, in the reviewers' or the editor's view. There's not much one can do about that.

Lauters: I have not found a theory to be invalid through the course of my historical research, though as I said before, I have found a theory to fit in a different way than I expected. I, too, have faced negative reviews because my cultural work was not deemed critical enough, but I also have faced negative reviews from scholars who did not understand that I was not completing a content analysis with a coding schema in my work. I am clear about my methodology in approaching content systematically in some research (choice of content being one prong of applying cultural theory), but using a qualitative method to analyze the choice of content seems to throw some reviewers off.

Marcellus: Nothing comes to mind. I have a couple of papers still floating around in my computer because, in part, they don't match expectations or I haven't (maybe yet) dug deeply enough to make a convincing case for my interpretation.

Kilmer: Since I do the research before finalizing my theoretical approach, I have not found a theory to be invalid. I have expanded on theoretical ideas because the evidence inspired me to get in a different

direction. For example, in my study of Teresa Howard Dean, the Chicago columnist, which was published in *American Journalism*, I had begun with the hero's journey of Joseph Campbell.

As I read her news articles and a few personal letters, I realized that she was racist, and so I pointed out that although for the standards of her time, she was considered tolerant, in fact, she elaborated on stereotypes, and so her heroine's journey did not lead to insights that improved her community's grasp of equality.

The investigation empowered me to see the hero's journey within the context of the times and to understand that human flaws sometimes prevent heroes from behaving in the simplistic idealized way we often predict in fictional plots.

Dean accomplished many things and helped knock down barriers for other women, but she was not perfect.

Q: *In standard usage in the social sciences, a theory must be testable. Do historians who use a theory require either that it be testable or that a second historian should be able to replicate a study and get similar results? Why or why not?*

Marcellus: This is easy: No, because it's irrelevant.

As I tell my grad students, if they're doing social science (content analysis as opposed to textual analysis, for example, or a survey as opposed to a focus group), then replication is a good thing. But if they do interpretive work and two or more come up with the same "answer," then one of them isn't thinking, and it's possibly even plagiarism. To me it's not even comparing apples to oranges; it's more like apples to, say, a roast beef.

History is a narrative, derived from interpreting often discrete data from the past. Bringing theory (a lens, not a hypothesis) to bear on data from the past provides a way of seeing and interpreting it. Another his-

torian may argue for her own interpretation, but replication just isn't the issue.

I do, again, question why media scholars so often see social science as the gold standard. To me, that's why so much good work is being done on media in English departments; they don't let themselves be hindered by that prejudice.

Lauters: I agree with Jane, and think she stated the point eloquently.

Kitch: I wonder if this question really is about hypotheses, rather than theory? In any case, I think that most historians view their work as a contribution to a variety of perspectives on a particular topic, rather than a replication of existing research that either proves or disproves it. Sometimes a new work does seem to challenge an earlier study; for instance, in the 1990s historian Joanne Meyerowitz studied the same 1950s magazines that Betty Friedan had studied and saw a much greater diversity of messages about women ("Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture," *Journal of American History*, March 1993). (This is even more interesting because Friedan's famous book was not a work of historical research, although today people treat it as such, and it influenced *decades* of media-history scholarship, including mine). That is an example of the value of two different researchers looking at the same evidence, with an outcome that is valuable for historiography. But no one can replicate another person's interpretation.

Kilmer: I do not think about other historians replicating my findings because my essays clearly reveal the evidence trail that supports the theory that the examples and facts illustrate. The process of citing provides a means for others to trace the cognitive evolution of pieces.

Historians do not devise experiments that others then prove valid

through repetition. Lumping all theoretical approaches in one basket results in confusing the tools with the substance.

Q: *Theories in history have come and gone, and those that historians used a few generations ago are now in the dustbin. How confident are you that theories that historians are using today — or specifically the one you are using — will still be accepted a generation or two from now?*

Kilmer: I hope new theories arise over time. Theories exist in the mind and should evolve with time to reflect each generation's reality. Relevance emerges as a fickle value subject to changes necessary according to events, discoveries, and shifts in the heart. What does not change, dies, and so of course, theories depend on the shared reality of the moment for their life force.

I do my best, which is all anyone can do, to apply relevant ideas to evidence and, therein, interpret my findings in frames that illuminate the past. I do not think about whether the narrative concepts I invoke will persist over the centuries; however, I know that human beings are storytelling animals, and so understanding the meaning of things will always compel them to see their place in the cosmos in terms of plot, character, and motivation.

Kitch: Let me answer this by considering trends in journalism studies more generally. If a theory has been useful in the past, we shouldn't assume that it's gone. Theories popular with one generation of scholars and then rejected by a second generation can re-emerge among a later generation. Two currently dominant theories in journalism studies — theories about gatekeeping and professional socialization (newsroom ethnography) — debuted in the mid-20th century, receded during the 1990s amid more cultural research, but now are back because technological developments have threatened the editorial authority and eco-

conomic survival of the newspaper industry. Another example is political economy, used in 1980s studies about media ownership, considered less useful in a “post-scarcity” era, but again embraced by scholars studying new labor issues in the media industries. Feminism, a theory that has influenced me, has not disappeared but evolved, as researchers have debated what issues are most important to study while maintaining theoretical premises about patriarchy. These developments illustrate the cyclicity of theory, which also affects historical research. For instance, there is renewed interest in the history of media economics, as well as the history of women’s workplace experiences (concerns of 1970s feminism, incorrectly pronounced “over” by the 1990s).

Marcellus: Theory should not be static. Much critical theory arises in light of insights about current phenomena. There’s a reason the 1910s-1940s were such a rich time for theory-building. While I’m often amazed at how relevant theory developed in the past is to new media technologies (McLuhan being one example), I think that theory development is important in a changing world, so I hope that as media evolve, theory does as well. A doctoral course in theory-building could be interesting, and I wonder if anyone teaches one.

Lauters: I think that with continued exploration, other ideas and theories will come into play in the future. I appreciate cultural theory for many reasons, one of which is that as a concept, it holds up over time, and I don’t see that changing. However, I do think it will continue to evolve in the future. That’s a good thing. Scholarship should remain dynamic as new research is conducted and new territory is explored.

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Historian Interview: Louise Benjamin ©



Benjamin

Louise Benjamin is a professor and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Arts and Sciences at Kansas State University. Her research interests include the history and regulation of electronic media, especially early broadcast radio. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters on media law and history and two books, *The NBC Advisory Council and Radio Program Development, 1926-1945*, and *Freedom of the Air and the Public Interest: First Amendment Rights in Broadcasting to*

1935. The latter won the National Communication Association's Haiman Award.

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

Benjamin: I grew up on a farm about halfway between the Iowa towns of Onawa and Whiting on the western side of the state, about five miles from the Missouri River. My twin brother and I were the oldest of eight children — two girls and six boys. Louis and I graduated from Whiting High School in 1968. I then completed my undergraduate degree at Briar Cliff University in 1971, where I majored in English with minors in journalism and sociology. At first I thought I would be a high school English teacher, but a one-hour course in television changed that. I

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Benjamin

loved the electronic medium. So I immediately began a master's degree at Iowa State University in journalism with an emphasis in telecommunications to hone my skills and understanding of media.

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

Benjamin: As a graduate student, I worked half-time for the Iowa State Extension Service for a couple of years, writing radio copy for daily distribution and writing and producing weekly public service television spots. All were featured on broadcast stations in Iowa. Then WHO-TV in Des Moines hired me, and I worked there for five years, first as a production assistant then as a director-producer-writer. I worked there until I finished my master's degree in 1978.

With this professional experience and my master's degree, I was offered a job as an instructor at the University of Nebraska-Omaha in 1978. There, I found out how much I loved teaching, and after two years went back to school full-time to pursue the Ph.D. At the University of Iowa I discovered my love of historical research and feel so fortunate to have been able to blend both history and media experience into my career. I received my Ph.D. in mass communications in December 1985.

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

Benjamin: I have taught at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, Indiana University, the University of Georgia, and Kansas State University. The breadth of undergraduate classes I have taught ranges from skills courses in electronic media — studio and field production; writing for electronic media, including news writing, public service/commercial writing, feature writing, script writing for television, and writing for social media; and directing and producing for the electronic media — to conceptual courses in media advertising, media history, mass media

law and policy, and introductory courses in mass media and telecommunications. At the graduate level, I have taught courses in historical methodology, telecommunications policy and legal research, critical/cultural research methods and theory, and mass communication theory.

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?*

Benjamin: I have always loved history. When I was in grade school and high school, I read so many books on historical events and was fascinated by ancient Greece and Rome, but it wasn't until graduate school in the 1980s that I discovered how I could participate in the discovery and adventure of historiography. One of the core theory and methodology classes I took at the University of Iowa required use of primary documents. I knew from the Iowa history I studied in junior high that President Herbert Hoover had been in charge of radio during the 1920s, that his presidential library was just 10-15 miles from Iowa City in West Branch, and that this library held documents from his entire career, including radio. At that time, I thought the Hoover archives had to have been mined thoroughly on the topic of radio. So imagine my elation when, in doing my secondary source analysis, I found that the Hoover papers relating to radio and its development had hardly been touched. Of course, that's not the case now, as many eminent media historians have used the papers since the early 1980s. Anyway, that class produced a paper on the Four Radio Conferences Hoover called in attempts to help the industry regulate itself. That paper led to my dissertation, "Radio Regulation in the 1920s: Free Speech Issues in the Development of Radio and the Radio Act of 1927." The dissertation became the first few chapters of the first book I wrote, *Freedom of the Air and the Public*

Benjamin

Interest: First Amendment Rights in Broadcasting to 1935.

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

Benjamin: There have been so many influences on my historical outlook and work that I hesitate to name any for fear that I might forget someone. With that caveat, though, I must mention several individuals who have been extremely important over the years, beginning with my dissertation committee. All, but especially Carolyn Dyer and Ellis Hawley, were instrumental in helping me shape my work focusing on early radio's development, the impact it had on society, and the subsequent regulations formed to manage the then new technology. After receiving the Ph.D., I continued working on early radio's development through the mid-1930s. Many colleagues at other universities were willing to talk with me about my ideas and to review drafts of the books and articles I wrote. I owe special thanks to Christopher Sterling for his comments and suggestions over the years.

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

Benjamin: My work focuses primarily on radio as a "new technology" and the impact the medium had on the evolution of freedom of expression in the United States, especially since broadcasting's inception in the 1920s. Many of the concerns that evolved with radio from 1900 to 1945 are the same concerns that are present with today's social media: censorship, monopoly, media ownership, and use of/access to the media. Monopoly control and equitable access to the Internet by both consumers and organizations are key discussions today.

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

Benjamin: I've completed two books. As I mentioned earlier, *Freedom of the Air and the Public Interest* grew from my dissertation research and continued to explore issues of censorship, monopoly, media ownership, listeners' rights to hear information via radio, and speakers' rights of access to the medium, especially political candidates. The book examined the relationship of the First Amendment to censorship by radio stations, networks, and government actors and the free speech rights of broadcasters, listeners, and speakers. Issues of access and control over the medium, especially monopoly over the airwaves, emerged in the debates leading to the formation of the Radio Act of 1927. Radio benefited tremendously from the interplay of government officials and industry leaders, such as RCA, GE, Westinghouse, AT&T, and others. Their symbiotic relationship came at a time when ex parte rules did not exist, and both government and industry worked together to bring broadcasting to the American public. As radio grew during the interwar years, questions of who was to control, use, own, and have access to the new medium became crucial in discussions of broadcast radio, freedom of expression, and the public interest. I was thrilled when the book received the "Franklyn Haiman Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Freedom of Expression" from the National Communication Association in 2002.

My other book is *The NBC Advisory Council and Radio Program Development, 1926 to 1945*, which grew out of *Freedom of the Air*. This book looked at the Council's formation and its influence on radio programming and policy from 1926 with the inception of the NBC network to its quiet demise during World War II. NBC CEO Owen Young established this advisory board of prominent citizens (including soon-to-be Supreme Court Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes and former Sec-

Benjamin

retary of State and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elihu Root) to help the network in programming decisions but also to deflect concerns over NBC's dominance over radio. Their decrees, especially their denial of use of NBC's facilities to birth control advocates in the early 1930s, laid down principles for broadcast of controversial issues and what material was appropriate for broadcast and what was not. The Council's policies resonated into the 1980s with the Fairness Doctrine.

I also presented numerous conference papers and have published 25 articles and book chapters as well as 16 invited essays and articles, most on broadcasting's evolution to 1945. Of these, probably my work on the famous, or infamous (depending upon your point of view), Sar-noff "Radio Music Box Memo" is best known.

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

Benjamin: Of course, as with many authors, I received the most satisfaction from the publication of my first book, *Freedom of the Air and the Public Interest*. The process of researching and writing a book is so time consuming that completing it and finally holding the book in my hands when it was hot off the press was so memorable and rewarding. Then, the icing on the cake for me was receiving the Haiman Award in recognition of the contribution the book made to understanding evolving issues of free speech in the U.S. Such validation of one's work from one of our major communication associations is humbling as well as gratifying.

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?

Benjamin: My work on free speech issues related to radio as a new technology is, to me, my most important contribution overall. Issues of censorship, monopoly, rights to access the medium for communication, individuals' rights to receive information, and ownership of the medium have emerged with every new electronic distribution form, from the telegraph to the Internet. Radio is mature enough to examine these free speech issues from the medium's inception to its prime to glean insight into how the powers that be can influence free speech via any medium.

I must also note that I am recognized just as much for my investigation into legendary NBC executive David Sarnoff's claims that he predicted broadcasting in 1915 in a memorandum to his superiors. This memo has become known as Sarnoff's Radio Music Box Memo. Trying to find that Memo and his superior's reply led to two articles. The first, "In Search of the Sarnoff Music Box Memo," reviewed a memo written in 1920 that originally appeared in Gleason Archer's 1938 book, *Radio to 1926*. That book was the first to give wide credence to Sarnoff's claims of prescience in seeing wireless evolve into broadcasting, and it provided citations used in virtually every media textbook that included a chapter or section on early radio history. My research rewrote those textbook entries.

My first article, published in 1993 in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, noted that the provenance of the oft-cited memo could be traced only to a 28-page memo Sarnoff wrote to his superiors at RCA in January 1920 that covered all of RCA's radio and wireless business endeavors. In that 1920 memo, Sarnoff noted on pages 13-14 that in 1915 he wrote E. J. Nally, his boss at American Marconi, to outline his vision for a Radio Music Box and that Nally had replied to Sarnoff later that year. Sarnoff then presented a case for RCA to reconsider developing the Radio Music Box business in 1920. When I wrote this first "In search of..." article, neither the original memo nor Nally's reply

could be located. So, I concluded that article by stating Sarnoff *may* have written something in 1915 to Nally regarding wireless reaching the masses, but until either that original memo or Nally's reply was found, we'd never know for certain what, if anything, was written. We could state only that the Sarnoff "Radio Music Box" memo could be traced to the 1920 memo when broadcasting was on the verge of being introduced into American society.

Five or six years after that article was published, I received a phone call from the archivist at the Sarnoff Library, then housed in Princeton, N.J., that he had found something he thought I'd be interested in seeing. (Always make friends with archivists!) It was Nally's reply, which had been misfiled in Sarnoff's papers. That short memo proved Sarnoff *had* written something in 1915, and so I wrote another article, "In Search of the Sarnoff 'Radio Music Box' Memo: Nally's Reply," that appeared in the *Journal of Radio Studies* in 2002. "Nally's Reply" revisited my conclusions in the first "In search of..." article and stated that, while Sarnoff *did* write something in 1915, we would not know how detailed the original memo was until it was found. I also pointed out in both articles that Sarnoff was not the only person who had the foresight to see wireless in the Teens as a potential medium for mass communication.

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

Benjamin: First, I think I would take more classes in history as an undergraduate to have another minor or a double major in history. Second, I would separate *Freedom of the Air and the Public Interest* into two volumes. The first volume would cover the time up to the passage of the Radio Act of 1927 and the second, from 1927 to 1935, just after passage of the 1934 Communication Act. By doing so, I could have presented the single volume's chapters in more detail.

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.

Benjamin: As I tell graduate students, my philosophy of history and approach to media history research begin with answering questions that begin with “Why?” Why did something happen? Why did a situation evolve the way it did? Then, I move to answering more specific questions such as “How are technological developments, communication, and freedom of expression inter-related in this situation?” “What other reasonable assessments of this phenomenon lend perspective to my conclusions?” and “What societal and cultural tensions influenced these developments, and why?” For me the main factor in studying media history is my innate curiosity in answering those questions.

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

Benjamin: I think the many strengths of current historiography include the growing use of primary resources, the expansion of theoretical perspectives and methodology employed in media history research, and the amount of material accessible to researchers, especially materials that are readily available online. These lead to more in-depth analyses that comprise historical accounts. Historians look at the same situation through different, yet related, lenses and in doing so, create richer interpretations of the past. As I see it, one weakness, which is not related to quality per se, is that historical study often seems to take a back seat to other social science research being done in our field. In part, the amount of time needed to conduct good historical work and to get it published goes against the academic model of publishing as much as you can to get tenure.

Benjamin

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?

Benjamin: Because the past is often prologue, we educators need to show students how that past is relevant to what's happening today. Often, parallels in media development can be drawn from the past to the present. We also need to meet the students where they are. With the array of technology available, I've found incorporating their smart devices into accessing assignments and using more visual material in class, especially video, help keep their interest in history. Many students today seem to acquire knowledge better through watching documentaries or the actual video of historical events than through classroom lectures. We have seen an explosion of material we can use for education from services such as YouTube, Reddit, Netflix, and others. To me, that's exciting.

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

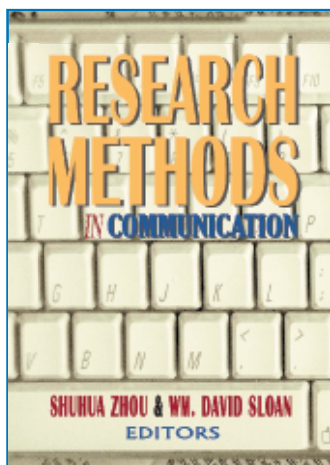
Benjamin: One challenge that concerns me is overall enrollment decline at the university-level that may lead to budget cuts in higher education. The cuts could affect media history courses because they are often seen as non-essential. The enrollment decline can be attributed, in part, to demographics. Over the next few years, the traditional college-age group of 18-to-24-year-olds will be comprised of Generation Z (also called iGen or Centennials), roughly those born in 1996 and later. This age group is smaller as a whole than previous demographic groups, such as Generation X and Millennials/Generation Y. Fewer 18-to-24-year-olds overall may mean fewer students, if universities do not engage in more education for adults who want to complete a degree or certificate. Couple that with the increasing cost of education and, for

Historian Interview

public universities, states cutting their higher education funding, and you can have a situation of continual downsizing. So the emphasis we place on media history may become a casualty if we cannot convince students (and administration) of the importance of knowing and understanding the past.

One other concern I have revolves around future historians' access to the software and hardware that will retrieve today's electronic, pixelized material. This material will comprise many of the primary resource documents used in future historical research. But as our technology changes, I have to ask, "Will those future historians have the ability to retrieve material that's common today?" For instance, I have 3/4-inch BetaMax tapes of television programs I produced in the 1970s, but I have no way of retrieving those shows myself. Finding a machine that can play those tape cassettes, much less transfer them to today's technology, is daunting.

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Book Award Interview: Jinx Broussard ©



Broussard

Jinx Broussard won the Best Journalism and Mass Communication History Book Award, given by the History Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, for the year's outstanding book for her 2013 account, *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History*. The book was also a finalist for the Kappa Tau Alpha-Frank Luther Mott Award. She is the Bart R. Swanson Endowed Memorial Professor at Louisiana State University. She received her Ph.D. in mass communication from the University

of Southern Mississippi.

Q: Give us a brief summary of your book.

Broussard: The book traces the history of black participation in international newsgathering from 1846 through 2009, providing insight into how and why African Americans reported on marginalized and people of color worldwide. It is about women and men such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary, William Worthy Jr., Ethel Payne and Howard French, and the periodicals that invested their human and financial resources to tell the truth or, as they often wrote, to tell the other side of the story. Shadd Cary and Frederick Douglass, both abolitionists, became accidental foreign correspondents and gave birth to the genre of international news gathering by blacks. Although my book primarily addresses Af-

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rican American foreign correspondence in black print publications such as the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Chicago Defender* and *Ebony* magazine, where the reporting was most prolific, it also critically examines writings from abroad by blacks who worked for mainstream publications and covered events and issues that affected not only their communities, but the entire world during periods that were emblematic of black, media, United States and world history.

My book is about more than just African American foreign correspondence. In examining how and why blacks used their pens and voices, it contributes to a broader conversation about navigating racial, societal, and global problems that persist today.

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

Broussard: While doing research for a journal article about African-American foreign correspondents during World War II, I discovered that not only did twenty-seven African Americans cover all theatres of that war, but black men and women had been reporting from abroad for almost two centuries. Their work represented a vast output of editorial content; yet black foreign correspondents remained almost invisible in media history. Even when the journalists appeared in major works, they were little more than asterisks. Therefore, I decided to write a book that would challenge the traditional concept of foreign correspondence as a mainstream media enterprise by focusing on what and why the correspondents reported, and how they did their jobs and the obstacles they faced.

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?

Broussard: My initial sources were major African-American periodicals that included the ones I mentioned above as well as the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Negro World* and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* newspapers. In addition to *Ebony*, I examined the *Voice of the Negro* and *Crisis* magazines. My goal was to determine if the publications ran foreign correspondence and the names of the writers who produced the content. Primary sources in those publications included by-lined articles, columns, editorials and other opinion pieces. Articles about the writers in the publications also were reviewed. As I identified the writers, I located other primary sources such as the correspondents' letters, notes, diaries, passports, journals and autobiographies. This was an on-going process that lasted about seven years.

I obtained newspapers and books via inter-library loan and online historical databases. I also travelled over several years to conduct research. The *Chicago Defender* gave me access to the files of its foreign correspondents, and the archivists at *The Afro-American* and several libraries and research centers directed me to sources and assisted me after my visits. Likewise, the staff at the following assisted: the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature of the Chicago Public Library, and the staff at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, the Peabody Collection at Hampton University, Morgan State University, the Chicago Historical Museum, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library.

I also conducted oral interviews with correspondents or individuals who were associates, friends, family, employers, or fellow employees.

Secondary sources included books and articles about world, black and American history; foreign correspondence; journal articles; public records; and biographies.

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

Broussard: I think I exhausted primary and secondary sources.

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

Broussard: I would tell them to read widely, especially secondary sources that could lead to primary sources. Be meticulous and do not overlook any potential source. Be prepared to spend hundreds of hours gathering information, following up and tracing leads. Read *everything*, and do not rely on random or stratified random sampling. It is too easy to miss an important item if choosing the latter method. You need the context.

I would also advise employing external and internal criticism to assure that the person you are writing about is the real subject or the information you uncover is factual. Double check the information you obtain during interviews because memories may fade or information may not be accurate.

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

Broussard: A major challenge was locating information about correspondents I wanted to write about. I had to eliminate some individuals because information about them was unavailable. Some correspondents were dead and had not written autobiographies or did not have relatives or associates who were aware of the work they had done. For instance, I talked with and arranged to interview a World War II correspondent, but he became ill and died before we could meet. His files had been destroyed in a fire. I tried to obtain primary source material from

the son of another correspondent, but he refused to share the information. Based on the articles they wrote in the newspapers, they certainly would have had a place in my book.

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?

Broussard: Historian must always be objective. They should follow the evidence and avoid becoming judgmental to the extent it would influence their writing.

Q: What new insights does your book provide?

A: My book provides insight on and elevates African-American reporting as part of the elite genre of foreign correspondence. Significantly, I gained insight into the valuable work the correspondents were doing, often under trying circumstances. Finally, at the core of the African-American foreign reporting was the belief that America could be greater if it lived up to its stated democratic principles. Most African American foreign correspondents believed they could gain equal rights and human dignity for blacks and oppressed people if they provided credible, verifiable evidence of other nations' more egalitarian treatment of their black populations, and if they exposed the hypocrisy of the United States as it professed a doctrine of freedom and equality in its international involvement while denying basic human rights to blacks domestically.

Q: What findings most surprised you?

Broussard: I was surprised to learn that: 1) there was a vast amount

foreign correspondence by blacks. (Before beginning the book, when I thought of black foreign correspondents, the names of CBS's Ed Bradley and CNN's Bernard Shaw came to mind — only two people); 2) the oppressive condition of African Americans in the United States was the impetus for black reporting from overseas. (Slavery and the status of free people of color in American society during the antebellum period led to the birth of black foreign correspondence and determined its subject matter. The subjugated status of blacks and people of color remained a major theme.); 3) Reporting by blacks was important as an antidote to the elite media, as the correspondents saw the world primarily through the race lens and provided an alternate and accurate perspective.

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

Broussard: I would suggest that they not only tell hiStory or herStory but consider topics that elevate and explicate alternative forms of journalism history. For instance, no work on foreign correspondence should ignore the role and experience of blacks in reporting from overseas. Additionally, writing journalism history requires thinking broadly and then narrowing down the topic to one that is manageable and doable. Finally, be prepared to spend hours, weeks, days and even years on the project.

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