

Historiography

in Mass Communication



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Historiography in Mass Communication

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

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

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

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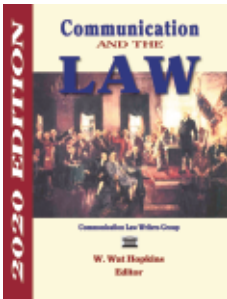
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Easy Explanations

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

Recall when you've done historical research. How many times have you begun thinking that explaining your subject would be easy? Then as you got deeper into the research, you became convinced that the subject was so complex that you would never be able to understand or explain it. But you kept working in the sources, and finally, after untold hours of research, you began to understand.

Now contrast that with the number of times you've looked at the program for a history conference and were able to guess the papers' conclusions based simply on their titles.

Why could you guess the conclusions? Obviously, the wording of titles gave a hint. But the titles also revealed the authors' perspectives. And if you knew a perspective, it was not hard to guess the verdict. In fact, some of the authors may have known their conclusions before starting their research.

Such presuppositions present a danger to accurate explanation, and they are widespread. Two of the prominent perspectives in JMC history are Cultural Studies and its cousin Cultural and Critical Studies.

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If you know a “historian” holds to one of those mindsets, you can guess his or her conclusion if you know nothing more than the subject. But since much has been written about both of them, let’s consider another perspective that doesn’t receive as much attention these days but that, nevertheless, provides the underlying mindset for a large percentage of works in JMC history.

It’s the Progressive interpretation. Like Cultural Studies and Cultural and Critical Studies, it is fundamentally ideological.

The Progressive interpretation emerged around 1900. For at least three decades it dominated the writing of American history, but it declined in the 1940s, when a Consensus interpretation began to replace it. In the 1960s a New Left school appeared on the scene and for a time challenged Consensus thinking. Since, though, interpretations rarely last more than a few generations, a Neo-Consensus interpretation replaced the New Left in the 1980s, and it has remained strong ever since.

Amidst those waves of change, Progressive history still has its followers. However, despite the efforts of its most zealous advocates, it has never regained the ground it once occupied.

But there are pockets of activism.

Notwithstanding the fact that most JMC historians don’t make a deliberate effort to write from a particular perspective, the Progressive interpretation has never vanished from our field. In fact, it has remained strong.

The Progressive school grew, in part, out of a change that had taken place in the study of American history in the late 1800s. Professional historians began to replace the gentlemen Nationalist and Romantic historians who wrote most histories in the 19th century.

A similar change took place in the writing of JMC history. While working journalists continued to write historical works, many JMC historians in the early 1900s were educators from the emerging departments of journalism at public universities. Because most of those uni-

versities opened their doors to everyone, the new professional historians came from various levels of society.

Influenced by the ideas of such Progressive historians as Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles Beard, Claude Bowers, and Vernon Parrington, reform-oriented JMC historians began to view the past as a struggle in which editors, publishers, and reporters were pitted on the side of freedom, liberty, civil reform, democracy, and equality against the powerful forces of wealth, conservatism, and class.

For Progressive historians, the fundamental key to understanding history was ideological conflict. The past consisted of a black-and-white, conservative-vs.-liberal, bad-guy/good-guy dichotomy. On one side were the forces of equality and reform, and on the other were the wealthy and the politically influential. The fulfillment of the American ideal required a struggle against those individuals and groups that attempted to control the media for their own use.

Sympathetic with the goals of the Progressive reformers of the early 20th century, historians wrote in such a way as to show the media as tools for social change, progress, and democracy and as an influential force in helping assure a better future. They believed the primary purpose of the media should have been to champion the causes of the common people and to crusade for social and economic changes — to fight on the side of the masses of the common, working people against the entrenched interests in American business and government. They saw the media as a means of exposing the vices of conservative forces, contributing to progressive political ideas, and influencing the general public into accepting ideas for political and social reform. They explained the past in cycles of democratic and journalistic advance, which occurred when the media improved in serving the masses in America. They praised journalists and episodes that had contributed to greater democracy, while criticizing those favoring an elitist society.

Editor's note: The next few pages of this essay provide a summary

of how Progressive historians have explained various periods and subjects in JMC history. Since the explanations are predictably similar, you may find them tedious. But that is to be expected whenever historians base explanations on their own ideology rather than on research and open-mindedness. So, after you get the hang of their views, you may wish to quickly scan or simply skip the summary and jump to the end of this essay. Why bore yourself?

While Progressive historians reevaluated every major period in JMC history, works by three historians in the 1920s and 1930s epitomized their ideological approach and their use of history to change conditions of their own time.

The first was Oswald Garrison Villard. Deploring what he considered to be crass materialism on the part of most of the press, he argued that the best newspapers were those that led the fight for improved social conditions. In *Some Newspapers and Newspapermen*, published in 1923, he claimed that newspapers too often had deserted their leadership role in molding public opinion and instead appealed to public tastes in scandal, racial hatred, and social animosities — all because owners thought the best way to make money was to appeal to public passions. He described, for example, Adolph Ochs' *New York Times* as racist and a promoter of discriminatory separation between blacks and whites.

In *The Disappearing Daily*, published in 1944 as a revision of his earlier book, Villard argued that fighting crusades was more important than providing news, and he scorned the trend toward pictures, features, and a generally soft approach to news. Believing that the role of the press was to keep a wary eye on the government in order to protect the public, he claimed that too few newspapers championed enough causes. The problem with American journalism, he concluded, was that newspapers treasured profit more than principle.

The second historian, George Seldes, in two major works in the

1930s, attacked wealthy owners' self-serving use of their newspapers.

In *Freedom of the Press*, published in 1935, he argued that big business' control of the media was destroying press freedom. A pro-business oligarchy owned and manipulated the American press, he claimed, and its intent was to destroy the democratic foundation of the American political system. No section of journalism went untouched. Advertisers, public utilities, big business in general, and propagandists colored and suppressed the news and corrupted both the media and the public. The Associated Press, Seldes declared, always sided with authority, no matter how corrupt, while the *New York Times* spoke without exception for the conservative status quo and William Randolph Hearst advocated privilege and possessed no social conscience.

Seldes denounced the press for its opposition — despite the great need for social reforms — to the rights of organized labor, support of child labor for purely financial reasons, emphasis on scandal, invasion of privacy, interference with trial by jury, and critical treatment of the American Newspaper Guild (the reporters' labor union). He concluded that a majority of American newspapers published propaganda simply because to do so was profitable. Thus, it was impossible to have freedom of the press and unconcealed truth.

Seldes followed his first work with *Lords of the Press* in 1938. Employing the same theme of the pernicious effect of wealthy moneymakers' ownership, he argued that newspapers typically were ultra-conservative and failed to ensure fair news treatment of labor or social and economic reforms.

One of the most trenchant Progressive attacks on the press came from Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior under Franklin Roosevelt and director of the Public Works Administration. In his 1939 book *America's House of Lords*, a caustic criticism of publishers who opposed Roosevelt's New Deal, Ickes argued that the shortcomings of the press resulted from modern publishers being businessmen more interested

in running their newspapers as business enterprises than journals of news. Publishers, he said, imparted to their papers an upper-class outlook and sought to make them profit-seeking businesses rather than public-spirited agencies concerned with social good. As a result, the emphasis on business endangered the free press that a democracy requires and led to a lack of fairness in newspaper pages, unreliability, suppression of information, and fabrication of news.

The Progressive perspective has shown up in the explanation of almost every major period and subject in JMC history. Here are some examples:

The press and the American Revolution: The Revolution was as much a revolt against the control America's wealthy class had on the country as against English authority. Progressive historians, most of whom believed that conservatives were motivated primarily by economic self-interest, reasoned that those Revolutionary printers served best who had advocated the cause of the common people against the economic and political domination by the elite.

The party press: Progressive historians were sympathetic to the liberal causes of the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian press. They viewed the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian editors, in fights with Federalists and Whigs, as advocates and protectors of the rights of the people. The Jeffersonian and Jacksonian press was especially important in the fights against aristocratic rule, to guarantee fuller participation of the public in the affairs of the nation, and to assure fuller civil liberties, especially freedom of the press.

Freedom of the press: Progressive historians believed that most Americans were libertarians but that wealthy and aristocratic classes had attempted to suppress freedom of the press. Elitist leaders had exploited "freedom of the press" for their own ends. Instead of a check on government, the press became a tool for preserving entrenched interests.

The frontier press: Some Progressive historians praised liberal, reform-oriented editors, especially abolitionists, Populists, and crusaders. Others criticized conservative, reactionary editors. Historians of Native Americans and women praised members of those groups who edited newspapers or condemned Anglo-Saxon and male editors for neglecting or mistreating them. The picture of the typical frontier editor that emerged from Progressive histories generally was a critical one. White, male editors, who had made up the majority of frontier editors, were racists and sexists who urged repression and advocated violence.

The penny press: The penny press represented the emergence of a new voice in support of the interests of the common people and democracy. For example, Progressive historians especially favored Horace Greeley, whom they described as an advocate of the great mass of Americans, of reform, and of economic and democratic equality.

The press of the post-bellum industrial age: Progressive historians focused on the press in a conflict between “big business” and “the people.” Journalists and newspapers should have been on the side of the masses and against wealthy industrialists, who tried to maintain control of the government for their own self-interest. Progressive historians viewed positively crusades against corrupt government practices and profit-hungry industrialists. Most presented journalism in a good light because they selected for study newspapers that were exercising their independence from political parties and taking up crusades against corruption in both government and big business.

New Journalism: Even as newspapers innovated practices, Progressive historians were interested in the practices mainly as they related to social and political issues. Concerned about the great influence that corrupt industrialists exercised and about the social problems that industrial conditions presented, Progressive historians judged the press in terms of how it supported the struggle of the masses against

the wealthy and powerful minority.

Muckraking: Muckrakers were on the side of the “people” in an attempt to challenge the dominant and corrupting position of big business and a privileged class in American life. Progressive historians reasoned that reformers were attempting to restore both political and economic democracy to the nation.

The press and the world wars: Progressive historians opposed or only reluctantly supported American involvement in war because they believed war halted liberal reform and killed responsible reporting. They opposed American participation in World War I because they believed that it did nothing to improve conditions at home, that America got involved in the war because of British and chauvinistic propaganda, and that war resulted in dangerous censorship and irresponsible, jingoistic journalism. Although they were not as hostile to U.S. involvement in World War II, they still were concerned about nativism and jingoism in the media and about the war’s effect on journalism.

The press and the Great Depression: Progressive historians were critical of the purely financial motivations of media owners and their failure to support President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal policies. At the same time, they were complimentary of journalists who worked for social reform and of specialized publications such as labor newspapers that supported workers and the underprivileged.

The general press of 1900-1945: The press’ primary purpose should have been to crusade for liberal social and economic causes, and to fight on the side of the masses of common, working people against the entrenched interests in business and government. The heroes for Progressive historians were journalists such as Heywood Broun, a leader of efforts to unionize journalists in the 1930s; Marshall Field III, the liberal owner of *PM* in the 1940s; William Allen White, who turned from his early Republican conservatism to become a mainstream leader of liberal causes; and E. W. Scripps, whose newspaper chain crusaded for

improvement of various social conditions.

Broadcasting: Broadcasters should have crusaded for liberal causes and fought against the self-serving powers that dominated business and government. Progressive historians were concerned with how economic factors affected broadcasting's ability to serve the public and how big business — through its ownership of radio and television and its alliance with government — controlled broadcasting to the detriment of the public interest.

The press of 1945-2000: The profit motive of owners prevented the news media from performing in socially responsible ways. Progressive historians pointed to a number of shortcomings of the press and placed the blame on the underlying financial motivations of owners. Among the problems were the emphasis on journalism primarily as a business, the growth of chain ownership, a decline in editorial vitality, a decline in newspaper competition, and reduced newspaper expenditures for news services. Other failures were the press' ideological conservatism, its reluctance to speak out on issues, the threat posed to freedom of the press by economic considerations, journalism's close ties to government and subsequent official control over information, a middle-class definition of news, American informational "imperialism," and media owners' insatiable greed for money and power.

Do these views sound familiar? Probably so — since it is likely you've heard them in many conference research papers. And you probably have seen them in journal articles also.

It's less likely that you have come across them as the underlying thesis of books on JMC history. Just a guess here, but books require a lot more research than conference papers do. And when historians dig deeply into primary sources they're less likely to be satisfied with superficial interpretations. They realize that people in the past and their motives can't be explained by a historian's glib, easy explanation. They were much more complex.

For our rountable in this issue of *Historiography*, Terry Lueck recruited four historians — Maurine Beasley, Meta Carstarphen, Bruce Evensen, and Julie Williams — who explain the connection between who they are as individuals and what they do as historians. As their comments show, the relationship between the two facets of each individual are not the same from one historian to the next. We follow the roundtable with the text of the acceptance speech that James Danky gave at this year's national convention of the American Journalism Historians Association when he received the AJHA's Distinguished Service to Journalism History Award. He emphasizes the need for historians to use a variety of sources in their research. In a second essay, Leonard Teel describes the work in sources he has been doing to provide a historical perspective for a book about journalism and civil society in the modern Middle East. As an extra benefit, he includes an extensive bibliography of sources. For our interview with a historian, Mike Conway of Indiana University, a broadcast historian, graciously submitted to a Q&A. Finally, for our interview with a book author, Richard John of Columbia University did a Q&A about his award-winning book *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications*. As always, we believe you will find this issue of *Historiography* to be stimulating reading.

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Historical Roundtable: Journalism Historians and Identity: The Professional Is Personal

By Therese Lueck, Maurine Beasley, Meta Carstarphen,
Bruce Evensen, and Julie Hedgepeth Williams[©]



Lueck

This roundtable addresses ways we come to know ourselves in the process of doing JMC history and how our personal narrative finds expression in cross-genre storytelling.

Exploring the inner resonance of their research interests, topic selection, and subject development, four widely published scholars consider the benefits and challenges they've encountered in the interplay between their personal and professional identities. Sharing the significant relationships and events that have shaped their lives, these historians reveal the inspirational backstories of their scholarly work, as well as how journalism history has allowed them to discover other creative venues.

As a detective in a Louise Penny mystery explained, "You can't be good at this job if you don't know who you are," which framed the question, "How can you possibly find the truth about someone else if you won't admit the truth about yourself?"

Terry: *Was there a significant point (or points) at which you discovered a personal identification with your journalism history research?*

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Bruce: The *choice* of what stories to tell as a journalism historian has been a particularly autobiographical process from the outset.



Beasley

I spent 1983 and 1984 as a journalist and bureau chief based in Jerusalem. When I began my doctoral work at Wisconsin in 1986, I was drawn to patterns of

Therese L. Lueck is a professor emerita of the University of Akron and a former president of the American Journalism Historians Association. Inspiration for this exploration of professional and personal identity surfaced with the confluence of Terry's retirement and her inheritance of family histories.



Carstarphen

Maurine H. Beasley is a professor emerita of journalism at the University of Maryland College Park. She is the author of *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady* and *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media*, among other books, and a co-editor of *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*.



Evensen

Meta G. Carstarphen is a Gaylord Endowed Professor at the University of Oklahoma, Gaylord College of Journalism and Communication. With research interests spanning rhetoric and writing, and inclusive historiographies of race/gender/class diversity, her books include *Sexual Rhetoric: Media Perspectives on Sexuality, Gender, and Identity*.



Williams

Bruce Evensen is a professor of communication at DePaul University, where he directs the graduate program in journalism. He spent a decade in broadcast journalism and has written eight books on journalism history and ethics, including his most recent, *Journalism and the American Experience*.

Julie Hedgepeth Williams is an assistant professor at Samford University. A former president of the AJHA, she was predestined to love history because her great-uncle survived the *Titanic*. She thinks everyone loves history; they just may not have found that personal connection yet.

reporting about the region. It was electrifying to read about how policy shifted on the question of supporting the creation of a Jewish state. At the Harry Truman Library in Independence I found the facsimile of a May 14, 1948, statement announcing U.S. recognition for “the new Jewish state.” Truman crossed out “Jewish state” and wrote in “state of Israel.”

I remember weeping. I had not gone to Jerusalem to recover my Jewish roots. But reading primary materials leading to the creation of a Jewish state reached me in a way I hadn’t anticipated. I remembered this moment as I wrote my dissertation, which was published as my first book, *Truman, Palestine and the Press: Shaping Conventional Wisdom at the Beginning of the Cold War*. I tried through the selection and description of successive scenes to offer readers some of the same emotional salience I felt, so that they would understand the *difference* that journalism played in the drama that unfolded. That has been my strategy in every successive book.

I am an ardent sports fan, so I was drawn to the role of the rapidly expanding sports section in the quarrel over journalistic professionalism during the Jazz Age. Since Jack Dempsey was voted the greatest stimulus to circulation during the period, I wrote *When Dempsey Fought Tunney: Heroes, Hokum and Storytelling in the Jazz Age*. I wanted readers to experience the role that journalism played in pushing the celebrity culture during the interwar era.

I received Christ as my personal savior when I was 11 years old and responded to an altar call when Billy Graham came to Chicago in 1962. Years later, I read Graham’s observation that much of his success was built on the foundation laid by D.L. Moody in the 19th century. So I began investigating Moody’s revival work through primary materials in the Moody Bible Institute. I was particularly interested in his use of what Charles Finney described as “all available means” in bringing revival, particularly his interactions with the press. That sent me to col-

lections at Kew Gardens outside London. Later, I traveled to the Yale Divinity School and the Moody Center in Northfield, Massachusetts, in developing my central story — *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D.L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism*.

Thirty years of teaching journalism history, listening to the questions my students asked, and reflecting on the illustrations I offered in explaining the role of journalism in American history led me to write *Journalism and the American Experience*. My primary interest isn't journalism or journalism history in that book. My primary interest is telling the nation's story by describing journalism's unique role in the creation and maintenance of a more civil society.

Julie: All three of my books, two of which are based in journalism history, had personal connections. *Wings of Opportunity* is about the Wright Brothers' time in Alabama. I had been chasing the Wright Brothers all my life: I was born in Dayton on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and I grew up in North Carolina. In a book about the Wright Brothers, there was a picture of a shed covered in words: "The Wright Brothers' hangar in Montgomery, Alabama." I HAD to find out about it. The resulting book was entirely drawn from the press of 1910.

A Rare Titanic Family was inspired by David Sloan saying, "Too bad you didn't write about the *Titanic*. Didn't you have a relative on it?" The idea would be to have the book out for the 100th anniversary of the *Titanic* in 2012, and it was already 2010. I e-mailed my publisher. In February, the co-owner said, "Yeah, we can do the *Titanic* book if you can have it done by October." Could I!

I was so sure of myself because my great-uncle Albert Caldwell survived the *Titanic*. He was 26 and lived to be 91. I practically could write the story from what I knew from Uncle Al — or so I thought. I knew little about his first wife, Sylvia. Uncle Al and Sylvia divorced in 1930, and in 1936, he married my great-aunt. Al and Sylvia were Presbyterian

missionaries in Siam, and word in our family was that Sylvia didn't like living there, so she faked an illness. On their way home they took the *Titanic*. As I wrote the book, I realized that our whispered disdain of Sylvia wasn't fair to her, and I owed it to history to find out the truth. Two 1912 newspapers said that an ambulance was awaiting Sylvia dockside, ready to take her to Presbyterian Hospital.

I waded into the Presbyterian archives and discovered the Caldwells were *fleeing* their jobs in Siam. They had given Sylvia's illness as the reason, but the boss concluded she wasn't sick. The purpose of the ambulance ride was to determine whether Sylvia really was sick. She gave the ambulance the slip. The introduction to the book turned out to narrate my personal journey in finding out the hitherto secret story.

My third book started life as an AJHA paper. *Three Not-So-Ordinary Joes* is about three guys who almost accidentally started Southern literature: Joseph Addison, the British journalist of the early 1700s, associated with Richard Steele; Addison's namesake Joseph Addison "J.A." Turner, who produced the only newspaper known to be published on a Southern plantation; and Turner's apprentice Joel Chandler Harris, who got his famous Uncle Remus stories (originally newspaper columns) from his time as an apprentice on Turner's newspaper.

My sister reminded me how we teased our grandmother. Dolly Schwab shared a birthday with Harris, who at his death (shortly after Gran was born) was the most famous author in the world. He, like Dolly, was from Atlanta. She was elated when the school system shut down in honor of her sixth birthday. Schoolchildren went to Harris's home, Wren's Nest, to hear tales of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. Harris was so famous that his birthday, December 9, was declared a holiday. But Dolly believed the big birthday bash was for her. Oh, we teased our Gran about that! We'd say, "Happy Birthday, Gran! Happy Birthday, Uncle Remus!"

As I wrote I realized that Gran's life bracketed the fame of Harris. When Gran turned six, he was the greatest author the South had ever produced. By the time Gran left us in 1977, Harris had fallen from grace. Gran's life was the perfect frame for Harris — and I wrote the book that way.

Maurine: Yes, as a child I knew my mother admired Eleanor Roosevelt even though my family was *very Republican*. In the 1970s after I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on Washington women journalists of the 19th century, a journalism professor who was a reader for an academic publisher suggested that I carry my topic up to the present. I immediately thought of Eleanor Roosevelt's White House press conferences for women only — which I had heard about from veteran Washington women reporters — and decided that Eleanor Roosevelt and the media would be a fascinating subject to explore. At the time I was a reporter for *The Washington Post* and I occasionally would cover a local event along with one or two women who had attended the press conferences.

Meta: All history is personal, and everything we know about what we consider to be personal is mired in historic resonances. I knew that I loved history as early as seventh grade when Mr. Calbazano became my history teacher. He was the second man of color, and the last one, that I had in my public school experience. His deep voice led us through discussions, lectures, and exams about the world through his eyes. The past and the present made sense within the safety of his classroom. Perhaps my experience of watching a brown-skinned man inhabit the narratives he shared with such authority and passion made me believe that I, too, could do likewise.

Like many of us, I worked in journalism before teaching it. I wanted to make journalism history — by telling those stories that no one else had — before I embraced researching journalism history. I have often

told my students of the time I was part of a small investigative reporting team for the leading jewelry trade magazine, *Jewelers' Circular-Keystone*. My task was to interview jewelers and store owners about their thoughts on discrimination in the industry. I share the moment one subject became quite candid about how he treated “those people” who entered his store, unaware that my skin color, which he could not see, put me in the group of “those people.” Was this personal? Yes. Was this professional? Yes. I found, in that instance, I could live within the overlapping streams of both, and perhaps always will. Our published report earned the highest award from the American Business Press. We made history.

It wasn't until my graduate experience when I experienced the freedom of looking backwards with a critical eye. At the end of my doctoral study, I wrote a dissertation tracing the rhetorical presence of race in the lead pages of *The Dallas Morning News* over 100 years of publication. I could map absence and presence, context and meaning, of how people of color appeared in “history's first draft” of events of a major city newspaper. Was this personal? Yes. Was this professional? Yes. All of this came about because I actively sought throughout my studies the presence of people like me within the texts I read. It seemed that there was a connection between the texts I read and the people behind them.

Terry: *How did the recognition of a personal connection change your approach to your research subject? Could you write objectively, or did you find yourself writing more as an advocate?*

Bruce: Recognition of my personal connection to my subject informs how I write about the subject. My work as a journalism historian includes the ceaseless search for parables, illustrations, and the selection of certain scenes in establishing my story. Editing keeps me on the road.

It knows my destination and it has plotted my pathway forward. If I am an advocate it is in the manner of *The Friend*, a Quaker publication which on the eve of the Civil War warned, when we lose our understanding of the past, “we lose our identity and become as wanderers.” The journalism historian tells us what we are a part of and where we have come from as we anticipate our pathway forward.

Julie: I’ve always admired the Wright Brothers. When a scholarly press suggested that the brothers’ half year in Alabama was not significant, I turned to a publisher of popular books, and it’s been so much fun speaking to audiences about the book. But I came to realize the Wright Brothers’ time in Alabama *was* truly significant — more than I had realized as I was writing it. The brothers held the nation’s first civilian flying school in Alabama. The Wrights owned the patent on flight (really on the ability to bank the airplane). Thus, with the Alabama flight school, the Wright Brothers gave flight to the public.

As to the *Titanic* book, it’s a myth that men weren’t allowed off. In reality, men were only barred from lifeboats on one half of the ship. Uncle Al was on the “allowed” half. I didn’t go into the book with the thought of defending him, but I was glad to make that point clear to a larger audience.

Three Joes — that was hard. J.A. Turner’s descendant refused to loan me his journal, but I decided that I needed to write this book. I know how important Harris was to my grandmother, and her experience indicates his tremendous importance in his day. Some people now think of Harris as racist — but in fact, the opposite is true. I keep thinking, “If you’d just read the book, you’d see.”

Maurine: I think my mother’s interest in Eleanor Roosevelt, shown by her enthusiasm for Eleanor’s “My Day” column in the *Kansas City Star*, made me aware in a personal way of the importance of Eleanor as a role

model for women in the 1930s and 1940s. I realized that Eleanor and her press conferences were significant political and symbolic events for women that had been written off by conventional histories of journalism. I don't think I turned into an advocate for Eleanor, since I had written a dissertation on women's history and study of Eleanor Roosevelt's use of the media was a logical continuation. I have never favored writing about Eleanor as a saint but see her as a historical figure who managed to tower above her circumstances and provide inspiration for others.

Meta: This recognition of a personal connection changes everything. I am actively searching for the "what's missing" and "who's missing" in all of the work that I do. For example, two of my books, *American Indians and the Mass Media* (with John Sanchez) and *Race, Gender, Class and Media: Studying Mass Communication and Multiculturalism*, are intentional in their focus about excavating the presence of race in journalism/media history, and the significance of this presence.

But equally important are the ways in which *all* histories rely upon media and ephemera of their times, including letters, newspapers and periodicals, photographs, vintage radio and television archives. What we do, or don't do, as journalism historians to uncover and celebrate the hidden or lesser celebrated stories can have an impact upon all of our histories, writ large.

Consider the works of historians/authors I admire. Taylor Branch, a celebrated author of civil rights histories, in the three-part *America in The King Years* series, draws significantly from both the mainstream press and the black press to tell stories about this country from 1954 to 1968. However, I began to wonder why Branch could have been drawn to this subject. In the interviews, in the official biography posted on his website, I could not find any pointed exploration of his personal motivation for such an overarching and comprehensive project. To me, the

facts of his life speak to this. Branch is white, a son of the South from Atlanta, who became active in the civil rights movement as a college student. Branch's birthday (January 14) is one day before the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Branch's work in this area is full of personal resonances, all of which he recounts in one way or another. But I believe his persona and reputation as a historian are portrayed as the consummate researcher (which he clearly is) who works apart from the personal (which he clearly does not).

There is something in the role of a historian that begs a separation from the personal, and that exalts the power of fact, observation, and intellect. Claiming the historian's role begs for a refutation of feeling, emotion, and personal connection. We like our histories sanitized. It keeps us, perhaps, from mining difficult topics — racism and sexism — for the historical truths they hold. Yet, things are changing. We can celebrate the work, for instance, of Annette Gordon-Reed for her pioneering work in documenting the role of Sally Hemings in the life history of Thomas Jefferson. Her identity as an African American woman gave her the confidence that this was a story worth telling.

All history is personal, I believe, if we look closely enough at the “whos” and the “whys” of historical storytelling. No historian is exempt. No journalism historian is exempt. I am not exempt. But it is still not part of the norm, it seems, to claim these influences aloud.

Terry: *How have the research and writing of journalism history helped you reconcile your personal and professional identities?*

Bruce: I've come to see less distinction between my personal and professional identity. When I trained to be a journalist at Northwestern University in the 1970s, Curtis MacDougall was still alive. His emphasis was the journalist is not the story, the story is the story. I've taken that instruction into my work as a journalism historian. The story of jour-

nalism history is the story. Our telling the story reveals only our pattern of selection. We are selecting certain scenes and characters in depicting this history. We let the characters speak for themselves. We let them live. It's the least we can do in honoring the dead.

I've never seen my work as a journalism historian as making an argument. Instead, I see it as telling a story that is only as compelling as the evidence I offer.

Julie: I became an adjunct to split the roles of mother and professor. I didn't realize this allowed me some freedom in research. A friend explained that at her large research university you were supposed to make yourself an expert in one topic of research only, and a research agenda would specify that I had to stay in colonial media. What? I realized then that I was glad I had miraculously escaped that fate!

Maurine: My work on Eleanor Roosevelt has made me much more understanding of the cultural expectations surrounding my mother and female relatives in the Middle West in the first half of the 20th century. It has given me insight into my own upbringing and choice of an occupation. The study of Eleanor Roosevelt has been the keystone of my general work on women as participants in and subjects of journalism in the early and middle decades of the 20th century. It obviously has lent itself to research on the media portrayal of first ladies in general, a field of tremendous fertility for a historian of women and journalism.

Meta: I don't know that research and writing journalism histories help me reconcile the personal and professional identities, nor do I think they should. For me, it is that tension, that hidden space between what is seen and what is unseen that helps fuel my inquiries. In one of my more recent roles, I have taken on the editorship of a quarterly journal that offers reviews of books in journalism and mass communication. I

have given priority to histories as I scan potential titles for review. I have also been intentional in including titles that explore identity (race, gender, class) in multiple genres for their ability to illuminate the work that journalists and media scholars do.

I have long ago learned to live in the spaces that are both personal and professional. I know no other way.

Terry: *What other venues have you explored for sharing your more personal stories?*

Bruce: When I am teaching journalism history I am performing journalism history. I perform journalism history by permitting every member of the orchestra to have his or her moment. Their performance tells us how they saw the story and the role they played in the unfolding of that story. That story is the American experience. And what these players are showing is the significant role of journalism in the American experience.

Julie: NewSouth Books is committed to getting its authors places to speak. I present a PowerPoint about *Wings of Opportunity* that emphasizes the fun in the story. That has made it fun for me, too.

The Florida Chautauqua asked me to do a performance tea of *A Rare Titanic Family*, and my one-woman show was born. I “become” Sylvia, my great-uncle’s wife on the *Titanic*. In considering the story from Sylvia’s point of view, I have learned much more about the Caldwells’ escape from the ship.

For *Three Not-So-Ordinary Joes*, I recruit audience members to play parts in three skits, telling stories from each of the three Joes. I don’t bring up my grandmother’s personal connection, although I did for one special show — at Wren’s Nest on December 9, 2018, 105 years to the day after my confused little Gran celebrated her sixth birthday there. I

ended the show with, “Happy Birthday, Gran. Happy Birthday, Uncle Remus.” And that made me teary-eyed, saying it again after all those years.

Maurine: I have done and still do a lot of speaking — usually but not always unpaid — to community groups in the Washington, D.C. area, where I live, on various aspects of first ladies as media celebrities. In fact, I have just committed myself to two speeches for 2020 and have been asked to again teach a more general course on the history of news for a non-credit program for senior citizens at a university. In these venues I share my interests in women’s journalism history from a personal perspective.

Meta: I have written short fiction and poetry that allow me the opportunity to explore personal stories. I don’t know if the sum total of these writings will ever see the light of day! I have published some select poems and short stories in small journals and have won writing prizes. However, my most ambitious project, which I am writing now, is the most personal as I work to complete a manuscript about an African American serial killer I interviewed. His victims were women, and as I recount my investigation of this case and my correspondence with him — the only journalist to break through to him — I am writing the most personal narrative of my own journey as a professional woman of color in this field.

Terry: *How has your pursuit of journalism history proved beneficial in shaping your personal and professional identities?*

Bruce: The eleven years I spent in journalism were a perfect preparation for the role of the journalism historian. Few things are as satisfying as finding out something I didn’t know that has importance and sharing

it with others. The work of the journalism historian — as well as any writer of history — is an elaborate pretense. You are constructing a seamless narrative that you have returned to hundreds of times. I am hiding the fact I wrote *Journalism and the American Experience* over six years. I am covering the stops and the starts and all the time and attention spent on matters better left on the editing room floor.

Every sentence has that mystery in it. When I start to think it, I haven't thought it through until I'm finished, but you'd never know that by reading it. This is the art, I suppose, of the journalism historian. It is an expression of a certain egotism. I don't want readers to read all the unsuccessful sentences, only the successful ones appearing in print, some of which I may one day wish had instead found their way to the editing room floor.

When my first book was published, I hurried to the library so I could see it in the stacks. There had been rain the night before, and drips were coming down from a leaky roof. I peeked behind the plastic sheeting — and there it was — finally at 40 — my first book. It was a forlorn feeling. The book that had occupied several of my years now simply sought some sun. My hope as a journalism historian is to leave behind something of permanent value insofar as anything can be permanent. My first book did survive its first rain. It has found itself a dry home in the stacks. It is a modest ambition — but a small triumph, nevertheless, for the journalism historian.

Julie: I now teach freshmen English, and we are encouraged to teach the second semester course based on our area of specialization. Thus, I have the pleasure of taking my freshmen to the university archives to read old newspapers and old magazines, pick out themes, and write about them. That has been a terrific twist in my professional identity.

As to my personal identity, I love that the audiences often say, "If I had had you as a professor, I'd love history today." That makes me hap-

py.

Maurine: My pursuit of journalism history has allowed me to merge the two identities to the extent that friends ask me to give talks to their friends. I feel that I have been extremely fortunate to have done academic work that has a relatively wide appeal and has kept me professionally engaged during retirement by writing book chapters.

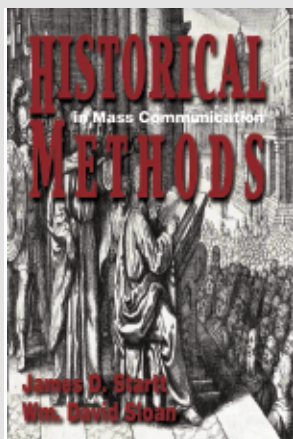
Meta: I love journalism history because it reaffirms my belief in and reverence for the power of journalism. Nothing else gives people the tools to record and pass on the significant events of our life. Even when we do not get everything right, even when we ignore some things at the expense of others, we are there in ways that no one else can be, or will

be.

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Exploding the Canon of Journalism History

By James P. Danky ©



Danky

Jim Danky received the American Journalism Historians Association's 2019 Distinguished Service to Journalism History Award. It was only the fourth time the AJHA, which was founded in 1982, has given the award. Danky received it in recognition of a forty-year career with the Wisconsin Historical Society, during which time he was not only responsible for the preservation of the newspaper collection he inherited, a collection that is second in size only to that at the Library of Congress, but also for radically

increasing the scope of the Society's serial holdings in many new fields. The AJHA noted, "His achievements in the preservation of historic newspapers and other periodicals are exceptional, and perhaps no individual has ever done more than he to develop and preserve newspaper and periodical collections." He gave the following remarks when he accepted the award on October 3 at the AJHA's national conference in Dallas, Texas.

* * *

Good evening. First you must know how very honored I am to receive your Distinguished Service to Journalism History Award. When you have been retired for a considerable period, you don't expect such

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things. But this is lots of fun and I feel very grateful tonight. So first of all thanks to David Sloan, who plucked me out of our mutual journalism history past and organized the nomination. And thanks to Tom Mascaro, who guided the process, and to the friends who wrote in support.

I would like to take my brief time to make a few points about our field of journalism history.

In 1974 I published my first book, a bibliography of underground or alternative newspapers, the result of a fortuitous comment from my major professor at the University of Wisconsin when I submitted a virtuous but derivative idea for a term project, “why don’t you do something on those weird/bizarre newspapers you were talking about?” So I did. I had a graduate job at the Wisconsin Historical Society processing underground newspapers from all over the U.S. and Canada. I was in hog heaven, having been a reader of the *Los Angeles Free Press* since Art Kunkin founded it in 1964. The year before the Society’s Press published my book, I was hired full-time at the Society and had the good sense to never leave.

In *Undergrounds* I stated: “Any attempt to write the history of the United States (or even of many foreign countries) for the period 1965-1973 would be defective if it failed to make note of the ‘underground’ press.” Today I would remove the dates and suggest that historians need to consult the widest possible array of sources, including any and all possible journalism.

This is critical for a couple of reasons that should be self-evident to anyone who has been a journalist or studied journalism. First, every group should be allowed to speak for themselves. Their words, whenever possible, should be the ur-text for historians to incorporate into *their* narratives, whether in self-justification or to give them enough rope to hang themselves with.

This is the basis for authenticity, where we as historians do not rely on middlemen and women but instead convey the thoughts and actions

of those who were there, who participated, who saw, and who perhaps were arrested, and so forth.

In honoring my work you note the many bibliographies but also various books and articles that not only described obscure serials but also indicated how they might be employed in research. This is a charge I took up myself in examinations of German-American radicals and their press and especially in contributions to *The History of the Book in America* project.

That is the essence of how I spent my decades at work, asking students, faculty, and anyone else what they wanted to do and then trying to respond as if I were going to do the work myself. That led to the promotion of alternative publications with their often-unique perspectives, titles that my publics would not have found on their own. So it was not just acquiring the titles and providing access, it was promoting them to potential users.

I suspect some of you read the professional literature starting with the footnotes, of works where titles or authors catch your attention. I do. What sources did the author use to craft the story being told? Historical inquiries into race in Chicago, let's say, that quote only from the *Tribune* or *Sun Times* and not the *Defender* or the *Bee* will not receive a reading from me. The narrative is lopsided, with its emphasis on those with power, not those without. It really is that simple.

The starting point for my bibliography of African-American newspapers and periodicals was a question from a student, "How many African-American newspapers have been published?" There were answers; it's just that they were dated, or incomplete. So I went to work, and two decades later Harvard University Press published a very large volume in 1998.

In the decades I spent combing the country for titles, I regularly visited towns' public libraries, any bookstores in African-American neighborhoods, black newspaper offices, et cetera. This gave me an opportu-

nity to do an informal comparative analysis, especially with whatever daily newspaper was available (no, not *USA Today!*).

What I discovered, to no surprise, was a daunting and depressing similarity. In the white journalistic world there was positive news generated by the activities of whites, and crime, which was often focused on people of color. In the latter sets of predictable stories, the words of the police and courts and sometimes-civic leaders were quoted, but virtually never the community newspapers — black newspapers — that know these communities so much better.

In 1992 my birthplace, Los Angeles, was once again enflamed in a rebellion between police officers and African Americans. The dominant paper, the *Los Angeles Times*, had very few reporters and photographers who were black, who lived in South Central, or who had ties beyond the police there. For historians, there is a second chance provided by the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and other black newspapers, to get the perspective that only being part of a community can provide. This is the truth that my friend Patty Loew, now at Northwestern, related about her years in local television news. Colorize your Rolodex (remember those?); don't interview the same people over and over again. Simple advice but too little followed.

When Ron Paul ran for president the final time in 2008, he stressed his libertarian credentials but not the racist opinions that he shared earlier. Paul's campaign had put his various newsletters online, all of which were created as fund-raising tools, but not the earliest of them. Those were only available in a single library that had paid for subscriptions to each of the titles, the Wisconsin Historical Society. In those publications Paul expressed the racist thoughts that were too controversial to make available via the web. Librarians formerly would tout "access, not ownership," which is fine as long as someone owns it and can provide access.

The Wisconsin Historical Society has collected religious periodicals

since 1846. Our founder, Lyman Draper, was a Spiritualist; so there are many periodicals issued by groups that purported to communicate with the dead. When Reuben Gold Thwaites succeeded Draper, the collection of Congregationalist titles swelled, though the earlier emphasis remained. When I took over the collection in 1976 I faced a conundrum. The collection had many religious serials, mostly from mainline Protestant groups, and I had little interest in religion.

To fulfill that part of my duties I worked my way through publications like the *Handbook of American and Canadian Churches*, searching for overlooked periodicals. But I also reflected the changes in American society. “The New Religious Movements,” as they were termed: I sought out their serials for the collection. My friends and colleagues knew of my interests and would send me titles such as *People’s Temple News*, a single issue that showed First Lady Rosalind Carter on the cover with Jim Jones, that was the only known public copy for many years.

One of the most effective ways of building a research library collection is to read the incoming periodicals. Now I couldn’t read every issue of the 9,000 titles but rather used a selective process focusing on titles that listed other publications.

Sundays offered a collection-development opportunity as the family watched *60 Minutes*, which offered wonderful vistas into humans, including talking to people from groups I had not heard of, frequently citing their publications. The Sahara Club’s newsletter produced by off-road enthusiasts who wanted full access to our national parks. Groups of veterans suffering from Agent Orange exposure from their time in Vietnam. And on and on. Several times I would call CBS on the following Monday to ask for contact information in that pre-Internet era.

Rajneeshpuram was an intentional community in Wasco County, Oregon, briefly incorporated as a city in the 1980s and populated with followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who published *Rajneesh Times*, to which we subscribed alongside serials from Methodists, Catholics,

and, well, you get the idea.

The Rajneeshees were infamous for offering homeless people in Portland free lodging and food if they would move to far eastern Oregon, the other side of the state. The goal was to establish a municipal government the group would dominate. The bhagwan's legal problems, his multiple Rolls Royces notwithstanding, caused Rajneeshpuram to go out of business. But just before the end I telephoned, since we were missing some issues of their paper. In the course of talking to someone there I asked what they were going to do with the property, just making conversation. She said they hoped to sell it, to which I replied that I knew people who might be interested — neo-Nazis. I'm glad she had a sense of humor. I explained that a pair of neo-Nazi dry cleaners from The Dalles, Oregon, had dressed as homeless types to get into the Rajneesh compound. Why? Because as much as they were repelled by the eastern religious group, they wanted to understand and replicate their ability to organize. How did I know this? Because I read their periodical too, *NS Vanguard*, one of the most racist and anti-Semitic titles around.

I am very fortunate to have a spouse who is my designated *New Yorker* reader. It's not that I don't appreciate the text between the cartoons; it just comes down to a matter of time. So when my wife gave me a recent edition in 2003 and suggested that I would find it of interest, I stopped and read Peter Boyer's "The Jesus War" about Mel Gibson's controversial film about the crucifixion of Jesus for which he was accused of anti-Semitism.

As my eye reached the second page, she said, "Do you get it?" to which I replied, "No, but I will." The "it" was Mel's dad's self-published periodical *The War Is Now!* Begun in Australia, where Hutton Gibson took his large, Catholic, New York family after winning big on *Jeopardy*, Gibson wrote one of the longer-running anti-papal screeds around, a world where Jews were Christ Killers. When Hutton returned to the

U.S., the title became the perfect addition to a collection documenting religion in America.

With the help of local Texas librarians, I tracked down Hutton at the house of one of his daughters, and we had a series of fascinating conversations that resulted in him selling the Historical Society a nearly complete set of his periodical (he had cut up the first few issues for reuse in later ones). In one conversation he asked if I would be interested in the books he published. Of course I would. The books are more of his anti-Vatican II views of corruption in the Catholic Church; the cover of one tips the reader off to something, where a drawing by one of Mel Gibson's brothers shows an outline of Italy kicking the papal miter.

I immediately had the materials filmed (it would be digitized today) since I knew there would be interest in Mel Gibson's theological roots due to his father's antisemitism. There was an article in Wisconsin's largest daily, and the items were the basis for several articles in national periodicals tying the film Mel made to his father's work. It was most satisfying — since most collecting is usually redeemed only in the distant future.

My point is that to tell the real story of America you need to read a wide variety of sources, sources that need to be collected and preserved. That is the basis for good work in journalism history and much more.

Thank you.

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The Professional



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

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Middle East Journalism & Civil Society Before the Arab Spring: An Historiography

By Leonard Ray Teel ©



Teel

Developing a historiography has been essential to frame the book I am writing about journalism and civil society in the modern Middle East. I already had in-hand a wealth of primary sources, but for significance they needed context.

Those primary sources had been developed well before the Arab Spring in 2011. From 1999 to 2004, my Center for International Media Education at Georgia State University conducted workshops in which journalists paired with representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs). Together they wrote and published stories about CSO work to alleviate a host of social and economic problems. Those stories documented that early period in the rise of CSOs to address a host of unmet needs across the Arab world, notably in and around the five cities where the workshops were conducted — Cairo, Casablanca, Amman, Beirut, and Ramallah. The Arab journalists' stories became more significant for having documented the early rising of CSOs. Since the Arab Spring, international funding has expanded enormously — into millions of dollars — for CSO work across the region. In that context, the Arab journalists' stories evidence what was becoming an historic

Leonard Ray Teel, professor emeritus at Georgia State University, has published five books, including two journalism histories that won national awards. In 1995 he founded the Center for International Media Education and co-founded the Arab-U.S. Association for Communication Educators.

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movement mobilizing citizens for change across the region from Casablanca to Beirut. With those primary source stories in hand, I have now developed the appropriate background or context — the political, economic, religious, social, intellectual and aesthetic perspectives. Using all the sources together, I am able to establish understandable perspective and significance for the civil society movement in the context of Arab culture. Without such a perspective for the journalists' fine work, I would resemble the diligent but unfocused researcher whom Wayne Booth described in his book *The Craft of Research*: "Here's some research and here's some more."

PERSIA method. In classifying secondary sources for applicability to my work, I have used a method taught in graduate studies by Professor John A. Alexander, whose name is remembered annually when scholarships are awarded at Georgia State University. Alexander recommended organizing relevant sources by categorizing them in one of six descriptors of civilized activities: politics, economics, religion, society, intellect and aesthetics, easily remembered by the acronym PERSIA. Nearly all sources in this bibliography are categorized. The secondary sources were chosen to provide perspective on (1) the countries and groups related to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the Palestinian Territories, (2) the Middle East generally, and (3) specific topics related to the Middle East, most notably the arguments concerning Orientalism, generally applied to the study of the Arab and Islamic world.

A central book in writing about the Middle East has been Edward Said's *Orientalism*. First published in 1978 and reissued as a 25th anniversary edition in 2003, *Orientalism* has been the focus for continued controversy among historians of the Arab world. As such the book deserves special attention, pro and con.

In his 2003 preface, Said declared that it was "still a source of amazement to me that *Orientalism* continued to be discussed and translated all over the world, in thirty-six languages.... *Orientalism* is very

much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history.” And in the 2003 Afterword, Said asserted: “To those in the Arab and Islamic world who felt Western encroachment with anxiety and stress, it appeared to be the first book that gave a serious answer back to the West that had never actually listened to or forgiven the Oriental for being an Oriental.”¹

Said wrote that he hoped for fresh scholarship. “My idea in *Orientalism* is to use humanistic critique to open up fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange.”²

Long before 2003, Said, as University Professor at Columbia University, had often contradicted and discounted other established scholars of Arab affairs, most notably Dr. Bernard Lewis, the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University.

In Said’s 2003 preface, he resumed his dispute with Lewis, prompted by the U.S. invasion of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq with the avowed purpose to destroy weapons of mass destruction. Said traced the invasion strategy to Bernard Lewis and his colleagues, whom he termed “chicken-hawks” because they allied with military hawks. “The major influences on George W. Bush’s Pentagon and National Security Council were men such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, experts on the Arab and Islamic world who helped the American hawks think about such preposterous phenomena as the Arab mind and centuries-old Islamic decline that only American power could reverse.”³

By then, Said’s public dispute with Lewis had become monumental. As far back as 1982, four years after *Orientalism* was published, they exchanged attacks in a special issue of *The New York Review of Books*.

Said: “Insouciant, outrageous, arbitrary, false, absurd, astonishing, reckless—these are some of the words Bernard Lewis [NYR, June 24,

1982] uses to characterize what he interprets me as saying in Orientalism. ...Lewis' verbosity scarcely conceals both the ideological underpinnings of his position and his extraordinary capacity for getting things wrong. Of course, these are familiar underpinnings of the Orientalists' breed, some of whom have at least had the courage to be honest in their active degradation of Islamic, as well as other non-European peoples. Not Lewis."⁴

Lewis: "It is difficult to argue with a scream of rage.... I noted that while Said condemns British and French scholars for their lack of respect for Islam and links their efforts to imperial domination, he had nothing to say about Soviet scholars who are far worse offenders.... Perhaps the most remarkable is Said's answer to my charge that he had falsified and rearranged the history of the Middle East to bear the structure of a hypothesis that he wished to impose on it."⁵

This case of academic agitation over Orientalism is the most illustrative of other disputes over Middle East and Arab affairs that will be considered in the book.

What follows in the bibliography are citations of categorized primary and secondary sources which are expected to be of use as foreground and background in the writing of the book.

Finally, I thank Dr. David Sloan and the various other scholars with American Journalism Historians Association for all the opportunities and encouragement given me since 1984 in advancing my research and publications. I can envision you all as an ensemble looking over my shoulder and saying, "not bad; keep working."

NOTES

¹Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 335.

²*Ibid.*, xxii.

³*Ibid.*, xx.

⁴"Orientalism: An Exchange: Edward W. Said and Oleg Grabar, reply by Bernard Lewis." *The New York Review of Books*, 12 August 1982.

⁵*Ibid.*

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Historian Interview

Mike Conway ©



Conway
photo by Steve
Raymer

Mike Conway, one of today's leading historians of American broadcasting, is an associate professor at Indiana University. He's the author of the books *The Origins of Television News in America: The Visualizers of CBS in the 1940s* and *Contested Ground: The Tunnel and the Struggle over Television News in Cold War America*. He has been a finalist for the AEJMC Tankard Book Award and twice has won *American Journalism's* "Best Article of the Year" award. He is 2nd Vice President of the American Journalism Historians Association. He received his Ph.D. in mass communication at the University of Texas.

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

Conway: I was born and raised in Terre Haute, Indiana, the youngest of five children. My father, the late Dr. Thomas J. Conway, was a pediatrician in Terre Haute and helped set up the first neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in the state of Indiana, dramatically decreasing the infant mortality in the Wabash Valley. My mother, the late Mary Jo Conway, encouraged all of us to pursue whatever interests we had.

I stumbled into journalism as a senior in high school when I found

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out I could fulfill my English requirements with a journalism class. Our journalism teacher, Rose O'Neal, showed us the power and responsibility of journalism, even if it was just a high school paper. I then attended the Indiana University High School Journalism Institute (HSJI) to make sure I was interested in pursuing this path.

I followed two of my older brothers to Indiana University. At freshman orientation, a faculty advisor told me about the campus radio station, WIUS, where I volunteered for four years, serving as news director for two of those years. My love of broadcast news was instilled by my mentor at IU, legendary professor Richard Yoakam. During college, I also worked at WFIU, the Bloomington NPR affiliate, and at my hometown television station, WTHI in Terre Haute.

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

Conway: I spent more than fifteen years in local television news, working at stations in Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Kansas, and Pennsylvania. The first half of my career was on-air, working as a reporter, news anchor, sports anchor, and photojournalist. I then moved behind the scenes as a producer and news director.

In 1999, I moved to Austin, Texas to start my graduate studies at the University of Texas. In 2004, I graduated with my master's degree and Ph.D. and was hired as a research professor at Indiana University.

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

Conway: At the University of Texas and Indiana University, I have taught or assisted in 17 different courses. At Indiana University, I have taught journalism history courses, both on the undergraduate and graduate level. I also teach our journalism capstone course. I created a service-learning course with a local community radio station, WFHB, to

Historian Interview

give students experience in a non-profit news environment.

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?*

Conway: I have always been interested in history and tried to integrate it into my work as a television journalist. I was honored by the Erie, PA Historical Society for our station's efforts to tell stories about the city's history, through weekly reports and special series.

In graduate school, I first pursued quantitative research projects, working with Drs. Paula Poindexter, Maxwell McCombs, and James Tankard. Then I switched over to qualitative and historical research, under the direction of Drs. Don Heider, Kris Wilson, and Patrick Cox. My first graduate course was with Don Carleton, the Executive Director of the Briscoe Center for American History. Dr. Carleton had acquired an amazing collection of American broadcast news personal archives, which became the cornerstone of my first journalism history research.

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

Conway: Three of the books involving media history that first influenced my work were Carolyn Marvin's *When Old Technologies Were New*, Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone's *Form of News*, and James Baughman's *The Republic of Mass Culture*. Getting involved in the American Journalism Historians Association (AJHA) as a graduate student was a very important step for my history research. Journalism historians including Pat Washburn, Hazel Dicken-Garcia, Maurine Beasley, Michael Murray, David Copeland, and so many others provided guidance or encouragement along the way. At Indiana University, David

Nord has been a great mentor and colleague.

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

Conway: My journalism history research focuses on the mid-20th century in the United States, when radio and television became important platforms for journalism. The guiding principle of my research is that if we had a better, clearer understanding of issues and problems involved in the introduction of radio and television in the last century, we would be better prepared to handle the upheaval in twenty-first century journalism.

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

Conway: My first major project involved the early years of television news in the United States, roughly the 1940s, an era that had been dismissed or erased in journalism and broadcast history. The technology for recording a television program did not really exist until 1948, so I could not rely on historic broadcasts as a primary source. Instead, I had to scour archives around the country for documents and track down people involved in those newscasts and conduct oral history interviews. Since this research questioned the common story of Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite and others “inventing” TV news in the 1950s, I first faced rejection and skepticism at the conference and journal level, forcing me to find even more primary sources to convince the reviewers.

That project resulted in a few journal articles and finally a book, *The Origins of Television News in America: The Visualizers of CBS in the 1940s* (Peter Lang, 2009), part of David Copeland’s “Mediating

American History” series.

My next big project involved two main themes, the rise of television news in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, and the leadership and vision of Reuven Frank of NBC. Frank created and produced the *Huntley-Brinkley Report* and dozens of important documentaries. I had the privilege of doing a few oral history interviews with Mr. Frank before he died and knew he played a key role in the advancement of television news. Once again, I was stymied by the lack of primary sources. Even though the *Huntley-Brinkley Report, 1956-1970*, was the most popular journalism outlet in the country for most of those years, very few of those broadcasts were saved and/or available to academic researchers.

I finally settled on two key moments in Frank’s career, and in television news history. In 1962, he produced a documentary about a daring tunnel escape under the Berlin Wall. That project brought condemnation down on NBC, from both sides of the Iron Curtain, from the U.S. Government, and from print journalists, with most attacks happening before anyone had seen one frame of the film. The documentary, *The Tunnel*, was finally broadcast and it inspired Frank to write a memo to his staff on the unique role television can play in American journalism. That memo, affectionately known as “the bible,” became a touchstone for generations of television journalists at both the network and local level.

That work has resulted in my new book, *Contested Ground: The Tunnel and the Struggle over Television News in Cold War America* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), which comes out this month, November 2019.

My current project’s working title is *Television as New Media: A Reconsideration of an Emerging Technology*. I have been struck over the past decades by the enthusiasm by scholars and journalists about emerging technologies and what is often called “new media.” This con-

trasts sharply with the reaction when television was in its experimental phase and emerged as a mass medium. This project will use examples of people, programs, and trends in early television and reimagine them through the focus of the current research and discussion of “new media.”

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?

Conway: I am most proud of my efforts to put the history of television news under the lens of scholarly historical research. So much of American broadcast news history is comprised of anecdotes and individual events, often written by people who had a stake in how they were going to be remembered in history. Serious scholarship is needed to help us understand the broadcast era in American journalism, which spans most of the last century and continues to today.

As a former television news journalist, I also push to get my research beyond the academic circles and into the journalism community. I resist the academic language and practices that keep our work hidden from the people who might be most interested in what we have found.

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

Conway: I can’t think what I would do differently. My decades in broadcast journalism gave me insight into how the industry works, and I believe that experience helped me gain the trust of journalists that I wanted to interview for my research as well as understand the documents I found in personal and company archives.

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.*

Conway: I’ve always felt that many of us who started in journalism and then became research professors gravitate to historical research because the work is similar. We have ideas or questions and then start tracking down the evidence we can find to help understand the issue. I know as a television journalist, I never had the time to do the amount of historical research I wanted to on most stories, especially in the pre-internet era.

I don’t know that I have a specific “philosophy.” I consider the arguments and check to see if the primary sources support that argument. Like most people, I do tend to gravitate to research that is written in a compelling manner and doesn’t try to hide behind academic jargon. I also look for historical research that questions what we thought we knew about a topic, as long as the primary sources are there to support that approach.

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

Conway: I’ve been quite vocal about the need for serious scholarship on radio and television news history. A few years ago, I published an essay in *American Journalism*, “The Ghost of Television News in Media History Scholarship,” that looked at the decades of research published in our two journalism history journals. Even in studies set in the past half-century when television news was clearly the most popular form of journalism in the United States, fewer than ten percent of the published articles involved radio or television news. Journalism historians still seem fixated on the printed (or digital) word, even when its impact

on the public has been diminished.

I am encouraged in recent years by new research in broadcast history. At the recent AJHA convention, a panel involving recent winners of the best article award in *American Journalism* happened to all involve broadcasting in some form.

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?*

Conway: *Classroom:* This is a serious problem and one that is difficult to solve. I think universities with a strong journalism history tradition have a better chance of holding onto the courses that are already part of the curriculum than those of us trying to protect elective courses or even add courses to the curriculum. Journalism programs seem under even more pressure to offer skills courses. Everyone agrees on the importance of a broader liberal arts education and a wider understanding of media, but when it comes down to the courses a student has to take to graduate, history gets pushed to the side.

Wider Field of History: This doesn't concern me as much because the lack of respect from History Departments seems to consist mostly of turf battles and lack of understanding of the work involved. I've personally found that friends and colleagues in History departments don't see any differences when they know your work.

I think, in both cases, journalism historians need to promote and defend their work any way possible. Since many of us are former journalists, we should be able to get our work noticed both inside the academic community and in the wider world of journalism. We need to make sure our journalism history courses are interesting and convince the students of the importance of studying the past to understand today.

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Book Award Interview

By Richard R. John ©



John

Richard John received the 2011 AEJMC History Division's award for the best book of the year for his *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications*. The book also won the first Ralph Gomory Book Prize from the Business History Conference. He specializes in the history of business, technology, communications, and American political development. He teaches in Columbia University's Ph.D. program in communications and is a member of the core faculty of Columbia's history department,

where he teaches courses on the history of capitalism and the history of communications. He has a Ph.D. in the history of American civilization, from Harvard University.

Q: Give us a brief summary of your book.

John: *Network Nation* is a history of an epochal media innovation — the popularization, for the first time in the history of the United States, and, arguably, the world — of an electrical communications network as a mass service for the entire population. This network — the archipelago of telephone operating companies that linked the nation's largest cities, as well as thousands of its towns and a large swath of the rural hinter-

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land — was re-envisioned around 1900 as a mass service for short-distance (mostly intracity and local) communications. The most innovative of these operating companies were located in the nation's largest cities (e.g. Chicago and New York City) and were affiliated with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (then popularly known as Bell, and today known as AT&T). Also important in certain localities were independent (or non-Bell) operating companies. The independents competed with Bell in many markets until 1907, when, as a result of a speculative bubble that was exacerbated by the Panic of 1907, they suffered a crippling defeat. Following the acquisition by Bell of a large financial stake in Western Union in 1909, Bell managers reconfigured the telegraph to provide a comparable service for long-distance (including nationwide, but not international) telegraphy. "Universal service" referred to this hybrid low-cost telephone-telegraph service, which the US Justice Department declared illegal in 1913. The later history of this concept has obscured its origins: "universal service" did not originally refer to low-cost long-distance telephone service, though it did embrace the idea of low-cost short-distance telephone service inside cities and towns and their immediate hinterland. The vast majority of telephone calls in this period were local: the average distance of a telephone call originating in Chicago in 1900 was only 3.4 miles.

The popularization of the telephone was hastened not only by telephone managers, but also by telephone users, social scientists, and government officials at the municipal, state, and federal level. More basically it was shaped by the political economy in which telephone network providers operated. This political economy was progressive, in the sense that lawmakers presumed that the service that (the often quite literally) entrenched network providers operated promoted the public good. The telegraph, in contrast, was commercialized in an antimonopoly political economy that presumed that the public good was best served by competition between rival network providers. The antimo-

nopoly political economy fostered innovation — e.g. the telephone, the phonograph, and sound recording — but was not intended to, and did not, result in the popularization of telegraphy.

The phrase “network nation” is a metaphor. It is meant to highlight the extent to which the evolution of telegraph and telephone networks were shaped by governmental institutions and civic ideals. In addition, it draws attention to the cultural power of the identification of these networks with the nation — an identification that has long been a source of fascination — and misunderstanding. (Consider, for example, the exaggerated significance that many media historians and social scientists have assigned to the completion of the first transcontinental telephone link in 1915.) The phrase “network nation” is not meant to imply that the federal government was the only or even the most important regulatory forum. The telegraph network was regulated first at the federal and then at the state level. The telephone network was regulated first at the federal and municipal level, and later at the municipal, state, and federal level.

The term “telecommunications,” it might be added, would not be used in the United States until the 1930s: I put it in my title as a matter of convenience. Indeed, one might argue that the 1913 consent decree that led to divestiture by Bell of its newly acquired telegraph network marked the end not only of “universal service,” but also of the vision of telecommunications as a united telephone-telegraph-network as had been articulated by the French postal official who had invented the neologism “telecommunications” in 1904.

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

John: The project that became *Network Nation* originated in 1998-99, when I had the privilege to spend a year as a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D. C. Having

recently completed a history of the early American postal system, I was intrigued by the challenge of telling the story of American telecommunications in relationship to developments that it *followed*, rather than to those it *preceded*. The final years of the last millennium were abuzz with portentous pronouncements about the coming “information age,” and, frankly, I was skeptical of all the hype. This supercharged media landscape helped to attune me to the considerable role that advertising and public relations campaigns had played in publicizing an earlier generation of media innovations. I became particularly skeptical of the claims advanced by Bell publicists — who had successfully convinced several generations of media historians, social scientists, and network critics that Bell’s supposed triumph over its rivals in the early twentieth century was due to its superior long-distance network. This claim cannot withstand close scrutiny, yet it was then, and to large extent remains today, a staple of academic and popular writing on the history of American telecommunications.

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?*

John: *Network Nation* took a decade to research and write. It takes the form of a monograph that is based on a comprehensive investigation of the relevant primary sources. These included the business records of Western Union, American Telephone and Telegraph, and the Bell and non-Bell operating companies; legal records (including in particular the records of Sidley Austin, counsel for the Chicago Telephony Company); the personal and public papers of inventors, promoters, network critics, and government officials; the archives of the Chicago City Council and the U. S. Justice Department; the trade press (which proved invaluable); the popular press; published government documents at the fed-

eral, state, and municipal level (including laws, regulations, hearings, and court cases); and the pamphlet and social scientific literature. One of the most remarkable collections that I mined were the business records of the dozens of Bell and non-Bell telephone companies that are maintained by AT&T in its San Antonio archive. This archive complements — and in many ways serves as a corrective to — the more familiar archive maintained by AT&T in Warren, New Jersey. For too long media historians have relied on the Warren, New Jersey, archive, which, while invaluable for many purposes, provides an extremely limited and distorted view of the actual operation of telephone operating companies in their formative period.

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

John: I have never been able to locate the business records of the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company (the original Bell licensee in New York City) or its successor, the New York Telephone Company. I have been told on various occasions that these records are somewhere in White Plains — but have not been able to determine where. If they have survived, they would be an invaluable resource for future historians of American telecommunications. In addition, I did not have the opportunity to work in the large collection of telephone operating company records that are located at the Telecommunications History Archives in Denver, Colorado.

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

John: Media historians often reiterate claims that were originally advanced by corporate public relations flacks to promote a specific agen-

da.

There is, for example, no good reason to call the 1913 consent decree that ended the first anti-Bell telephone antitrust suit the “Kingsbury Commitment.” This bit of terminology has promoted a Bell-centric view of the first great media antitrust suit and has downplayed the extent to which the resulting settlement was a major defeat for Bell.

Media historians should also recognize that the users of new media have interests of their own. In the case of the telephone, for example, these interests sometimes opposed the expansion of the network. In addition, media historians should be wary of the self-serving claims that have been advanced on behalf of inventors, insurgent network providers, and financiers. The only way to avoid being misled is to read widely in the sources; to pay special attention to personal correspondence (which is often franker than public pronouncements); and, in particular, to the trade press. Journalists who cover a “beat” for a living are often better informed about events on the ground than almost anyone else. To be sure, journalists have their biases — but they are rarely as self-interested as inventors, network critics, or corporate public relations departments. Relying on the secondary literature is of course in many instances inevitable. Yet media scholars should be wary of books that, like Tim Wu’s *Master Switch*, do little more than regurgitate the self-interested talking points of inventors, network critics, and corporate publicists.

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

John: The sheer magnitude of the source base was almost overwhelming, as was the challenge, early on, of obtaining access to the records of telephone operating companies. Digital keyword searches, of course, pose various problems, but they do generate a mass of material that media historians might otherwise have dismissed as falling outside of

the scope of their project.

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?*

John: Media historians should be wary not only of uncritically repeating public relations boilerplate, but also of unconsciously adopting the perspective of inventors, network critics, and users. It is far more important to understand how a communications network evolved out of an *earlier* network than to compare it to networks that it preceded. Literary critics champion what they call a “hermeneutics of suspicion.” Media historians would do well to follow their lead. Facile comparisons — such as, for example, between flat rate internet access in the 1990s and flat rate telephone service in the 1890s — pose a particular peril, since media historians often lack the “soak time” in the archives to interpret correctly engineering reports that date back many decades.

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

John: *Network Nation* reminds us (building on and gently critiquing the foundational work of STS scholar Langdon Winner) that politics have artifacts, as well as the other way around, and that the political structure in which a communications network evolves can profoundly shape its business strategy (an elaboration and critique of a central insight of the magisterial business historian Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., who famously contended that business strategy shaped corporate structure). In addition, it shifts our attention from well-known inventors, such as Samuel F. B. Morse and Alexander Graham Bell, to a much larger constellation of actors, who include network critics, business managers, lawmakers, social scientists, and journalists.

Q: What findings most surprised you?

John: When I began my project, I believed, like virtually everyone who had written about the formative era of American telephony, that Bell president Theodore N. Vail was a critical figure in the emergence of the twentieth-century Bell System. Vail *was* important, and not only because many of his managerial innovations at Bell built on his previous experience in the 1870s as the superintendent of the Railway Mail Service of the U.S. Post Office Department. Yet Vail played a far less central role in the popularization of the telephone (my main interest) than is often assumed.

I did not come to this conclusion all at once. In fact, it took me several years of research to discover that the key innovations in the popularization of the telephone preceded Vail's return to Bell in 1907, and that they had virtually nothing to do either with Bell's much-hyped transcontinental telephone network (long a money loser) or the supposedly nefarious machinations of financier J. P. Morgan. The real action originated in the Bell-affiliated operating companies in the big cities during the 1890s — a decade in which Vail was in Latin America working on projects unrelated to telephony. The full significance of the fact that hundreds of thousands of Chicago boarding houses and private residences relied for many years on a pay as you go “nickel-in-the-slot” telephone instruments (a device that resembled a modern pay telephone) took me some time to digest. I found this innovation to be so unexpected that I sought out the testimony of Chicagoans who remembered how they worked.

I was also surprised to discover that there is virtually no evidence for the common claim that women invented telephone sociability — a claim that seems to have originated in a campaign by telephone managers to deflect attention away from the propensity of male office clerks to clog the telephone network by gossiping about the latest sports

results. Men and not women invented telephone sociability, at least in Chicago in New York City. The assertion that women invented telephone sociability has been so often repeated by sociologists and historians that no one has bothered to return to the sources to see if it was true. I am convinced, based on the mass of materials that I have consulted, that it cannot withstand close scrutiny. The telephone was re-envisioned in Chicago and New York City in the 1890s as a mass service; women telephone users figured little in this epochal development.

I also found startling the existence of scattered (though very persuasive) evidence documenting Samuel Morse's unrequited love for Anne Ellsworth. This is intriguing, since Anne was not only the daughter of patent commissioner Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, but also the person credited with the first telegraph message "What Hath God Wrought." I spent a good deal of time trying, unsuccessfully, to learn more about the Morse-Ellsworth connection: Anne Ellsworth had various chaperones, but none of them left a written record of her feelings toward her much older suitor. Nothing from her own hand in this period has survived — so far as I have been able to determine. I would be eager to learn more about Anne Ellsworth — I have found hints in the popular press that the memory of her relationship with Morse lived on in France.

While I am on this subject, I have long been intrigued by the likelihood that the two most consequential telegraph and telephone patents were dowries. Ellsworth knew about Morse's infatuation with his daughter Anne, and, thus, was aware that the very expansive patent rights he granted Morse might work to his family's benefit, while Gardiner Greene Hubbard (the telephone promoter who helped shepherd Bell's patent through the patent office) was unquestionably intent on building a nice nest egg for his daughter, Mabel, who, as is well known, would marry telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell.

Q: Are there any misconceptions about *Network Nation* that you would like to address?

John: I have been gratified by the very favorable reception that *Network Nation* has received in the popular and academic press. Two reviews, however, puzzle me. In one, it was contended that I neglected telephone users. I am mystified by this claim, since, in fact, I wrote extensively in *Network Nation* not only about the myriad anti-Bell telephone user strikes in the 1880s — a topic almost entirely neglected by previous historians, in large part because it was downplayed by Bell-centric publicists — but also about the support telephone users gave to the Chicago Telephone Company in 1906, when the renewal of its franchise became a public issue. The title of chapter 7, “Telephomania,” drew attention to the frustration of telephone operating company manager Charles N. Fay with his users. Chapter 8 — “Second Nature” — shows how Fay’s successor, Angus Hibbard, popularized the telephone in Chicago around 1900. If media historians were able to fit only one chapter of *Network Nation* onto their syllabus, it might well be this one. True, I did not write specifically about the agency of female telephone users, but this is because I found little evidence that they were important in the initial popularization of the telephone, which I date to the 1890s.

The second review that puzzled me implied that I “love” monopoly. This is an odd criticism, but a fruitful one, since it gets to the heart of the question I was trying to answer. My book was animated by my conviction that it is a worthy goal to make the fruits of invention accessible to all. In my reading of the evidence, this goal was largely attained by Bell — in conjunction with its independent rivals — by 1907 — with many of the key events occurring in the nation’s largest cities (e.g. Chicago and New York City) in the 1890s. In the subsequent decade, lawmakers and network critics mounted a serious (though today mostly forgotten)

political campaign to nationalize the telephone and telegraph. One result of this campaign was the invention in the 1910s of corporate public relations, which Bell managers pioneered to beat back the call for Bell's nationalization — a topic that Roland Marchand wrote about brilliantly in *Creating the Corporate Soul*. I wrote as dispassionately as I could about this campaign, and its result — the legitimation of the Bell System as a managerial enterprise — a development that hastened the ascendancy in the United States of the corporate order that the business historian Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. (my mentor) termed “managerial capitalism.”

For the record, I do not regard myself as a lover of monopoly: in fact, I am currently writing a history of the antimonopoly tradition in the United States from the Enlightenment to the present. Rather, I tried to set the record straight. Toward this end, it is important to underscore that the key regulatory contest in this period pitted defenders of *two kinds* of regulated monopoly — the first was a government owned and, presumably, a government operated monopoly, and the second was a government regulated monopoly. No one proposed the atomization of the telephone network in 1913 — a fact that may provide a perspective on the revival of the antimonopoly movement today. The separation of the telephone and telegraph network was, of course, a goal in 1913 — and this goal was, it is perhaps worth repeating, one that federal lawmakers attained.

The primary alternative to the 1913 consent decree ending the antitrust suit against Bell that had been launched by attorney general James C. McReynolds (a consent decree that is most accurately termed the “McReynolds settlement” — and *not* the “Kingsbury Commitment,” a Bell public relations coup that media historians have uncritically embraced) was the nationalization of the telephone network — an outcome that would have aligned telephone and telegraph regulation in the United States with telephone and telegraph regulation in Great

Britain, France, and much of the rest of the world. Whether such an outcome would have better promoted the public good than the Bell System is of course a historical imponderable. Historians, of course, cannot run controlled experiments. But I remain very impressed by the creativity of Bell Labs — which were established in 1925 as a direct result of the cartelization of the telephone network — and regard it as an open question as to whether the federal government could have matched its record.

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

John: Sound historical scholarship on a plethora of media-history topics is in short supply. Write for readers who will not find their way to your publication at least a decade after it first appears in print; this will help you to avoid the temptation to strain for relevance. Nothing dates historical writing more rapidly than a narrowly presentist agenda.

Appreciate the magnitude of the task and the obligation you have not only to your readers but also to the historical actors whose lives you are recovering. Respect the fact that your protagonists might well have different priorities than you might have assumed, or wished for, and try to figure out what these priorities were. Do your best to understand the constraints that your protagonists confronted. Consult the secondary literature, devise a feasible research strategy, and collaborate with other media historians who are working on related topics. Read widely in primary sources — including the trade press — and avoid making facile assumptions linking past and present. Your topic is important on its own terms — don't feel a need to make it hip. Future readers, if you are lucky, will be grateful.

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