

# *Historiography*

in Mass Communication



Volume 8 (2022). Number 3

# *Historiography in Mass Communication*

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

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# *Historiography*

## in Mass Communication

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# The Story of Pee Wee, the Pretender

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

**H**istorians are not journalists. Historians aren't partisans. They're not ideologues. Or activists. They aren't philosophers. Or psychologists. Or critical theorists.

If historians aren't any of these personas, what are they?

The answer is simple. Historians are historians.

I'm reminded of one of my aunts who had a dog that she called a cat.

She named her dog "PeeWee," but that didn't seem to make any difference about its species. In fact, she had in succession a dozen short-haired Chihuahuas. Each time one died, she got another. She named each of the twelve "PeeWee." She called some of them dogs, and she called others cats. I don't know why the difference.

As soon as my aunt got another PeeWee, she began feeding it food straight from the dinner table. Soon every little PeeWee became a fat PeeWee.

Whenever a visitor came to see my aunt, PeeWee yelped and yelped

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and then ran and hid under the living room sofa. My aunt seemed to think it was cute that her cats did that.

We nephews and nieces thought our aunt was eccentric, and we never really knew if she thought her dog in fact was a cat. Or if she knew her dog was a dog but just liked to call it a cat.

All of which leads me to think about historians, or, more precisely, about people who call themselves historians when they really are something else.

Some are more interested in journalism. Today's professional practices and issues excite them more than history does. Some are ideologues, activists for a variety of issues, and partisan zealots. Others claim to be historians but really are untrained psychologists or would-be philosophers or critical theorists.

Historians need to know something about a wide range of topics, such as journalism and psychology and politics, but they shouldn't be primarily involved in any of them rather than in history.

As long as they're mainly something else, they will never be historians. Anytime people are acting in another role, they're not historians. That's true even if they cloak their partisanship or other interest in the guise of history articles and papers, or if they promote ideology and pretend they're teaching history.

JMC history has many practitioners who have the talent to be good historians but aren't. They dissipate their energy by diffusing their focus. Last year, they wrote conference papers on ethics. This year, they write papers on history. Next year, they'll write papers on law or journalistic practices or writing style or some other topic rather than history. One can't be a master of everything.

So they never will write anything important about history. They are merely dabbling. They just stir the surface rather than probe the depths.

## The Story of Pee Wee, the Pretender

They might get an article published or write a conference paper, but their work will never amount to much.

Fortunately, they don't do much harm.

But some interests are truly inimical to history. Ideology may be the worst. It takes a variety of forms.

Consider this year's announcement by the American Journalism Historians Association of its competition for the outstanding book of 2021. It states that "we particularly encourage nominations of books by women, LGBTQ+ and BIPOC authors, as well as books that engage with critical theory as long as the major focus is history."

The description suggests that the AJHA may be more interested in gender, sex, race, and critical theory than in history — which we assume isn't the case.

But the hazard remains. In fact, it goes further.

Besides biasing the selection process, the announcement harms the reputation of the award, and will damage the winning book if a woman, a LGBTQ+ or a BIPOC is the author or if it deals with women, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, or critical theory. Who wouldn't think the book got special treatment or that it won, not because it was the best book, but because it fit the award's ideology?

Ted Smythe, an eminent scholar who died earlier this year, knew the importance of keeping biases out of historical writing. "I've known a number of important historians," he observed. "My greatest admiration for them is that, even though they may have had political or ideological viewpoints that shaped and shape their perception of history (as we all do), yet they didn't let their biases influence their interpretations of events and motives. That tolerance for other viewpoints counts for more than I can say."

Unfortunately, the field of JMC history has its share of ideologues,

partisans, activists, fledgling philosophers, amateur psychologists, and critical theorists.

Fortunately, it also has people who refer to themselves as historians and really are historians.

If you are truly interested in history, why would you want to be consumed by something else? Why wouldn't you want to be a historian?

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# In Memorium: Ted Smythe

May 6 1932 – February 18, 2022

By Anthony R. Fellow ©



Fellow

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ted Smythe, author of *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900*, died February 18, 2022. He was one of the best thinkers ever to work in journalism education, a historian and scholar of the first rank.

His scholarly work covered a variety of areas, but he thought of himself mainly as a historian. In 1992-1995 he served on the Board of Directors of the American Journalism Historians Association.

He was born May 6, 1932, in Tacoma, Wash., to Hilda Mae (Mastrude) and Ted M. Smythe. He had three brothers, all of whom preceded him in death.

After receiving his B.S. degree in 1954 at Sterling College in Kansas, he served two years in the U.S. Army. He then worked as Sterling's director of public relations from 1956 to 1960. After receiving his master's degree at the University of Oregon in 1962, he taught at California State University, Fullerton, until his retirement in 1992. He completed his doctoral program at the University of Minnesota in 1967. His dissertation was titled "A History of the Minneapolis Journal, 1878-1939."

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## Ted Smythe: A Tribute to a Great Professor

**T**ed Smythe was my professor, colleague, and friend. He also introduced me to some of the nation's greatest media historians, such as Edwin Emery, Michael Emery, and David Sloan. He guided my final research paper in his graduate class, where I met earlier giants in the field, including Frank Luther Mott, Robert E. Parks, James Carey, Frederic Hudson, and John Tebbel, co-author of the first edition of my *American Media History* book.

Dr. Smythe also takes a place with these giants in the field. His *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900* is among the finest research on the period. He is known as well for his excellent *Mass Communication: Concepts and Issues* and hundreds of research articles on American media, which are now stored in the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah.

During my graduate work, I would meet with Ted. His office was almost frightening. I am sure he was allotted more bookshelves than any other professor on campus, but they were bulging with a maze of stacked books that reached to the ceiling. I always eyed an escape route in case of a fire or earthquake. I didn't imagine then that I would become the recipient of many of those boxes with valuable files of newspaper and journal articles when he retired.

However, with my master's degree in hand as well as ten years of professional journalism experience, I was offered a position as an adjunct journalism teacher at California State University, Fullerton, where Ted taught from 1963 to 1992, after obtaining his B.S. at Sterling College, an M.A. at the University of Oregon, and a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota.

Even then he was pushing me to go further. For nine years, he would meet me in the department office on the first day of classes and

## In Memorium: Ted Smythe

say, “Tony, have you started on your doctorate?” That question annoyed me after about the fifth year. However, he beamed the year when my answer was, “Yes, Dr. Smythe, this is my last semester here. I begin doctoral studies at the Walter H. Annenberg School at the University of Southern California next semester.”

Following my doctoral graduation and a full-time teaching stint at California State University, Los Angeles, I was offered an associate professorship at Cal State Fullerton. It was because of Ted and the thought of teaching American media history alongside him and Dr. Terry Hynes that secured my positive response. The frequent luncheons among the three of us are some of the greatest memories of my teaching career. Here were three professors who spent hours talking about topics in American media history and sharing ideas about how to be better professors.

Ted was an exemplary professor, scholar, and mentor. Dr. Ed Trotter, our long-time department chair, said it best when Ted’s son Randy notified him of his father’s death. Trotter said, “Your father was a giant in our department at Cal State Fullerton. Everyone loved him, as he was the gentlest person we knew. And, of course it was always an adventure to visit his office where he had ‘filed’ most of the printed material in the English language! We are privileged to have had him among us.”

Ted continued to be my strongest advocate, closest friend, and role model even after he retired in 1992 and returned to Kansas for four years to teach at Sterling College, where he had first met his wife, Barbara Ann Matthews. They married on June 1, 1956, and remained together for 62 years. He once said, “I’ve made several good moves or choices during my life, but marrying Barb was the best, next to my having chosen Jesus as my Savior and Lord.” They had three children: Tim, Randy, and Kris.

## Fellow

Ted was an exemplary Christian and a founding member of the Evangelical Free Church of Yorba Linda, California, where he spent many years as an elder, teacher, and leader. When he would return to his Orange County home for visits, he and I would have lunch. I continue to cherish those meetings. He always wanted an update on my teaching and research. Of course, we would take up the topic of religion. And it's probably because of him that I am now enrolled in a post-doctoral program in Catholic theology.

The past several years, the Smythes spent time in Park City, Utah, where Ted occasionally helped at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, finally retiring for good in Warm Beach, Washington, in 2014.

Several weeks before his death, I promised Ted I would send him a copy of my newest book, *American Media History: The Story of Journalism and Mass Media*, in which I acknowledge his contributions to my career and in which his work is cited. He said, "Tony, I am going to call you in a week. I have some news to tell you." Death robbed me of that call. But he will continue to have a tremendous impact on my life and career.

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# In the Beginning Was the Theory

By Thérèse L. Lueck ©



Lueck

**W**ord on the street is “theory,” and it’s causing great angst. Angry street theory is framed as front-page protest with front-loaded trigger words. Yet theory itself is a trigger, and not just on the street. Theory suggests an awareness of self and the potential for actualizing that awareness. Angry street theory is a classist threat fueled by populist anti-intellectualism.

The nature of theory is the abstract. And those who hold the reins of theory harness meaning, with conceptualization of the abstract guided by the ones who generate interpretation. As abstract thinkers, scholars occupy a privileged position, and historians deal in the grand abstraction of history. The subject matter of the media historian occupies two fields of abstraction — history, always a reconstruction, and media, always symbolic. JMC historians are masterful storytellers who capture time and again the mediated world of the past. These are the stories of who we are and how we got here. They are also the stories of who we are becoming.

*Thérèse “Terry” Lueck is a professor emerita of the University of Akron and a former president of the American Journalism Historians Association. She is co-editor of the two-volume Women’s Periodicals in the United States.*

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Ironically but perhaps not accidentally, theory is at the forefront of the rapid-fire reshaping of media, culture, and my scholarly community. Theory is not only front-page news, it resides at the core of academe. JMC history harbors a long-simmering debate on the value of theory. It is a debate I've internalized. Having reached that theoretical someday called retirement, I'm revisiting research left unfinished from days filled with students, classes, and meetings. I'm developing the theoretical side of a study whose significance resides in the cultural impact of the press coverage, and the prospect of teasing out meaning quickens my intellectual pulse.

I approached the press coverage as a social construction, and it still seems a good fit. The cultural construction of news perspective that has been advanced through the work of media scholar Daniel Berkowitz and his compilations locates journalism at the heart of what sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann identified as the social construction of reality. I can build value components into this journalistic dimension of the theory in the manner of sociologist Gaye Tuchman to account for how social dominance is reflected in the press coverage. Unlocking cultural meanings of the news offers exciting potential, yet the internalized debate surfaces. Uncertainty arrests my hand, turning my research restart into a struggle against myself that asserts that the gap in the literature must be there for a reason. A running narrative reminds me that life is racing past as I spend my days pondering theory or idly typing. Only when I recognize self-doubt as a privileged position am I free to work toward the lofty goals of my theoretical someday. To move forward, however, I must begin at the beginning.

Words. The structure of words and the language offers a reassuringly finite universe of interpretation through structuralist objectivity. Yet the power of words is that they carry their culture with them, and I'm

searching for meaning in words printed a century ago. Words form the basis of the cultural construction of news, and as a symbol system they can be decoded through the playful linguistic perspective of semiotics. Words and images preserved through media are the foundation of historical journalistic inquiry, with JMC historians providing interpretation through reconstruction of society and the times. Stories carry meaning, and who is telling the story matters.

Routine navigation of the virtual realm transports us beyond what Poet Laureate Joy Harjo refers to as the absolute world. Daily we confront the metaphysical, which sensory experience has always made available by prompting emotions such as joy and anger and conjuring concepts the likes of truth and beauty. Such philosophical concepts hold a spectrum of nuance, the very range of which signals that meaning is made in the mind of the beholder. Dizzying relativism can provoke a wariness that our world is expanding exponentially and that it is poised to dismantle its own foundations. The widening purview offers myriad versions of historical interpretation, and therefore of the slippery subject of history itself. To corral the abstract, master narrators debate the value of theory. Conceived of as an afterthought, theory becomes an appendage to historical narrative with the sole function of lending it social science credibility. Yet it is theory that allows stories to be told — and heard — on multiple levels, to operate in the ideological sphere of cultural myth. Theory lends perspective; and if we're honest, we're never without it.

We have layered careers and education into lives of gendered ethnicity and class to arrive at our perspectives. Those who carry a journalistic sense into higher education often prove adept at identifying significant artifacts and showcasing them in the lexicon of historical narrative. Backgrounds forged in the 20th-century newsroom bring to the re-

search process a naturalized approach of learned neutrality and a habit of unvarnished presentation of facts. The 21st century, however, has laid bare the supposition that the evidence speaks for itself. Technology has cast into the realm of the quaint the notion that the camera doesn't lie. Recognition that the pictorial realism of the photograph depicts a reality unique to its photographer, once a theoretical perspective among film scholars, is now an unquestioned worldview.

Historical realism is crafted from facts that we filter through our inherent and learned perspectives. As feminist cultural critic bell hooks consistently reminded us, everything we do is "rooted in theory." With historical interpretation constructed at the intersection of theory and evidence, a good marriage between theory and historical fact is intellectual bliss as well as a dialectic that advances the scholarship. It's time for me to cast aside doubt and resolve the internal debate that deadlocks my research process.

Media historians have broadened the scope of scholarly inquiry by incorporating those who have been absent from historical accounts. Filling the gaps in the literature has enriched the field by opening the media history narrative and welcoming future research that fills additional gaps. Yet a gap in the scholarship often mirrors something wanting in the primary source, and recognition of the lack carries an obligation to address the meaning of the absence itself.

JMC scholars hail from an industry that was confronted with a similarly daunting task a half century ago. The news industry faced a crucial social obligation when, in 1968, the Commission on Civil Disorders assigned media the responsibility of telling the story of U.S. race relations. Analyzing the causes of the nation's race riots, the Kerner Commission cited that the news media unconsciously reflected the bias of white society and its indifference toward the concerns of African Americans. The



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report noted that the very absence of Black faces excluded African Americans from society's mediated vision of the future. Gains were made by people of color and white women in the decade following the report. Women were allowed membership in the National Press Club and brought discrimination lawsuits against high-profile employers. Broadcast news featured more females, but a federal study charged that the women were merely "window dressing." Across the media, audiences were seeing more Black faces. The press was improving its coverage of people of color in normal social situations, but the newsroom diversity necessary for full-scale reform of press portrayal was too slow-paced to be fully realized before the sea change of journalism.

When the American Society of Newspaper Editors began tracking hiring in 1978, minorities represented 3.95 percent of newsroom staff. By 1990, minority representation in the newsroom had increased to 7.89 percent, but the nationwide reduction in newsroom employment that boosted the percentage foretold the transformation of the industry. Neither the millennial goal of parity between representation in the newsroom and the society it covered nor a later deadline for diversifying the newsroom could be achieved in the new world of journalism ushered in by the 21st century.

In scholarship as in industry, attempting to fill the gap does not satisfy the obligation. Examining the existence of a gap through evidence presented in its "cover story" reveals how the absence of women and minorities was constructed and how the lack was normalized. Theorizing cultural implications and historical consequences of representation when the story becomes someone else's story calls for an articulation of that which is intrinsically us.

Along with incorporating diversity in the 1970s, the newsroom and news production facilities were adopting computerized technology.

Viewed now from the other side of that arc of innovation, it is clear that the newsroom missed the 21st century. Despite pockets of early adoption as well as the suitability of both newspaper content and reading habits for translation into the digital realm, the news industry was a laggard in the technological revolution, which left it vulnerable to its eclipse in the current culture.

I step back with my research to examine the newspaper pages, ready to bring forward the cultural meanings of news. My research is focused on a cover story. The news has been there, its words encased in history. In news coverage that seemed to be the story of women, the women were subsumed in the words of the press. As the official version emerged, the front page brimmed with coverage familiar to press practice, government process, and reader routine. Politics was constructed as a battle that provided a platform for the swaggering rhetoric of prominent figures.

In a media history fraught with episodes of business, government, and individuals seeking wealth, power, and hegemonic control of society, we have observed a media survival strategy of metamorphosis. We have constructed a continuum of innovation to describe media changelings in cycles of disruption and adoption that cast the waning present into the folklore of tradition. Mass audiences of the 20th century flocked to theaters to sit among a community enthralled by newsreels. As the moving pictures moved to the small screen, newspapers repositioned themselves when television became the medium that brought the immediacy of breaking news into people's homes. The paradigm is again shifting, unsettling the center like loose gravel beneath our feet.

At a time when scholarly and popular narratives have become more fluid, there is reassurance in locating ourselves in the historical narrative as a means of finding optimism for the future and strategies for achiev-

ing our vision. Without the recognition of self comes a feeling of absence, or of displacement. While more inclusive historical accounts are paving the way toward embracing intersectionality, so, too, the shifting of the paradigm is recasting the familiar reflection of privilege.

As the media paradigm shifts, we mourn the loss of journalism as we knew it, aghast over the print culture and its analog counterparts that have been lost. Those entering academe steeped in 20th-century newsroom culture represent the last of an era. Carrying the sociology of the newsroom that rewarded its professional ethics and craft into the research, these scholars are writing the late history of the waning industry. A healthy respect for empirical evidence informed by social responsibility provides a prototype blend of objectivity and theory for historical scholarship and for envisioning the future of journalism. These are the stories that have the power to disrupt the co-option of news by the power-hungry and help journalism regain its rightful place in our democracy.

The richly woven stories that characterize JMC historical scholarship are increasingly articulating theoretical perspectives, claiming theory for JMC history. As an integral component in the transmission of media history, theory strengthens the scholarly credibility that is essential for the field's survival in the competitive business of academe. An interplay between theory and evidence generates meaning as well as a persuasive logic capable of engaging even highly distracted audiences. Interpretative authority is contested territory in popular culture as well as higher education. In a culture conversant in the metaverse yet resistant to cognitive dissonance, guardians of interpretative integrity risk the construction of history falling into the hands of scoundrels.

A recent *Journalism & Communication Monograph* by Elisabeth Fondren traces the German development of modern propaganda during

World War I and makes the case that wartime propaganda abounds in the American conversation more than a century later. Fondren's monograph, in tandem with commentary by Mike Sweeney, Ross Collins, and Sarah Oates, makes a compelling argument that the propaganda strategies have been adopted well beyond the bounds of war, with current political discourse stoking a public appetite for emotive narrative, regardless of factual content. Embracing theory in JMC history scholarship enables the creation of persuasive narrative that operates on an ideological level to cut through the cacophony.

Guided by theory, my research transports me through history to the words of the news, toward a story it is time to write. The press was telling the story of social responsibility as it covered officials who were making tough decisions on questions that the culture dictated it was time to decide. In the familiar news narrative of heroes and villains, the sliver of womanhood slipped away. I seek the meaning of the absence in order to bring forward a cultural construction of news that contributes to the scholarship and to the vision of the future of journalism, confident in the magic of history and the power of its stories.

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# Newspapers as the First Rough Draft of History

By Reed Smith ©



Smith

*“If I desired to leave to remote posterity some memorial of existing British civilization, I would prefer, not our docks, not our railways, not our public buildings, not even the palace in which we now hold our sittings; I would prefer a file of *The Times* newspaper.”* — Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1855.<sup>1</sup>

Although English novelist and politician Bulwer-Lytton is credited with introducing the often-parodied line “It was a dark and stormy night” to fiction writing, his statement above concerning *The* [London] *Times* still resonates with journalism historians, even as we go deeper into the 21st century online news environment. For many historians, newspapers from bygone eras serve as a valued resource when it comes to faithfully reconstructing the past. Likewise, the title of this article — though not satirized to the degree of Bulwer-Lytton’s phrase — is frequently utilized and bears important implications for historians. But is the statement really accurate? And during a time when print newspapers are increas-

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ingly scarce, what does this mean to historians who rely on them as a source? Both the origin of the phrase and historians' reliance on newspapers have been debated over the years and probably will continue to be. So, this article attempts to put the former to rest and to provide guidance for current and future historians who will be researching archived newspapers.

Reputable sources of the fourth estate, including former *Post* executive editor Ben Bradlee, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist David Halberstam, Graham's widow, Katherine, and *The Encyclopedia of American Journalism* all concur that Philip Graham first coined the expression. In her autobiography, *Personal History*, Katharine attributed the phrase's origination to a speech her late husband gave in 1963 to *Newsweek* foreign correspondents in London. However, she was wrong by a couple of decades and with the credit. Philip Graham indeed had employed the term in speeches, but, dating back to the late-1940s, it also had appeared numerous times under the bylines of multiple *Post* reporters throughout the 1940s and '50s.

We will return to tracking down the origin of the oft-repeated phrase later, but before doing so, the claim inherent in the statement has been important to historians for more than a century. They often have relied on newspapers as a resource in striving to accurately recreate the past. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a Rough Draft as "a first version of something (such as a document) that needs a lot of editing and rewriting."<sup>2</sup> Because of the journalism profession's standard of "truth-telling," an ethical reporter attempts to make the first version of a newspaper story as accurate as possible, and devoid of the grammatical and syntax errors that often characterize other forms of writing. Newspaper stories are typically published soon after the occurrence of a noteworthy event. Thus, they may include inaccuracies or reporter bias, and

fail to provide sufficient context. However, the fact that both the oldest form of journalism (newspapers) and the word “history” appear in the phrase, make it especially relevant to journalism historians. Nonetheless, because journalism is “literature in a hurry,” in the words of British poet Matthew Arnold, historians who esteem primary documents above other forms of documentation, have considered newspapers suspect when it comes to relying upon them as a credible source.

This has made reliance upon newspapers as a trustworthy historical source controversial. As a result, dating back more than 100 years, some prominent historians have sought to make a case for the usefulness of newspapers as a valid research source. Journalism historian Jerry Knudson has identified John Bach McMaster’s 1883 *History of the People of the United States* as the first book to rely extensively on newspaper content to document the past. And with its publication, other historians began to recognize “the wider role of the press in both reflecting and shaping society,” Knudson adds.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, in the early 20th century, non-journalism historians undertook the task of justifying newspapers as credible historical sources. In 1909, Pulitzer prize-winning historian James Ford Rhodes noted that historians at the turn of the 20th century were prone to “apologize” for utilizing newspapers as sources because of what they considered the unreliable or sensationalized content of newspapers during the Yellow Journalism era. Rhodes rejected this logic, noting that “newspapers satisfy so many canons of historical evidence.” He argued that the validity of newspaper stories could be verified by vetting them with other trustworthy sources, just as historians have traditionally validated other research. For historians who questioned newspapers’ credibility as a source, he equated this to a form of snobbishness, in which scholars believed that a medium that “caters to the ‘masses,’ will never suit the ‘classes.’”<sup>4</sup>

In his *History of the Civil War: 1861-1865*, Rhodes said he relied on personal papers as well as government documents for evidence, but he said he also utilized newspapers extensively. He believed they were the best way to understand the “spirit of the times was to steep my mind in journalistic material,” which allowed him to live “over again that decade.” He disputed that diary entries and personal letters, or government documents, just because they resided in “dusty archives,” should be regarded as more historically credible than newspapers, because “some men have lied as freely in private letters as in public speeches.”<sup>5</sup> Today, we could add to that argument the acceptance of oral histories as admissible recollections of past events. Memories fade over time and are subject to selectivity, self-aggrandizement, and bias.

In 1923, in a 566-page tome, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, Lucy Maynard Salmon extensively explored the intricacies of newspapers as valuable artifacts of history. “The periodical press still remains the most important single source the historian has at his command for the reconstruction of the life of the past three centuries,” she noted, then added that those who believe the press is not a worthwhile instrument for reconstructing the past because of its recognizable flaws are not making a well-founded argument. “The chief function of the newspaper is not to give the news,” she asserted, “It is not even exclusively to reflect public opinion, — important as this is, — but it is to record all contemporaneous human interests, activities, and conditions and thus to serve the future.”<sup>6</sup> She addressed the importance of evaluating the advertisements, editorial content, letters to the editor, placement of stories, and relationship to other stories within a newspaper as important elements in comprehending and truthfully reconstructing the past. She concluded that what a historian really should glean from newspapers was not actually news, but a picture of life at the time past. Salmon added that



just as a reporter had interpreted events, the historian likewise must interpret the story.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these historians marshalling a defense for newspapers as credible sources, others continued to dispute their value. In 1970, in *Newspapers as Tools for Historians*, journalism scholar William H. Taft wrote that newspapers had value as research sources, but he qualified his statement by concluding that newspapers “can be useful research tools, [but] they should be used with caution” because of their questionable reliability for accurately telling the truth with an impartial point of view.<sup>8</sup> Even former journalists have weighed in on the value of newspapers as credible sources for reconstructing the past. During a 1960 interview, journalist turned novelist Normal Mailer said, “Once a newspaper touches a story, the facts are lost forever, even to the protagonists.”<sup>9</sup>

In his 1993 *Late to the Feast* article, Knudson argued for a broader perspective on the importance of newspapers beyond their reporting of event details. He said history “should be concerned - - not only with what actually happened . . . but with what people thought was happening.” Although it is a given that newspaper accounts should not be relied upon as the absolute truth regarding an event, they are nevertheless valuable in helping the historian understand and reliably reconstruct for readers the context surrounding stories. Knudson concluded that “it does not matter if the news is false or distorted as long as readers believed it and acted upon it.” News coverage itself could have altered the outcome of an event.<sup>10</sup>

Non-historians likewise agree that newspapers play an invaluable role in helping us understand the past. Research librarians Sara Morris and Jenny Presnell note that “newspapers are an essential source for understanding localities, people, and movements throughout time.”<sup>11</sup>

And former Poynter Institute writing coach Chip Scanlan, adds

that “what I love about reading [old] newspapers is that more than anything perhaps they give you the feel of today, today’s news, that is, and that may be the closest we ever get to living in the past or trying to recreate it with words.” Scanlan notes that historical fiction writers often make extensive use of old newspapers to help them accurately paint a picture of the scene where action took place.<sup>12</sup>

In other historians’ minds, another quandary they face is whether to consider newspapers as a primary or a secondary source. It is a popular topic, as demonstrated by the reality that numerous university libraries offer advice to researchers on how to distinguish between the two. A review of a cross section of them leaves the investigator with the answer that: It depends! Research librarians make a case for having it both ways, but for journalism historians, the American University Library in Washington, D.C. provides some of the best elucidation of the topic: It defines a primary source as “any older publication, such as those prior to the 20th century.” However, because there are a variety of types of articles in newspapers, most of them should be considered secondary sources, unless a reporter “is an eyewitness to an event.” In that case, it becomes a primary source. The American University Library adds: “Any topic on media coverage of an event or phenomenon would treat newspapers as a primary source.”<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the American Library Association defines primary sources as “the raw materials historians use to interpret and analyze the past,”<sup>14</sup> and the Library of Congress states that primary sources are “original documents and objects which were created at the time under study. They are different from secondary sources, accounts that retell, analyze, or interpret events, usually at a distance of time or place.”<sup>15</sup> The Internet writing site Scribbr adds to the description when it states that primary sources provide “first-hand evidence. A primary

source gives you direct access to the subject of your research. Primary sources are more credible as evidence, but good research uses both primary and secondary sources.”<sup>16</sup> These definitions leave it in the hands of the historian to make the determination. Seeking to clarify the classification further, journalism historians James Startt and David Sloan characterize the identification of a primary source as dependent upon the “object” or “purpose” of the item. For example, a newspaper editorial is a secondary source “if the writer were commenting on an event for which he did not have first-hand knowledge. If, though, the object of the study is the writer’s opinion, an editorial would be primary.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to newspapers, primary sources also include autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories, many of which are recorded long after the event in question occurred. Therefore, scrutiny of the purpose and context of an article is essential when a historian considers how to designate a newspaper article as a primary or a secondary source.

In terms of the process of actually doing research, the historian must be ready to ask important questions before deciding to include newspaper articles in his or her work as accurate and truthful. There are three main purposes for an historian to use a newspaper, according to the Ray Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. These are the following:

1. Discovering facts about specific events; 2. looking for long-term trends; and 3. searching for “texture,” or context. The Rosenzweig Center suggests that historians need to probe further in discerning the value of utilizing a newspaper article. Additional qualifying questions include: Who published it and why? What was the paper’s political affiliation and its competitors? Who was the intended reader? Was he perceived as highly literate, or was the paper attempting to merely capture the reader’s eye with a loud headline or lurid graphics? What facts or stories

were left out of the edition that other newspapers included?<sup>18</sup> The Ohio State University Library adds that newspaper stories can help scholars understand how people viewed an event when it took place, and they can provide multiple points of view about an issue, including a comparison of US and international views. They can help the historian trace developments over time, and they can provide a “snapshot” of people and places at the time, including how they lived, what they ate and what clothes they wore.<sup>19</sup> A reality the historian must keep in mind is that an editor constructs each edition. The editorial philosophy that guides that newspaper plays a role in the decisions made regarding which articles are included, how much space is devoted to each one, and where they appear in that edition.

Historians have always faced the challenge of finding relevant stories within newspapers, especially in the days before they were digitized and available on the Internet. “Keyword” searches take less time and are more efficient, but “contextual” searches can require ponderous scanning of multiple pages over weeks or months of editions, especially with many of the digitized services failing to provide full page screen shots, and with some newspapers, especially local ones, not being available in digital form. (The Library of Congress’s “Chronicling America,” is an exception to this.) A researcher can count himself fortunate if he does not have to squint at a dimly lighted screen or poorly functioning microfilm reader, or even have to leaf through torn, stained, or yellowed paper copies of an archived newspaper. Most of these are unindexed, making the search process especially laborious. Even newspapers that have been digitized do not guarantee that the content is readily accessible or even usable. Sometimes the digitizing service fails to include important ancillary information, cuts off portions of articles or whole parts of pages, and the reproduced print is so often so small that it is difficult

to read without special assistance. Idaho journalism historian Dane Claussen related one such experience: “I recently stumbled across a digitized newspaper in ... [a major university library] that looked like chicken scratching. Could not make out a single word. Very disturbing, assuming that bound volumes have just been pitched. One fantasizes that they might also have it on microfilm.”<sup>20</sup>

There also is the issue of whether a researcher possesses library affiliation with a university that subscribes to a comprehensive range of digital newspaper archives. All libraries, especially those at smaller institutions or public libraries, cannot afford to subscribe to an extensive number of digital services. Today, unaffiliated historians increasingly must pay for historic newspaper access (*Newspapers.com*, as one example). This issue leads some historians to rely on the most easily accessible historic newspapers, such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. They have made their archives available online, or databases commonly include them, such as ProQuest, because of their reputation or name recognition. This means scholars at wealthier institutions have easier and wider-based access to newspaper archives. One scholar concludes that the result of this in the years ahead will be that the disparity “will result in a ‘digital divide between the ivory-tower haves and have-nots’ going forward.”<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, this author has found librarians at distant sites often to be more than willing to help with either online or hard-copy access to otherwise inaccessible newspaper archives on a short-term or individual case basis. A plaintive phone call or email has generated gracious cooperation on several occasions. Researchers should not give up until they have explored all possible avenues for access.

The fact of the matter is that at no point in history (overall) have historical newspapers been more accessible or more easily searchable than they have been in the past. Yet the 21st century and the accompa-

nying demise of print newspapers are bringing with it a whole new set of challenges for historians. Morris and Presnell predict that “historians in 2050 will not be able to count on libraries like they do today or as they have for the previous century” to access newspaper archives. They are especially concerned about the current trend of newspaper content being available only online, so-called “born-digital content.” This strategy eventually will probably replace print versions altogether. An example of this situation occurred in 2019, when the seminal Black newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, transitioned into only a born-digital paper. Its online content is no longer available via microfilm, and for libraries around the country, its archive is only available via ProQuest. Historians thirty years from now who want to research “how Covid-19 affected the Black population,” for example, may not be able to access the *Defender’s* archives to find out. Storage of content, largely for in-house access, and archiving (available to researchers) are two different strategies for retaining newspaper content. The research librarians note that for historians to have access to their pages, newspapers must make a commitment to archive their content, but this is not a high priority or an expense that many newspapers can or are willing to bear, especially when that undertaking includes access “via metadata, indexing, and keyword searching.” The reality is that “market forces more often decide access and archiving methods, which don’t always meet the needs of users,” instead of any concern that historians will need access to conduct research in the future. Morris and Presnell term the evolving newspaper archival landscape a “canary in the coal mine” for historians, meaning it will become increasingly difficult to rely upon ready access to newspaper archives to conduct research. They encourage historians to contact librarians to find out how they are dealing with the changes, and to impress upon them the need for newspaper archival access to conduct

historical research.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these challenges, it is likely that some form of newspaper archives will continue to serve as an important resource for journalism historians, and historians have long been acquainted with such challenges. Overcoming them is what makes historical research especially rewarding. Historians are familiar with the sometimes-lengthy search for seemingly lost or hidden, sources, that uncover new insights to past events and personalities. This fact provides the motivation for returning to where this article began, or rather, where the “rough draft” phrase originated. In an August 2010 article in the online magazine *Slate*, Jack Shafer posed the question: “Who Said it First? Journalism is the first rough draft of history,” in which he attempted to track down the originator of the expression. He related that in an email that etymologist Barry Popik had sent him in 2009, Popik said he had traced the phrase’s first usage to the publication of a 1943 book review of Harold Ickes’ *Autobiography of a Curmudgeon*, written by Alan Barth for *The New Republic*.<sup>23</sup> Barth provided a mixed review, commenting that he found Ickes’ book detailed “but lacking in perspective and in the sort of anecdotal material necessary to illuminate” Ickes’ time in Franklin Roosevelt’s Administration. Near the end of the review, Barth states that “news is only the first rough draft of history.” The line appears just after he quotes Ickes as saying he wrote his memoir because he had been sick when he started it, and he “didn’t know what kind of obituary I’d get.” Barth concludes the review with: “One can only imagine that the draft will be revised, and the title of the Autobiography refuted when obituaries at last come to be written for Harold Ickes.”<sup>24</sup>

In case Barth’s name is unfamiliar, do not be surprised. It may be because he was a largely anonymous *Washington Post* editorial writer, although he fulfilled that role for twenty-nine years, from 1943 to 1972.

As is still the case. *Post* editorials appeared sans bylines. Eugene Meyer (Katharine Graham's father) — hired the mild-mannered, soft-spoken Barth in 1943. The adamantly Republican Meyer did so, even though he recognized that Barth was a devoted liberal. Nevertheless, Meyer wanted a diverse range of opinion in the *Post*, and he assured Barth that he would have complete freedom to express his oppositional views, and Meyer kept his word. Barth did not set the *Post's* editorial policy, but insiders say his perspective influenced its tenor. He consistently backed society's disenfranchised and less fortunate, leading *Post* historian Chalmers Roberts to label him “the conscience of the *Post*.”<sup>25</sup>

So, what is noteworthy about this oft-repeated journalistic reference: “The first rough draft of history?” Shafer argues that the phrase flatters journalists and resonates because of its “artful redundancy.” The words symbolize the news story as “a raw beginning where truth originates.... [The] single syllable words fall like a hammer blow driving a nail.”<sup>26</sup> The case for Barth as the originator of the phrase is, of course, circumstantial, like history can be itself, yet it is strong. He may have borrowed it from another journalist who heard the comment in an informal, off-the-cuff manner years before or even from an historian. Regardless, it became entrenched in journalism culture with Graham and other *Post* writers employing it as justification for the value of *Post* articles specifically and the journalism profession in general. It explains the historical value of news stories written during or immediately after an event, but clarifies that stories are published before all the relevant facts are known or their meaning fully understood. As importantly, it provides historians with a rationale for utilizing them as evidence to document seminal events as well as the journalistic strategies of the men and women who chronicled them.

There most certainly are errors in news stories from the past. Re-



porting events in the heat of the moment can result in erroneous or missing details. Bias and lack of perspective can also taint them. French author André Gide once proclaimed: “I call journalism everything that will be less interesting tomorrow than today.”<sup>27</sup> For the journalism historian, he could not have been more wrong. Flawed though they may be, archived newspapers contain a treasure trove of detailed knowledge that is unavailable anywhere else. For certain, historians enjoy the benefit of hindsight when utilizing stories as sources to confirm accuracy. They cannot be utilized alone without the utilization of other primary sources. However, they make an initial contribution to public knowledge and begin the process of chronicling the significance and impact of an event as it progresses throughout its lifespan. As a result, they serve as significant artifacts that help historians better understand and more thoroughly explain the past. While numerous historians still prefer other primary sources, newspaper content will continue to serve as an important resource in a variety of salient ways in the future.

### NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> “Rough Draft,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rough%20draft>.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry W. Knudson, “Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources,” *Perspectives on History: Archives and History, American Historical Association*, October 1, 1993, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-1993/late-to-the-feast>.

<sup>4</sup> James Ford Rhodes, “Newspapers as Historical Sources,” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1909, 103: pp. 650-651.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 651, 656.

<sup>6</sup> Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, p. 491.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 469-470.

<sup>8</sup> William H. Taft, as cited in Alison Jones, “The Many Uses of Newspapers,” *Richmond Daily [Va.] Dispatch*, p. 2, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://dispatch.richmond.edu/docs/papers/usesofnewspapers.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Norman Mailer, “She Thought the Russians Was Coming,” *Esquire*, June 1, 1960, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> Knudson, “Late to the Feast.”

<sup>11</sup> Susan Morris and Jenny Presnell, “FINE PRINT: Libraries, Historians, and the Future of Newspaper Access,” American Historians Association, March. 17, 2001, accessed December 30, 2021, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2021/fine-print-libraries-historians-and-the-future-of-newspaper-access>

<sup>12</sup> Chip Scanlan, “Read All about It,” email newsletter, Poynter Institute, September 20, 2003, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2003/read-all-about-it>.

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<sup>14</sup> “Primary Sources on the Web: Finding, Evaluating, Using,” RUSA: A Division of the American Library Association, accessed November 15, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/rusa/sections/history/resources/primarysources>.

<sup>15</sup> “Research Guides: Primary Sources,” Library of Congress, accessed December 19, 2021, <https://guides.loc.gov/student-resources/primary-sources>.

<sup>16</sup> Raimo Streefkerk, “Primary and Secondary Sources,” Scribbr, 2018, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/primary-and-secondary-sources>.

<sup>17</sup> James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*, 4th ed. Northport, Ala.: Vision Press, 2019), p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> “World History Sources: Unpacking Evidence,” George Mason University, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://Chmm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources>.

<sup>19</sup> “Why Use Newspapers?” The Ohio State Libraries, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://guides.osu.edu/newspapers/why-use>.

<sup>20</sup> Dane Claussen, email to author, January 3, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Morris & Presnell, “FINE PRINT.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jack Shafer, “Who Said it First? Journalism as the First Rough Draft of History,” *Slate*, August 30, 2010, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2010/08/on-the-trail-of-the-question-who-first-said-or-wrote-that-journalism-is-the-first-rough-draft-of-history.html#:~:text=Many%20journalists%20give%20for%20mer%20Washington,first%20rough%20draft%20of%20history.%E2%80%9D>.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Barth, “Synthetic Misanthrope,” *The New Republic*, 1943, 108: 676-677.

<sup>25</sup> Chalmers Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 281.

<sup>26</sup> Shafer, “Who Said it First?”

<sup>27</sup> André Gide, as cited in Thomas Griffith, “The Pursuit of Journalism,” *1959 NiemanReports*, accessed September 4, 2021, <https://niemanreports.org/articles/1959-the-pursuit-of-journalism/#:~:text=Andr%C3%A9%20Gide%20was%20severer%2C%20but,fact%20history%20on%20the%20run>.

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# Historical Roundtable: Causality in History

By Bruce J. Evensen, Michael S. Schudson,  
James D. Startt, and Patrick S. Washburn ©



Evensen

**H**istorians often must deal with the issue of causes. Yet, they disagree on exactly how causes are to be approached and explained. Some say we can't know what the causes were. Others try to explain events through single causes, while others believe all events had multiple causes. Handling causation is no easy challenge. It involves a number of problems. In this roundtable, three senior scholars offer their views on the issue.

***Evensen:** In the eighth book of his *Physics*, Aristotle famously concluded there is no real knowledge of a thing until we have grasped its cause. Would you say that is true of researching and writing history?*

**Schudson:** I hate to disagree with Aristotle! But one of the delights of doing history is that you can add something to our understanding *without* identifying causes. What history can do is to rule out some causes.

*Bruce J. Evensen is an Emeritus Professor of Journalism at DePaul University. He's written eight books and thirty-eight chapters and articles. His latest book is *Journalism and the American Experience*. He received his Ph.D. in mass communication from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For ten years he was a broadcast journalist in Washington and Jerusalem.*

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I am a sociologist by training (Ph.D. in sociology, Harvard University, 1976). My most influential teachers in graduate school were Daniel Bell (a journalist before he began to teach at Columbia, at that point granted a doctorate for his published magazine pieces) and David Riesman (whose only advanced degree was a J.D. before he started to teach undergraduates at the University of Chicago), so I am used to in-



Schudson

Michael S. Schudson is professor of journalism at Columbia University. He is the author of *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (1978) and author or editor of fourteen other books, including *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (1998), *The Rise of the Right to Know* (2015), and *Journalism: Why It Matters* (2020). He has been awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellowship and honorary degrees from the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and Hong Kong Baptist University.



Startt

James D. Startt, professor emeritus at Valparaiso University, is the author of *Woodrow Wilson and the Press: Prelude to the Presidency* and *Woodrow Wilson, The Great War, and the Fourth Estate*. He is co-author of *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*, and co-editor of *The Significance of the Media in American History*. He is working on a book about Wilson's Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker. A former president of the American Journalism Historians Association, he is a recipient of the Kobre Award, the association's highest honor.



Washburn

Patrick S. Washburn is a professor emeritus at Ohio University's journalism school, where he taught from 1984 to 2012. He is the author or co-author of four books and two journalism monographs as well as the editor of *Journalism History* from 2001 to 2012. A former president of the American Journalism Historians Association, he is a recipient of the Kobre Award, the association's highest honor. He was an invited speaker twice at the Smithsonian and the National D-Day museums.

terdisciplinary routes to research.

My dissertation explored the history of how “objectivity” became a central value in American journalism; it became my first book, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (1978) and I went on to write a half dozen other books on 19th and 20th century U.S. history of journalism, political culture (*The Good Citizen*, 1998), cultural memory (*Watergate in American Memory*, 1992) and public policy history (*The Rise of the Right to Know*, 2015) among other works.

As I have said to my graduate students, chronology is your friend. It really helps to know what came first and what came later. For instance, if you see that “trust in the media” measured by public opinion polls has been declining since the early 1970s, you can feel certain that social media have not been the primary cause of declining trust in media since there was no Internet, let alone social media, when the decline began and gathered steam. Are social media today a contributing factor? Maybe so. Are they the primary cause? Certainly not. A phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s cannot have been caused by something that did not exist until the early 2000s.

**Startt** : I disagree with Aristotle in this instance. My response rests on his reference to “its cause.” No action or event of consequence during World War I can be attributed to a single cause. For example, consider President Wilson’s cancellation of his press conferences after the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915. His critics then and later claimed he used that crisis as an excuse to end the conferences, which he considered a nuisance. However, if his dislike of them, which is not altogether true, was the reason for cancelling them, why did he fail to do so when his wife Ellen Axon died on August 7, 1914? Her death shattered Wilson. He was heard uttering afterwards, “Oh my God, what am I to do?” The

war in Europe had just begun, and as John Milton Cooper, Jr. suggests, it would have been understood if, under these circumstances he decided to stop the conferences.

So, why did he stop them? One explanation is that reporters had previously misinterpreted his comments and that there had been previous embarrassing leaks from his conferences. Also, after the *Lusitania* was torpedoed with great loss of life, there was an uproar of opinion in the country against Germany. As war appeared imminent, utmost caution about news from the White House was necessary. It was also doubtful that the president could have given the reporters the type of answers to their questions that they wished to have. In addition, people were asking questions that were far from settled in Wilson's mind. Failure to answer them in a press conference would be itself open to interpretation. Consequently, press conferences were too risky to hold at this time.

***Evensen:** Scottish skeptic David Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding claimed there was often "no necessary connection" between events other than the mind willing it to be so. More recently, historian Daniel Boorstin observed that "the greatest obstacle to discovering the shape of the earth, the continents and the ocean, was not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge." How have you guarded against making needless assumptions about causality in some of your own research?*

**Washburn:** In more than forty years as a historian, I only assumed the major cause of what occurred once before I started my research. That was for the 2020 book, *Sports Journalism: A History of Glory, Fame, and Technology*, that I did with Chris Lamb. The book examines how American sports journalism changed over almost 300 years and why changes

in it occurred. Because of my extensive sports background—a high school and college athlete, a newspaper sportswriter, a college sports information director, and an NCAA faculty athletic representative—I assumed sports journalists were the major cause for changes. That’s because I grew up reading about sports in newspapers and magazines, listening to games on radio, and viewing them on television. However, as I did the research, I was determined, despite my assumption of the major cause, to let the evidence guide me. And I was surprised at what I found.

I discovered that only a handful of sports journalists deserved major credit for the changes that occurred. While many of them justifiably earned national fame for their writing and broadcasts, few changed the field. Instead, they merely inspired others to imitate their excellence. But what did occur in answer to the study’s why question were numerous technological changes starting in the early 1800s, and continuing up to the present, that literally gave sports journalism national prominence with readers, listeners, and viewers. Some of the technological changes impacting the media included faster presses, the telegraph, photography, telephones, linotype machines, and wireless telegraphy; other changes were the result of emerging media, such as radio, television (including ESPN), the internet, and *Sports Illustrated*. But those were not the only causes bringing about changes in sports journalism. Other important factors included sportswriters on black newspapers pushing in the 1930s and 1940s for the admission of blacks into baseball’s major leagues; the sudden escalation of women into sports journalism in the 1980s; ethics and religious considerations; and sports journalists changing the way they dealt with famous black athletes starting in the 1930s.

Thus, the research emphasis in the book changed dramatically by the time the book was written. Quite simply, I could not see the forest

for the trees when I began. Technological changes were an obvious major answer to the cause question, but my life-long immersion in sports had blinded me initially. Fortunately, I had it drummed into me by historian Dave Nord, when I was a doctoral student at Indiana University, to make no assumptions about why things occurred historically. I let the evidence about the major cause speak to me in my research, which kept me from making a mistake in the book.

***Evensen:** What is your reaction to Charles Beard's assertion that historians should be modest in their generalizing about the past, since, in his view, "Every historian's work — his selection of facts, his emphasis, his omissions, his organization and his methods of presentation, bears relation to his own personality and to the age and circumstances in which he lives."*

**Startt:** Beard is right. It would be less than honest not to realize that selectivity and personality affect an historian's work. No matter how fair and balanced historians try to make their writing, some idea moved them to select a particular topic. In my case, it was an interest in diplomacy and journalism that led to my studies of Wilson. Moreover, as an astute politician and world statesman, one of the few our country has produced, he was the type of figure I wished to study in depth.

I was less drawn to Henry Cabot Lodge. My study of sources pertaining to Wilson seemed endless, but because of the pressures of time and expense, those used for Lodge were limited to secondary sources and newspapers. To compensate for this preference, I tried to keep in mind that Lodge had a long and distinguished career in the Senate and was for years the Republicans' leading authority on foreign policy. Furthermore, millions approved of the positions he took against Wilson. I also refused to overlook Wilson's mistakes. In the end, I found him as



guilty as Lodge for the Senate's failure to ratify the Versailles Treaty.

**Schudson:** Like Charles Beard, I'm all for modesty, and what he says here is obviously true — yes, we are all influenced by our personality, the breadth or narrowness of our own experience, the time and place of our location on this earth. But can the historian do his or her best to keep these idiosyncrasies in mind and try to protect against their undue influence? Certainly. And the professional, publishing historian is obliged to do exactly that. That's what "peer review" is all about. I loved the sign a child held up at the San Francisco Women's March in 2017: "What do we want? Evidence-based science. When do we want it? After peer review!"

Peer review is not a perfect system. But it is the best we have. It makes history as well as biology and chemistry as reliable as they are. Historians may spend much of their time in libraries, archives, and at their own desks, but in the end their work becomes public, even before publication, as they check it and cross-check with colleagues near and far. Writing history is a social process, not the work of hermits.

***Evensen:** Alfred Lord Whitehead chastised historians for "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" which he said infected far too much of the history being written. In your research, how have you managed to stay within your own findings and avoided overstating what your evidence may or may not have demonstrated?*

**Startt:** I have tried to make my research as free as possible of "misplaced concreteness." To begin with, the sources used were carefully examined and, wherever possible, the figures examined were allowed to speak for themselves. By making a wide search for pertinent material, it was pos-

sible to determine Wilson's flaws as well as his assets. Upon entering politics, even those who had encouraged him to enter the Democratic campaign for Governor of New Jersey had little faith that this university president would be able to survive the machinations of state politics. Wilson needed help. He received it from several journalists: the editor and publisher of the *Trenton Free American* Henry Eckert Alexander, and the editor of the *Trenton Evening News* James Kerney. Without their counsel it is doubtful that he would have survived the election for governor.

By searching widely, it was also apparent that Wilson made a major mistake in handling the most serious foreign policy issue of his early presidency, the Mexican Revolution that began in 1911. Wilson pursued a neutral policy at first, but he changed course three years later to support the party trying to oust the dictator Victoriano Huerta. Wilson's liberal supporters were outraged and even more so when he had American marines land at Veracruz to prevent a large shipment of arms bound for Huerta. As Oswald Garrison Villard told Wilson, his action was "mistaken and untenable."

On the other hand, few people of his generation were so gifted an orator as he. Few could match his record, as governor or president, for having debated domestic legislation approved. And, no one blended realism and idealism so well as he did in his war address on April 2, 1917. As Walter Lippmann wrote to him afterwards, "Only a statesman who will be called great could have made America's intervention mean so much to the generous forces of the world, could have lifted the inevitable horror of war into a deed so full of meaning."

*Evensen: E. P. Tapp once taught a Philosophy of History course at the University of New England, where he observed, "day and night we think of*

*causation” and therefore “without a concept of causation, there can be no history.” What’s your reaction to such a claim?*

**Startt:** I disagree with Tapp. My preference has always been to write history from the bottom up. By starting with a careful examination of the sources that people and events left behind, it is possible to write a reliable history about what caused them to act or events to occur. But, by starting with a theory of causation, historians run the risk of allowing the theory to influence their selection and application of sources. Consider Walter A. McDougall’s *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy*. It is an account of how America’s civil religion, “God is on our side,” betrayed the country’s national interest. His chapters on Woodrow Wilson are full of engaging reflections, but according to his interpretation, the president was only able to do wrong. He leaves no room for the possibility of Wilson’s inspiring leadership. In the end, McDougall claims that Wilson took his country into a war among European countries that had their own civil religions “in order to prove, like a pagan priest-king that his tribal gods were mightier than theirs.”

Rather than accept Tapp’s “without a concept of causation there can be no history,” I prefer Richard J. Evans’ remark on the subject in his book, *In Defense of History*. After considering various approaches to history he wrote, “It really happened, and we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out how it did and reach some tenable conclusions about what it all meant.”

**Evensen:** *Twentieth century causal pluralists — such as Christopher Hitchcock, Ned Hall, Leon de Vreese and Nancy Cartwright — have begun making the case that not one but several causes likely have the greatest efficacy in explaining change in the past. How might their observation be reflected in*

*your research?*

**Washburn:** I taught a graduate historical research class for twenty-eight years, and I always stressed to students that nothing ever happens in history for just one reason. There are always multiple causes — one may be a major cause and others minor — but if you have only one, go back and look again. And the more you know about your research subject, the less likely that you will miss a cause.

Here is an example from my dissertation on the federal government's investigation of the black press in World War II. In visiting archives, looking at documents that I received from the Justice Department and the FBI under a Freedom of Information Act request, doing interviews, and reading black newspapers, I noticed that the black press subtly began criticizing the government less in the summer of 1942 for black inequalities. Several reasons were obvious for the cut-back. By the summer, blacks were in the marines and the Army Air Corps for the first time, the Navy would allow them to do other things besides work in kitchens, and the Army had far more blacks in it than before. Thus, blacks were making important gains. In addition, black newspapers were getting far more advertising than before the war from white-owned companies because of a federal excess profits tax, and publishers did not want to possibly jeopardize their sudden increase in profits by continuing to complain.

However, I wondered if those were the only reasons for less criticism by the black press. On May 22, 1942, Attorney General Francis Biddle was told by President Franklin Roosevelt to do something to get black newspapers to be less critical because they were hurting the war effort, and a month later Biddle met with John Sengstacke, the publisher of the *Chicago Defender*, the country's second largest black newspa-

per. What had occurred in that meeting intrigued me, but while their meeting was mentioned in several government documents, nothing indicated what was said. I asked Sengstacke in 1983 about that meeting, expecting he would not remember something that occurred forty-one years ago. He surprised me by giving a detailed account of it, explaining he had never forgotten it because that was the only time he met with an attorney general. In the meeting, he said, Biddle threatened the black papers with a sedition indictment but then said that would not occur if they toned down their criticism of the federal government. Sengstacke said he immediately told other black publishers what Biddle promised. While they never told readers, they quickly shifted most of their criticism to state governments, individual congressmen, and private companies.

As a result of that conversation with Sengstacke, I uncovered the major cause for the editorial change in the black papers toward the federal government in the summer of 1942. In terms of black press history during the war, that was a significant discovery. I could have easily missed it, but what I had found in my extensive research resulted in me asking Sengstacke a question that I thought was a waste of time. The bottom line is that causes in history are more likely to be found as knowledge of a subject is increased.

**Startt:** The pluralists have it right. An example from my study of Newton D. Baker illustrates their claim. One problem in that inquiry that held my interest was: Why did the isolationist movement become so much more effective in the 1930s than it was a decade earlier? An answer that intrigued me was that it was because of the influence that revisionist writers such as Harry Elmer Barnes and Walter Millis had on the interventionist-isolationist debate at that time.

These writers challenged the existing narrative regarding American intervention in the World War claiming that Wilson took the country to war in 1917 for nefarious reasons. It was not because of the explanation he gave in his war address on April 2, but because international traders, munitions-makers, bankers, and foreign propagandists duped the president and the American people into war. There was nothing new about these ideas. They were promoted during the period of American neutrality (1914-1917) by German and Irish American editors and some Socialist editors. Disgruntled progressives like those at the *Nation* carried revisionist writing on into the 1920s. Two books published later in the decade, Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Techniques in the World War* (1927) and Sidney B. Fay's two volume *Origins of the World War* (1928), added credence to the revisionists' arguments.

Fay, who benefitted from the German archives' recent publication of documents on the origins of the World War, claimed that Germany neither plotted nor wanted the war. That implied that the Versailles Peace Treaty, which was premised on the idea of Germany's responsibility for the war, was wrong and should be revised. Revisionists, therefore, could argue with added authority that the war was a tragic mistake and that the Versailles Treaty was a gross unfairness to Germany. Baker, the voice of Wilsonian idealism in the 1930s, was so angered by the revisionists' claims that he wrote a letter refuting them to the *New York Times*, which he later expanded for an article in *Foreign Affairs* and yet later into a short book *Why We Went to War*. He contended that the United States intervened in the war because of Germany's renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare and the ensuing sinking of more ships crossing the Atlantic, and nothing more. Regarding the influence of munitions manufacturers, bankers, and foreign propagandists, he insisted that they were of no concern either to Wilson or to the cabinet.

Nevertheless, revisionist history was only one factor in the renewal and expansion of isolationism in the 1930s. There were abundant other causes. The impact of the Great Depression and the corresponding rise of economic nationalism are impossible to dismiss as contributory causes as was the influence of pacifist and anti-war societies. The image of the Europeans as a warring people must also be considered. As the isolationist William Randolph Hearst once wrote, “Europe is always planning for war or fighting war.” Then, too, there was the belief that the United States did not need to aid France and Britain to protect its own national security since it was protected by its two ocean barriers. In addition, there was the possibility that the upswing in isolationism reflected the resentment felt by many Midwesterners toward the intellectual “establishment” in the Northeast. Only multi-causation can explain so diverse a movement as isolationism.

***Evensen:** Based on your years as a researcher, how might you guide future researchers, who search for causation in mass communication history? For instance, Helen Steward, in her *Metaphysics for Freedom*, observes that we all have a theory of action, based on our understanding of what causes people to act. She urges historians to distinguish between those who act and the events that triggered the individual to act. What would be your advice about searching for causality in the past?*

**Schudson:** The causality problem that troubles me most in media history is the assumption that the media are powerful forces in history, what has been called “media-centrism.” I think the media deserve attention in general histories of the world but they rarely get it. In U.S. history textbooks, they barely get mentioned — a parenthetical note, perhaps, that the Federalist Papers were published in newspapers; possibly

a mention of Ida B. Wells and her anti-lynching campaign — maybe it made a difference, but of course lynching persisted for decades after her journalism attacked it. A sentence or two about yellow journalism pushing the U.S. into war against Spain in 1898? Yes, although there's no evidence that President McKinley paid the slightest attention to the New York papers of Hearst and Pulitzer, nor was the U.S. Senate — still elected by state legislatures and not by popular vote — so influenced.

It is damnably difficult to know when or to what extent media influence public opinion, or how or when public opinion influences public policy. I believe that media matter but I do not think anyone has much of a grasp on how much.

**Washburn:** In the mid-1970s, when I was a reporter for the *Rochester* (N.Y.) *Times-Union*, the newspaper ran a syndicated column one day in which the writer said no two words in the English language mean exactly the same thing. I joined some of my peers in discussing whether the columnist was correct, and we agreed he was not. That was not a surprising opinion. We were trained to write short sentences, and if a shorter word would suffice — such as saying “about 500 people” instead of “approximately 500 people”—that was okay. However, I never forgot what the columnist said, and about five years later, when I started becoming a historian, I slowly began thinking he was right, and over time, this made me a better writer. I found myself paying attention to every word in every sentence that I wrote, making sure it was exactly what I wanted to say.

If you approach writing history in that fashion, it will not only make you a better writer but a better historian. And it particularly will make your statements about cause in history more precise and accurate.



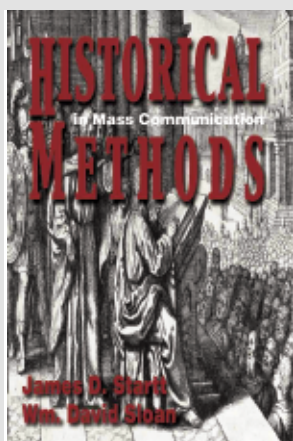
In discussing this with my students, I told them that sometimes you know exactly what impact a cause has on an historical event. But more often it seems to me that historians must speculate on the impact of a cause because they do not know for sure. I suggested to students that, based on the evidence, they should assign a percentage to how sure they were of a cause's impact, such as 90 percent. Then, when they had a percentage number, they should convert that to an appropriate phrase, being as positive as possible. Thus, I would tell them to think about the difference in various words that could be used with a cause; for example, these included saying something was "almost sure," "possible," "probable," "may have occurred," and "suggests" among others.

The bottom line is that good historians use precise English. To not do so can result in other researchers, who use a sloppily written study, drawing incorrect historical conclusions about cause.

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# Book Award Interview

By Tom Mascaro ©



Mascaro



**T**om Mascaro won the Tankard Book Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2013 for *Into the Fray: How NBC's Washington Documentary Unit Reinvented the News* (Potomac Books, 2012). He is a retired documentary historian and professor of media and communication at Bowling Green State University. He's at work on a new book about NBC News documentaries, 1967-1989, "Hard Truths: The Documentary Odyssey of Bob Rogers and Rhonda Schwartz." He received his Ph.D. in Radio-TV-Film from Wayne State University.

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

**Mascaro:** *Into the Fray: How NBC's Washington Documentary Unit Reinvented the News* develops new history about the formation of the NBC Washington documentary unit under the leadership of Ted Yates and Stuart Schulberg to produce the prime-time magazine-documentary series *David Brinkley's Journal*, which aired from 1961-1963 to wide acclaim but low ratings. The book documents the formation of the unit, the mixture of field production in

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color film with studio continuity segments, as well as Brinkley's wry but sincere approach to journalism. The unit shifted in 1964 to long-form documentary production. Together with writer-associate producer Robert Rogers, the unit developed signature documentaries, such as *Birth Control: How?*, *Vietnam: It's a Mad War*, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, *Santo Domingo: War Among Friends*, *Congo: Victim of Independence*, *The Undeclared War* (in Guatemala), and *The Battle for Asia*, a trilogy covering Laos, Thailand, and Indonesia. Schulberg and Yates grew apart in 1964 and Rogers became the writerly counterpart to the dynamic Yates. The crew was in Jerusalem on June 5, 1967, the start of the Six-Day War, where Yates was killed by Israeli gunfire. In addition to providing biographies of Yates, Schulberg, Rogers, and many other production members of the unit, *Into the Fray* details the difficulty of repatriating Yates's remains to America and the transition to the Rogers unit (the subject of a sequel in progress).

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

**Mascaro:** I met Bob Rogers as part of a grad-student research project in 1987. We had Vietnam in common, I as a soldier, Rogers as writer and associate producer of one of the most important films on the war, *Vietnam: It's a Mad War*. Lawrence W. Lichty, then a professor at Northwestern and an expert on Vietnam documentaries, told me Rogers had done admirable work but got little credit. I used that as a springboard — to see what he had done and whether he deserved historical treatment. (By the time of his death in 1989, Rogers had produced more than one hundred documentary and magazine reports for NBC News and won numerous awards. He frequently produced the premiere episode of NBC's many documentary/magazine series). I had intended to

write a biography of Rogers, but his story was inseparable from Yates. I decided instead to write a biography of the unit, from its origin in 1961 to create *David Brinkley's Journal*, through the transition to documentary, ending with the death of Yates in 1967.

***Historiography:*** *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?*

**Mascaro:** I engineered a large number of lucky accidents, first through writing to Rogers's widow, Liz. She sent his papers to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. I examined — over several visits — the papers of Rogers, Yates, David Brinkley, film expert Bob Asman, and Robert Doyle, the show's director, including Doyle's blueprints, drawings, and camera blocking for the *David Brinkley's Journal* set. On my return trip from the Wisconsin archive, I bumped into Ed Fouhy, former producer for NBC News, at AEJMC in Chicago. He suggested calling Rogers's associate, Naomi Spinrad, who still worked for NBC. Naomi put me in touch with Rhonda Schwartz, who worked the longest with Rogers. Rhonda opened her Rolodex and sent me to Lois Farfel Stark, who started with Rogers in 1967, camera operators, editors, sound techs, and researchers. I conducted extensive interviews with crew members and associates of Rogers and Yates, including his widow Mary Yates Wallace, who married Mike Wallace of CBS News. (Wallace was close friends with Ted Yates having developed the infamous *Night Beat*.) I interviewed Yates's surviving sons, documentary makers Eames and Angus Yates. Angus moved his father's papers — several file cabinets — to his home in Washington, D.C. and let me work in his garage office to examine and photocopy material. I was hon-

ored, thrilled, and humbled by what I discovered, which included Yates's wallet, press badge, and the pocket notebook he carried when he was shot. Liz Rogers gave me Bob's film collection and 16mm projector so I could view rare films. I scoured archival records at NARA II in College Park, the LBJ Papers in Austin, NBC collections in Wisconsin and at the Library of Congress, congressional records, and viewed as many films and production photographs as I could. I obtained the military service records for Yates, Schulberg, and Rogers, which answered unusual questions. I felt a bit squeamish contacting the family of NBC correspondent Irving R. Levine within weeks of his death. Levine's papers were at the Library of Congress but closed. His family graciously waived the several years waiting period and granted me access. Levine was the main NBC contact for the network and Yates family when the producer was killed. He liaised with Mary, from Athens, with NBC and the Washington, D.C. funeral home to arrange services. Levine's notes on napkins and hotel stationery were vital to my understanding. I interviewed two Jesuit priests who were friends with Rogers and sat with him as he lay dying from cancer. I started research in 1987 and sent my manuscript to the publisher around 2011, so I had worked on it more than 20 years, writing articles and papers along the way.

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

**Mascaro:** There are a few people I wished I had interviewed before they died. I was unable to connect with Richard Goodwin, a friend of Yates. (It was announced recently his papers are going to Austin, so I hope to gain access soon.) I had little luck getting records of Yates's death from the city of Jerusalem, although some documents were in the papers his

son provided. There was reported to be film footage of the actual shooting of Yates at NBC News, but I never found it. Yates was incarcerated during a production in the Congo, but I have not found records from that locale. Julian Townsend, one of the chief camera operators for the unit, was dead by the time I found his son; but he left papers, some documents, and many 35mm production slides. There are always unanswered questions....

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

**Mascaro:** If you think you should talk with someone, do it now. You need to prepare, of course, but you can't read everything, and if you wait, your subjects may become ill, forgetful, or dead. Learn as much as possible about the details of their careers and especially their productions. I've found sources quite willing to go beyond the superficial once they realize you've done your homework. Don't ask "philosophical" questions; ask about process and procedure. You can ask about why this shot versus another or probe the producer's intent in a particular scene of a report. Get to the point with questions. My transcripts routinely begin with pages of me explaining what I'm doing and then gradually getting to my questions. It's not a bad technique for establishing credentials and report, but the goal is for them to talk, not you. Take notes while you watch films, including direct quotations that are important. I keep a running spiral notebook dated log when I'm in the archive, and that has helped me recall details. You may not be able to locate transcripts, and transcripts don't always match the film as broadcast. If you are recording interviews, take notes simultaneously as a back-up, and make damn sure your equipment is working. It's less of a problem now

with Zoom and iPhones, but I once did an interview and forgot to plug the phone mike into the recorder. All I got was my voice, nothing from the subject and no notes.

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

**Mascaro:** No one had published on the NBC Washington documentary unit or its producers and crew members, so I was dropping into open seas. That meant sifting and finding interesting stuff that was not necessarily in response to my research questions. I was still developing my archival research methods, including recording box/folder numbers on the spot, or at the end of the day after a long archival session. But I often had volumes of documents that were interesting but not essential. It takes time to develop frames for scanning documents, especially working in unexplored research areas. I had the luxury of a year-long appointment in Washington, D.C. in 2006-07, so I had several days every week at NARA II for two full semesters. I had a travel grant to the LBJ library in Austin, but nothing for trips to Wisconsin. It is challenging to go through everything efficiently and completely and come away with high-quality records of your research scanning. I do feel that I've looked at some papers multiple times, although, I find new information the second and third time through.

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

**Mascaro:** This is a two-part question better framed as a single question:



*How do historians maintain their neutrality of viewpoint as they probe more closely to the essence of a subject or person?* I want to know as much as I can about the subject. I want to get “too close,” if you will, to understand warts and all, appreciate their interpersonal relationships, etc. This is what reveals a subject’s *values*, which is what is meaningful historically. Also you want/need to stay focused on the person/subject in their times. The goal is to return the reader to the period under review and introduce/analyze the conduct of the character in their times. The more you know, the closer you get to their value systems, the better your ability to interpret their actions from a historical point of view. When I started investigating Yates, he was a legend who died a hero’s death as a journalist. No one had a bad word to say about him. Records, speeches, awards, etc. all spoke to Yates’s esteem. I knew from obituaries that he’d been a “combat correspondent” during the Korean War, so I was all set to draw on that “courage” in writing the history of his courageous reporting under fire in Jerusalem in 1967. But I learned from his military records that Yates never went to Korea. He sometimes let that misunderstanding slip by when others misreported his service. Yates served as a U.S. Marine Reservist *during* the Korean War. He was a “combat correspondent” by designation, but he never left Camp Lejeune. That’s a pretty damning discovery about a documentary producer. But I learned it was never Yates but others who misinterpreted “combat correspondent” to mean he was in Korea, including in obituaries and testimonials. The overall record of Yates calibrates his many virtues in many other very dangerous places as a reporter and documentary producer-director. The detail about Korea — getting that close — revealed to me the significance of Yates’s reporting from Santo Domingo, under fire, when U.S. Marines shot at U.S. journalists. Yates covered it live and emerged from that moment as the “combat corre-

spondent” he had always wanted to be. When you get “too close,” you discover an opportunity to work against your thesis and push harder for understanding. The facts are the facts, and you record them as required. But you can’t spend years on a subject without having either a modicum of respect and appreciation for the individual or at least becoming invested in the significance of their story in their times. The antidote to “too close” is reliable, respectable colleagues who review your work and challenge your conclusions.

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

**Mascaro:** There are not many histories of documentary units, especially in network news. *Into the Fray* fills a void in that sense, including documenting the interactions among members of a documentary crew to bring a film to air. My book also delves into production details regarding travel to sites and interactions with subjects on the ground. Network documentaries were highly involved enterprises. Travel during the 16mm film era required many cases of equipment transferred from small plane to boat or truck for many legs of a journey. Traveling with subjects was arduous and dangerous. Crew members were deeply committed to their journalism and openminded about how the stories affected the people, not from a network perspective but from the point of view of those affected by events on the ground. *Into the Fray* offers new insights about women in network documentary journalism, including Maggie Weil and Judy Bird, who paved the way for other women as documentary researchers and producers. They offered intelligent, highly informed takes on certain projects, especially Bird in Indonesia. I’m particularly proud of the chapter on *Vietnam: It’s a Mad War*. The documentary aired on NBC before President Johnson’s major escalation

and outlined all of the pitfalls awaiting U.S. troops in country. It was predictive and accurate and still one of the most important films about the war. Finally, the trilogy on *The Battle for Asia* was on the cusp of understanding U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia and a sense of the dynamics at play in the region, as part of and apart from the Vietnam War. Yates and Rogers were ahead of the curve. The difficulty covering the outbreak of war, as in Jerusalem in 1967, and danger involved is not always well detailed in the annals of journalism history. Yates was one of the first producers to appear as correspondent in reports he also produced and directed. He had a gift for on-camera reporting, and he was more effective partnered with Bob Rogers, who did much of the advanced research and most of the writing. They were a unique team and theirs was an exciting buddy salvation road trip, in the fashion of adventure movies. *Into the Fray* is a historical tribute to fallen journalists in times of war.

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

**Mascaro:** Yates's military record, of course. Also Rogers's sense that *Vietnam: It's a Mad War* was "his" report. Rogers asked Yates to be director of that film and Yates rejected the request. He followed all of Rogers's film suggestions and Rogers wrote the script. When Yates died, Rogers and film editor Desmond McElroy put together a tribute film, *The Documentaries of Ted Yates*. It showcased many of Yates's best films, ending on *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, a high point for Yates. But Rogers excluded any clips from *Vietnam: It's a Mad War*. I found that omission surprising but also indicative of Rogers's feelings about the film as more his than Yates's. I was excited talking to and meeting with Judy Bird and learning firsthand her progression from Cornell Uni-

versity graduate to documentary researcher, and finally associate producer in Indonesia. That program gave her the confidence to break out as an independent journalist. The “surprise,” I think, was learning about the obstacles for women even in a crew that supported their work. It triggered my search in my sequel book (“Hard Truths: The Documentary Odyssey of Bob Rogers and Rhonda Schwartz”), which carries a rich vein of women’s history in network documentary journalism. Yates coming into his own as a war correspondent in Santo Domingo was revelatory, but his work with Rogers in Guatemala, including their sympathy for leftist rebels being oppressed by U.S.-supported government troops was also a revelation suggesting these journalists understood extremely well the stakes involved in their documentary reporting.

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

**Mascaro:** Choose a topic that is deeply interesting to you and layered rather than one dimensional. You’re going to be with it a long time, and you can’t sustain professionalism if you don’t care about the arcane details you will discover. Understand the difference between introducing new history where none exists and asking specific research questions about well-known historical events. The NBC Washington documentary unit was not in the literature, so the first challenge was to document and develop the historical narrative of that outfit and account for the personnel and their reporting. Now that that history exists, we can ask different, more probing historical questions: What were the effects of individual reports on viewers and policymakers? How did this unit compare/contrast with others at NBC and at other networks? Why did-

n't *Vietnam: It's a Mad War* and other journalistic reports that warned of the folly of Vietnam stop the war before so many died? What's the difference between a journalist parroting "official" sources and using them as raw material — or what evidence reveals the independence of journalists in relation to "official" sources? What is the history of the women who worked on network documentaries? Why were there so few minority figures at any position in network documentary? When a historian goes at an existing topic, the questions will be different from those when carving out new history from unexplored sources.

***Historiography:** How did this book project change you as a historian?*

**Mascaro:** To the extent the sources permitted, I became fascinated investing time and understanding in the lives of documentary journalists. The people I studied were universally dedicated and professional. Their research commitment was extraordinary, never going into a story just to shoot and get out. They cared very much about the people they encountered. They were openminded about both or all sides of conflicts and controversies. They were patriotic and skeptical regarding official, especially military and foreign policy, sources. This project confirmed for me that my job is to take myself and my readers back to the era under study and work as hard as possible to make the times, places, and people vivid with contemporary resonance.

***Historiography:** How did this book project change you as a scholar?*

**Mascaro:** In the arena of documentary journalism history, I've learned from this and other projects that there are at least two approaches to our scholarship: one focuses attention on the scholar as interpreter and the

other focuses attention on the documentary journalists and their work.  
I know now my goal is the latter.

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# Perspectives on African-American History

By Bernell E. Tripp ©



Tripp

African American historical research has been a work-in-progress since the latter half of the 19th century, and the historiography of African American contributions in American history has encountered even more obstacles. Debates have ranged from whether the race has a true history, to whether it possessed a cultural heritage, to why historians should study black history as part of American history. The most recent resurgence of these ongoing deliberations has grappled with defining the historical perspective or framework from which to examine and share a more accurate representation of the development of black history and culture within American society than produced by previous historians. African American mass media is one of those cultural components.

The conflict deals with the perspective or framework from which

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historians can best determine and interpret the contributions of African Americans to the overall makeup of American culture. The traditional approach has been to assume that blacks lost all connection to their African heritage when they were forced to assimilate into the world of their white captors, and their actions and accomplishments should be viewed as successful attempts to triumph over adversity. Yet, 21st-century researchers are attempting to document how the transplanted Africans, with the aid of the black press and institutions within the black community, demonstrated their independence and self-determination by setting and achieving personal goals for future generations without the aid or threats of white individuals or mainstream American society. According to this newer approach, which is based on the concept of cultural retention, historians should be able to validate the race's ingenuity and ability to cooperate as partners within the communities without denying white racism as a major trigger for African American advocacy and activism.

African American press history is a critical component of racial advancement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and its partnership with entities and institutions within the black community it served makes it impossible to separate the two and analyze one without examining the other. Hence, the only way to understand this concept of analyzing black history from the perspective of cultural retention, rather than cultural oppression, is to consider the overall historiography of the evolution of African Americans in the United States, as well as how that evolution has influenced black press development.

The study of African American history in the United States began in Civil War veteran Oliver Jones' "tea room" in his West Virginia home, where black miners gathered in the evening to buy ice cream and fruits, while listening to young Carter G. Woodson read the newspapers



aloud, in exchange for free food. According to Woodson, although Jones could not read, he subscribed to both mainstream and black-owned newspapers to be read and discussed in his home nightly by other Civil War veterans and miners who frequented his home.<sup>1</sup> Those discussions of current events soon began to include the listeners' reminiscences about their worldly experiences, including anecdotes about the culture — folktales, songs, family histories, poetry, and children's games passed down through the generations.<sup>2</sup> The discussions in Jones' tea room launched Woodson on a mission to record and share African American life experiences in a way that would make black people proud of their heritage, as well as illuminate the true history of all inhabitants of the United States. Woodson noted that, at the beginning of the 20th century, American history overlooked the contributions of African Americans, and race prejudice was a tradition. The story goes that while earning his doctoral degree in history from Harvard University, Woodson encountered a professor who claimed that black people had no history at all. When Woodson contested the statement, the professor challenged the student to prove him wrong, which is what Woodson did for the rest of his life.<sup>3</sup>

Woodson believed that disseminating knowledge of black history in black and white communities was essential in gaining historical recognition and redefining the mainstream narrative of American history that systematically denied access to contemporary ethnic historical experiences. He was convinced that a partnership with the black press and his public-education program would be essential to the intellectual and cultural success of his black history movement. Yet, while focusing on proving that African Americans had a history in the United States, Woodson neglected to include the history of the race *before* it arrived in the New World. Consequently, with the support of one of the first soci-

ologists to research blacks in the United States, a research agenda that deliberately disregarded the race's prior history in Africa soon became the *traditional approach* to researching African American history in the United States.

Noted for his denunciation of racism and its practices that shaped the African American family experiences in the United States, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, nevertheless, declared that unlike any other minority group in America, blacks were the only ones whose culture could not be distinguished from that of white Americans. Frazier, who produced one of the first sociological works on African Americans researched and written by an African American, concluded, "Having completely lost his ancestral culture, he speaks the same language, practices the same religion, and accepts the same values and political ideals as the dominant group."<sup>4</sup> Probably more than any other study, Frazier's stance on the lack of cultural retention helped to shape how historians viewed or chose to study black history. Throughout the early half of the 20th century, the *traditional approach* to studying African American history was to frame historical events from the perspective of individuals' reactions or responses to forces *outside* the African American community, mainly the actions of whites in the United States. In short, it focused on what happened *to* black communities and their reactive response to that influence, rather than what transpired *within* the communities because of their proactive actions to achieve a goal of their own making. From this perspective, historians most often depicted the role of the black press as a tool to advocate against the practices of racism and to promote African American achievements as a way of demonstrating racial equality, rather than as a willful act of self-determination.

In this manner, *The Negro Family in the United States*, a book published from Frazier's 1932 dissertation, helped to confirm everything

that Woodson had fought so hard to disprove about blacks' retention of their life experiences before and after they were forced into bondage. The study analyzed the forces that had influenced the development of African American families from slavery to the mid-1930s, with Frazier concluding that slavery and racial oppression had eliminated all vestiges of African cultural heritage. He added that memories of the homeland had been obliterated, and even after emancipation, what little information blacks "retained of African ways and conceptions of life ceased to have meaning in the new environment." Frazier's body of research elaborately depicted the African Americans' adjustment as a racial and cultural group to a life within the larger society and that society's resultant responses to their presence. Not until Melville J. Herskovits, an early researcher in African retentions of black culture, sparked an intellectual debate did historians begin to question the argument that African Americans were culturally "American" without any traces of their African past or cultural traditions.

In contrast to Frazier, Herskovits, an anthropologist and pioneer of African American studies, countered that not only did Africans retain much of their heritage, but the memories of their African culture influenced mainstream American culture, both through the Africans taken as slaves and their descendants never having entirely assimilated into the ruling white culture. He added that, similar to its influence in America, African culture also made significant contributions to world history. Herskovits' theories originated from the thesis of his 1941 book, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, which stressed that "New World Negroes" revealed their West African heritage in all aspects of their lives, including social institutions, religion, family structure, codes of behavior, and multiple creative outlets.<sup>5</sup>

This 1940s debate marked the early development of a competing

historiographical research approach that focused on examining historical subjects as active participants in identifying and defining their own culture, rather than as passive nonconformists reacting to oppression in American society. The new approach challenged the traditional historiographical approach by examining previously ignored (or by shifting the focal point to) historical factors and institutions *inside* the African American community that demonstrated black citizens' own initiative in empowering themselves to unify the race and establish an identity within American history. The more recent approach does not eliminate the history of discrimination and oppression, but it tells the story from the perspective *inside* the life African Americans were trying to construct for themselves in their new home.

Historians of the last few decades have been reticent about acknowledging the legitimacy of the multifaceted nature of black life in America and the influence of a pre-existent heritage Africans retained even when enslaved. Frazier maintained that "there is scarcely any evidence that recognizable elements of the African social organization have survived in the United States." Frazier's conclusion was based on the assumption that black culture in the U.S. resulted from, mimicked, or reacted to white culture. In essence, by forcing Africans into servitude, European masters erased the slaves' long-held beliefs, character traits, and traditions as they adapted to the prevailing white institutions. This explanation conjures an unfavorable and uncharacteristic depiction of African Americans as caricatures of their white captors and members of a race unable to act of their own accord or to devise their own course of action. According to Frazier, this subservience facilitated and accelerated the assimilation process for mimicking the family mores and core values of their white families. Conversely, Herskovits argued that African roots were still alive in the African American subculture, and Af-

rican “survivals,” cultural phenomena that outlive the set of conditions under which they developed,<sup>6</sup> could be readily noted in music, dance, funeral practices, worship services, style of dress, speech, and many other aspects of African American life. According to Herskovits, the strongest influence of African American culture on white culture could be seen in such interests as music and dance.

While the debate continued, yet another historical methods question arose during the Civil Rights era about *why* black history should be conducted as a part of American history research. Herskovits’ premise that African traditions influenced the dominant society, as well as worldwide advancement, may have been a consideration in the development of noted historian Dwight W. Hoover’s “guide” to studying African American history, albeit using the traditionalist approach that pointed to oppression as a critical component in black involvement in historical events. With his 1968 anthology *Understanding Negro History*, Hoover endeavored to define the “major problems in studying and writing Negro history, the compelling questions that are being asked by discerning contemporary scholars, and the areas of exploration that seem to hold the most interest for the future.” However, Hoover also confessed that the journal articles he included in this first edition of the book were intended not only as a how-to process, but also as an examination of *why* historians should study ethnic history.<sup>7</sup>

Hoover published nine editions of *Understanding Negro History* between 1968 and 1969 in English and German before concluding, much like Herskovits, that the major reason for studying black history in America is because it offered “the best clues to the nature of that society” in which it resides. Thus, he reasoned, studying African American history as a form of immigrant history would fit the pattern of research designed to acquaint present generations with the moral courage and

strength of past generations. Yet, he admitted, it did not fit the typical immigrant history pattern of tracing the group's arrival to the New World, the tribulations suffered in struggling to survive, and the cohesiveness they developed in order to survive. Based on this pattern, the second generation would then face the dichotomy of two incongruent cultures, while the later generations would then eventually assimilate into American society. In this way, the Americanization of the disparate group symbolized the culmination of a journey from *failure* to *success*.

Hoover theorized that research training for professional historians of the 20th century was oriented toward *success*, and they were rarely called upon to explain *failure*. Consequently, Hoover concluded, the major problem in researching African American history was how to explain *failure*. In his *Understanding Negro History*, he rationalized that African Americans, much like Native Americans, had failed "to be fully accepted into American life," and having seldom been expected to explain failure, American historians were oriented toward constructing a tale of deriving success from failure. Thus, they examined African American history by trying to figure out "how to fit it into a framework of progress and success." By the 1970s, with Civil Rights Movement leaders' campaigns to promote the contributions of black Americans and progressive white leaders' endorsement of efforts to celebrate blacks in America, the entire nation recognized the role African Americans played in American history. Likewise, his premise of battling obstacles in order to progress seemed to define the traditional 20th-century approach to researching the role of black press journalists in fulfilling the needs of its specialized audience. Based on this premise, media historians using the traditional approach would analyze the journalists' partnership with other entities and institutions within the African American community through the lens of unifying to combat a common enemy,

specifically slavery and the racism that hindered black advancement in American society.

Recent historians of the African American institutions and culture have argued that early scholars who used the traditional approach in studying black history oversimplified the importance of these community institutions in history and internal partnerships by framing events as responses or reactions to forces outside their control. The latest approach seems to employ Herskovits' conceptualization of "cultural relativism" in analyzing the culture and institutions to reveal the entities that evolved and took actions independent of the threats and restrictions of the dominant society. For example, Jacquelyn Bacon likened this early historiographical trend to "casting African Americans as 'objects' rather than as 'subjects' of history." Revisiting conclusions about the early black press, Bacon determined that her study of *Freedom's Journal* using the recent approach allowed her to expand on "the history of African-American rhetoric of the late 1820s through consideration of the voices of people who might not have been well known or influential but who were able, through the newspaper's columns, to contribute to discussions and debates about issues important to them."<sup>8</sup> Bacon argued that while it is true that American society influenced African American cultural advancement, formulating conclusions based primarily on white influence "diminishes the importance of self-directed action among African Americans."

This new approach, according to Gary Nash, assumes that "alongside a history of discrimination and oppression must be placed the internal history of a people striving to live life as fully, as freely, as creatively, and as spiritually rich as their inner resources and external circumstances allowed." In *Forging Freedom*, Nash's examination of Philadelphia's 18th- to 19th-century formation of a black community, he

noted that the city's alleys and courtyards produced a diverse assemblage of men and women who established some of the North's first "black schools; literary, musical, and historical societies; and black newspapers." Thus, his study of "this dialectic between oppression and achievement, racism and race consciousness, external structures of power and internal consciousness and experience" was intended to offer a more accurate depiction of a culture than previous studies had provided.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, historian Craig Steven Wilder noted that the traditional approach cast "African cultures as simple while European cultures are complex; thus, African social forms passively folded under the force of European organization."<sup>10</sup> Wilder warned against a research approach that ignored a culture that drew on independent forms and generated functions "that were independent of white behavior." Due to the proliferation of assumptions about African American race and culture over the centuries, Wilder also cautioned that scholars interested in studying the cultural connections between blacks' life experiences in Africa and in America need to be able to discern both the logical connections and the means by which the connections were transferred or shared.

Although decades earlier, Herskovits' ideology seems to complement this research approach, especially the concept of "cultural relativism" as it relates to historical research. Herskovits, particularly with his book *Man and His Works* (1948), helped forge the concept of "cultural relativism," which refers to the idea that the values, knowledge, and behavior of people must be understood within their own cultural context.<sup>11</sup>

Wilder's study of black men in New York begins with Herskovits' observations that obvious "Africanisms," which refer to African traditions, beliefs, and practices that survive in modern-day African Amer-



ican society in the United States and elsewhere, were evolving in the tradition of similar African organizations that used a cooperative model that blended social, political, and spiritual interests. In other words, when placed against similar patterns in West African society, foundations of communitarianism were visible as “remnants of African sensibilities about social relations rather than deviations from a gross, white cultural standard.” Communitarianism’s dominant philosophy is based upon the belief that community relationships primarily shape an individual’s social identity and personality, rather than individualism, which influences development to a much smaller degree. Based on this premise, which is an integral part of the new perspective for researching the black press, Africans should have arrived in the Americas fully equipped with intellectual traditions and sociological models that enabled them to respond as part of a community or unit, instead of simply reacting to oppression. These creative independent forms, either reproduced in their original form in the black media or critiqued by media correspondents, provide invaluable insight not only into the role of the black press, but also into factors that shaped black life in the 19th and 20th centuries.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Burnis R. Morriss, *Carter G. Woodson: History, the Black Press, and Public Relations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Carter G. Woodson, “My Recollections of Veterans of the Civil War,” *Negro History Bulletin*, 7 (February 1944), 103-04, 115-18.

<sup>3</sup> Morriss, *Carter G. Woodson*, 39. “Many historians date the beginning of the Modern Black History Movement as the September 1915 date Woodson created the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History,” Morriss noted.

<sup>4</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 680-81.

<sup>5</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1941).

<sup>6</sup> “Survivals,” in anthropological terminology, refers to a phrase first employed by the British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* (1871). Although, Tylor viewed survivals as primitive cultural elements that were retained even though they no longer served a useful function and became poorly integrated into the rest of the culture. Later researchers expanded the term by arguing that survivals maintained concrete functionality rather than symbolic meaning, and they argued that an item or ritual could change in its function and, in doing so, remain integrated with the rest of culture. See, for example, Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871).

<sup>7</sup> Dwight W. Hoover, *Understanding Negro History* (Chicago, Ill.: Quadrangle Books, 1968), preface/introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom’s Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 10-11, 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology*. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948).

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# Historical Roundtable: The Black Press

By Bernell E. Tripp, Mark K. Dolan,  
Nathaniel Frederick II, and Aleen J. Ratzlaff ©

**T**his roundtable addresses the issues relating to the historiography that Prof. Bernell Tripp explains in her essay “Perspectives on African-American History.” The panelists were selected because of their use of the recent approach in their research on the African-American press, representing an illuminating departure from previous studies that regarded African-American collaborative actions as replications or parodies of those by their white counterparts. They were asked to consider how analyzing the black press by using a proactive perspective, rather than a reactive one, might provide a more accurate analysis of the black media’s contributions not only to overall mass media development, but also to developing a national consciousness that endeavored to link members of the race to a shared identity and a place in American history.

***Historiography:** The basis of this ongoing clash of research approaches centers around how historians study the development of marginalized groups within the United States. What is your view on the debate of cultural retention vs. cultural alienation, also referred to as cultural annihilation, and how does it relate to black press historical research?*

**Tripp:** Although blacks were traumatized by the experience of being transported to a new world so drastically different from Africa, I believe

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## Tripp, Dolan, Frederick, and Ratzlaff



Tripp

Bernell Tripp is an associate professor of journalism at the University of Florida. A multiple winner of the AJHA's J. William Snorgrass Memorial Award for the Outstanding Paper on a Minorities Topic, she is also the author of *Origins of the Black Press* and several book chapters on the black press' development. She received her Ph.D., with a specialization in media history, from the University of Alabama.



Dolan

Mark K. Dolan is an associate professor of journalism at the University of Mississippi. His scholarly work on the black press has appeared in the *Illinois Journal of History*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, *Discourse and Communication*, and *Southern Cultures*. His dissertation was titled "Cathartic Uplift: A Cultural History of the Blues and Jazz in the *Chicago Defender*, 1920-1929." His research areas include black press history, journalism as literature, mass media history, historical research methodology, popular culture, legal history and cultural history of American newspapers. He received his Ph.D. at the University of South Carolina.



Frederick

Nathaniel Frederick II is an associate professor in the Department of Mass Communication and former director of the African American Studies Program at Winthrop University. He is co-editor of the textbook *Media Ethics at Work: True Stories from Young Professionals*, 3rd ed. (2021). His research interests include African American mediated cultural production in the 20th century, civil rights movement activism and oral history. He received his Ph.D. at Pennsylvania State University.



Ratzlaff

Aleen J. Ratzlaff is a professor of communication at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas. Her research focuses on the black press and its role in community building. Her dissertation, "Black Press Pioneers in Kansas, Connecting and Extending Communities in Three Geographic Sections, 1878-1900," won the 2001 American Journalism Historians Association award for best doctoral dissertation of the year. She has published several book chapters, including "Ebony Triangle: The Black Newspaper Network in Kansas," in *Seeking a Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19th Century Press*. She received her Ph.D. at the University of Florida.

those early generations of slaves managed to retain remnants of their African roots, despite previous theories that the enslaved lost touch with their past life experiences. How do you justify the argument that two centuries of captivity can completely eliminate thousands of years of cultural evolution that defined established notions about the identity and character of an entire race? While today's generations may not remember why they practice some traditions that have connections to their African heritage, they still performed the rituals or passed down folklore and customs. Even when families were divided, they had to reconstruct their social institutions into new forms, but those new forms contained traces of the old.

**Dolan:** In my view, both cultural retention and cultural annihilation reflect simultaneously in the black press. Consider, for example, the financial hardships many editors suffered, the secreting of distribution in the South of the *Chicago Defender*, the firebombing of editorial offices at the *Jackson (MS) Advocate* — such challenges characterize an outsider press, one historically under siege, begrudgingly given First Amendment rights. That cultural retention existed, with the newspapers as cultural touchstones, reminds me somewhat of the ways cultural expression survived in Native American communities, in other words, despite various degrees of cultural annihilation. How could aspects of African culture echo on the pages of American newspapers, technologically rooted in the printing press, and written in English? One way to think about cultural retention might be to consider varying degrees of literacy in black communities, which determined how black newspapers were consumed. The often-cited story of copies of the *Defender*, and probably other newspapers being read aloud to those who could not read, has few analogues in the history of white publications. And so, even though

papers like the *Defender* borrowed Hearst-era headlines from a white press, those publications were not the object of FBI scrutiny, or published under the specter of annihilation. While a British newspaper might have been shared in a grog shop, a black newspaper in America might have been smuggled into someone's home, consumed surreptitiously. How then can we locate this *retained* culture in the black press? The contents of letters which refer to family, literary expressions, in the form of poems and essays, of a people displaced from a culture, point to its survival, though a survival also shaped in part by whiteness. One finds in the black press of the 20th century frequent Afro-centric items, in everything from notices for literary publications to news about Marcus Garvey.

**Ratzlaff:** It's important to acknowledge and understand the communal cultural identity and values of African Americans that were transferred and reinforced through religious and educational institutions, fraternal organizations and the black press. The black press did not operate in isolation apart from other vital community networks.

**Historiography:** *What first piqued your interest in researching the history of the African-American press?*

**Frederick:** My interest in researching the African-American press was inspired in graduate school during a media history course. The class was one of my favorites, and the readings focused on the African American press were the most interesting to me. While researching possible topics for the term paper in the course, I discovered a bound collection of *Negro Digest* magazines in the library. I scanned the pages and became fascinated by the content and illustrations. *Negro Digest* was published

in 1942, and I felt like I traveled back in time and found a treasure. I decided at that moment to explore this publication for my term paper. The research was well-received by my professor, and he encouraged me to submit the manuscript to the American Journalism Historians Association Conference. The manuscript was recognized as a top paper, which instilled confidence in me to continue the research path that started with a trip to the library.

**Dolan:** When I first saw 1920s copies of *The Palmetto Leader*, a weekly published in Columbia, South Carolina. The content reflected a thriving black middle-class, one little studied. Onto those pages came profiles of educators, poets, business and civic leaders, along with banner headlines chronicling lynching and other atrocities. I felt as though I held in my hands an underground newspaper, a sort of subterranean truth, something a little dangerous even. I spent weeks going through this newspaper and then *The New York Age*.

**Ratzlaff:** I was familiar with the *News Hawk*, an African-American newspaper available periodically in my Wichita neighborhood in the 1990s. Having experienced that, I was intrigued when I discovered microfilm rolls of African-America newspapers in Ablah Library at Wichita State University that were published a hundred years earlier in the city. That started me on a journey of research that has lasted nearly 30 years.

**Tripp:** While I have no firsthand memories of events in the Civil Rights movement, I'm old enough to have a child's memories of a segregated Deep South — of businesses with two entrances, two high school parades, and two sets of rules for life in a small, rural town. The only black-produced newspaper my father could buy was the week-old

Sunday edition of the *Chicago Defender*, hand-delivered by the same man who picked up Daddy's shirts to take to the next town to the only black-owned dry cleaning service. From the *Defender*, I read the same national news stories that ran in the mainstream press, but I also learned about such things as hair-braiding styles based on African tribal customs, black celebrities' achievements, and royalty from whom all African Americans were supposedly descended. I didn't have access to a black newspaper in high school or in my undergraduate years of study, but when I needed to select a media history topic in graduate school and I was given a draft of J. William Snorgrass' *Media in America* textbook chapter, I became fascinated with 19th-century African American media history. It also brought back memories of my early years reading the *Defender* and the role it played in disseminating cultural identity, as well as news that impacted its African American readers.

**Historiography:** *In this ever-changing climate of attempts to control how and what can be said about the history of race relations in the United States, has the relevancy of studying the African-American press changed? What can we learn from studying a press for an audience outside the margins of mainstream society?*

**Ratzlaff:** I recently conducted a workshop for teachers on using primary sources to engage their students with current issues. Participants analyzed the coverage by mainstream and African-American newspapers of an event in 1892. They were struck by the similarity of disparate viewpoints evidenced then and that are present today. Studying a press that targets a marginalized audience helps to unpack and give insight regarding complex perspectives and experiences.



**Frederick:** Studying the African American press is crucial in understanding and contextualizing the history of race relations in the United States. Much can be learned by studying the press of marginalized groups. I think an important lesson learned from this research is that the African American community is not a monolith. The history and lived experience of African Americans is extensive and diverse.

**Dolan:** The audience reveals the textures and undulations of black life in America, in weekly or daily installments. The pages of the black press can amplify, for example, a conservative black voice, yet a voice of protest nonetheless. One might look in vain for stories about jazz, for example, in various papers of the 1920s, when caution may have been the watchword, rather than a diet of splashy stories about flappers and gin. Such an audience confirms the very presence of black readers whose lives were outside the margins of white press stereotypes, as well as outside the margins of what even more forward-thinking whites might have believed about African Americans. In a way, the African-American press shows, even in the absence of some coverage, an intentionality to affirm humanity. And this is quite unlike the mission of a then mainstream white press, generally.

**Tripp:** Herskovits and Hoover theorized that the major reason for studying the history of marginalized cultures within American society is because that perspective offers the best clues to the nature of that overall society. American history is an amalgamation of multiple histories. Therefore, historians can't establish a true picture of life in America through the centuries without examining interrelationships between the groups in the "melting pot" or without understanding life within the cultures of the independent groups that make up American society.

Even within the marginalized groups, life experiences are diverse. For example, the life experiences of African Americans who lived among Native Americans in the South during Reconstruction were vastly different from African Americans living in urban areas in the North during the same period — different, yet somehow very similar. The results of those differences, as well as commonalities, were reflected within the developing black culture and in the black mass media of the times, while the culture of mainstream press readers of the same period shared few, if any, similarities to them. So, the only way to understand the big picture is to examine all the individual pieces and how they fit together.

***Historiography:*** *How is our historical understanding of the lives and achievements of African Americans distorted when we as researchers begin our examination of these subjects from the traditional framework of triumph over adversity, rather than acknowledging that the subjects already possessed innate skills and knowledge that might have accounted for their accomplishments?*

**Dolan:** Such preconceived notions assume that black editors and readers did not operate within a developing African American culture. Yes, the culture of this particular audience was indeed revealed through its music, poetry, prose, parables, and in tantalizingly cryptic messages, e.g., letters or fragmentary messages. The other variables that contributed to the demise of these papers, such as an ability to afford subscription costs, at least in part relates to cultural annihilation, because impoverishment, across generations, alters culture.

**Tripp:** When historians go in with preconceived notions, we are destined to miss something. But what worries me the most is if we miss

something that *could* have provided critical information that would have helped us understand motivations, expectations, or even the hopes and dreams of the people we're researching. For example, in looking at early research on the black press, I noted that several researchers implied that newspapers in the 19th century had failed because they did not follow the mainstream news format for content. But when you consider that the culture of this particular audience was often revealed through its music, poetry, prose, parables, and even cryptic messages on hand-made pottery, black media content can not only teach you about that culture, but you also learn to consider other variables that could have contributed to their demise, such as readers too poor to be able to afford regular subscription costs.

***Historiography:*** *This new historiographical trend examines “historical factors that demonstrate the power within the African-American community.” How do you view your approach to examining the factors that affected the content of the African American media and the motivation of its practitioners?*

**Ratzlaff:** In researching the African-American press, I have been profoundly affected as I've become aware of and recognized ways in which editors, columnists and reporters established and reinforced identity, both among those who were involved with the press, but also for communities of their readers.

**Frederick:** My approach to studying the African American media has always been to assert the agency of African Americans. For example, my use of oral history methods is an attempt to prioritize the narrator's voice. My primary interest in oral history has been the importance of

allowing the participants to speak for themselves. My goal is to validate and valorize previously excluded experiences of African Americans as social actors and to highlight their contribution to media.

**Dolan:** The African-American community is both an actor and is acted upon. It would be hard to imagine a white American entertainment audience without black artists who developed artistically independent of it, making contributions that personified the “power within the African-American community.” At the same time though, these artists functioned against a backdrop of white promoters, white record companies. African-American newspapers did not publish in a vacuum; no mass media flourishes without its requisite lowercase culture.

**Tripp:** Historical research is like looking through a kaleidoscope. At first glance, we perceive one pattern, but only a slight rotation produces a totally different pattern or perspective that’s no less reasonable or intriguing than the first. By examining factors *within* the community the 19th-century newspapers serves, I learn not only who the intended audience was, but also what things were important to them, what issues concerned them, or what goals they had for future generations. For example, examining music that the community embraced, or even condemned, helps me reconstruct how the community perceived its racial identity or sense of self. By studying the period and the leaders of the black community, I can also quickly discover the interrelatedness of the press and the institutions within the community, as well as determine what role the press played in advancing its goals. You can’t understand the role of the press without understanding the community that it served, whether on a local or national level.

**Historiography:** *Researchers have often referenced the interconnectedness of the African-American press to the community it served. In works on the history of Freedom's Journal, the first known African-American newspaper in the U.S., researchers have characterized it not only as an outlet for forgotten voices, but also as a glimpse into antebellum life for freeborn blacks, as well as the enslaved. How do you view the role this press played as one of the institutions in the lives of its readers and what can be learned by studying it? How has that role or interconnectedness of this press and the black community changed from its appearance in the 19th century to modern times? Does that alter the perspective from which historians should examine black press content?*

**Frederick:** I think the role of *Freedom's Journal* was critical in establishing a voice for African Americans to galvanize allies and create a template to replicate similar efforts. In addition, *Freedom's Journal* provided the blueprint for the justification of the African American press. Even though the traditional African American press is not as robust as it once was, the concept has morphed into digital platforms like hyperlocal websites and even Black Twitter. This alters the historian's perspective because information is no longer centralized, and everyone can be a publisher.

**Tripp:** The African American audience for *Freedom's Journal* was only a small component of a race fragmented by differences in factors ranging from education to financial status to free status. Therefore, *Freedom's Journal* served as a way of bridging the gap or at least raising awareness of the differences and urging changes in African American life throughout the country, as well as African Americans' perceptions of themselves as a race. On the national level, but maybe not at the community news-

paper level, the black press has lost that interconnectedness it previously had with the community it serves, and this 21st-century loss may have derived from the struggles of the media outlets to survive as a business. However, this detachment may be the wake-up call for current historians to re-examine black press content of the past with an eye to what was done for the good of its community of readers because of the journalists' individual goals for supporting cultural identity rather than reacting to oppression.

**Dolan:** I wonder if, as other media forms began to appear — radio, recordings, and later television, as well as newspapers with greater circulation — readers began to get distracted. This sounds simple, but nowadays we talk about a fractured audience, and so possibly a dilution of sorts began to occur, a distractedness. Imagine the raptness with which readers of *Freedom's Journal* may have held those newspapers as they read about themselves.

**Ratzlaff:** The African-American press of the late-19th and early 20th centuries certainly was one of the essential pillars of their communities, alongside churches, schools and fraternal organizations. The richness, agency, and vitality of their community have been tied to the press. Even though the format of media has changed, the article “The New Black Press” (in the *Nieman Reports on Diversity*) emphasizes the role of current media outlets, such as TRiibe in Chicago, as identifying relevant issues for the African American community. “Nimble, mission-driven outlets and a citizen-focused initiative are telling stories about — and for — Black communities.” (Nieman Foundation at Harvard, n.d., “Meet the New Black Press,” *The Nieman Reports*, accessed 16 February 2022, <https://niemanreports.org/articles/meet-the-new-black-press/>.)

**Historiography:** *Researching non-mainstream media outlets, especially those that operated up to the latter half of the 20th century, comes with unique challenges because few people thought they might be invaluable to historians in the future. What has been your greatest challenge in researching the African American press? Explain how you conquered this obstacle or challenge.*

**Ratzlaff:** The challenge of finding a breadth of primary sources can result in gaps in answering the substantive “So what?” question. Persistence and patience are vital. It may mean putting a project to the side for a time but not giving up. Sometimes I’ve needed some space and then I can return with a renewed commitment.

**Frederick:** I tend to gravitate toward somewhat obscure topics even among the African American press, so there can be some difficulty approaching the research. The biggest challenge for me is finding a topic of interest that I feel has enough primary sources to provide a proper level of inquiry. To be honest, this is always a challenge for me, and patience is a virtue when doing this type of research. I continue to read new and existing scholarship and write down ideas as they come to me.

**Tripp:** Scarcity of primary sources, namely original copies of newspapers and correspondence, is a given when researching African American media in the 19th and early 20th centuries. At the time, few people thought someone in the future might be interested in the content, so many items were never preserved. So, I wouldn’t exactly say I’ve managed to conquer the obstacle, although I’ve learned to take advantage of technological advances and just plain luck. Digitalization of what few extant copies of resources and making them available on the internet

has been extremely helpful, as well as pdf images of other publications from the period. Also, accessing census data or city directories, biographical data, records of social organizations' operations, and personal or business correspondence has always been a nightmare, especially when examining the lives and activities of little-known African American women. Pseudonyms, partial names, and multiple family members sharing the same names add to the confusion. Trial-and-error and the willingness to sift through uncatalogued documents in boxes in small museum or library vaults, along with checking theses and dissertation topics to see if others have located what you're looking for or at least created a compilation of names and other information, much like Armistead Pride's 1950 dissertation "A Register and History of Negro Newspapers in the United States: 1927-50."

**Dolan:** One challenge comes from traditional historians who see the newspaper, any newspaper, as a source to be consulted for various historical studies, something that informs a given historical narrative, as opposed to the history of a given newspaper itself. Also though, a look at African American newspapers across a given time period is often difficult because of fragmented archives; as is so often the case, only a few copies of a given newspaper exist, and sometimes none at all, as is the case with *The Memphis Free Speech*, the Ida B. Wells newspaper. For me, one of the greatest challenges has been to discover the business correspondence of editors and publishers, which may help explain how and why some content appeared in various newspapers, as well as the revenue streams behind the page.

**Historiography:** *In surmounting one or more of these obstacles or challenges, did you discover some piece of primary source evidence that caused*



*you to rethink your original expectations or conclusions about the African-American press?*

**Frederick:** My most recent media history project focused on the gag cartoons in *Black World* magazine published from 1970-1976. I decided to interview as many cartoonists as possible. I think information gleaned from conducting interviews can often challenge expectations. Most of my understanding of *Black World* magazine was based on magazine content and archived documents as primary sources. However, after having the opportunity to speak with individuals who were freelancers or were employed full-time by the magazine, I came away with a different understanding of their motivations and broader issues affecting the content.

**Dolan:** Reading various columns about black entertainment showed me that while general histories and documentaries about jazz, for example, talk about the popularity of say, Sarah Vaughan or Duke Ellington, some black newspapers gave more coverage to lesser-known artists, for instance, or comparatively minor figures by today's canonical standards. And so, while musical scholars, for example, might write a history of jazz, a different sort of, incremental history gets told on the pages of the black press, a history that reveals possibly what readers were actually listening to at the time. At the University of Mississippi where I teach, there exists a rich blues archive as part of our library's special collections. Visiting scholars are often surprised to find not what they expect among the records once belonging to famous blues artists: recordings by country singers, say, as opposed to other blues travelers. Moreover, once when interviewing a former African American colleague about what television shows she watched growing up, I was surprised to learn it was

“Hee-Haw” and not “Soul Train.” Such cultural insights caused me to rethink the porous positionality of black media as a whole, like all mass media, and to grapple more fundamentally with its leading role as the shaper of communities, and its supporting role, as an entity shaped *by* community.

**Tripp:** Researching black women prior to the Civil War is filled with challenges. Calling themselves housewives instead of journalists on census data, signing a submission as “Mrs. Whoever,” or using a pseudonym that has nothing to do with their real name have all caused frustration. But it’s forced me to get creative in how I research them. Starting with a male relative and backtracking from there is one of the surprising tricks I’ve learned. However, my favorite find was discovering that Mary Miles Bibb was publishing her husband’s paper regularly while he was on antislavery tours. For this one, I was actually researching the feud between Mrs. Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd Cary. While reading through issues of the Bibbs’ *Voice of the Fugitive*, I started to notice issues that appeared during times he was nowhere near Canada and also times when he was out of town AND her sick mother was a houseguest. I plotted a timeline of all the “missing editor” editions and finally came across a tiny mention of Henry Bibb thanking his wife for simultaneously putting out the paper and taking care of her mother. Not only did it give me a better understanding of the black women journalists who had to work in their husbands’ shadows, but when I presented the paper, I received an email from Dr. Afua Cooper, the only other person researching Mary Bibb, congratulating me for confirming the same thing she had also been trying to determine. Last semester, I received another email from a doctoral student at Howard University asking for insight into Mary Bibb’s activist work and involvement with the news-

paper, and I pointed her in Cooper's direction.

**Historiography:** *What past research projects might you consider re-examining knowing now what you did not know then about a framework of analysis that examines African American press history as something that happened not because of, but in spite of, the influence of the white culture in which it existed?*

**Dolan:** I'm inclined to re-examine all of my prior research with an even greater emphasis on the "in spite of" perspective. My interest has been in the black press as a vehicle for the dissemination and development of African American culture, as something uniquely American. The Abbott-Sengstacke collection at the Chicago Public Library is a source which reveals the relationship of the newspaper to its adjacent community, through a number of lenses, as are materials relevant to mediated constructions of black identity at the Schomburg Center in the New York Public Library. I'd like to revisit my dissertation, in order to delve more deeply into primary sources that would help illuminate the reporting on culture within communities that black newspapers served.

**Tripp:** My master's thesis because, while it acknowledged black journalists' partnership with organizations and institutions within the community to achieve crucial goals for racial advancement in the antebellum period, it failed to provide insight into the communities' reliance on independent cultural forms that did not rely on responses to white behavior. Similarly, I'd also be interested in revisiting my dissertation, which focuses on the empowerment of black women journalists prior to the Civil War, but it falls short on demonstrating how their skills were an element of their racial identity and not the result of societal de-

mands.

**Historiography:** *Because of revitalized interest in the African-American press during the latter half of the 20th century, research on various aspects of its history have increased significantly. Has anything changed your mind about the value of continuing your line of research? Are there still gaps to be filled in our understanding of its evolution?*

**Frederick:** I still find value in the research. Going forward we need to think of new ways to engage the public with our research. I am excited to explore advancements in digital humanities to utilize digital technology in new dynamic ways. Certainly, there are gaps to be filled. We must continue to highlight the accomplishments of African-American women journalists. In addition, the African American press in the South and the student press at Historically Black Colleges and Universities are fertile areas to explore.

**Ratzlaff:** My primary research focus and interest has been regional. My initial focus was the late 19th century in the Midwest. I'm still drawn to focus on the African American in the Midwest, and now that focus is on the first half of the 20th century.

**Tripp:** When I first started studying the black media in the 1980s, I was often approached at conferences and asked why I was researching something that wasn't really journalism because its form did not resemble mainstream newspapers. I would painstakingly explain not only why it was journalism in its purist form, but also why it mattered to our understanding of overall mass media development. There are always gaps. Irving Garland Penn's *The Afro-American Press and Its Writers* in 1891

and Armistead Pride's *The Black Press: A Bibliography*, a 1968 publication based on his dissertation, both list names of African American newspapers, as well as of men and women journalists, that have yet to be researched or even to be located. What about those not even mentioned? My dissertation topic about black women journalists before the Civil War developed out of a lack of information about any of these women who truly did exist. Secondary sources in the 1980s mentioned only Ida Wells-Barnett after the war, while others about Canadian blacks mentioned only Mary Ann Shadd Cary, but not her sister Amelia, who helped run the *Provincial Freeman*. Also, recently digitalized primary sources have sparked a renewed interest in re-examining earlier conclusions about black media based on the traditional approach of framing its activities and development as resulting from a reaction to white oppression.

**Dolan:** I believe there exist many gaps, especially those studies yet to be written which consider the newspaper through a theoretical lens. Consider, too, the many papers, for which only a few years, months, or weeks exist in microfilm. The gaps are related to the evolution of the press as something that was acted upon, but also *acted*, in the development of black institutions, from colleges and universities to fraternal groups.

**Historiography:** *What suggestions would you offer to current and future scholars researching the history of mass media of a marginalized group?*

**Dolan:** Consider an examination of mass media in depth, employing thick description rather than statistical tests. Consider writing an essay about your findings, rather than a traditional research paper, because an

essay, if well written, can reverberate with a large audience, and, with the lived conditions of a marginalized group in ways that traditional academic research might not. James Carey advocated for the essay as a lens through which to explore media history, as a way to energize the past via a compressed and memorable narrative, poetic language even. Too, marginalized peoples often leave incomplete or fragmentary histories of their marginalization, however this does not mean as scholars, we should not write deeply and beautifully about the fragments. I've said earlier in this discussion that in my view, the two research perspectives, that cultural annihilation and cultural retention, are both at play in a press rich with paradox and irony. Thus, it's important to consider the cultures adjacent to whatever media you might be researching.

**Ratzlaff:** Recognize the value of making a long-term commitment to conducting research on this topic. Cultivate relationships with other scholars who are researching the mass media of various marginalized groups for their support and to glean from their experience and insight.

**Frederick:** I would say take advantage of university and regional archives pertaining to African American life, history and culture. Many libraries are increasing and highlighting their holdings related to under-represented groups. In addition, some larger libraries have digitized collections which make historic documents, photographs, and artifacts more accessible.

**Tripp:** For the 19th and early 20th centuries, first, understand how the members of that ethnic group communicated with each other, as well as what cultural “survivals” remained an integral part of their community. For example, African Americans communicated in a variety of ways and traditions — such as song, parables, dance, clothing, quilts,

## Historical Roundtable: The Black Press

art, religion, and children's games. Then, as "Mister Rogers" used to say, look for the "helpers." This is where you'll find the media and the cultural institutions with whom they partnered in their endeavors to help the group thrive.

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## News and Notes

### **Call for Papers: Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression**

The steering committee of the Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression solicits papers dealing with U.S. mass media of the 19th century, the Civil War in fiction and history, freedom of expression in the 19th century, presidents and the 19th century press, images of race and gender, sensationalism and crime in 19th century newspapers, and the antebellum press and the causes of the Civil War.

Selected papers will be presented during the conference Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, November 3–5, 2022. The top three papers and the top three student papers will be honored accordingly.

The Symposium will be conducted via ZOOM (for both speakers and participants). If possible, it will also be conducted in person.

The purpose of the November conference is to share current research and to develop a series of monographs. This year the steering committee will pay special attention to papers and panel presentations on the Civil War and the press, presidents and the 19th century press, news reports of 19th century epidemics, coverage of immigrants, African Americans, and Native Americans, and 19th century spiritualism and ghost stories.

Since 2000, the Symposium has produced eight distinctly different books of readings: *The Civil War and the Press* (2000); *Memory and Myth: The Civil War in Fiction and Film from Uncle Tom's Cabin to Cold Mountain* (2007); *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism* (2008); *Seeking a Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19th*



*Century Press* (2009); *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting* (2013); *A Press Divided: Newspaper Coverage of the Civil War* (2014); *After the War: The Press in a Changing America, 1865–1900* (2017); and *The Antebellum Press: Setting the Stage for Civil War* (2019). The panel presentations from the 2020 Symposium were recorded and aired on C-SPAN.

The symposium is sponsored by the George R. West, Jr. Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Communication Department, the Walter and Leona Schmitt Family Foundation Research Fund, and the Hazel Dicken-Garcia Fund for the Symposium. Because of this sponsorship, no registration fee will be charged.

Papers should be able to be presented within 20 minutes and be at least 10 pages long.

Send your paper (including a 200–300 word abstract) as a Word attachment to [west-chair-office@utc.edu](mailto:west-chair-office@utc.edu) by August 26, 2022.

David B. Sachsman, Ph.D.

George R. West, Jr. Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs and Professor of Communication

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<https://new.utc.edu/arts-and-sciences/communication/west-chair/holder-of-west-chair>

## **Call for Papers, Panels, and Research in Progress 2022 AJHA National Convention**

The American Journalism Historians Association invites paper entries, panel proposals, and abstracts of research in progress on any facet of media history for its 41st annual convention to be held in Memphis September 27 through October 1, 2022.

The deadline for all submissions is June 1, 2022.

The AJHA views journalism history broadly, embracing print, broadcasting, advertising, public relations, and other forms of mass communication that have been inextricably intertwined with the human past. Transnational research is also welcomed.

Because the AJHA requires presentation of original material, research papers, research in progress, and panels submitted to the convention should not have been submitted to or accepted by another convention or publication.

An individual may submit one entry in each competition, but papers and Research in Progress submissions by an individual author may not be on the same topics.

At least one author of each accepted paper or research in progress must register for and attend the convention. Panelists must also register and attend.

### **Research Papers**

Research entries must be no longer than 25 pages of text, double-spaced, in 12-point type, not including notes. The *Chicago Manual of Style* is recommended but not required.

Papers must be submitted via email as Word attachments. Submissions must include the following:

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- Completed paper, including 150-word abstract, with author identification in the file name only.

- A separate file including the abstract and author identification (email address, telephone number, institutional affiliation, student or faculty status).

Send papers to [ajhpaper@gmail.com](mailto:ajhpaper@gmail.com).

Accepted papers are eligible for several awards, including the following:

- David Sloan Award for the outstanding faculty research paper (\$250 prize).

- Robert Lance Award for outstanding student research paper (\$100 prize).

- Jean Palmegiano Award for outstanding international/transnational journalism history research paper (\$150 prize).

- J. William Snorgrass Award for outstanding minority-journalism research paper.

- Maurine Beasley Award for outstanding women's-history research paper.

- Wally Eberhard Award for outstanding research in media and war (\$50 prize).

Questions about paper submissions can be directed to AJHA Research Chair Gerry Lanosga of Indiana University ([glanosga@indiana.edu](mailto:glanosga@indiana.edu)). Authors will be notified in mid-July whether their papers have been accepted.

### **Panels**

Panels may relate to any original topic relevant to journalism history, presenting a variety of perspectives that will draw the audience and panelists into meaningful discussion or debate. Preference will be given to

panels that present diverse perspectives on their topics, and organizers should consider diversity in race and gender in selecting panelists.

This year, AJHA will accept panel proposals through an online form that requires the following:

- A title and brief description of the topic.
- The moderator and participants' information (name, institutional affiliation, student or faculty status).
- A brief summary of each participant's presentation.

Submit proposals at this link: <https://bit.ly/3bpVwyA>.

**No individual may serve on more than one panel.** Panel organizers must secure commitment from panelists to participate before submitting the proposal. Moderators are discussion facilitators and may not serve as panelists.

Questions about panel submissions can be directed to Rob Wells of the University of Maryland ([robwells@umd.edu](mailto:robwells@umd.edu)), who is coordinating the panel competition. Authors of panel proposals will be notified in mid-July whether their panels have been accepted.

### Research in Progress

The Research in Progress category is for work that will not be completed before the conference. Participants will give an overview of their research purpose and progress, not a paper presentation, as the category's purpose is to allow for discussion and feedback on work in progress.

For research in progress submissions, send a blind abstract of your study. The abstract should include a title, a clear purpose statement, and a brief description of your primary sources. Abstracts must be no longer than two pages of text, double-spaced, in 12-point type, with one-inch margins, excluding notes. Primary sources should be described in detail

on a separate double-spaced page.

The AJHA Research in Progress competition is administered electronically.

- Proposals must be submitted via email as Word attachments, with author identification in the file names only.

- The text of the email should include the author's information (name, project title, telephone number, email address, institutional affiliation, and student or faculty status).

Send research in progress proposals to [ajharip@gmail.com](mailto:ajharip@gmail.com). Authors will be notified in mid-July whether their proposals have been accepted.

Questions about submissions can be directed to Gwyneth Mellinger of James Madison University at [mellingx@jmu.edu](mailto:mellingx@jmu.edu).

### **Call for Papers: Broadside Extra!**

#### ***News, songs and provocations in the history of cheap print and street literature***

One-day conference Saturday, October 15, 2022, hosted by the School of Media and the Centre for Critical Media Literacy (CCML) at Technological University Dublin. Organised by the Traditional Song Forum and CCML, with the support of the Irish Traditional Music Archive and An Góilín Traditional Singers Club. This will be an in-person conference, with proceedings live-streamed for those who cannot be there. Admission is free.

We invite proposals for 15-to-20-minute presentations on any aspect of cheap print and street literature in Britain and Ireland (and their diasporas) — including intersections of the histories of journalism and other facets of the popular press.

The Traditional Song Forum's annual Broadside Day conference has been held every February for almost twenty years, but whenever possible the TSF likes to add a second event, Broadside Extra, in the autumn, in partnership with other institutions and organisations. This is the first time the event will be held in Dublin.

Broadside Extra is an opportunity to gather and talk about the fascinating field of cheap print and street literature of the past; broadsides, chapbooks, last dying speeches, catchpennies, garlands and news sheets, penny histories and children's books, popular prints, pedlars, jobbing printers, ballad-singers, and so on. Proposals for papers and panels are invited in any of these areas. Proposals that examine how marginalised people and groups used these media forms are particularly welcome.

For queries and to send an abstract of approximately 250 words, together with a biography of not more than 150 words, contact [steveroud@gmail.com](mailto:steveroud@gmail.com)

**Deadline for proposals:** 31 July 2022

No payment from authors is required.

Website: <http://criticalmedialiteracy.org/>

### **Joseph McKerns Research Grant**

**Deadline: June 15, 2022**

The American Journalism Historians Association seeks applications for its annual Joseph McKerns Research Grant Awards.

The research grant is intended to provide research assistance and to recognize and reward the winners. Up to four grants for up to \$1,250 each will be rewarded upon review and recommendation of the Research Committee. Grants may be used for travel or other research-related expenses, but not for salary.

Awardees must submit a brief article to the *Intelligencer* newsletter about their completed research by Sept. 1, 2023 discussing method, findings, complications, significance.

### **Eligibility:**

- All current AJHA full members with a minimum of three years' membership at the time of application are eligible.
- The research must be related to mass media history.
- Awardees are expected to continue their membership through the grant period.
- Members may apply for a McKerns Research Grant once every five years.

### **Application requirements:**

- Complete application form included with the Call For Proposals.
- A 1- to 3-page prospectus/overview of the project, including a budget (which should include a listing of amount and sources of other support, if appropriate), timelines, and expected outlets for the research.
- If appropriate, include Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the applicant's university.
- A shortened curriculum vita (no more than 3 pages).

Grant applications must be submitted via email to Research Committee Chair Gerry Lanosga. Materials may be submitted as PDF files or Word documents by June 15, 2022.

## **International Communication Association History Division Preconference**

The Communication History Division's preconference "Reconsidering

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Empires and Imperialisms in Media and Communication History” is scheduled for May 25, 2022.

The event is open to all, but advanced registration is required as places are limited.

If you are planning to attend, please register using this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/reconsidering-empires-and-imperialisms-in-media-and-communication-history-tickets-321242473887>.

### **Dominique Trudel, PhD**

Associate professor

Audencia Business School

[dtrudel@audencia.com](mailto:dtrudel@audencia.com)

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### **Preliminary Schedule**

#### **8:30 Registration**

Meet at the entrance of the Agence France-Presse, 13 Place de la Bourse, Paris (near the Bourse metro station in the 2e *arrondissement*)

#### **9:00-9:15 Welcome Address**

Jade Montané, François Robinet, Dominique Trudel

#### **9:15-10:55 The Power of the Press: Exploring Imperial and (Post)Colonial Configurations**

Chair: Nelson Ribeiro, Universidade Católica Portuguesa

*Yehiel Bril and the Emperor: Foreign Language and Minority Press as Transnational Propaganda Medium of the Second French Empire (1865-1871)* — Gideon Kouts, Université Paris 8



*German Cultural Imperialism, The “War of the Languages” and the Hebrew Press in the Ottoman Empire Before WWI* — Ouzi Elyada, University of Haifa

*Foreign Affairs and the Discourse of Colonialism: The Case of Algeria* — Kathryn McGarr, University of Wisconsin-Madison

*Hybrid Empire and the Asymmetries of Soft vs State Media Power* — Kenzie Burchell, University of Toronto

**\*\*11:15-12:30** Reconsidering Imperial Figures: Native Informants, Amateur Photographers, and Park Rangers

Chair: Derek Vaillant, University of Michigan

*Reconsidering Native Informants* — Arthur Asseraf, University of Cambridge

*Imperial Cameras and the Amateur Photographer* — Annie Rudd, University of Calgary

*America’s Storytellers: The US National Parks in the Digital Age* — Cait Dyche, University of Michigan

### **12:30-14:00 Lunch Break**

### **14:00-15:15 Imperial Media: Codes, Infrastructures, and Special Operations**

Chair: Annie Rudd, University of Calgary

*Mapping Communication Infrastructures: Colonizing Modern World Maps* — Zef Segal, Open University of Israel

*Hebrew Media Technologies in the Fight Against the British Mandate* — Ido Ramati, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

*Il y a Quelqu’un? Opération Rose des Vents and the Phantom Power of French Colonial Shortwave* — Derek Vaillant, University of Mich-

igan

**15:45-17:25 Cultural Imperialism and Resistance**

Chair: Jérémy Vachet, Audencia Business School

*Airwave Apartheid during Late Portuguese Colonialism: From Monolingualism to the First Multilingual Broadcasts in Angola and Mozambique* — Nelson Ribeiro, Universidade Católica Portuguesa

*Transnational Exuberance and the Modern Petro-city: Arabs in Oklahoma, U.S., at the Start of the 20th Century* — Kristin A. Shamas, University of Oklahoma

*De La Havane à Miami : repenser l'impérialisme culturel au travers du clip « Patria y Vida »* — Alix Benistant, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord

*Reconstructing Imperial Encounters, Establishing Postcolonial Identities: Commonwealth Comedy on YouTube* — Sujatha Sosale & Mir Ashfaquzzaman, University of Iowa

**17:25-17:45 Concluding Remarks**

Jade Montané, François Robinet, Dominique Trudel

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