

# *Historiography*

in Mass Communication



Volume 5 (2019). Number 4

# *Historiography in Mass Communication*

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### Contents

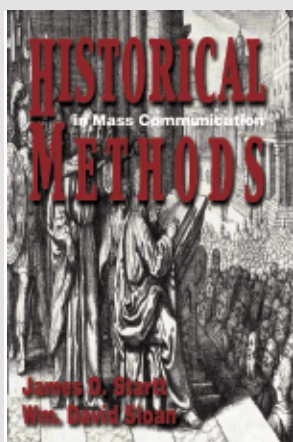
- From the Editor: "Accuracy, Truth, and Historical Explanation" page 1
- James D. Startt, "Psychology in History" page 5
- Historical Roundtable, "Media Ethics Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" page 11  
John Ferré, Thomas Bivins, Sandra Borden, and Stephen Ward
- Historian Interview: David W. Bulla page 25
- Book Award Interview: Carolyn Edy, *The Woman War Correspondent, the U.S. Military, and the Press: 1846-1947* page 37

After you download the pdf of this issue, you can go directly  
to an article by clicking on its title.

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# Accuracy, Truth, and Historical Explanation

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

When I was a senior in college, I was editor of the newspaper in the local town. Being 21 years old, I naturally knew the solutions to all the world's problems. And I would explain them in a long column every week.

After a column I thought was particularly astute, my brother, a graduate English major, pointed out that I had misspelled a word. "It's not *inconsequential*," he lectured me. "It is *inconsequential*."

"It's just one letter," I replied.

"But, David, if your readers can't trust you to spell correctly, why do you think they will trust you when you try to explain an issue — which is, after all, much more difficult to do than to spell correctly?"

That's a lesson that has stuck with me. It was true when I was an undergrad, and it remains true today. It is true no matter the discipline — whether it is English or journalism or *history*. If the historian can't get the facts right, why should readers have confidence in his or her explanations? Facts are easy to ascertain. Any sophomore journalism student should be able to report them without error. But explanations are complicated.

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The difference is between accuracy and truth. They are related but easily distinguishable. Truth is more complex than accuracy. Accuracy is factual. Truth is moral. One can have accuracy without truth, but one cannot have truth without accuracy.

It's easy to provide glib explanations if one doesn't have to worry about facts — but in order to provide truthful explanation one must have factual accuracy. If a historian can't get the facts right, there's no reason to assume the explanation is right.

One can see the close connection between facts and explanation in, for example, a recent textbook. When *Publick Occurrences* was published in 1690 in Boston, the author tells students, the British king immediately suppressed it, and the issue planned for the following month did not appear.

Anyone who has paid any attention to the history of printing in colonial America knows better, knows that it was not the king but the Massachusetts governing council that banned *Publick Occurrences*. Every historian of the colonial press knows that, or at least should know it.

Even if our textbook author were not familiar with the historiography on the American colonial press, he at least could use common sense and only a slender knowledge of the colonial era to see that his statement is factually incorrect.

Let's ask, "How long did it take for a jet airplane to cross the Atlantic in 1690? How about a ship with an LM2500 General Electric gas turbine engine?"

Oh, I almost forgot. Jets and turbine engines weren't available in 1690.

So how long did it take a sailing ship to cross the Atlantic in 1690?

Answer: At least six weeks — and that's one way.

But once *Publick Occurrences* appeared on September 25, it was only four days before authorities suppressed it — certainly not enough

time for an official report to reach James II in London, for him to issue an order, and for the order to get back to Boston. That would be true even if a British ship were powered by a jet engine. By the way, just in case you're wondering, the transatlantic cable could not have carried James' order either. It was not laid until 1858.

With the author having made an error in understanding such basic conditions, how can we have confidence in any explanation he offers?

But being unfamiliar with a time period is just one reason a historian can make factual errors and offer flawed explanations. There are others. The use of *a priori* assumptions based on theory is one. The notions of Cultural and Critical Studies come to mind. Trying to apply non-historical suppositions to history is another. Most of us know this error from JMC philosophizers who present themselves as historians but who are more interested in general ideas than they are in history and who are not adequately trained in either philosophy or history.

The solution to factual inaccuracy and faulty explanation is for people who claim to be historians to understand historical methods and then to practice the highest — or even normal — standards of research.

Unfortunately, the field of mass communication historiography has a sizable number of people who want to be considered historians yet who ignore not only basic principles of history but instead actually propose anti-historical approaches. They're the ones who usually praise the work of other pseudo-historians who share their views. Fortunately, those people make up a minority of scholars in our field, but one still can find their attitude not only in textbooks but even in conference research papers and essays in our history journals.

That leaves one with the indelible impression that if we are looking for someone to blame for problems, we need to look at ourselves.

But not to end this observation on a bad note, let us remember that most of the people in our field who claim to be historians actually are pretty good at doing the job of historians. They realize that just because

a statement appears in a book, or a paper is presented at a conference, or an essay is published in a journal doesn't mean that it has its facts right or its explanation true.

In the effort to offer explanation, some historians have been attracted to the methods of psychology. In the first essay in this issue of our journal, Prof. Jim Startt, our field's leading expert on historical methodology, assesses the use of psychology in historical study. As he points out, the use of psychology raises a number of questions and, unless handled with care, poses several potential problems. Some of the concerns that historians have about the use of psychanalysis apply to other questionable grounds of explanations. For our roundtable, Prof. John Ferré, an authority on media ethics, has put together a discussion of the subject with three other preeminent ethics authorities: Tom Bivins, Sandra Borden, and Stephen Ward. For our interview with a historian, Prof. David Bulla graciously consented. He is an authority on the press of the American Civil War. Finally, for our interview with a book author, Prof. Carolyn Edy did the Q&A. Her book *The Woman War Correspondent, the U.S. Military, and the Press: 1846-1947* was a runner-up in 2018 for the award for the best book of the year given by the American Journalism Historians Association. We trust you will find this issue of *Historiography in Mass Communication* worth your time.

[CLICK HERE  
TO RETURN  
TO THE TABLE  
OF CONTENTS](#)



# Psychology in History

By James D. Startt ©



Startt

If the goal of writing mass communication history is to write good history, then one must be broadly informed about the various dimensions of the subject. Historians may have to stray into divisions of knowledge related to history but in many respects different from history. How far and in what manner should they travel along these lines?

Let's consider the use that some historians wish to make of psychoanalysis, a methodological challenge that, beginning mainly in the 1950s, called into question norms associated with the practice of history.

The desire to probe into the mind and behavior of individuals and groups in the past has been alive in history since the days of its inception in ancient Greece. So it might be reasoned that some form of psychological thinking has long been alive in historical inquiry.

What historians have come to call psychohistory, however, goes beyond the limits of the more informal previous use of psychological generalization because it is a response to the development of psychology as a modern field of behavioral research. It also reflects the inten-

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tion, which can be traced back to the nineteenth century, of some historians to make historical inquiry more scientific in nature. Since many people today consider whatever is “scientific” to have a high degree of objectivity and intellectual sophistication, one can understand the desire to use science to increase the accuracy and truth of history. In his much heralded presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1957, William L. Langer encouraged historians to deepen their understanding by exploiting “the concepts of modern psychology,” by which he meant psychoanalytical thought and development.<sup>1</sup> Many decades have elapsed since Langer’s address, and during that time historians have revealed a heightened interest in psychoanalysis as a useful tool in their inquiries. The most notable use of psychoanalysis in communication history is Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform* (1955), which attempted to describe muckrakers of the early 1900s as motivated by “status anxiety.”

During this same time, apprehensions about applying psychoanalysis to history surfaced and could not be dismissed. Part of the reason is that a number of important psychological biographical studies, such as Erik H. Erikson’s *Young Man Luther* (1958) and Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt’s *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: Twenty-Eighth President of the United States: A Psychological Study* (1967), contained, in the judgment of many historians, serious flaws.<sup>2</sup> Even Hofstadter, one of the most prestigious American historians of his generation and an advocate of applying psychological analysis to history, was criticized for his handling of psychological theory in *The Age of Reform*.

The reasons why historians are apprehensive of psychohistory, however, go beyond criticism of particular works. They deal with perceived differences between psychology and history and the difficulties of applying the former to the latter. Communication historians should consider these apprehensions about psychohistory as well as the reasons for using it, for they frequently operate in an area of history that

calls for an illumination of personality, persuasion, and motivation. Their work often necessitates the ability to recapture the emotional edge of a historical moment; and, one must admit, in dealing with the mass communication practitioners of the past, they have more than their fair share of eccentric personalities to decipher.

Basic to historians' uneasiness regarding the practice of psychohistory are concerns about approach and evidence. To begin with, they tend to suspect that a psychological approach to history imposes prefixed theories on human actions in the past. Thomas A. Kohut, a scholar trained both in history and psychology, in an examination of this question observed: "... the psychohistorical method relies on theory, particularly psychoanalytic theory, to provide understanding and explanation. Figures and events from the past are not comprehended or made comprehensible on their own terms but are understood and explained primarily by psychological theory. Too often, when employing the psychohistorical method, the historian comes to the past with an understanding and explanation already in hand; the understanding and explanation do not emerge from the past itself but are the products of a theoretical model."<sup>3</sup>

Traditional historians are no strangers to theoretical thought about the past. Most historians have ideas in mind about and possible answers to questions they intend to pursue when they approach their investigations. Furthermore, they approach their study with an awareness of the modes of thought of their own society. They should not, however, seek to impose a theoretical model on the past. They believe that, to the greatest degree possible, history should be allowed to speak for itself. Accordingly, historians are committed to understanding particular events and figures of the past on their own terms. The application of psychological theory to past experiences can mar historical explanation since to be historical an account must emerge from the evidence of the past itself.

Beyond these considerations about approach there is the matter of causation to consider. Historians tend to see particular experiences of the past in their full complexity and usually depend on a mixture of motives to explain human action. Psychological interpretations can suggest an unhistorical reductionism in causative explanations. Or, as scholars such as Jacques Barzun suggest, they may place too much emphasis on tracing the behavior of adulthood to the circumstances of one's youth.<sup>4</sup> The matter of causation in history logically leads away from such tendencies and toward hard evidence.

The question of evidence in psychohistory involves several considerations. Again there is the problem of psychoanalytic theory to confront. Historians use evidence of the past, but, as Kohut once again cautioned, "psychohistorians, when they rely on theory, also accept evidence from the present to validate their interpretations."<sup>5</sup> Their theories, he noted, are normally derived from contemporary evidence rather than from past evidence. His observations — and they are not those of a detractor of psychohistory — deserve close attention, since evidence lies at the core of historical inquiry.

Some historians believe that every age is unique. Conditions of one time are never repeated. Therefore, ideas and theories fashioned under the conditions of one time may be erroneous when applied to those of another. Surely it would be careless to suppose that people in the past were the same psychologically as people are today or will be in future generations. Their psychological responses to fear, anxiety, and suffering were influenced by a variety of social and cultural realities that were particular to their day.

A number of recent studies have shown that human behavior has changed over time. They underscore the credence of the traditionalist historian's concern about the autonomy of a past period. But is that autonomy complete? It is difficult to quarrel with the conclusion of Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns that psychohistorians need to pay

greater attention to the fact of “change in emotional behavior over time ... while admitting that certain psychological findings probably do describe human realities that may be immune to change.” To that they add: “After all, we are animals with biological constraints; it is curious that many historians and social scientists have ignored biological factors in their studies of emotion.”<sup>6</sup> Current treatment of mental disorders, which is based on medicine as well as on therapy, tends to confirm their point.

Moreover, it would be reckless to assume that the record of the past with which the historian normally works is similar to that which psychoanalysts handle in the routine of their work. The clinical relationship is missing. The historical “patients” cannot be questioned, and the records they leave behind are far from complete. In many cases those records are spotty. Perhaps they were randomly kept in the first place. Or, perhaps they were carefully chosen for posterity. Consequently, although the psychohistorical method may be a valuable tool, it has limitations.

Nevertheless, within limits, historians have come to appreciate psychoanalysis as useful in probing human conduct in the past. They agree that it is not the one and only tool, that it must be substantiated by sufficient historical evidence, that what it produces must be placed in realistic perspective, that the psychoanalytic interpretation is simply an interpretation that might help to explain a particular past human action, and that the lack of psychoanalytic training is a problem for most historians. Still, the reasons for accepting properly applied psychoanalytical thought as a tool of historical inquiry are compelling. Historians, after all, are interested in human behavior, in human motivation and reaction. They should prepare themselves to understand these things as sharply as they can. Suppose, for instance, in the course of a study they become convinced that a person in that study was mentally ill. Knowledge of psychoanalytic explanations of mental illness would

be useful in such cases.

But beyond that type of extreme instance, psychological generalization can help the historian to elucidate past human behavior. Historians are not interested, as a practicing clinician would be, in the proper treatment for the patient. Rather they are interested in understanding human action and reaction in the past and describing it with sophisticated accuracy in their explanations. Feelings and emotions were realities in a given past human episode and must be understood in their fullness.

Regarding the traditionalist's concern about the use of psychological theory in history, current literature on historical methodology suggests two conclusions. First, it is not a tool for all historians to use. Second, those who decide to use it need to understand it and should consider it only one of the methods they employ in their scholarship and as one of the factors to consider for purposes of explaining thoroughly examined historical material.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> William L. Langer, "The Next Assignment," *American Historical Review* 63 (January 1958): 284.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of the many reviews on the Freud and Bullitt study of Wilson, see A.J.P. Taylor, "Silliness in Excelsis," *New Statesman*, May 1967, pp. 653-54. Erikson's study of Luther received considerable criticism from historians, though the more thoughtful of their critiques also recognized Erikson's achievement. See, for instance, Roland H. Bainton, "Psychiatry and History: An Examination of Erikson's Young Man Luther," and Lewis W. Spitz, "Psychohistory and History: The Case of Young Man Luther," in Roger A. Johnson, ed., *Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of Young Man Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 19-88.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas A. Kohut, "Psychohistory as History," *American Historical Review* 91 (April 1986): 337-38.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 72-73.

<sup>5</sup> Kohut, "Psychohistory as History," 337-38.

<sup>6</sup> Peter N. Stearns with Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History and Emotions of Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90 (October 1985): 824.

# Historical Roundtable: Media Ethics Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

By John P. Ferré, Thomas H. Bivins,  
Sandra L. Borden, and Stephen J. A. Ward



Ferré

The ethics of news reporting has been a concern in the United States at least since the Progressive Era, when newly formed schools of journalism taught professional standards and the American Society of Newspaper Editors adopted its Canons of Journalism. But reflection over the history of journalism ethics is much more recent. Arguably, it began with *Four Theories of the Press* by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm and Schramm's follow-up volume, *Responsibility of Mass Communication*, broad treatments of historical ways of thinking about journalism in society. But not until the 1970s did scholars begin to examine the history of journalism ethics as such. The first was Harvey Saalberg, who wrote "The Canons of Journalism: A 50-Year Perspective" for *Journalism Quarterly* in 1973. Clifford G. Christians followed in 1974 with the *Journal of Communication* article, "Fifty Years of Scholarship in Media Ethics." That same year, Lee Brown published *The Reluctant Reformation: On Criticizing the Press in America*. These three works would influence how a generation of scholars contextualized journalism ethics.

Now, a half century later, three preeminent journalism ethics scholars reflect on the history of their field. Their previous work has examined key issues and concepts in the history of American news

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reporting and public relations. Sandra Borden's subjects have included *The Catholic Worker*, Janet Cooke, and feature films about journalists. Stephen Ward has grappled with objectivity, technology, and globalism. And Thomas Bivins' work on public relations has focused on professionalism, education, and particular crises. In this roundtable, Bivins, Borden, and Ward consider the state of historical research in journalism ethics.

**Ferré:** *What is the value of studying the history of media ethics? What can a student of media ethics today learn by reading about media ethics from a previous generation? How do cases of media ethics from the past speak to the current media landscape?*



Bivins



Borden



Ward

**Borden:** It is tempting to dismiss “classic” cases and “old” media ethics problems as being irrelevant to today’s rapidly changing media ecology. But it is important for media practices to pass down their traditions, to piece together the normative content of those tradi-

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Sandra L. Borden is the Director of the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society at Western Michigan University. Her books include *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics and the Press*.

Stephen J. A. Ward, Distinguished Lecturer of Ethics at the University of British Columbia, has written *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond* and other books.



tions, to examine the continued relevance of precedents and role responsibilities, and to have some grounds (on the basis of the actual record) for deciding when an ethical problem is truly “unprecedented” or requires a radical break from the past. All these tasks require us to study the history of media ethics.

The history of media ethics can provide a critical lens. It can help us trace the influence of certain ideas in the present, or even come to see how certain historical narratives may have been distorted or oppressive in hindsight. Especially with systemic ethical problems, it can be important to reconstruct the past so that we understand “how we got here.”

Indeed, to be reflective at all necessitates being able to look backwards. To draw meaning from events and decisions, one has to revisit them. Without remembering the past, we cannot lay down plans either for meaningful reform or for meaningful recommitment to enduring ideals.

**Ward:** There are both conceptual and pragmatic reasons. Pragmatically, understanding how our fundamental principles came to be helps us evaluate their worth today. We see analogies between past and current issues, and proposed solutions. However, I think the conceptual reasons are equally, or more, important: The historical study of ethics widens and deepens our understanding; we are no longer working from a narrow place in the present, closeted within our culture.

Ethical thinking is thinking in time. We realize it is a thinking that could have turned out differently and could change tomorrow. Our current norms are fallible, revisable. Historical research not only broadens our understanding of the past, it nurtures creative thinking and reimagining of the future. In the past we find resources — ideas, traditions — for developing new conceptions. We gain new insights by which to revise media ethics. We tap into the collective history and ex-

perience of our species.

Ethics as history is a bulwark against dogmatism and a support for pluralism. To take history seriously means we are ready to look at the mental “tools” (or concepts) we use today with a critical eye, and to ask whether other tools may be more adequate. Ethics as history opens the mind to reform.

**Bivins:** It is natural to study media historically. After all, it is media that have recorded the past — in words and images from writing to printing, from electrical to digital. Studying history of any kind reminds us of who we were, where we were, and how we got to where we are now.

It is important to remember that ethics are, at base, a human response to life among other humans. Studying the history of media ethics can tell us not only how far we have come technologically and socially, but also how far (or not) we have progressed in our moral responses to the world we live in. And, since all stories are told within the context of culture, we should be able to discern the physical media landscape, its effect on the culture in that time, and the moral atmosphere reacting to the resultant changes. For example, who was left out of the territory of access when printing was invented? The same can be asked in this digital age.

***Ferré:** In what significant ways does the history of media ethics differ from the history of media?*

**Borden:** Media technologies, business models, divisions of labor, conventions for labeling images, and any number of other things could be studied under the heading of “history of media.” Media ethics, however, studies the obligations of media practitioners and media owners, the ends they pursue, the stakeholders they are morally accountable to, and the good or bad that results from their efforts. In short, media eth-

ics is inherently normative — striving to evaluate and prescribe, not merely to describe and explain. The history of media ethics traces not just ideas, but ideals, and makes careful judgments about which ones merit our approval.

For example, one could chart how many television shows in history have focused on people experiencing poverty and relate the rise and fall of such shows to various social, ideological, political, and economic factors. Such a story would surely help us better understand why such shows have (or have not) existed and perhaps with what effects. But a history of the ethics of TV would ask whether such patterns were just, whether the portrayals were truthful, whether they harmed the dignity of those experiencing poverty, or caused other injuries of moral significance. And a history of media ethics would fast forward to today and try to understand to what degree such ethical questions continue to be relevant and make recommendations for addressing them.

**Ward:** In the history of media ethics, we are primarily focused on the development of normative ideas across time. This goes beyond the empirical description of an era. Economists, sociologists, political scientists, and researchers in the humanities — all can trace the history of media. And in so doing they may note ethical issues. But, in most cases, that is not their focus, nor do they use ethical methodology and reasoning to evaluate positions. In contrast, the history of media ethics makes these normative questions its focus.

For example, many people write today about the advent of globalization of media. They study how technology has created a global media system, they study its effects on culture, the economy, and so on. This study is, in the main, not focused on discussion of the ethical issues, values and problems that are raised by globalization, nor is the aim to propose certain ethical principles to deal with globalization's impact. Nor do such studies seek to create an ethical theory of global media, let

along lay down new normative guidelines for the use of global media. Global media ethics is not globalization of media.

However, I am not arguing for a dualism of empirical and ethical studies. The study of ethical issues in globalization must be informed by the facts about globalization and by leading theories among social scientists and others.

**Bivins:** Because I am both a media ethicist and a media historian, it is difficult for me to separate the two. The traditional focus of media history has tended toward the various technologies that have moved us socially and culturally forward as we explore newer and more efficient means of communicating with increasingly larger audiences. However, beyond the realm of technological accessibility lies the question of the moral obligations incurred with each new innovation.

History is replete not only with innovations, but also with the people who coaxed them into existence, and, more importantly, the people who were affected by them. Too often, media history dwells on the technical changes without considering those who were ignored, left out, or left behind. History is not without context. The same industrial revolution that allowed for steam-powered presses that could reach the masses living in squalor within major American cities also allowed for the steam-powered cotton gin, which in turn increased the volume of cotton that could now be loaded onto the new steam-powered river boats by the thousands of slaves who had also picked it. It's the context that counts, both in history and in ethics.

**Ferré:** *Has media ethics exhibited major revolutions or upheavals? If so, what were they?*

**Borden:** Upheavals in media ethics have followed social, political, and economic upheavals. In the West, the tie between democracy and jour-

nalism means that whenever our ideas of what politics is for and what citizens need changes, then our ideas of what journalism is for and what it should do changes, too.

I'm thinking, for example, of the turn toward journalistic objectivity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Impartiality was not a new ideal, but the quasi-scientific characteristics of the professional ideology that developed at this time were partly the result of developments in industry (such as scientific management) as well as politics (such as Progressivism). These forces combined to favor expertise as a kind of "science" that could be put at the service of Progressivism's "informed citizen." The informed citizen could then use knowledge to counter corruption and navigate the large-scale changes happening in society at that time. Previous eras did not presuppose any such citizen, as Michael Schudson has pointed out, and journalism ethics thus did not presuppose the collection of verified "facts" as its main duty. You can see this pattern, too, for example, in journalistic coverage of labor and other issues reflecting a more collective outlook in the 1930s compared to today's more individualistic outlook focused on personal success in a meritocracy.

**Ward:** In the West, there have been five media ethics revolutions corresponding to five revolutions in the press or media. Ethical revolutions are responses to media revolutions. The first revolution was the creation of a primitive, non-codified journalism ethic in the 1600s in Western Europe with the early newsbooks. Editors claimed to publish only "matters of fact" in an impartial manner. The second was the creation of a "public ethic" during the Enlightenment as newspapers grew in importance. The idea of journalism serving a public originated then.

The third revolution was the development of a liberal theory of the press in the 19th century, which interpreted the public ethic as promoting liberalism through a free marketplace of ideas. The fourth was the

development of professional journalism ethics in the early 1900s which resulted in a codified ethic of objectivity and neutral reporting. Much of the 20th century was spent noting the limits of this ethic, resulting in Social Responsibility Theory, feminist media ethics, and other critical approaches.

The fifth revolution is the fragmentation and challenge to professional media ethics caused by a media now digital and global. The voice of the professional practitioner is lost in a cacophony of partisan media, extremism, and disinformation.

**Bivins:** I believe media changes tend to be more evolutionary than revolutionary. For example, the idea of being literate itself is loaded with a bias in favor of those who can actually read. The same can be said of the printed word, while advancing literacy still remained a domain of the learned. No moral injunction accompanied its birth, and billions of people remained illiterate. Liturgical tracts and plenty of religious propaganda were its first export. In fact, 150 years passed from the advent of the first press in England to the first newspaper in the English language. Any form of a parallel media ethics was purely informal as the right to print was severely controlled well up until the end of the 18th century. There were, of course, dissenters such as John Milton, and practically every printer in the American colonies during the run up to the Revolution. The philosophical idea of freedom of the press was finally codified in the subsequent Bill of Rights.

In the following 200-plus years, the ideal of a free press has ping-ponged between uncontrolled partisanship and a monetized social conscience. With the advent of a professionalized journalism at the beginning of the 20th century, there seemed to be hope of a return to the philosophical roots of the First Amendment, which has lasted up until the recent fragmentation of communication in all its forms. In short, any form of media ethics has nearly always been backgrounded by the

realities of emergent technology and its rapid, often uncontrolled spread.

***Ferré:** How have media revolutions — including the current era of digital and global media — affected media ethics in terms of philosophy and practice?*

**Borden:** Many observers think we are experiencing another media ethics revolution now due to the development of digital journalism and what Ryan Thomas calls the “democratized journalism project.” This project has in various ways argued for less of a distinction between journalists and their audiences and for journalists to focus on audience participation as a key ethical imperative. However, we must beware of becoming determinists. The technological ability to be more transparent about journalistic methods, for example, certainly raises the question of whether journalists, therefore, ought to be. But it does not answer the question in and of itself.

Seeing our era as uniquely consequential belies a presentist bias in itself. The technological environment in which the media currently operate has accelerated the pace of innovation and raised new questions, just as rapid technological changes did in the past. But prudence is required to determine what is called for in each instance of dramatic change — ethical extravagance or ethical moderation. One of the benefits of a long view: It brings perspective. Not every change calls for transformation; not every anomaly indicates a paradigm shift. Studying the history of media ethics can help us to discern the difference.

**Ward:** The current revolution questions almost every major principle of professional ethics, such as objectivity or neutrality. New practitioners often prefer a more interpretive or perspectival way of writing that advocates, which means the older objectivity ethic has little relevance

to their work. New technology and forms of media, from VR to drones, call for new guidelines; the speed and unverified nature of social media raises new ethical issues. The capability of citizens to publish online means that global media can be used for almost any purpose, including advancing racism. Information receives less verification and it is difficult for people to discern which media sources are reliable.

Moreover, the global nature of the media and our world now requires that our parochial codes of media ethics be replaced (or revamped) by global media ethics where codes deal with the global impact of stories. The result: a need for a radical rethinking of media ethics from a global viewpoint.

**Bivins:** The most prevalent philosophy of the media has been the liberal-democratic formulation that accompanied the rise of democracy in the West. The idea of an informed citizenry, as Jefferson noted, is vital to a participatory form of government; and, a free press is essential to that process. Even the partisan press of the early 19th century informed the people, despite their obvious biases. Nonetheless, the only real attempt to come to grips with an often uncontrolled information network, in all its “great blooming, buzzing confusion,” accompanied the move to professionalize journalism, and to reorient it to its original course that had been set at the end of the 18th century.

But, as Walter Lippmann predicted, the media, in all forms, without moral restraint and guidance would eventually dissolve into a cacophony of disparate voices all shouting for attention. Alasdair MacIntyre noticed this emotivist tendency still existed 60 years after Lippmann’s warning, and today we are in danger of losing complete touch with any ethical underpinning of our media environment, despite a century of red flags. Lippmann was probably right. We have become overpowered by information overload. The answer, in part, is to return to a more comprehensive and inclusive vision of media ethics readjusted for our



cacophonous age.

**Ferré:** *How and why do you choose your research projects?*

**Borden:** It is common for my projects to follow up on unanswered questions or unexplored avenues in my previous work. For example, after publishing *Journalism as Practice*, I began a comparative program to address theoretical complexities and practical applications of the framework I introduced in that book. That program, in turn, led me to consider how (and if) a neo-Aristotelian approach could contribute to the debate about global media ethics. Wrestling with the fit between Aristotelian particularism and the notion of global media ethics led me to review the history of casuistry and to propose combining this ethical method with virtue ethics to address media ethics disagreements between cultures. Another track led me to explore how the historically rich moral category of hospitality might help the media to engage difference more responsibly.

My research and teaching are always in conversation with each other as well. For example, my comparative work dovetailed with my development of a study abroad program on comparative media ethics in London. I suppose you could say that, in my case, one thing leads to another.

**Ward:** I choose projects that help me write books. I am a philosopher who views things historically. So almost all of my writing includes historical research and reflections. My background in philosophy and history of ideas helps a great deal. I am never starting research from scratch. Which projects I choose depends on what book I am writing. For example, if I am writing about extreme populism, I research the history of populism. For my book on the invention of journalism ethics, I traced the senses of objectivity back to ancient Greece. I am now writ-

ing on irrational publics; and, again, I am immersed in the history of ideas of rationality and irrationality.

As stated earlier, history provides me with rich conceptual options. For example, most criticisms of journalism objectivity — and the critics are legion — are flawed by a lack of historical knowledge. People appear to think that the notion of objectivity as neutral stenography of pure (uninterpreted) facts is *the* notion of objectivity; so if they debunk this idea (which is pretty easy to do) they have debunked objectivity per se. Not so. A little bit of historical research will show how there have been many, richer notions of objectivity that can be used in journalism and that escape obvious criticisms.

**Bivins:** I don't usually work from a master plan, mostly because I have eclectic interests both practical and philosophical that often intersect serendipitously. For example, my first published history paper came as a result of discovering a letter in a box of files in the Edward Bernays collection in the Library of Congress. A simple query from a newspaper editor had resulted in an article by Bernays attempting to explain the nature of modern public relations, including the professionalism of the nascent practice. That attempt led me through a labyrinth of paperwork and a massively complex national war over utility ownership in the 1920s. Eventually, it turned into an exposé of a young Bernays struggling with espousing an ethical foundation for public relations while bending his own ethics to suit the practical circumstances of his clients' demands.

Following that initial success, I decided to pursue ethics as it directly related to historical media development with a piece on the changing use of moral language comparing journalism codes of ethics from the 1920s with codes of today. Following a virtue ethics approach I discovered that Alasdair MacIntyre was probably correct in concluding that we no longer engage in moral discussion at the level we once did. Ex-

ploring that early period led to a deeper look into propaganda in the same era (during and following WWI), which is my current focus.

**Ferré:** *What research in the history of media ethics would you like to see? Are there unanswered questions that need to be addressed or major areas of media ethics history that could use substantial new thinking?*

**Borden:** As I implied in one of my earlier responses, the ethical standards by which he have evaluated media have always been “thickened” by prevailing conceptions of politics, citizens, and related ideas at any given time. I would like us to do some historical deep dives to interrogate basic concepts in media ethics theorizing — not just concepts such as autonomy or transparency, but even more basic concepts, such as humanity and community. After all, the project of ethics has always been predicated on studying what is ethical for humans. For example, what if our very definition of humanity is changing due to rapid advances in virtual reality and artificial intelligence?

If we have a reasonably good idea of what humans (however we understand them) need to flourish, can we delve into the past to discover what sorts of political, economic, and social arrangements (including media institutions and practices) might have supported human flourishing? How do our contemporary arrangements measure up? Assuming that there is at least some continuity between the humans of today and yesterday, what might be worth preserving (or recovering,) and what needs to be adjusted or replaced?

**Ward:** There is so much we need to know more about that it is hard to pick and choose. However, I think we need more work on the nature of media ethics revolutions and how they occur. We need more research on when a change in media ethics is needed, and when we might need to be radical in our conceptual reform.

In this era of hot media talk and intolerant populism, we also need research into the problem of maintaining group tolerance and a plural, egalitarian society. This issue has been around at least since the French Revolution. How did other cultures and eras deal with it? Where and how was respectful public dialogue established and why. What role did media play in developing the notion of intolerance in Western society? We need more work on the relationship of democracy and journalism (and media) and what sort of democracy journalists should promote.

Finally, we need more research into non-neutral, engaged journalism across history so we can draw up better ethical guidelines on what distinguishes responsible and engaged journalism from partisan, irresponsible advocacy.

**Bivins:** Because I built my original research program on ethics in public relations, I continue to be interested in the complexities of media used persuasively. This interest, unfortunately, blends nicely with current issues concerning “fake news,” deliberate misuse of social media, visual and aural digital manipulation, native advertising, greenwashing, and all the unsavory techniques used to alter reality and, now, perhaps even democracy.

As we enter a world of virtual and augmented reality, I continue to wonder how we as corporeal beings will be able to adjust to the technology of media whose operation is merely a matter of training but whose motives may be purposely beyond our comprehension. I recall a paper co-authored with a colleague 15 years ago on “Ethics at the Intersection of Consciousness.” We opened that paper on the moral issues inherent in virtual reality with a quote from John Dewey, which I believe is even truer now than it was in 1932: “In the present state of the world, the control we have of physical energies, heat, light, electricity, etc., without control over the use of ourselves is a perilous affair. Without control of ourselves, our use of other things is blind.”

[CLICK HERE TO RETURN TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Historian Interview:

David W. Bulla ©



Bulla

David Bulla, one of today's leading historians of the press during the American Civil War, is a professor at Augusta University. He previously taught at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates and, before that, at Iowa State University. He received his Ph.D. in mass communication at the University of Florida, where his advisor was Dr. Bernell Tripp. He says that studying under her guidance was one of the "biggest rewards" of his academic career.

Among his research awards are three for best paper (in 2007, 2008, and 2017) at the Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression. He's the author of the book *Lincoln's Censor: Milo Hasscall and Freedom of the Press in Civil War Indiana* and co-author (with Greg Borchard) of *Journalism in the Civil War Era* and *Lincoln Mediated: The President and the Press Through Nineteenth-Century Media*.

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

**Bulla:** I was born and raised in Greensboro, North Carolina. My dad was an industrial engineer for Western Electric (AT&T). He was also in the Naval Reserves. Although he was an engineer, he read newspapers reli-

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giously and consumed both TV and radio news every day. This year is the 50th anniversary of the launch of Apollo 11. I can remember well watching it with him. We flew model rockets together, and we both knew this was the big event of our lives. We also were proud that flight had started at Kitty Hawk in our state. Anyway, his really good friend, neighbor, and member of the same church, Irwin Smallwood, the managing editor of the *Greensboro News & Record* (and a member of N.C. Press Hall of Fame in Chapel Hill), took a chance on me as a clerk in the newsroom when I was 16. I started in the newsroom that summer and remember tearing off the copy as news came over the wires that Elvis Presley had died. I've been a journalism guy ever since.

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

**Bulla:** I was a sports editor and sports writer in North Carolina for a decade. I interviewed all the greats in ACC basketball back in the 1980s — Dean Smith, Michael Jordan, Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Valvano, Lefty Driesell, Terry Holland, Bobby Cremins. I even covered a NASCAR race that Richard Petty won toward the end of his career. Mostly, though, I covered high school sports, and college football and basketball. Then I taught high school English and journalism for a decade before I began work on my master's degree in journalism at Indiana University in 2000.

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

**Bulla:** In the late 1990s, I was a newspaper adviser in my hometown at Ben L. Smith High School. Our newspaper was called *WordSmith*. I taught the introductory writing and reporting course at the University of Florida while working on my Ph.D. Then, with my first job in academia at Iowa State University, I became the main reporting professor

after three or four reporting professors retired about the same time. I taught introductory media writing, intermediate reporting, sports reporting and public affairs reporting. I had no idea what I was doing in the latter, but Iowa (at least at that time) had a bunch of great investigative journalists and I relied on them to visit class and push our students in the right direction. Then I taught at Zayed University in the Middle East for six years. I mainly taught introductory reporting there, but also the history of communication and research methods. I also taught several graduate courses, and I am happy to report that three of those students have gone on to work on their doctoral degrees. I am starting my third year at Augusta University, and I teach Writing for the Communication Professions and Sports Communication here.

***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?*

**Bulla:** I kind of played around with it at IU, but I regret to say that I did not take a class with either Owen Johnson or David Nord. That was a big mistake, but I was into digital journalism and took a bunch of classes in that direction. Still, I listened to them and to John Dilts, and I got interested in the Civil War in Indiana. I began reading everything I could get on the subject, which led me to two key books: (1) Jeffery Smith's *War and Press Freedom* and (2) Robert S. Harper's *Lincoln and the Press*. Those two books cinched it; I was going to write about press performance in the Civil War, focusing on constraints. I should back up a second. There was one film and one other book that pushed me toward Civil War research. The film was Ken Burns' *Civil War*, and the book was David Herbert Donald's *Lincoln*. There are probably 20,000 books about Lincoln, but Donald's is the best, and Burns showed us the Civil War instead of telling us about it, something that's rather hard to do

since it is so far in the past (by American standards). He also introduced Americans to Shelby Foote, whom I was already aware of because I am a big fan of the novels of Walker Percy, Foote's best friend.

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

**Bulla:** Shelby Foote said something one time to Brian Lamb about going to where the action happened. I think Winston Churchill felt the same way. He wanted to see Gettysburg and the battle sites in Virginia and Maryland, so he visited them on some of his trips to his mother's native land. Foote's lesson came home to me about five years ago. I was in South Africa doing work on an article about Mohandas K. Gandhi as a journalist. My son, Viraj Bulla, was with me. Our driver decided to show us Johannesburg. He took us out to Soweto. I saw where a black teenager named Hector Pieterse was killed by the police. He and his classmates were protesting the teaching of only Afrikaans in their schools. I also saw Nelson Mandela's home and his jail cell at the Old Fort Prison on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. That's where Gandhi had been jailed too. Seeing the effects of apartheid and the way Gandhi was treated for resisting the constraints he and his fellow Indians lived under were edifying. On the flight back to Abu Dhabi, I was listening to a Bruce Springsteen album. Something clicked. I saw that the segregation of the Jim Crow South and South African apartheid were virtually the same thing. I would have never really seen this without Viraj and I making this trip to South Africa. Academics do a lot of great things in terms of theory and in the abstract, but what I think makes history my home is how concrete it all is. Fifty years ago today, three astronauts sat on top of tons and tons of highly combustible fuel and lifted off for the moon. It was an amazing engineering feat with millions and millions of interlocking man-made devices that took team work, audacity, and courage



## Historian Interview

— and President John F. Kennedy’s determination and vision. You can go to Washington to see the spaceship. You can go to Houston and see Mission Control. You can go to Florida to see the launch pad. These are all material and real. Likewise, here in Augusta, I can visit a cemetery where only slaves are buried and I can go see a key building that housed the Confederacy’s largest gunpowder manufacturing concern. Foote showed history is alive, even if it is long in the past. Maybe he learned that from Faulkner.

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

**Bulla:** The main idea, as it turns out, is always freedom. I started out mainly writing about freedom of the press, and I keep coming back to that, especially in recent years when I have gotten interested in William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass and the abolitionist editors of the nineteenth century; then I began work on another kind of freedom — and this was where I latched onto Gandhi’s work as a journalist, but while he focused on the methodology, nonviolent protest, it was also his message — freedom from oppression and universal equality. At the same time that I got into Gandhi, I drifted into looking at the coverage of slavery and have been working with a group of international scholars on that topic. As I’m a Southerner and a historian, it is hard for me ever get away from that topic. I am very thankful I met up with Dr. Karen Bravo, a law professor at Indiana University who is Jamaican. Her perspective has driven me to see things I never saw before. Finally, if I live long enough, I want to write a book about Churchill as the last great communicator. I don’t think any leader in history, except maybe Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, comes close to what Churchill did as a journalist, public speaker, historian, and artist. He wrote millions of words, goaded England through World War II with his speeches to Parliament,

and turned out to be a pretty fair painter. If he had lived longer, I dare say he would have become a TV star and today would have millions of followers on social media.

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

**Bulla:** My historical research has mainly been about the nineteenth-century press, especially the performance of journalists in times of crisis. The bulk of my work has been about Civil War journalism. The Civil War was by far the gravest crisis we've faced after the Revolution. It tore apart the country. Journalism was a vital part of society then. There were more newspapers then than there are now. Every town had more than two, like Greenville, Mississippi, which had five or six. Most of them were political, but they were also steeped in the personality and rhetorical skill of the editor. The cast of characters from that era included Horace Greeley, James Gordon Bennett, Joseph Medill, Samuel Bowles, W.W. Holden, Brick Pomeroy, Arunah S. Abell, Wilbur F. Storey, Parson Brownlow, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Nathan S. Morse, Dennis Mahony, and Louis Charles Roudanez. What a lively crew, and I am leaving out the reporters, the artists, and the photographers.

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

**Bulla:** *Lincoln Mediated*, which I co-wrote with Greg Borchard, was by far the most satisfying. Greg and I had long wanted to do something on Lincoln together. We had both written books where Lincoln played either a central role or a pretty important role. We decided to go for the whole lock, stock, and barrel. Oddly, just before our book on Lincoln

and the media was published, Harold Holzer, who has written a lot about Lincoln and the Civil War as general topics of history, came out with a book about Lincoln and the press. His book was a bit narrower than ours, but we essentially had the same cover on our books. Still, I am glad we did ours because we explored something that is very significant — how Lincoln’s image got created over time. We took it just to after the assassination. What might even be better is to carry it forth since that time. He’s just a myth now in popular culture — a bank, a car model, on the penny, and so forth. Therefore, we need to write a sequel on how Lincoln’s image has evolved over time, bring him back down to earth where he becomes all the more impressive.

*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?*

**Bulla:** The things that stand out to me are my students, especially a few in the United Arab Emirates who have gone on to get their doctoral degrees. One of them wrote a dissertation about the first wave of female journalists in that country. Having those students go beyond the undergraduate level is almost revolutionary for that part of the world where academic freedom simply does not exist. The other thing that stands out is my writing partnership with Greg Borchard. We were both at the University of Florida at about the same time, and we both wanted to go spread eagle on the Civil War. We came a little bit after Ford Risley, who also went to UF, and Debbie van Tuyl, who went to the University of South Carolina. Greg wanted to write about the Republicans in the North, and I wanted to write about the Democrats in the North; so that’s what we did. And then we came together on Lincoln. That led me to branch out toward what came after Lincoln, and I hit on Gandhi because

he was born four years after Lincoln died — and Gandhi was fascinated by Lincoln and wrote about him in his South African newspaper titled *Indian Opinion*. To sum up, my accomplishment has been to write about what might be called gaps in journalism history. The Democrats in the North almost don't matter to the meta-narrative of the Civil War, but they were a pain in Lincoln's side and they also had every right to criticize. Gandhi is not remembered for his journalism, even though he practiced it his entire adult life. He is remembered for his political methods and getting India out of the British Empire. Yet he was one prolific journalist, and all of his books are based on his journalism. That's a gap that does not get into the popular history books about the Mahatma.

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

**Bulla:** Had my wife, Kalpana Ramgopal, edit all of my books. She is a journalist and a very good magazine editor. She always tells me to cut out the first six pages of anything I write. It's not bad advice. I also wish I had gotten into writing history much earlier in my life. I did not go to Indiana for my master's degree until I was forty-one. I waited too long.

*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.*

**Bulla:** My philosophy is to examine the record, to bring to light the things and people who put a dent in history. I often think about journalism history this way: If there is a Mount Rushmore for American journalism, what four faces go up? Who are the candidates? Ben Franklin, Horace Greeley, Nellie Bly, William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer,

## Historian Interview

Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, Ted Turner, Katherine Graham, Frederick Douglass, Walter Lippmann, H.L. Mencken, William Duane, William F. Buckley. There are hundreds of us in mass communication history. I would love to see all of us come up with a massive list and then have a vote and see which are the top-four vote getters. We're Americans. We ought to be polled. On the other hand, if you asked me the most important event in American mass communication history, I would not say it was Murrow's "This is London" or Cronkite shedding a tear for John F. Kennedy or saying "Oh, boy" with the launch of Apollo 11. Rather, it was the invention of the telegraph. That brought us into the electronic age — what has followed down to the smartphones of today and everything else goes back to that first electronic communication technology. It was the most important invention after the printing press. It created a revolution, and like all revolutions it had to be tamed. But every time an electronic communication invention gets created, there is a new revolution. See the internet. See the smartphone. What's next? We historians have to look at those "What's next" moments and go back and build up the context around it. That's what my philosophy is. Put the whole thing in perspective. The speed and distance that the telegraph gave journalists was determinant. You were not going to be able to compete unless you took advantage of it. Even the weeklies spread out all over the country needed the telegraph to tell the folks at home what was happening in the battlefields in Virginia and down in Mississippi and Tennessee and then Georgia.

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

**Bulla:** Strengths are the sheer variety. We are hitting more gaps than ever before. As always, we get caught up in present-mindedness too much, and we tend to hold historical folks to impossible standards. I am

running into this with Gandhi, who is being vilified in some African nations because of the sides he took in various South African wars. And, of course, the leader of India and his party are grossly revising history by suggesting that the radical newspaper editor who killed Gandhi was justified because Gandhi wanted to unite Muslims and Hindus. The monuments business is very problematic, from all sides.

*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?*

**Bulla:** (1) We have to keep fighting to stay in the curriculum. I also think we need to be more creative. That means we need to take advantage of the technology. I applaud Teri Finneman doing the podcasting she's been orchestrating. More of that. And also we need to produce videos. Here I am inspired by Ken Burns, and I have never even thought about making a video. I would love for someone in Chicago to make one about Wilbur F. Storey. Is there a great documentary of Douglass made by journalism historians? I don't think so. We need to make that. Furthermore, we j-historians should come together and create a communication technology museum. Maybe we call it the McLuhan Museum of Media Technology. (2) Except at some Ivy League schools, history enrollment is in decline. This is a shame. I live in Georgia, and most of my students cannot tell you more than the mythology of Dr. King. It's a crying shame. My students are not bad; they are just not informed. This is structural in part — too much emphasis on STEM (and I like science, since my father was an engineer) — but it also has to do with a society that has sped up communication so much and so overwhelmed us with trivial information that nobody has time to read books or scholarly articles anymore. We have to fight this, but I fear that we will go under with the undertow.

## Historian Interview

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

**Bulla:** Again, a society that doesn't read. Most of our books are bought by people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s. They will die off soon. Who is going to read our books in twenty years? That's the biggest threat. I also fear the final loss of print journalism. A friend of ours at the *New York Times* says that the newspaper will not have a print edition in ten years. The *Post* and *Wall Street Journal* probably won't be far behind. Another issue is that I bet the bulk of the membership of the AJHA and AEJMC History Division is beyond 50 years old. I am about to turn 60. We are dying out. It breaks my heart when a Dwight Teeter or a Wally Eberhard is no longer with us. Are the universities, the colleges, the schools, and departments still going to want to hear about the history of the press, advertising, electronic media, public relations, and freedom of the press?

**Q:** *What would you do for journalism history if you had a boatload of money?*

**Bulla:** I'd probably buy a printing press first, but I would want to start a TV show that C-SPAN's Book TV would pick up. I would also want something on public radio, a Terry Gross-type show, only it would be about communication history.

**Q:** *What about the two big groups out there for mass communication historians, the AJHA and the AEJMC History Division. What advice would you give both?*

**Bulla:** Go international. Have your conference outside North America. I would even encourage *American Journalism* to think about changing its title to make it global. One of my graduate students from the Middle

East should be in both groups. She can afford to fly anywhere, but the American dominance of our two groups would probably keep her leaning more toward a conference like ICA or something regional. That's a shame. She has done great work and is finishing her Ph.D. at a university in London. And there are good historians all over Europe, in South Africa and other parts of Africa, in South Asia, China (a bunch who went to the University of Missouri for their doctoral degrees), and South Korea, not to mention New Zealand and Australia. We need to branch out. We need to see that journalism here is interconnected to journalism everywhere. Along those lines, read more about international journalism. I am thoroughly into a biography of Marie Colvin right now. Yes, she was an American and a disciple of John Hersey (she took his journalism class at Yale), but she worked all over the world and mainly lived in London.

[CLICK HERE  
TO RETURN  
TO THE TABLE  
OF CONTENTS](#)



# Book Award Interview:

By Carolyn Edy ©



Edy

Carolyn Edy was a runner-up in 2018 for the award for the best book of the year given by the American Journalism Historians Association for *The Woman War Correspondent, the U.S. Military, and the Press: 1846-1947* (Lexington Books). She is an associate professor at Appalachian State University, where she teaches journalism in the Department of Communication. She received her Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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

**Edy:** My book outlines the history of women who worked as war correspondents up through World War II, while demonstrating the ways in which the press and the military both promoted and prevented their access to war. Despite the continued presence of individual female war correspondents in news accounts, if not always in war zones, it was not until 1944 that the U.S. military recognized these individuals as a group and began formally considering gender as a factor for recruiting and accrediting war correspondents. This group identity created obstacles for women who had previously worked alongside men as “war correspondents,” while creating opportunities for many women whom the

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military recruited to cover woman's angle news as "women war correspondents." This book also reveals the ways the military and the press, as well as women themselves, constructed the concepts of "woman war correspondent" and "war correspondent" and how these concepts helped and hindered the work of all war correspondents even as they challenged and ultimately expanded the public's understanding of war and of women.

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

**Edy:** I was a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina in 2008, looking through the papers of columnist Robert Ruark in the Wilson Library when I came across a letter in which Inez Robb chastised Ruark for using one of her anecdotes as his own. I had never heard of Robb, and none of the works I had read about journalism history seemed to mention her. And yet, she once had been the highest-paid female reporter in the nation, billed by International News Service and its subscribers as "the First Lady of the Press," and promoted (mistakenly) as the first woman accredited as a war correspondent. She intrigued me, and so I began to research her for an article.

As I did so, I was struck by how many competing claims of "firsts" I found for female war correspondents, as well how many of these women did not fit with the traditional definition of a war correspondent. While it was true that too many female war correspondents and their work had long been overlooked, I also began to see that books celebrating female war correspondence often held up women who had written about the war as though all of them had the same experience, and these books gave little attention to the "woman's angle" topics, such as the care and feeding of troops, that many of these women specialized in covering. The vague but sweeping claims many of these works made about the discrimination and obstacles every woman had

## Book Award Interview

faced as a war correspondent led me to wonder how the government had justified posing such limitations on women. The more questions I had, the more I read; the more I read, the more questions I had. While I thought at first that I would just focus on women who worked as war correspondents during World War II, I eventually decided that I could not tell that story without a clearer sense of the earlier history of women journalists in times of war.

*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?*

**Edy:** The book grew out of my dissertation, and so I had a committee of experts helping to ensure that I had a solid foundation in the secondary sources essential to my topic, which was quite interdisciplinary. I was fortunate that my committee members' expertise included women's history, labor history, U.S. history, journalism history, and American studies. They assigned seminal works in each of their respective fields, and they kept my topic in mind as they crafted questions for my comprehensive exams. In all, I relied upon more than 100 secondary sources to provide background for my study, to shape my research questions, to inform my method, and to help me understand my findings.

Once I was ready to attack primary sources, I began by trying to uncover the individuals whose records and experiences would be relevant by searching every database I could access (often visiting libraries at other universities to use their databases) to find every article I could that was written by or about a woman whose publication described her as a war correspondent up through World War II. After I had a running list of women whose publications had described them as war correspondents, I began to search for their published writings and their per-

sonal papers. A surprising number of these women published memoirs, and I relied upon these as well as memoirs written by the military officials, reporters, and editors with whom they had worked. I also considered all personal correspondence and government documents relating to war correspondents, housed in more than 50 manuscript collections at more than a dozen archives nationwide, including, of course, the National Archives. In the end, I had three DevonThink databases housing more than ten thousand documents, not to mention the hundreds of books on my shelves.

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

**Edy:** Of course, I wish I had been able to speak personally with the individuals whose lives and works I studied, and for every document that survived in manuscript collections I imagine thousands upon thousands will never be recovered. More practically speaking, I regret that I did not have the budget nor the time to visit every archive in person and had to rely on record requests (and helpful archivists) from a few key collections that I would have liked to have visited, such as those housed in Syracuse and Wisconsin.

Even within the archives I did visit, I found holes that I did not expect to find. Also, although I traveled four times to the National Archives in College Park, I was only able to stay a week or two each time, and I could probably have spent a year immersed in military records without feeling finished. My visits to the Library of Congress were similarly unsatisfying because of the amount of time I had versus the scope of materials. Several books came out the same year or shortly after my own, including Steven Casey's *The War Beat, Europe* and Ronald Weber's *Dateline — Liberated Paris*, and I would like to have had the chance to consider their works as well. Similarly, the Time-Life collec-

tion was not open to researchers until after my book went to press and, as I discovered on a visit to the New York Historical Society in January, it contains a wealth of records that I would have loved to have been able to access in time.

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

**Edy:** Much of the best advice is common sense, and my own advice might not be new to anyone in our field but might be worth revisiting. First, in July 2019 I published an essay in *American Journalism* discussing several of the lessons I learned (or, rather, re-learned) while researching my book, including the need to question all sources, to verify all facts with multiple primary sources whenever possible, and to never assume that just because one story has been told you will not find new ways worth retelling.

In addition to advice in that essay, I will add: Think expansively. When I started (and this is still embarrassing to admit) I thought I could visit the National Archives at College Park and simply request files related to women war correspondents. That approach netted maybe one folder. Instead, I needed to look through every file related to women, to the press, to war correspondents. I also needed to learn which military units interacted with war correspondents and look through all of their files. It might have been some sort of magical thinking that led me to seek records organized according to my own research question, but the fact I had to sift through folder upon unrelated folder led to materials I never imagined I would find. Even outside the National Archives, some of the most useful material existed in files that, at first glance, did not relate to either war correspondents (such as WAC director Oveta Culp Hobby's papers at the Library of Congress) or to women (such as Col. Ernest DuPuy's papers at Wisconsin Historical Society).

But just as I learned to temper my expectations at larger, less-wieldy archives, I also learned that researchers should not be afraid to dream. Harvard's Schlesinger Library awarded me a travel grant to spend two weeks immersed in manuscript collections that were so well curated and organized, with such rich material, I had to keep pinching myself. For one thing, it turned out that one female war correspondent not only kept nearly every letter and government record relating to her work, but her collection included accounts of dozens of other war correspondents as well because she had once planned to write a book about them.

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

**Edy:** The biggest one was self-inflicted. I started with a topic far too broad for the time and resources I had. I was forever wanting to learn more about all of the individuals I found and to read more of their work, and I often got lost in materials and ideas that I later had to set aside. The fact it started as a dissertation benefitted the work in ways I have already mentioned, but it also posed several challenges. When you learn as you go, you also make mistakes as you go and things take far longer than they should. For the first three years of my research, I was a single parent and a full-time graduate student. I had to work a second job for the final two years of my degree, and balancing everything was certainly a challenge. After I finished my Ph.D. and landed a tenure-track job, in 2012, my research funds hardly covered conference travel, let alone multiple trips to archives. I do relish the fact that I work at a public university where teaching, students, and service are valued so highly, but it continues to be a challenge to devote enough time to research and writing.

*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?*

**Edy:** Of course it is, and yet I know few people who can effectively research anything without getting too close. It helped that this concern had led me to my topic in the first place; I noticed how many works about war correspondents seemed to be written by individuals who sought first to tell fascinating tales of heroism and adventure, often with an unabashedly promotional tone. Some works were overly biased toward men, excluding women's stories entirely, and others were so determined to bring women forward they often lost sight of context and significance.

I worked and trained as a journalist earlier in my career, and the extent to which I do strive for neutrality often gets in the way when I write as a historian. In revisiting my book, I now see places where I could have been more analytical, where I probably should have taken more risks to share my interpretations and opinions. I was very careful, maybe too careful, in trying to maintain objectivity; setting out facts and evidence from which readers could draw their own conclusions.

But if I practiced too much restraint in my writing, my research was another matter. I found myself getting overly attached to many individuals whose stories really were tangential to my purpose, to the extent that I would spend days upon days trying to fully investigate the lives of, say, Suzette LaFlesche, Cecil Dorrian, Mildred Farwell, Elizabeth Murphy Phillips, Lee Carson — to name just five women whose stories kept luring me off my research path. I rationalized these detours by promising myself I would use what I gathered for future projects, and I guess time will tell.

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

**Edy:** Despite persistent claims of the “first and only” woman war correspondent, which continually resurfaced in newspaper articles throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, American women wrote about war whenever Americans participated in war. In addition to revealing the names of more than 250 women whom the press and military billed or credentialed as war correspondents up through World War II — a far higher number than previously reported — my book also presents a more nuanced account of the opportunities and obstacles these women faced. It considers the roles the press and the military held in constructing the concept of the “woman war correspondent” as an outsider among the public, the press, and the military. No matter how many women wrote about battles they witnessed firsthand or military strategy they gleaned from official interviews, members of the press and public were ready to label them “women war correspondents” and laud them for their novelty, often with no consideration of their work.

And yet, I found no mention of gender in military regulations related to war correspondents until June, 1944. At the start of World War II, women who had gained the respect of the press, military and public for their coverage of military operations and foreign relations had reason to trust the War Department’s claim that it would ensure equal treatment for all war correspondents. By 1943, however, the War Department’s Women’s Interest Section, seeking to increase participation among women, saw an opportunity in woman’s angle reporters, and soon the military began accrediting more women as war correspondents — many of whom had never traveled abroad nor reported on politics, military strategy, or anything close to war. The short-term effect of their presence was to make life more difficult for women who had long worked as war correspondents. Skilled war correspondents (women and men) who knew their way around war and the military, and had worked hard to secure their status and privilege, resented compet-



ing with these newcomers for facilities, stories, and access. These conflicts likely led the War Department, in 1944, to recognize officially a category for women war correspondents, along with a directive to assist officials in handling them. The War Department did not document the rationale behind the new policies, yet it is clear that many officials would have welcomed the directive as a means of handling the many women who sought greater access to the front.

This strategy also stood to benefit the military as a form of information control. Accrediting more women, and limiting them to covering women's activities, offered a way to increase news coverage while ensuring a stream of stories least likely to assist the enemy and most likely to boost morale.

The War Department also likely saw the directives as a means of reducing conflict among war correspondents grappling for limited accommodations, among commanders who did not believe women belonged at the front, and among women who continually questioned why officials were excluding them when regulations did not. But, as my book also shows, the directives were untenable and surprisingly short-lived.

**Q:** *What findings most surprised you?*

**Edy:** Among the most surprising finding was the fact that the military did not address gender as a factor for accrediting war correspondents until 1944, and how quickly those regulations seemed to backfire. I certainly did not expect to uncover so many women who were billed as war correspondents, nor did I expect to find so many discrepancies between accounts I had read about women war correspondents in secondary sources and evidence I found in archives, military records, and contemporaneous writings. I was also struck by the number of women who did important work whose names have been all but lost to history.

The women whose stories are so frequently retold are not necessarily those who were the most significant, unusual, or influential. The extent to which self-promotion and self-preservation (i.e., living long lives and donating papers to archives) help determine whose stories survive and how they are told did surprise me, although maybe it shouldn't have.

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

**Edy:** I was always happy to follow advice I liked, but I rather recklessly ignored the following advice, even though it came from mentors whom I trusted and admired: Don't rush to publish a book before you're ready. It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of a book, especially if editors contact you with offers to publish (as they likely will, by the way, if you win any dissertation award or honorable mention). Somehow, from the beginning, I could only see my project in its full scale, and I feared that setting the project aside to work on articles might mean cannibalizing the book I was already envisioning. I now see ways I could have rolled out individual aspects of my work in conference papers and journal articles before committing them to a book. Doing so would have helped me reach a broader audience, and it certainly would have improved my tenure process, if not the book itself. Some people in my department considered a blind-reviewed book as equal to just one blind-reviewed article, and that made the tenure process far more stressful. I also believe my book would have been stronger if I had taken the time to focus on separate time periods or individual arguments and maybe flesh them out as articles before addressing them all in one go.

[CLICK HERE  
TO RETURN  
TO THE  
TABLE OF  
CONTENTS](#)