

Historiography

in Mass Communication



The Latest News by Lorenzo Valles, c. 1880

Volume 12 (2026), Number 3

*An historian's guide to the hows, whys, methods, schools of thought,
and evolution of media history.*

Historiography in Mass Communication

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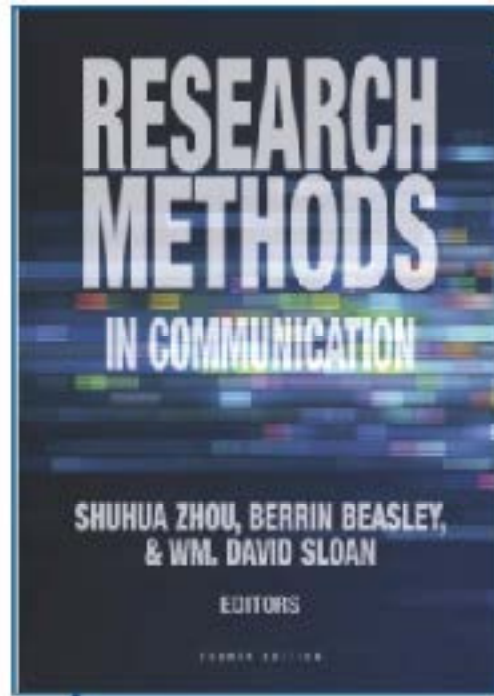
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From the Editor

‘Exact Imagining’: A Historian’s Tool

By Debra Reddin van Tuyl

Before I retired from teaching, I taught a course in journalism history, and one of my challenges was to explain to students how to “do history.” The historian’s imagination was one of my first topics, and I usually started that unit with a 1987 article by James Axtell, then a professor of humanities at William and Mary.

In that article, titled “History as Imagination,” Axtell said he believed the historian’s “most important tool is his imagination.” He admitted that some would find that idea “downright ludicrous,” and he quoted Cervantes, who said, “It is one thing to write like a poet, and another thing to write like a historian. The poet can tell or sing of things, not as they were but as they ought to have been, whereas a historian must describe them, not as they ought to have been but as they were.”

Axtell admitted that he preferred a definition offered by literary critic George Steiner and “a host of practicing historians, past and present.” Steiner, Axtell wrote, described history as “exact imagining.” That definition has always resonated with me, maybe because in my very young days, I anticipated my fixation with writing would lead me to a career in fiction.

Hear me out. History as “exact imagining” in no way means I am advocating for making it up as we go along. As Axtell explained it, historians spend their days mining diaries, letters, period newspapers, books, journal articles, and countless other sources for little “nuggets” of facts – those things we can establish without question as having happened in the past. Those nuggets might include “the color of a dead queen’s underwear,

the deathrate of cats in a French working-class parish, the changing price of peasant’s bread.”

We have all engaged in quests for the journalistic equivalent. I remember the day I found the records that documented how a campaign newspaper got started in 1864 North Carolina. That collection included an enumerated list of the used presses, type, and other equipment purchased for the press room as well as letters from men interested in serving as editor and lists of financial commitments from investors. I felt like I had hit the jackpot, because those kinds of facts are beyond rare. But by themselves, they were incomplete. I had to take those facts and put them together in a way that made sense, that told the story of trying to start a new newspaper business in one of the harshest economic environments in American history.

Most newspapers still operating in the South in 1864 were running on the owners’ sweat and willpower. The country was at war. Manpower was short. Nearly 80 percent of Southern printers were away fighting. Finding a sober printer was beyond challenging, if you believe the ads that ran daily for months in so many newspapers.

Then, there was inflation, which was far beyond anything modern Americans can imagine. I was a kid, but I well remember my parents suffering under the 14 percent inflation during Jimmy Carter’s administration. Inflation hit 600 percent in the Confederacy in 1864, a level most Americans cannot come close to imagining, but something I had to do in order to demonstrate just how courageous, foolhardy, and dependent on newspapers politics and politicians were in 1864 when Zebulon Vance needed a newspaper to support his run for reelection in the North Carolina gubernatorial election. So, I had to imagine what it would have been like to start a newspaper in such dire circumstances.

Axtell calls what I did with those facts “reanimation.” He wrote, “We must revivify, resurrect and re-create the past for ourselves, in our mind’s eye, before we can ever



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hope to transmit that vision to others.” Those materials we have gathered then have to be put “through the crucible fires of our own achieved awareness.” We must, he wrote, “imagine what we know,” for that is the source of “historical insight,” which is “a specially controlled exercise of the creative imagination.”

Early twentieth century historian and philosopher R. G. Collingwood also explored the radical idea that historical imagination is a means of re-enacting past thought. Collingwood developed his thinking through debates with “‘realist’ colleagues at Oxford,” according to Robert Bain and Jeffrey Mirel. Historical realism argues that it is possible to know something by intuition grounded in reality. Collingwood thought more traditional historians, whom he referred to as “scissors and paste men,” never truly understood their research subjects because they only chronicled testimony from authorities. Historical knowledge, he argued, is past thought re-enacted.

In other words, Collingwood believed that collecting and studying evidence was just the first half of historical research. The second half is considering what the evidence means in terms of what the people who were living the experiences and events thought about those experiences and events, and that requires asking questions of the evidence. Why would a person engage in a particular act might be a starting question, but Collingwood believed that translated into the question, “Why did this identifiable person think to take this action.” He believed research that sought answers without asking questions was flawed because actions are linked to an actor’s thoughts. “All history is the history of thought,” is Collingwood’s best-known quotation.

Bain and Mirel interpret this to mean the historian has to be a detective who reconstructs a crime from the evidence. They give the example from Collingwood of a daughter making a false confession to her father’s murder. Collingwood argued that traditional historians would take that confession as evidence and go with it. A critical historian would come a bit closer to the truth by realizing the confession is false and would dismiss it as evidence. A detective-historian would consider the confession and ask questions that consider the daughter’s thinking process in making the confession. One of those questions might be, “How can I protect someone I love,” which would lead to the real killer, i.e., someone daughter was trying to shield.

Collingwood’s approach might be a bit much for some to take seriously. He certainly has received his share of criticism through the years. Some of his critics have objected to the notion that a modern historian can accurately re-think the past, that attempting to do so allows work to become subjective or allows the historian’s biases to creep in. But at least some of his arguments seem compelling, and I suspect most of us

engage in some of what he advocates whether we do it consciously or not. Which of us has not obsessed over why one of our principal subjects took a particular action or believed a particular thing? That process is what Collingwood meant by re-enacting, or what might also be called this historian’s imagination.

American intellectual historian Hayden White also addressed the historian’s imagination by defining history as a creative project. His work contributed to the emergence of the “linguistic turn in modern historiography,” according to the American Historical Association. History, in his view, is a creative process, and consequently, historians’ commitment to construction of accurate narratives had cost it dearly due to its ossified practices. He argued that the narrative mattered as much as the facts. Form did not follow function, White contended in his major work, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. It was inseparable from function. He argued that history is “first, necessarily, and most obviously writing.” Like Collingwood, White had his critics who considered him “a postmodern relativist intent upon destroying the historical profession,” according to Amy J. Ellis in an article for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. One historian, Carlo Ginzburg, even argued that “White’s arguments echo the ruthless pragmatics of fascist politics” and “deprive him of any recourse to the rules of evidence as safeguards against distortions of the past, fascist or otherwise,” according to Wulf Kansteiner.

As much as I believe a historian’s imagination is real and is useful, it seems to me sometimes scholars, including me, can over complicate matters when they get bogged down in theory. Don’t get me wrong. Theory has its place. In my work as a nineteenth century historian, theory is one of the few tools available to explain why and how audiences engaged with publications or why editors chose to emphasize one story over another.

But the historian’s imagination has an adjunct consideration: lived experience. I realized that as I was starting to think about this essay over the summer when the majority owner of the daily newspaper I helped found told me he had decided to close the newspaper. Ironically, at that precise moment, I was writing about two ethnic newspapers, one that folded during the War of 1812, and another that suspended at the same time but reappeared about a year later. So, there I was writing about exactly what I was experiencing in my own life, and it felt really eerie. I did not have to imagine how my two editors felt as they wrote their validictories. I was facing the same situation.

I don’t know that you have to experience closing a newspaper to be able to write with imagination about how those two Irish-American editors felt about shuttering their publications. I would think human empathy as well as lived experience could inform such as story.

Maybe better. And my story had a happier ending than that of my two editors. Literally twelve hours before the deadline for announcing the closure, the majority owner called and said he had changed his mind. He would not be closing the paper after all.

Lived experience, according to Snita Ahir-Knight and Hazel Godfrey, the first an Australian social worker and the second an Australian sociologist, is not just testimony or perspective. It is a type of expertise and deserves to be treated as such in the research world. Lived experience is more than a personal story. “It is knowledge developed through ongoing learning that emerges from engagement with systems, institutions, and the realities of everyday life,” they write in an online publication *The Conversation*. Knowledge gained from lived experience “is not anecdotal. It is formed through sustained engagement with systems that shape everyday life.”

Ahir-Knight a sociologist, and Godfrey, a social worker, are not concerned about history. They are concerned with living people who are trying to navigate social systems such as health care and education. Still, I think their point has relevance for us. Many, if not most, journalism historians also have systems experience with the information industry. We have been professionals within that system, and that gives us the sort of lived experience that deepens what we are able to draw out of the sources we use in our work. Even if we are writing about professional colleagues who lived two hundred years before us, their experiences, many of them, anyway, are not so dissimilar from ours that we cannot recognize similarities.

I think the biggest advantage of lived experience is that it gives us an interpretative context – and fills in some of the gaps that theories of history do not always address. For example, whatever our jobs within the information industry, we likely spent a lot of time crafting narratives – narratives intended to attract audiences, sell products, explain issues. That narrative matters seems axiomatic. We also know that facts matter. We know

because we’ve likely messed up with facts at least once and then had to deal with the aftermath. Ultimately, I believe the best history is that which benefits both from contextualization via lived experience and from using one’s intellect, and, yes, imagination, to analyze and interpret facts.

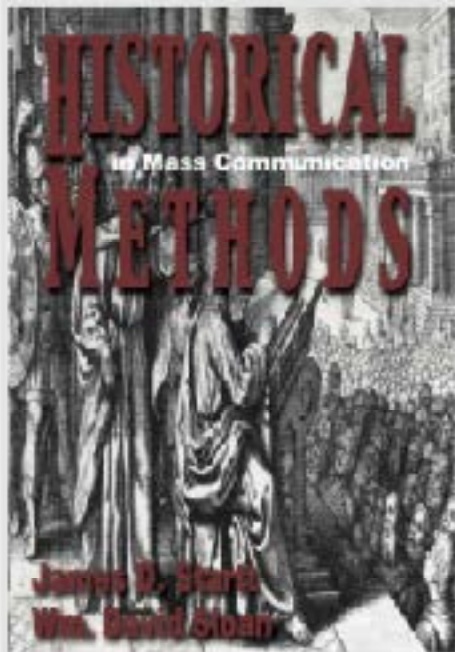
Is lived experience necessary to be a good historian? No. But it sure doesn’t hurt. Imagination, though, is another story. Imagination is as essential as archived newspapers, radio or television broadcasts, note cards (digital or handwritten), databases, computers, or any other of the historian’s tools. In fact, it may be the most important tool of all, for it is the tool that gives us our historian’s voice and vision, that allows us to construct the compelling narratives that keep readers moving from page to page.

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Media History Research: The Value of Regional History and Regional Publications

By Mary M. Cronin

Regional history has long been a contested area of research both in the United States and internationally. Historians often trace scholarly interest in the study of American regional history to the late nineteenth century when Frederick Jackson Turner presented his then-groundbreaking paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in 1893 at a meeting of the American Historical Association. That influential essay led several generations of historians to examine the effect of the West as a region on the nation's democratic system, as well as the impact of western regional expansion on the public's socio-cultural ideals and outlook.¹

Respect for regional history has waxed and waned over the decades. Although increasing attention has been paid to the field in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, such research "occupies an ambiguous position within the larger field of United States history," historian Carl Abbott has argued. Social science researchers from many fields, including media historians, geographers, sociologists, political scientists and urban planning specialists, have popularized the study of regional history within their respective fields. But this broadening has not only expanded how American history is studied; it also has led to a fracturing of the field. Scholars have divided and subdivided the nation's regions in their quests to examine differences and experiences among various populations. They also have further parsed regional history by theme and method. Regional history is increasingly viewed via a variety of scholarly prisms, including intellectual, social, cultural,

urban and economic approaches, as well as by labor historians and those who engage in the study of race, class and gender issues. Within the field of United States history, Abbott adds that respect for regional history also suffers from a longstanding approach to American historiography that stresses the national, rather than the regional. "The usual arenas for testing hypotheses are specific localities or the nation as a whole rather than traditional multi-state regions," Abbott states.²

Regional history also suffers from contested definitions of what constitutes a region, as well as "methodological uncertainties" in definitions (including temporal and spatial) and vocabularies.³ The concerns are understandable to scholars who study American history, including those of us who engage in field of media history. Determining what states or territories constitute discrete regions has shifted during the past two hundred and fifty years of the nation's history. Temporal concerns thus lead to their own conundrums. When my colleague Dr. Debra Reddin van Tuyll and I produced our two-volume edited series, *The Western Press in the Crucible of the American Civil War* (2021) and *The Midwestern Press in the Crucible of the American Civil War* (2022), we first engaged in a lengthy, considered debate about where to locate Kansas, Nebraska Territory and Dakota Territory. Did they belong to the Midwest or the West in 1860? We looked at then-contemporary views of the region and its geography when deciding to place the nascent press that emerged in the Great Plains in our Western press volume. We recognized that the decision was an arguable one. Many factors could have led us to place the publications into the Midwestern volume. But a decision had to be made and, ultimately, we decided that in 1860 the Western press should be defined as publications that were produced in locales that were west of the Mississippi River.

Despite the myriad of published debate about the value and importance of regional history among those



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who engage in historical research, the field has found a greater welcome among media historians, especially in more recent decades. We have long recognized that media, especially newspapers and magazines (in the decades prior to the digital revolution), may have contributed to regional identity formation and community formation.⁴ And local and regional publishers have long attempted to sway the public's opinion, at times, on international, national, state, regional and local concerns.

As historians, we also need to remember that for much of history, individuals' lives were—and often still are—local in outlook. Communities, states, and regions mattered and continue to matter to individuals. Many members of the public identify themselves by their geographic locales. Thus, regional history and the exploration of regional and local publications' reporting and editorial responses matter. There is much ground for historians to tread in their explorations of regional history. Scholars can explore how national issues or concerns played out in regional communities' media or explore how state or regional issues that are important enough for historical study were reported upon.

Then, too, serendipitous research moments can also occur when exploring regional publications' responses to broader issues. Regional issues can become catalysts of a sort, igniting debate on a national level or forcing long simmering issues to the fore. And the regional press can be at the forefront of that debate, especially when their stories are reproduced by other publications. For example, in 1870, when Massachusetts shoe factory owner Calvin Sampson attempted to reduce labor costs, his hiring of 75 Chinese laborers sparked a national debate. Reporters from both western Massachusetts and New York City heavily covered the action. Those accounts, which were reproduced by newspapers across the nation, revived longstanding nativist concerns about who had the right to be a United States citizen. Whether individuals who were neither Protestant nor of Anglo stock could—or even should—be citizens reignited with Sampson's actions.⁵

Digitization efforts by several state, federal, and for-profit entities have led to a surfeit of available newspapers and magazines for scholars interested in regional media history. Similar efforts have made thousands of letters and diaries from a variety of individuals available to researchers. Yet, numerous scholarly articles as well as papers presented at research conferences continue to use two long-available media sources as subjects of study: the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. While the prestige press has long laid claim to serving as an important voice on national and international issues, these publications have never been read by most Americans who, instead, preferred their own hometown publications or newspapers produced in important regional cities, like the Portland (Oregon) *Oregonian*, the Albu-

querque (New Mexico) *Journal*, the Kansas City *Star* or the Boston *Globe*.

Regional publications aimed at serving underrepresented communities (i.e., women, ethnic minorities, labor, and third-party political organizations) have garnered more attention by scholars who are interested in studying the press's role as a rhetorical agent in the struggle for civil, social and economic rights. Much work has yet to be done. For example, media historians have a ripe field in the exploration of the responses of the Hispanic press to broader national concerns, as well as important regional issues.⁶ But it is important for future media historians to recognize—and expound upon—how those publications and the lives of their readers were influenced by their geographic conditions, including the economic, social, political, cultural and legal traditions inherent in those spatial locations.

Editors and publishers, even those who produced small town publications with circulations of 500 to 1,000 copies, often viewed themselves as important and influential among readers, especially in the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, because of two issues: the normative social practice of pass around readership and the industry practice known as the exchange system.

As media historians, we know that circulation statistics are misleading. One copy of a newspaper or a magazine often was shared by family members then exchanged with neighbors for a different newspaper before being passed along to another family. In remote regions, individuals often shared newspapers among themselves, while bars and taverns from the colonial era through the twentieth century often kept reading matter at hand for patrons to peruse. Some newspapers in this period even maintained reading rooms of their exchange papers. Of course, readers gained further knowledge from newspapers and periodicals from other regions or important urban centers that were brought in by stagecoaches, and, later, by trains, from such cities as New York, San Francisco, Kansas City, Chicago and New Orleans.

The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industry practice of newspaper exchanges also may have led editors to perceive their influence as disproportionate. Exchanges allowed editors to mail their publications for free to other editors and receive other newspapers in exchange from which they could reprint news. This common action allowed editors of small-town publications to have their work reproduced in publications across the nation, thus giving them a far greater reach for their news stories and editorials. For example, when the Pemberton Mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts, collapsed in January 1860, killing and maiming hundreds of workers, newspapers across the nation reprinted articles written by local Massachusetts reporters that ini-

tially were penned for newspapers in the cities of Lawrence, Lowell, and Boston.⁷

Despite the practices of pass around readership and the exchange system, historians who choose to undertake regional media history need to be conscious of the issue of causality. As David Sloan has cautioned in a recent issue of this journal, historians must be careful when exploring the question of media influence on members of the public and its influence on public opinion more broadly. He adds that until recent decades, scholars, like the public, have largely perceived that the press has been a powerful engine of influence on public opinion formation. Even when articles are widely read, the issue of influence, of changing attitudes or moving people to action, is far from certain. As sociologists have long argued, attitude formation is a complex socio-psychological issue. And studies of opinion formation that began in the 1920s have long revealed that attitudes do not predict beliefs.⁸ Personal beliefs and values, literacy, educational levels, knowledge of the topic or individual in question and moral and ethical beliefs are among a myriad of factors and influences that impact opinion formation.⁹

Research into how the press has reported on significant regional events and issues also can serve as a means by which scholars can fact check this perceived power of the press. Letters and diaries from readers used in regional history explorations help confirm what David Sloan has stated about press influence. Individuals often name drop the titles of publications that they read in their letters and diaries, sometimes acknowledging factual information that they gleaned, or, on occasion, acknowledge agreement or disagreement with a publication's editorial stance, but none of the diaries and letters that I have used at archives have acknowledged opinion change based on what individuals read in newspapers. In undertaking a deep dive into the issue of editors' perceptions of their own influence, researchers also need to examine the related issues of personal bias by editors and publishers, as well as the potential personal economic and social benefits that might accrue for press members based on their coverage and editorial response to an issue or situation. For example, many nineteenth-century publishers and editors had vested interests in promoting their communities and thus were also careful in their coverage of issues and events. Establishing a newspaper business was, and still is, a financial undertaking. Attracting railroads, industries, and settlers to their towns was a necessity. Furthermore, as Barbara Cloud found in her study of the Western press, editors often also had secondary jobs as lawyers, real estate agents, or doctors, occupations that required regular streams of clients.¹⁰

Studying how media have covered significant national events, therefore, can have a valuable secondary

effect—exploring, and often challenging, broadly held beliefs about the so-called power of the press. Sometimes, of course, this can be disheartening, however, for as historians, we know that we must see where the facts lead us in our investigations. For example, when Katrina J. Quinn and I researched press coverage of the January 1860 collapse of the Pemberton mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts, we were somewhat disappointed (but not surprised) to find that although newspapers across the nation carried multiple stories for several weeks about what was then the nation's worst industrial accident (approximately 145 workers died and another 166 were injured), newspapers' vigorous calls for state and federal laws regarding factory construction and worker safety were ignored. Other factors, including broad political and public support for industrialization, a growing immigrant industrial labor pool and the reality that politicians and the public were increasingly distracted by socio-cultural and economic concerns that ultimately led to civil war meant that legislators' interests in industrial and occupational safety laws would become a trend in the post-Civil War decades.¹¹

Thus, regional media history matters, is valuable, and should be undertaken. The ways in which regional publications responded to local, state, regional, national and international issues allows us to explore community and identity formation, serve as case studies when explaining similarities and differences in regional responses to issues, events and individuals and allow scholars to further examine broadly held beliefs in the power and potential influence of newspapers and magazines. But a careful interrogation of the lives, livelihoods, experiences and motives of editors and publishers also needs to be undertaken and included as a factor in regional newspapers' coverage of and responses to events and issues.

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Painting with Voice: Visualizing Communication

By Mark Dolan

Bob Dylan’s paintings have hung from my walls for years. Not hung from the plaster, but in my memories, some of which are of firsthand experiences, others are from having looked at photographs of his subject matter over the years – highways travelled, roadside diners, mom-and-pop motels, train trips across the desert. I look away from those paintings and see just as vividly my Esso station logo, my telephone booth where a woman stands at dusk, a pleading look on her face, or an empty table and chair facing out onto a highway. His paintings show places I’ve never been, like Route 66, with its half-buried Cadillacs, the haunting, empty serenity of a long ago consumed American heyday. Maybe it’s not wishful thinking to feel as real life what you’ve consumed via media, even a time before your time, as in Dylan’s train coming through a canyon with a sign for the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Company, founded in 1906 amid a Nevada gold rush.

How is it possible then, to recollect as experience, whether from a painting, or a photograph, scenes one never witnessed? Here is an example. This spring, I gave a slideshow talk on his highway and railway paintings for Bob Dylan Week in Florence, Italy. This gathering is a celebration of all-things Dylan. It is part academic conference with paper presentations and part concert series with musical performances A local guitarist who attended my presentation, Giuseppe Acquaraggia, reacted to my slides of Dylan’s art as though he were looking at his childhood home. “Si, certo... ah, the images. Bellissimo, the Route 66.”



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One of the goals of mass media, of course, is to let audiences feel as though they are an eyewitness, right there, knee-deep in the Gulf of Mexico with the meteorologist in advance of the hurricane. It does so by using words, images, and sounds to gain attention and to convey information, to communicate – just as history does. John Dewey describes the communication process as deeply human, a lived process, and thus of all affairs, “most wonderful.” Communication, one can argue, whether for the purposes of journalism or history, relies on human presence. That presence, in turn, can help us understand our mediated lives, and how media history plays a role. For example, learning that Bob Dylan paints from old photographs is helpful. It lets us reflect on the many photographs we’ve seen of a place we may never have been but have come to feel that we have visited when we view the photographs.

By reflecting on our visual culture, we can perhaps better explore the difficulties of locating one’s voice in a society dominated by mass communication. Oh, we can wear the clothes the model wears in the catalogue, we can imitate speech cadences of a character in some movie, but these responses ultimately leave us groping evermore in darkness. I’m talking about that lonely feeling you get it in the chain restaurant with a farmhouse theme, where fake porticoes lead to nothing but a wall. An aloneness we experience when we hear a storm warning from some “trusted” broadcaster, as if he were the neighbor you’d call when the lights blink twice and then go out. Where are the actual neighbors on actual front porches with whom we might commiserate, we wonder? That culture existed, we have those people in those places in historic photographs.

Hanno Hardt writes that self in society is formed two ways. The first, of course, is individual human development. The second happens through social communication as Dewey defines is, e.g., through social relations and networks such as relationships with family, friends,

and colleagues. Dewy also sees the self being influenced by mass communication's conception of human relationships, for mass communication imitates the qualities of human communication, he notes. It seeks to replicate that most wonderful of human affairs Dewey spoke of, which is familial, interpersonal, community-based, one's town or street. The self in this model, and as it relates to Dylan's art, is pushed and cajoled by a litany of images collected internally over time – of highways, diners, train tracks, oil wells. We thus experience Dylan's highway art as if we had a personal stake. Gathering insights with Giuseppe Acquaraggia, asking him to elaborate on his feelings when he sees one of Bob Dylan's paintings, helps us understand the ritualized way we accumulate images and make meaning from them.

We might conduct interviews and ask open-ended questions, to explore the feelings about mediated content, however far flung from one's lived experiences. Such interviews, whether as oral histories or passing conversation, assist us in getting closer to what James Carey described in his 1974 article in *Journalism History*, which critiqued what he saw as a limited method used by media history researchers. Carey suggests rather an approach that illuminates the historical consciousness around events and places, a configuration of feeling, which he argues deepens understanding, an approach beyond the documentarian's who, what, when and where. Rather than tell readers that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, writes, Carey, a historian might convey what it was like to feel the attitudes, emotion and expectations of Caesar crossing the Rubicon.

An open-ended approach to interviewing can be helpful in unlocking the media history that produces emotion in a viewer. Consider John Popham, who in the 1950s covered the American South for the New York Times, driving his green Buick nearly 50,000 miles, town to town, hearing people's stories, parking his car near some government building and asking residents what was on their minds. Such field work, specifically interviews, was also, in part, Harold Innis's approach to developing his communication theory. Innis is noted, among his theoretical ideas about communication, for considering some media as time-biased, materials like clay and stone, as well as oral traditions, that preserve community and religion. Media that lasts a long time and is local, such as a poem carved on a granite statue in a town square, or stories handed down by grandparents on a front porch. Space-biased media contrast in that they are more portable, like paper or electronic signals, and travel great distances at great speed and can assist in governing large empires, though they are short-lived and fragile.

Regarding people's reactions to Bob Dylan's paintings, it's important to recognize a reservoir of emotions that might exist through repetition of similar images

in photographs. Dylan seems to recognize this, and he makes subject matter interchangeable. "Florida Country" (2016) shows the Paradise Motel with its red sign, its vacancy or "sorry" sign in neon. The motel, however, is in Tucumcari, New Mexico. Dylan frequently swaps one highway sign for another in his landscapes. And he repeats paintings, with variations in sky color or mountain range. Four of his works are titled "Endless Highway," the first a watercolor, followed by three acrylics. In several paintings, train tracks terminate into orange and red skies, as do two-lane highways, always with a double-solid line. In a way, he tells the same story visually, over and over.

Advertising is celebrated in his art, from names of motels, gasoline brands, and a locomotive engine with a sign for the Goldfeld Consolidated Mining Company, which operated in Nevada. The painting is based on a 2016 photograph. Similar cars were brought to a weedy yard where the actual train once sat. Here, the history of the painting is complicated by conditions that produced the photograph. No matter though; viewers react to the essence of the image. It's a forlorn fullness, a completeness. There is a desolation, too, in his paintings, such as "The Old Abandoned Wilkerson's Station," from his The Beaten Path series, showing a decaying roadside landmark on Route 66 in Newkirk, New Mexico.

The strength of such a scene calls into play similar images, those of Dorothea Lange and her Depression-era photographs, which form a structure of feeling, a symbolic terrain. The people in Dylan's art are those in Robert Frank's photographs – waitresses, cowboys, street musicians. The land he paints is what photographers Timothy O'Sullivan and Matthew Brady saw, only on canvas in 2026 with startling layers of color, energy and aliveness. As an artist, Bob Dylan is less the documentarian and more a commentator, a balladeer or bluesman reflecting on news events with a brush.

Though I'm describing visual media, consider listening to the song "Key West," from Dylan's 2020 record, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, an album title referring to another performer, the Singing Brakeman, Jimmy Rogers. Brimming with painterly images, the song references the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, borrowing lyrics from "White House Blues," by Charlie Poole, a country music star from the 1920s. Like the paintings, the song relies on antecedents, historical periods and news events. "Key West" though, is finally about following the Overseas Highway to its end. It offers a gathering of past and present images that equip one for what lies beyond the horizon, where exist no roads or rails, not ones gallivanted by the living.

At 85, Bob Dylan tours extensively the United States and Europe, with a set list that varies little night after night. Fans who attend relish slight variations in performances. His touring is a metaphor for his painting, an

inputting of familiar images and words, as though into a matrix. It reminds me of James Carey's model of ritual communication, in which news does not reveal anything new, just underscores what is already known, and is consumed by a mass. Perhaps this explains performer Giuseppe Acquaraggia's fondness for Route 66, a road he's never actually seen but holds dear.

I'm fascinated by what seems to be a desire for face-to-face conversation. To not be tethered to one's cell phone, to not have one's words absorbed into algorithm. Perhaps it's an awkward fumbling forward on the part of college-age youth who spent their early teens isolated by Covid; it's also a displeasure with billion-dollar media companies with their addictive platforms. Nobody, after all, ever found themselves unable to let go of a newspaper.

There's a welcome desire to slow our pace and experience real things. I witnessed this in the study abroad students from the University of Mississippi who attended my talk on Dylan's highway art, and who were present as well to hear presentation colleagues Dr. Jason Cain and Professor R.J. Morgan, who teaches a course called *Dylan and the South*. One student traveled with a film camera. Another purchased vinyl records from a store. Some said their long daily walks provided a granular, block-by-block view of Florence that left them feeling so very alive. Many said they enjoyed seeing in the slides of people they deem authentic, the cowboy, the waitress, the motorcyclist in the rain at dusk.

An appetite these days for the tangible seems demonstrable – which explains, at least in part, those sold-out iMax showings of *The Odyssey* in all its eleven-miles-of-seventy-millimeter film glory. We need bigger screens, things we can hold, people with whom to talk, roads to go down.

Of course, tragedy haunts the highway and railway. I'm thinking of the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane that destroyed portions of the Florida East Coast Railway in the upper Keys. Train passengers that night told of seeing a tidal wave approaching in the dark, the hurricane's twenty-foot storm surge, strong enough to derail iron train cars. I'm researching fatalities that occurred on celebrated roads like Route 66, and that makes me mindful of the crosses on the highways. Still, I love a road trip. The Cracker Barrel restaurant chain offers online a Route 66 table light – though it is sold out, last I checked, and I've checked twice.

And so, we have Bob Dylan's highway art, ablaze with sunsets and desert sky, a visual tracing again of the rounds, as it were, of America. The dozen slides I showed in Italy of his paintings are a mediated culmination of that which we may find firsthand, a distilling of countless photographs, a storehouse of mediated images, some of which bear heartstrings. Meeting with students and faculty in a basement tavern in Florence, Italy, to experience Bob Dylan's paintings is life giving and is, as Dewey, said of communication, "most wonderful."

Historian's Interview:
Melita M. Garza



Melita Garza is an associate professor of journalism at the University of Illinois. She is author of *They Came to Toil: Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression*, which was a finalist for the AEJMC Tankard Book Prize in 2018. She also won first place in the AEJMC History Division annual essay contest for work published in *Journalism History*. Additionally, she was winner of the 2013 AJHA Margaret A. Blanchard Dissertation Prize for the outstanding dissertation in media history. Garza has also been recognized for her teaching talents. In 2022, she won the Jinx C. Broussard Award for Excellence in Teaching of Media History, given annually by the AEJMC History Division to recognize original, creative practices journalism educators and media historians employ in their history classrooms. At the University of Illinois, Garza was named to the 2025 list of professors considered outstanding by students for her class Media Law Through History.

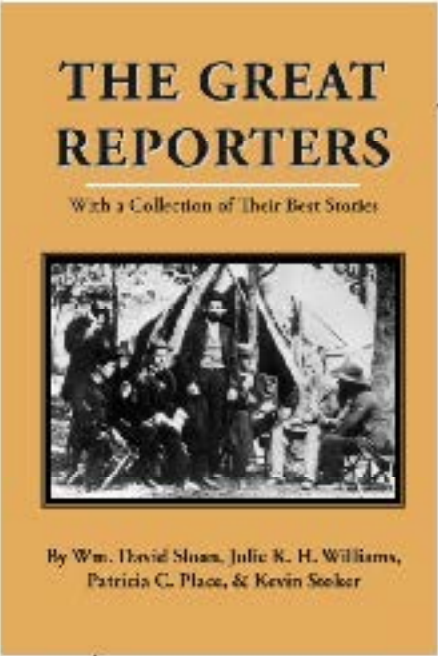
HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Tell us a little about your family background — where you were born and grew up, your education, and so forth.*

GARZA: I was born on an U.S. Air Force base in Madrid, Spain, where my father was then stationed in the military. I grew up mostly in the States, including Virginia (suburban Washington, D.C.), San Antonio, Texas, Detroit, and then back to the D.C. area, this time, in the Maryland suburbs, where I went to junior high and high school. My parents had been born and raised in San Antonio, Texas, and grew up speaking Spanish as their first language, which was the primary language of my Mexican immigrant grandparents. My

grandparents came to the U.S. fleeing the bullets of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. I grew up in a bilingual household at a time when Spanish-language programming was almost non-existent. Every time we moved to a new city, my parents would find the local Spanish-language movie theater, so that my brother and I could experience Mexican, Spanish, and Latin American cinema. Spanish-language films and television are so easy for anyone to stream now, of course. I attended an all-girls Catholic high school and then went on to earn an undergraduate degree in government with a certificate in Latin American studies from Harvard. A grant from the Harvard Committee on Latin American and Iberian Studies subsidized my undergraduate honors research in Nicaragua, where I focused on the appropriation and manipulation of religious symbols by the right and left in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. Prior to that I had spent a year studying at the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain, which made my summer of total immersion in a Central American Spanish-speaking country another idiomatic adventure. After graduation, I landed an internship at Crédit Agricole in Paris, as part of an exchange program between American and French students. One of my proudest accomplishments was walking into a French bakery to order a baguette, accompanied by a French friend from work who observed: “The baker didn’t even know you weren’t French!” Like all in the academy, I was one of those weird students who liked school, but I have to say my deepest and most memorable learning experiences took place far from campus life.

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

GARZA: I spent a little over two decades as a journalist, getting my start as a reporter trainee at the *Los Angeles Times* (working as a reporter and being paid as



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an intern). My first fulltime job in journalism followed at the *Milwaukee Journal*, in Wisconsin, which I vaguely knew to be “somewhere in the middle.” My brother jokingly asked whether I would be interviewing Elsie the Borden Cow. The closest I got was interviewing Alice in Dairyland. I then moved to the *Chicago Tribune*, where I worked a variety of beats over 15 years. I loved general assignment reporting, covering Cook County Circuit Court one day, City Hall another day, and in between all kinds of colorful stories that are found in a city like Chicago. Other beats included ethnic affairs and the Chicago Housing Authority, which was being dismantled at the time. I asked for a switch to the business desk because I began to see that while government reporting was essential, if I really wanted to make a difference, I should be reporting and writing about the companies and people who were influencing the levers of government, often behind the scenes. I began working on my MBA parttime to gain new tools to cover the CEOs and corporations on my beat, which was energy and manufacturing. One thing led to another, and I received an offer to work as an associate editor of the *McKinsey Quarterly*, the business research publication of McKinsey Consulting. The job was in London and so I worked fulltime for McKinsey while completing my MBA at the University of Chicago’s UK business school campus. Going back for a master’s degree after so many years reminded me how much I loved school, and especially the opportunity to do my own in depth research and write more extensive pieces than are generally possible in daily journalism. I moved back to the States to work fulltime for *Bloomberg News* in New York while I explored doctoral program in journalism. My acceptance in 2009 as a Park Fellow at the University of North Carolina Hussman School of Journalism and Media, as it’s now known, marked the end of my professional journalism career and my start in academia.

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

GARZA: As a doctoral student at UNC Chapel Hill, I taught an undergraduate course about covering the economy. After graduation from UNC, I joined the faculty at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, where I taught Business Journalism, Diversity and the Media, Media Literacy, and Journalism History. I also developed a course for the Honors College called Journalism and Moral Courage, for which I won the History Division’s Broussard Award. As the Illinois College of Media, where I’ve taught since fall 2022, I teach American Journalism History, Media Law Through History, Ethics and Diversity, Business Reporting, and I also teach graduate courses.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Tell us about your background in history: When did you first get interested in historical research? How did your education prepare you to be a historian? etc.*

GARZA: Looking back, I think I always wanted to be a historian, but was just distracted by so many other interests. Both of my parents loved history. My father took us to every U.S. Civil War battlefield many times over, and he collected and read antique books of military history, primarily of Spain and WWII, but also of the Civil War and the history of the U.S. southwest. When my parents retired to North Carolina, he joined the local Civil War Roundtable. My mother has been an avid subscriber to *Early American Life* magazine, and as a crafter (quilting and applique) has researched the work of early American artisans.

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

GARZA: The brilliant Barbara Friedman was pivotal in introducing me to the field of journalism history. Taking Barbara’s journalism history doctoral seminar at UNC Chapel Hill made me see new possibilities for research. My original plan had been to write a more contemporary dissertation related to business journalism and the Great Recession, which had just ended when I began my Ph.D. However, after learning how little research had been done on Spanish-language journalism, at least in the canon of journalism scholarship, I saw where I could make a difference. And the more I thought about it, I began to feel that just about anybody could do a dissertation on the media’s role in the economic downturn. There was still an economic aspect to my dissertation through its focus on the anti-immigrant sentiment against Mexican immigrants during the Great Depression, and the forced and voluntary departure of about half a million Mexican workers during the period I studied. I was able to demonstrate that all the contemporary arguments against immigration were mere echoes of arguments from the 1930s that traced even farther back in our nation’s history.

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

GARZA: On the macro level, I’d say that I study news as an agent of democracy. In part, I focus on journalism’s historical role in identifying who is American and what it means to be an American. Within that framework, I have specialized in Spanish- and English-language media and how these have represented Mexicans and immigrants more generally. As I explained in a 2025 invited essay for *Journalism and Communication*

Monographs: “I am a journalism historian whose alter ego is Alice, of “looking glass” fame. My explorations of the news in English and Spanish lets me slip inside two different constructed realities to study how journalists living in the same moment documented life for distinctive imagined communities of readers, who then, as so often now, remain divided by their news source “looking glass.” My perspective is drawn from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, first published on the cusp of the Gilded Age in 1871.”¹

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

GARZA: My two books are both historical works. In addition to *They Came to Toil*, which I mentioned earlier, I was the lead editor for *The Routledge Companion to American Journalism History*, which is both an effort to re-imagine the field of journalism history and a status update of how leading and emerging journalism historians see the field within their own specialties and across a broad range of media forms, formats, and theoretical perspectives, etc.² I was fortunate to share editorship of the volume with two AJHA presidents and remarkable scholars, Tracy Lucht and Michael Fuhlhage. My peer-reviewed articles have appeared in *American Journalism*, *Journalism History*, the *Howard Journal of Communications*, and the *US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal* (in press). I’ve also written ten book chapters, some of which are in press in summer 2026. Among the volumes I have contributed to is *The Midwestern Press in the Crucible of the American Civil War*, edited by Debra Reddin nan Tuyll, another AJHA president, and Mary M. Cronin, a board member of this journal. Another is *The Routledge Companion to Global Journalism and Media at the Borders*, for which I wrote a chapter “The Border ‘Invasion’ in Public Memory.” This volume is not historical per se, but in my chapter I trace the history of the border concept to the ancient world and draw a throughline of media representations of “the other” up to and including today.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Of the books and articles that you have written, from which ones did you get the most satisfaction?*

GARZA: My sole-authored book, *They Came to Toil*, told an interwoven story of newspaper and immigrant history in a Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers way. Not to say I wrote the book backwards and in high heels, but I told the story in two languages and in two cultures, which played out against a backdrop of private ownership versus chain-operated newspapers, with xenophobia, business interests, and white supremacy in the mix. As far as articles, I’d say the top prize for most satisfying would

go to “Legacy Media as Twitter Referee: Reframing Reaction to Sebastien De La Cruz’s Anthem Singing at the 2013 NBA finals,” which was published in the *Howard Journal of Communications*. For this article, I analyzed media coverage, including photo, broadcast, and print, in the U.S. and Mexico, for how legacy media handled the Twitter vitriol hurled at a Mexican American fifth grader, who sang the national anthem mariachi style in a mariachi suit. I was able to weave so much history into this contemporary coverage. I started with the history of how the national anthem became a staple of sporting events, which turned out to be a Chicago story. I went on to discuss the various performers who had been attacked for the different ways they sang the anthem. When I got into analyzing the media coverage of the young mariachi, history bounced off the stories and transcripts, as numerous outlets, big and small, local and national, English and Spanish, alluded to the civil rights movement and the nation’s legacy of racism to denounce the treatment of the young singer. Revealing the latent history in current events is wonderfully satisfying. I try to do that every day!

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *We realize that it is difficult to judge one’s own work — and that the most accomplished people are often the most modest — but if you had to summarize your most important contributions to the field of journalism/mass communication history, what would they be?*

GARZA: On a broad level, I would say that challenging the status quo—the East coast view of the nation as a binary— is my most important contribution. I take the view that our “Americanhood,” to use a Michael Schudson expression, is far more complex than the image a reader might get from much of journalism history.

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

GARZA: Gosh! For a bit, I regretted not doing doctoral work sooner. But then I realized that all the experiences I had as a journalist in California (Los Angeles), the Midwest (Milwaukee and Chicago) and New York and London, gave me a breadth of understanding not only about journalism, but also about the world and the way many different kinds of people think. It’s also given me the ability to research, study, and teach about journalism with a practitioner’s eye and a scholar’s training. In other words, researching journalism history is not a mere academic exercise for me. In fact, a photo of me taken in the *Milwaukee Journal* newsroom during the late 1980s was for sale on eBay not too long ago. It was labelled “historical photo.” That makes me an artifact of history!

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Tell us about your “philosophy of*

history” (of historical study in general or of JMC history in particular) or what you think are the most important principles for studying history.

GARZA: There are books written on this topic! At the most basic level, historical research, like all research, should aim to enlarge how people understand the world, or at least a particular topic or event in the world. You may have noticed that I used the present tense in the preceding sentence. John Bodnar famously put it this way: “Public memory is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.”³ Less well known, at least in journalism circles, is the idea that the river of life is history. At least that is how I would describe New Mexican poet Sabine Ulibarri’s philosophy: “Life, history, time is a continuum—it flows, like a river flows. We’ve tended to chop it up into past, present, and future. And we’ve let the past drop out of the flow. We are becoming a now people. A present people. The past is out of sight. And the future is out of sight. And living in the present is living in one dimension only.”⁴

And yet, just as journalism reveals something of the consciousness of the people living at a particular time, so does history. It is true that historians must avoid presentism, that is imposing contemporary morals and understanding on the people of the past. It is also true that every historian creates in the context of their own time, leaving them susceptible to hindsight bias at the very least.

As for principles, while “truth” with a capital “T” might be elusive, at a minimum historians (and journalists) should at least demythologize. This is not the only aim that history shares with journalism. We tell stories that began with a question or questions, or that begin with a source or sources, that lead us to questions.

Like journalists, we are asked to do something more than relay facts. We are asked to provide context and interpretation. Journalists attribute. Historians cite. We are both only as accurate as our sources and our interpretation, including our ability to see the biases and omissions in the sources themselves, and not just our own. Both fields require empathy and ethics, including transparency regarding the sources and artifacts we rely on. Before embarking on a story, journalists should always read the clips. What was written about this before? What are other news organizations writing now (or righting now)?

As researchers, we likewise build on the knowledge of others. And while we are asked to provide an intervention, this sometimes presents a conundrum when breaking new ground challenges historical orthodoxy. In the newsroom, many a knowledgeable beat reporter had to convince their editor that the story Brand X

promoted on page one was wrong, and the real story was something else. In academia, it could be a matter of convincing a journal editor that reviewer #2 might have felt challenged by the new method, or the new artifacts, and/or the resulting new interpretation, but that didn’t make the manuscript invalid.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *How would you evaluate the quality of journalism and mass communication history — its strengths and weaknesses?*

GARZA: I’m impressed with the expanding breadth of journalism history. One of the goals Tracy, Michael, and I had for the *Routledge Companion to American Journalism History* was to pinpoint areas that had been overlooked. Even though our book was published only two years ago, it seems that new and significant topics, events, and individuals are increasingly being researched. I’m not suggesting that the book spurred these changes. For instance, a push for increased research in transnational journalism had already begun before our book was published, but we hope our book reinforces trends already underway and encourages new directions. As for weaknesses, I think the size of our discipline, and the traditional research interests of the field, leave a very small bench from which to draw reviewers who can critically evaluate some of the work being conducted on marginalized groups, particularly those outside the Black-White race binary. I also see a gap in understanding of less frequently employed methods, particularly oral history.

One major impediment I sometimes see for the advancement of journalism history is an uncritical approach. This is evinced in numerous ways, including failing to note legacy media’s historical exclusion of women and marginalized people, both as reporters and editors, and also as subjects of news coverage. We study the records—the primary sources—that exist, sometimes without considering that they are, for the most part, the products of privilege and systemic racism and sexism. If we aren’t careful, journalism historians can simply perpetuate the biases that fed the construction of “the record” in the first place. While it is fair to ask oral historians to consider the bias, perspectives, etc., of the individuals we interview, it is equally important to ask the same of historians relying on existing records. It’s not easy to see what’s outside the frame.

I also see a problem with over reliance on the study of major metropolitan newspapers, particularly those based on the East Coast. John Maxwell Hamilton and Heidi J. S. Tworek pointed out the unrepresentativeness of *The New York Times* as a study subject, noting, among other things, that the *Times* wasn’t—and still isn’t—where most people get their news.⁵ To be fair, being unrepresentative doesn’t make the paper unworthy of

study. It does, however, suggest that research based on *Times* articles is unlikely to reveal the consciousness of the average American.

Even when regional and smaller newspapers are incorporated as part of a study, it is often the case that the research is limited to the headlines, or only articles on page one. The emphasis on examining page one only can blunt efforts to break new ground. When I conducted research for my book, *They Came to Toil*, I read the entire newspaper for all the years that were part of the study, and for a few years before and after. By looking at briefs buried in the back pages, I found small items that discussed fundraising activities, such as charity baseball games and bullfights, that Mexican Americans in border communities in Texas undertook to provide aid for the sad parade of Mexican immigrant repatriates and deportees that were crossing the border. These small items, when knitted together, showed that Mexican Americans had agency, and weren’t simply passive in the face of the expulsion of people with whom they shared an ancestry. This cast a different light on an ethnic group often characterized as docile and easily controlled.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What do you think we in journalism and mass communication history need to be doing to improve the status of journalism and mass communication history in (1) journalism and mass communication education and (2) the wider field of history in general?*

GARZA: In what is being hyped as the age of AI, journalism and mass communication history has a prime opportunity to emphasize how the study of change over time, based on facts drawn from historical artifacts and secondary sources, combined with interpretation, does more than help students learn to generate a compelling story. The history classroom is Life Time Fitness for the brain. Put together the puzzles of the past; recognize when pieces are missing, assess the meaning then and now, and perhaps consider what the possibilities might be, if any, for the future. The more tactile we can make the experience, either through archival library searches, oral history interviews, history scavenger hunts, or some combination of these and other ideas, the more we can help students develop the intellectual capabilities and the mental originality they will need to distinguish themselves from everyone else who can write an AI prompt.

Moreover, at a time when democracy in the United States appears to be fracturing, one parallel function of history and journalism, giving people the information they need to be free, is more important than ever. In my Media Law Through History course, I focus on the evolution of the First Amendment in tandem with the state of journalism and the nation’s zeitgeist in the era

in which the cases were decided. While not every case and era connects with issues of the present, some do. For instance, my spring 2026 students found the Vietnam War history that was a backdrop to *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969), and the *New York Times Co. v. United States* (1971) had special resonance after the Trump Administration announced that it would begin automatically registering 18-year-olds for the draft.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What challenges do you think journalism and mass communication history faces in the future?*

GARZA: Apart from AI, the ongoing challenge of the disappearing archives has become acute on multiple fronts. The closure of some 3,500 newspapers between 2005 and 2025, according to the 2025 Medill State of Local News project report, has led to an untold loss of archival material. Meanwhile, the need to preserve digital records remains acute. And it’s an old problem at this point. In 1990, the U.S. House of Representatives issued a report, “Taking a Byte out of History: The Archival Preservation of Federal Computer Records.” Not only is digital media vulnerable to decay much faster than other archival materials, such as acid free paper, the devices required to access it become obsolete very quickly. While digital media can be reproduced and saved, the integrity of the media is somewhat degraded with repeated copies. This doesn’t solve additional issues, such as hacking and erasing data. And of course, the problem of preservation is much older than 1990. In the days of papyrus, well-used scrolls required re-copying every twenty years, keeping armies of scribes constantly in re-write mode. Those scrolls had a longer life span than most digital media today. And broadcast, especially local outlets, have long had their own preservation challenges.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What historical work(s) have you read lately that provokes your interest?*

GARZA: I recently pulled a book off the shelf that had been part of my late father’s collection. The book is an 1863 copy of the first volume of John S. C. Abbott’s *The History of the Civil War in America*. The first thing you’ll notice is that Abbott is writing this history before the war was concluded. The second thing you might notice is that the term “Civil War” is in the title. Abbott was a Bowdoin graduate, an historian, and a Christian minister, and in no way a southern sympathizer. His use of the term seemingly contradicts a recent *New York Times* Op-Ed that suggested “Civil War” came into use only years later through southern whitewashing of the conflict. To be fair, in the text, Abbott also uses the term “slaveholding rebels.” As I am reading, I’m struck by the way Abbott, who studied at Andover Theological

Seminary, argues against the arguments of southern Christian ministers who attempted to justify slavery through biblical reference. “The slavery of the Bible, whatever its character, was not Negro slavery. The slaves were, almost without exception, white men.” Abbott then asserted: “The slavery of this country is not Negro slavery.”⁶ He notes that thousands of slave children were the sons and daughters of “Southern gentlemen of high position,” and were more white than black. Abbott’s criticism of the ministers resonates with current criticism of some evangelical leaders who support inhumane policies such as separating children from their immigrant parents, demonstrating a Christianity devoid of the Golden Rule. In other parallels, Abbott also makes an argument against false equivalence (without using the term), and he argues that “democratic equality” and “aristocratic privilege” can’t “live in peace under the same Government [sic] or even side by side.”⁷ And I’m only at page 21.

Notes

1. Melita M. Garza, “Research Beyond the ‘Two Class Theory,’” *Journalism and Communication Monographs* (Los Angeles) 27, no. 2 (June 2025): 111–18.
2. Melita M. Garza, Michael Fuhlhage, and Tracy Lucht. *The Routledge Companion to American Journalism History*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003245131>.
3. John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton University, 1994: 15. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691216188>.
4. “A Mi Raza: The Writings of Sabine Ulibarri,” (15:23-16:29), PBS, original air date, June 27, 1995, <https://www.pbs.org/video/colores-a-mi-raza-the-writings-of-sabine-ulibarri/>
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6. John S. C. Abbott. “The History of the Civil War in America.” New York: Henry Bill, 1863: 24.
7. Abbott, 21.

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Book Interview
Yankee Reporters and Southern Secrets:
Journalism, Open Source Intelligence,
and the Coming of the Civil War

By Michael Fuhlhage



Michael Fuhlhage is an associate professor of journalism at Wayne State University where he teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses. His Ph.D. is from the University of North Carolina. Before entering the academy, Fuhlhage spent twelve years working as a journalist on Palm Springs, Des Moines, and Santa Fe. He taught at the University of Missouri and Auburn University before joining the Wayne State University faculty. Fuhlhage, who is a co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to American Journalism History* with Tracy Lucht and Melita Garza, has won numerous awards for his research and teaching, including the AJHA Wally Eberhard Award for the Outstanding Paper on Media and War and the David Sloan Award for top faculty paper. He is also author of *Yankee Reporters and Southern Secrets: Journalism, Open Source Intelligence, and the Coming of the Civil War*, the book he discusses with us here.

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

FUHLHAGE: John Nerone made an observation in *American Journalism* that I just couldn’t stop thinking about: that the postal exchange system functioned as a nineteenth-century viral network. He noted that some editors such as William Lloyd Garrison of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* “looked for ways to ‘go viral’” through exchanges, which Nerone described as a media system that “consisted of local print offices networked through a postal system governed by a set of federal policies permitting cheap distribution to readers

and free exchange among editors.”¹ I built an internal grant application to fund archival research that the Wayne State University Office of the Vice President for Research funded in 2015. I proposed to examine the papers of several prominent correspondents and editors to document their information-gathering and writing behaviors during the secession winter of 1860-61. The goal was to create a model for understanding the media ecosystem of the abolitionist movement by seeing how articles covering secession were shared via the exchange network and reprinted. Specifically, I was interested in how the *New York Tribune* and *Boston Journal* covered the secession movement in the South and how they covered anti-slavery activities in Bleeding Kansas. Along with those topics, I wanted to know what obstacles undercover reporters had to surmount in order to inform the public about secession and how they surmounted them, and finally, how information about secession spread in the north. I identified about 70 editors who shaped the news and correspondents who risked their lives covering secession whose papers were in the manuscript collections at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Columbia University, Harvard University, and the New York Public Library. Those papers would provide the details for the narrative, but physical and digitized newspaper archives would give me what I needed to understand the flow of that information across northern publishing networks. The project threatened to spin out of control—how would I track every item published in every available newspaper about the most important issue of their time? Vince Golden at AAS suggested I structure a sample of newspaper titles suggested by the secondary literature, and I used that as a starting point. Yes, it mattered what was published. But what mattered the most was the information that government and military decision-makers acted actually acted upon. The answer was to

identify who the most significant policymakers were and to search their papers for evidence that secession news and opinion played a role in their response to the crisis.

It occurred to me that the firing on Fort Sumter was as earth-shaking to their generation as 9/11 was to my own. I wondered, did northern officials make the same mistakes as our own leaders made about the threats posed by al-Qaida?

Indications of organizing against the United States and the West were out there in the Arabic press and broadcasting, but we either ignored it or were unaware of it. Was the same thing true of Unionist decision-makers? Were the signs of organizing against the United States out there in the southern press if they had just bothered to read them? So, I read widely, and there was so much evidence of growing sentiment against the Union and of military, political, and infrastructural planning to break away that I had to create categories to organize and understand it. I modeled my analysis of secessionist journalism on the U.S. intelligence community's modern open source intelligence framework.

HISTORIOGRAPHY *What was the state of the historical literature about the topic at the time you began work on your book?*

FUHLHAGE: There were many works about war and political coverage during the Civil War, both in terms of opinion writers and war correspondents, from journal articles to published books. But coverage during the secession crisis was a different story, and I could identify no historical literature that examined the question of open-source intelligence — which, to explain it simply, is defined as verified advance information about the enemy from public sources — that circulated during the secession crisis. Edwin Fishel wrote a remarkable book published in 2001, *The Secret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War*. But most works about intelligence gathering during the Civil War Era were sensationalized popular histories published in the decades immediately following the war.

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?*

FUHLHAGE: I relied on purposive sampling of newspaper articles from online databases and physical archives and manuscript collections at several universities, the Library of Congress Manuscripts Division, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New York Public Library, and the Concord Public Library.

The great thing about working with federal records is that if you can deduce which agency handled which

kind of information, you could speed up your search substantially. There are two great published finding aids, *The Guide to Federal Archives Relating to the Civil War* and *A Guide to Archives of the Government of the Confederate States of America*, both published by the National Archives, that are indispensable. Their categorization of available documents led me to collections of the Army, Navy, State Department, Postal Service, Treasury, Justice, Interior, and Legislative Branch, as well as the papers of presidents and vice presidents of the Union and Confederacy. I also looked at the papers of governors and newspaper editors and publishers.

As for how long I worked on the book, I had been thinking and reading about Civil War journalism since learning about Albert Deane Richardson's coverage of the war for the *New York Tribune*, his capture and his imprisonment as a political prisoner by the Confederates when I was a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2008. But my work on this project started in earnest in 2015 and concluded with the book's publication in 2019.

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

FUHLHAGE: I think there's a lot of evidence I just didn't have time to get to in the U.S. Department of State papers, especially in dispatches from ambassadors and consuls in foreign countries. I found enough to determine that Union diplomats monitored the press for information about the enemy in the countries where they were stationed. But I think there's a richer and fuller story to be told based on the evidence left on the table because I just ran out of time and money to go looking for them. And with unlimited funds and time? I would love to look at the records of the governments of Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Mexico, and Russia to see if they engaged in similar use of the press as sources of information that guided their decisions about relations with the Union and Confederacy.

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

FUHLHAGE: I am in love with the archive. But I would be a lot better off if I had the patience and took the time to dive deeper into the secondary literature before I go harvest in the archives.

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

FUHLHAGE: Limiting the scope of the study was

a huge challenge. So was managing the enormous amount of evidence that I gathered. To understand the viral spread of information, I adopted a sampling strategy for watershed events and logged them in a spreadsheet. Alone, it would have taken several years. I was fortunate that some of our graduate students got infected by my enthusiasm for the project and volunteered to work with me as co-authors on conference papers and journal articles that led to the book, building the database with me in the process.

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?*

FUHLHAGE: It could be. I was indoctrinated into the Cult of John Brown as a Kansas grade-schooler. Anti-slavery and abolitionism were the cornerstone of Kansas' foundational myth, and I had a rampaging case of Dixiephobia until my late 30s. That could have led me to make all sorts of assumptions and not follow through on them — like assuming that along with having inferior troop numbers and equipment, the Confederates must also have had inferior intelligence gathering. I was a theater kid in high school and early in college. In theater, you drop your own personality and get into character — you attempt to get inside the personality and point of view of someone radically different from yourself. Historians can approach things neutrally by getting into the character of the people we are studying. Ask what they achieved, rather than framing everything in terms of their foes whom we might otherwise sympathize with. And remember that we are ultimately seeking to understand the truth about how things happened. That includes learning lessons from the "other" side that will help "our" side to do better.

HISTORIOGRAPHY *What new insights does your book provide?*

FUHLHAGE: Before this book, works about OSINT as a topic put its beginnings in World War II. *Yankee Reporters and Southern Secrets* pushed OSINT's timeline back by eighty years, and since its publication other scholars

have identified its use during World War I and other conflicts. It demonstrates that there were thousands of pieces of actionable information published in southern newspapers about South Carolina secession alone — and tens of thousands about the other Confederate states during their deliberation about whether to sever themselves from the Union. It also expands thinking about the categories of open source intelligence.

HISTORIOGRAPHY *What findings most surprised you?*

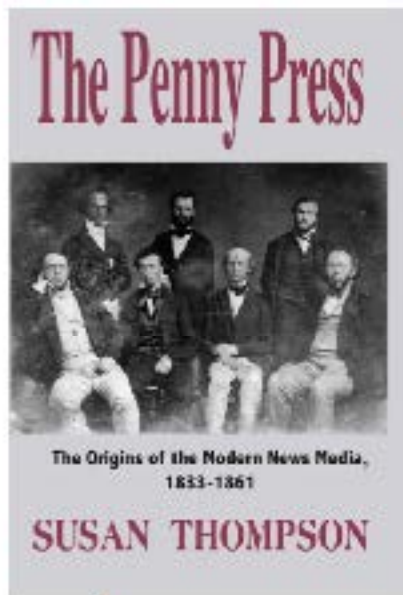
FUHLHAGE: The fact that so many pieces of evidence that decision makers on both sides of the crisis were saved and survived until I encountered them. It was a delight that I ran across a listing in the National Archives and Records Administration finding aids that was actually titled "Secret Correspondence." Remember that scene in "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" where Indy says "X *never* marks the spot" and it turned out the X marked the spot *precisely*? That was an Indiana Jones moment for me. But there were so many surprises—like that William Henry Seward, secretary of state for Abraham Lincoln, kept his open source information newspaper clippings in scrapbooks labeled "Herbarium," and that the archives holding them at the University of Rochester just took that label at face value. The most delightful surprise was that three years after finding letters containing newspaper clippings corroborating human intelligence from Seward's spy in Galveston, Texas, I was able to find Seward's replies to him in the Department of State Papers at the National Archives in Maryland.

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

FUHLHAGE: Don't worry about it if you don't have your idea narrowed down enough. The evidence will narrow the path for you.

Notes

1. John Nerone, "Why Journalism History Matters to Journalism Studies," *American Journalism* 30, no. 1 (January 2013): 15-28.



The Penny Press

Scholars have lauded this book as the best ever written focusing on the cheap press before the Civil War.

"Susan Thompson has written the ideal history of the penny press era. The writing is lively and engaging while remaining

rooted in sound scholarship and the documents of the period. She has provided a treasure-trove of stories and facts about this pivotal era of media development." — David Copeland, series editor, *Debating Historical Issues in Media of the Time*

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"Susan Thompson uncovers the shenanigans of penny press editors in a concise and entertaining narrative of the newspapers that first defined news and the mass audience in the United States. She reveals hypocrisies and controversies about sensationalism, invasion of privacy, truth in an era of hoaxes, and attempts at political independence." — William E. Huntzicker, author, *The Popular Press 1833-1865*

To purchase a copy, or to learn more about this book, click on the book cover above.

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Historical Round Table: Presidents and the Press

By Christina Littlefield,
featuring Thomas Mascaro, Jon Marshall and Diane Winston



U.S. presidents have always had a tense give-and-take with the press. They've utilized the media for their own ends and adapted new technologies to bypass the press to speak directly to the American people.

Donald J. Trump's second administration has ramped up his first administration's already unprecedented efforts to ostracize the mainstream press and amplify the news organizations that aid his agenda, including banning the Associated Press, taking over the White House Press Pool, and suing news organizations he doesn't like.

This roundtable develops a conversation started at the American Journalism Historians Association conference in Long Beach in September 2025, considering just how much Trump's attacks on the media diverges — or not — from past presidents. All three respondents have recently published books documenting the ways U.S. presidents have leveraged the press to further their agendas over the last 50 years, including researching the growing role conservative media organizations have played in boosting Republican politics.

The roundtable convener, **Christina Littlefield**, is an associate professor of journalism and religion at Pepperdine University. She's the co-author, with Richard T. Hughes, of *Christian America and the Kingdom of God: White Christian Nationalism from the Puritans through January 6* (University of Illinois, 2025), which explores the role of conservative media in fostering Christian nationalism. Most recently, she researched Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk's live streams on YouTube as part of his outreach to mobilize Christians toward his political agenda. Her ongoing journalism history work looks at the muckraking efforts of the late nineteenth century Social Gospel. She is a member of the editorial board for *Historiography in Mass Communication* and web editor and elected board member for the American Journalism Historians Association (2023-2026). She is a former reporter with the *Las Vegas Sun*.

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Professor Emeritus **Thomas A. Mascaro** is a documentary journalism historian and co-author of the recent book with the late William E. Porter, *Assault on the Media: The Nixon Years: Updated with Analysis of 21st Century Threats to Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024), author of *Into the Fray: How NBC's Washington Documentary Unit Reinvented the News* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2012), which won the 2013 James W. Tankard Award for Best Book on Journalism (AEJMC), and he is at work on "Hard Truths: The Documentary Odyssey of Bob Rogers and Rhonda Schwartz." His analysis of "The Benjamin Report" earned Mascaro the Covert Award for best article (co-winner) in 2006. He was elected to the board of directors for the American Journalism Historians Association (2022-2025).



Jon Marshall is an associate professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and the author of the books *Clash: Presidents and the Press in Times of Crisis* (University of Nebraska, 2022) and *Watergate's Legacy and the Press: The Investigative Impulse* (Northwestern University Press, 2011). His work has appeared in *American Journalism*, *Journalism History*, *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *com*, *TheAtlantic.com*, *Chicago Tribune*, and numerous other publications. He is a former reporter for the *Tampa Tribune* and *Daily Herald* and columnist for *Quill*. His most recent article for *Journalism History*, co-authored with Gregory Svirnovskiy, was "'Tin Cans and String': Democrats' Failed Attempts to Challenge Conservative Talk Radio from 1994 to 1996."



Diane Winston is the Knight Chair in Media and Religion and a professor of journalism, communication and religion at University of Southern California. Winston has authored and edited numerous books on the connection between religion, media, American history, and politics. They include *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (1999), *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* (2002), *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion* (2009), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the News Media* (2012), and *Religion and Reality TV: Faith in Late Capitalism* (2018). Her latest book — *Righting the American Dream: How the Media Mainstreamed Reagan's Evangelical Vision* (University of Chicago, 2023) — reveals how the Reagan presidency used news media to spread a new religious vision of American identity, one which continues to influence politics, including the rise of Trumpism and Christian nationalism. Winston covered religion for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Dallas Times Herald*, and *Baltimore Sun*, during which time she was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize three times. Her contributions have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Alta*, and many more.

Littlefield: How did you first become interested in studying the relationship between presidents and the press?

Marshall: My interest in presidents and the press goes back to my childhood when I closely followed the events of Watergate. I witnessed Richard Nixon vilifying journalists while the news media kept reporting damning details about his White House and re-election campaign. Since then, I have been fascinated by the dynamics between presidents who are trying to promote their own narratives and reporters who are attempting to get the next big scoop. My interest intensified when I worked as a political reporter who covered local politics and sometimes Congress, and I had the opportunity to see first-hand the tug and pull of the relationship between government officials and journalists. That interest continued as I became a journalism historian.

Mascaro: As a grad student at Michigan working with Dr. Mary Ann Watson on the Kennedy years. This expanded through my interest in the Vietnam era, the presidency and the press. My Michigan professor William Porter's book *Assault on the Media: The Nixon Years* made a lasting impression on me. I've generally followed the presidents and the press, though, in connection with influences on network documentary journalism. That changed when Trump was first elected. I urged the University of Michigan Press to re-issue Porter's book. They asked me to shepherd the project. It thrust me into research in areas far outside my expertise and comfort zone, but it opened my mind to not only the extent of the Nixon-era assault, including by organizations outside the White House, but also the structural gimmicks Nixon's people used to intimidate the press, including appointments to the Supreme Court. The Reagan era was particularly applicable to my research on documentary journalism, because deregulation and the relaxation of anti-trust enforcement rang the death knell for documentary units at the networks. But in researching and writing analyses for the Porter/Nixon re-issue, I came to understand the threats posed by Trump. I discovered my side project to honor Porter's original book proved to be highly instructive to my documentary research and publications. And it fostered a new ethos of concern about Trump's blitzkrieg against the press. The problem I have at the moment is knowing what to do about it.

It is important to stress a critical point about historical research on this setup — especially in these dangerous times for democracy and civilization. There is a risk to doing history that shows contemporary trends comparable to the past, to fall back on the ridiculous “pendulum” model of media and society — that this has happened before, yadda, yadda, yadda, so what's the

big deal? Yes, presidents have always tussled with the press, some with more panache than others. FDR and JFK, to name two, were particularly skilled in using the press to facilitate their agendas. George H.W. Bush and members of the Bush II administration reveled in their obvious contempt for the press. Nixon was the most dangerous of post-World War II's chief execs because he created structures, including regulations and intimidation tactics that involved cutting into press revenues. Nixon, who hid his nefarious meddling in LBJ's peace initiative with North Vietnam in 1968, prolonged the Vietnam War while stirring up hatred for all of the progressive outcomes of World War II. Nixon was the most dangerous in the history of president-press relations because he formalized his assault on the media, but also because he planted seeds that created Trump's 1984 approach to double-speak, fears of the state, attacks on personal liberties and bodies, and with a reckless disregard for “truth.” So we should avoid the tendency to reflect on the “give-and-take with the press” when the stakes are raised to the level of existential threat, as they are today. Roughly a third of American voters believe false notions proffered by Trump, or conversely, that Trump has picked up on to define his populist platform. Trump amplifies hatred for “others” the way infamous fascists and dictators did in the 1930s and '40s with catastrophic effects. Today is worse. Trump is sacrificing the human capital expended courageously to defeat fascism. He is using the press to belittle and *dismantle* the press. The goal of people surrounding Trump is to end legacy media, to put CNN, CBS, the NYT, *Wash-Post*, and others out of business. And a large swatch of American citizens not only don't care, they encourage these actions. You cannot exist for long on lies and double-speak as a civilization without falling into the depths of corruption, in which each individual claims authority through extortion, discrimination, outright theft, and the use of guns. So the historical question would be, what happened to the give-and-take between presidents and the press in post-WWII America? The answer is Nixon applied the lever, Reagan moved the fulcrum, and Trump ended the give-and-take and threatened American and world peace.

Winston: I began working on *Righting the American Dream: How the Media Mainstreamed Reagan's Evangelical Vision* in 2008. Barack Obama was president, and I thought it was a good time to evaluate the media's role in Reagan's successes and his legacy. This interested me for two reasons. The first was my belief that Obama's election would end the neoconservative era that had started with the Reagan presidency. I thought Obama, like FDR and Reagan, would be a transformational leader. The second was my contention that the so-called “liberal” news media is actually a conservative

force — small “c” conservative — that supports and maintains the status quo. That's because most of the legacy media are owned by corporations who do not support progressive societal change. Therefore, I was curious how newspapers reported on the conservative policies that Reagan proposed. Trump's 2016 election proved my first hunch wrong. Obama had not recast the nation's priorities. Rather, Trump's campaign, down to its Make America Great slogan, followed Ronald Reagan's path to the presidency. Trump even claimed to be Reagan's ideological successor. This made my project more interesting because the evangelical themes that Reagan professed were central to Trump's campaign. Trump's election made me curious about how today's media would respond to a president's similar embrace of the religious right.

Working as a reporter for a decade, I learned how publishers, editors, and journalists can skew the news. Sometimes this is done unthinkingly through word choices, headlines, photos, and story placement. But it also can be done intentionally. I saw stories spiked because they were too controversial. Other stories were slanted for political reasons: for example, until the rise of the DSA, there were few stories about socialists or socialism. Still others were placed in back pages because they were about the poor or people of color. My years as a journalist also made me aware that news outlets, especially on the East Coast, rarely report on religion and when they do, they treat it as an outdated anomaly. (This is slowly changing.) As a scholar of religion, I decided it would be intriguing to look at the coverage of Reagan's policies in light of his religious convictions and the impact that coverage and those policies have had on the nation.

Littlefield: For each of your studies, what were your major takeaways for how presidents navigated their relationship with the press?

Mascaro: FDR, JFK, Bush I, and Trump all took advantage of new media technology to reach people. But for FDR and JFK they used broadcasting, which reached every listener/viewer simultaneously. They could go over the heads of the press but they were using the bully pulpit to unite the country. The cable/talk radio era technology fractured audiences to those who could afford subscription television or conservative populists who preferred the egotistical musings of a Rush Limbaugh — designed to isolate audiences. Trump's use of Twitter/X/Truth Social more directly targets supporters rather than the country at large. At one time, guests on the Sunday morning broadcast news shows sat face-to-face with reporters and could be challenged directly about misstatements. Today's talk programs tend toward “open-mic” talking points that

do little to engage in dialogue and reinforce an administration's propaganda. In short, we can't consider the president and the press without a strong plank about technology, including whether it unites or divides.

Winston: Successful presidents, like Reagan, know how to work and work with the media. While Reagan's affability went a long way with reporters, his advisors set up new practices that aided the success of his message. These innovations included strict messaging (no more than one theme per day; visual semiotics (carefully curating backgrounds and photo ops to telegraph messages), and weekly radio addresses that allowed Reagan to go straight to the voters. The administration's goal was to keep the press in line and on message. This goal was uppermost when American forces invaded Grenada in 1983. Believing that embedded reporters had aided the antiwar movement during the Vietnam conflict, Reagan's men kept journalists on Barbados until the fighting was over. As a result, the administration's take on the invasion, which is all the news outlets had to offer for its first 48 hours, was set in the public's mind before reporters landed on the island. Their subsequent accounts, which often contradicted the administration's reports, gained little traction with the public.

Marshall: Every president, of course, handles the press differently depending on their personalities and the specifics of their eras, but I have found some common themes in my research. For instance, the presidents whom historians rank the highest in terms of effectiveness more often than not made a point of maintaining cordial relationships with individual reporters no matter how frustrated they grew with the press as a whole. Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan fall into that category. In addition, the presidents who adeptly took advantage of new technologies for political purposes were often considered the most successful. We can see this with many of the presidents who won two terms: Lincoln with photography, William McKinley with movies, FDR with radio, Dwight Eisenhower with television, and Barack Obama with social media, for example. As a counterexample, Gregory Svirnovskiy's and my article on talk radio in the 1990s showed Democrats, including the Clinton White House, struggling to harness the growing power of talk radio.

Littlefield: What primary sources have you utilized to document this relationship? How did the specific constraints or availability of your primary sources dictate the history you were able to write?

Winston: Thanks to digitization, I was able to use newspapers and magazines as primary sources. Since I

focused on large regional newspapers, copies from the 1980s were easily available online. I had wanted to look at television and radio stories from the era but those were much more difficult to get. That limited my research, especially since broadcast was more popular in the 1980s. However, both television and radio journalists tended to follow print media because it had more in-depth coverage, so I accepted the limitations.

Marshall: When researching presidents, especially the more recent ones, I have been able to make extensive use of the archives in their presidential libraries. One of my favorite moments was coming across daily schedules and menus in the George W. Bush Presidential Library to show how much his White House sought to butter up conservative talk radio hosts. To analyze news coverage of presidents, I have taken advantage of the digital collections of American Historical Newspapers, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers Digital Archives, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, and the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. The Internet Archive is also a great resource for chronicling the past three decades or so. Researching talk radio has presented the toughest challenge because it is difficult to find audio of old shows. However, the websites of some of the hosts contain transcripts of past shows, and sometimes there are C-SPAN or YouTube clips of the hosts in action. Old editions of trade magazines such as Broadcasting & Cable and MediaWeek have also been helpful for examining talk radio history.

Mascaro: For my documentary research, I found a trove of applicable documents in the National Security Council records of the LBJ administration, including memos that named names of journalists. The president’s correspondence with media personnel and orgs was also helpful. Not as much in the Ford and Carter papers. JFK also had close engagement with the press and I found many documents that served my documentary research, especially contexts of reports on foreign affairs. NARA II was useful for my OSS research during WWII and thereafter, including State Department files and dispatches specifically related to journalists. You have to have dates handy — it can be a slog. H.R. Haldeman’s diaries are now online from the Nixon library. These proved indispensable in documenting how Nixon hated the press and created his own gate-keeping-framing-agenda setting initiatives. I have also contracted with archives to scan small sets of documents and send me PDFs or photo files. Internet/Google searches now turn up studies and titles of articles I can request through my university’s Interlibrary Loan and government documents collections. The internet is feast or famine. It is easy to go down rabbit holes and get lost in primary documents that are unrelated

to one’s search, or spend two hours on a simple fact-check question and never get a usable citation. Travel to collections remains an obstacle for any historian. Network licensing arrangements have now put audiovisual documentaries largely out of reach. Getty runs NBC News’s collection and they get more stringent/stingy every year. Because I’m a documentary historian and not a presidential historian, my targets lie elsewhere. I’ve been fortunate with interviews of documentarians, their largesse in sharing documents and photographs, and papers of documentary producers.

Littlefield: Were there any archival discoveries you made that complicated a previous historical consensus?

Marshall: Making those kinds of discoveries is when research becomes the most interesting for me. One example that comes to mind is when I was researching a paper on Ethel Payne, the great reporter for the *Chicago Defender*, and her coverage of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy and his red scare tactics. I found that Payne was well ahead of Edward R. Murrow in investigating the case of Pentagon file clerk Annie Lee Moss, who McCarthy wrongfully accused of being a Soviet spy. Although Murrow is widely credited with having the courage to challenge McCarthy, Payne and some other reporters did it before him.

Mascaro: There is a scene opening NBC’s *Vietnam: It’s a Mad War* (1964). NBC Vietnam correspondent Garrick Utley once asked me if the scene was “set up.” A South Vietnamese officer is interviewing a VC prisoner, who spits at him, resulting in a slap to his face. My first queries yielded answers like, no way they would set that up. But I later received photographs of the shoot which showed what appears to be procedures to “direct” the scene, meaning set it up. In fact, research showed that South Vietnamese officials routinely roughed up VC and North Vietnamese prisoners, just as the communists tortured and brutalized American and South Vietnamese captives. So the directed scene — the slap — was set up, I learned. Utley was dead by the time I found the photographic evidence of the production. I had already finished my book on Ted Yates, so could not change the verbiage about the scene. The discovery complicated my research on the current book about Bob Rogers of NBC News. I mentioned the details of the setup in a footnote and concluded that Yates, not Rogers, had directed the report and was probably the one responsible for the scene. Rogers appealed to Yates to let him direct the report, which Rogers researched in Vietnam for many weeks, but Yates declined. So I have to make a judgment that the responsibility for filming the slap as shown lay with Yates, not Rogers. I’ve also had a few anecdotes told to me “off the record” that I’d

have liked to write about but could not out of honor to the subject.

Winston: I don’t think any scholar had previously looked at the evangelical messages embedded in Reagan’s speeches and interviews. Analyzing his words demonstrated the significance of his Christian convictions in his policy decisions. Biographers have written about his Christian commitments, but none focused on how these were routinely translated into his political positions. Likewise, historians have rarely considered how his evangelical commitments affected his presidency.

Littlefield: The definition of “the press” shifts dramatically across your periods of study — from the legacy newspapers and broadcast networks of the Nixon/Reagan eras to the conservative talk radio of the Bush years. As historians, how do you delineate the boundaries of ‘the media’ in your research? How does shifting our historical lens from mainstream news to alternative or partisan media change the broader narrative of presidential communications?

Marshall: I try to take a big tent approach when it comes to deciding what forms of news media to study, recognizing that the public has always received information through a variety of means. In my research of John Adams’ presidency, it was clear that pamphlets were almost as influential as newspapers in spreading news and opinions. The abolitionist press is essential for understanding Lincoln’s, the underground press for understanding Lyndon Johnson’s and Richard Nixon’s, and the conservative press for Reagan. Since the boom in talk radio in the late 1980s and the invention of the world wide web in the 1990s, we as historians can no longer fully understand presidential communications by studying just legacy media. The growing power of social media influencers will complicate that task even more for future historians.

Mascaro: You have to embed technological history within your presidential-press history. My mentor Mary Ann Watson chronicled JFK’s personal investment in the media process. During the Great Debates with Nixon in 1960, Kennedy would go to the production truck and look at pictures, consider lighting, how he looked, what to wear to stand out from the background. Nixon didn’t care and paid a price, looking washed out in gray on gray and having no interest in makeup or lighting. JFK also knew how to look over the heads of reporters at televised live press conferences and talk directly to the camera, to viewers at home. He knew how to use silence during interviews to reflect his pique about a line of questioning, knowing the network would have to edit out the silence. Reagan’s people staged numerous

photo ops for the president knowing what the networks would cover. After calling for corporate tax breaks and receiving condemnation, Reagan appeared at a pub drinking a beer like regular folks. CBS correspondent Lesley Stahl realized during her shoots how the president’s people would set up shots and her locations to control the backgrounds. The press people manipulated what viewers saw, which overwhelmed what Stahl said.

In terms of people like Limbaugh, I have worked to blend technological history and regulator history into the story. Without Reagan deregulation, begun during Carter, and ending the fairness doctrine and permitting massive corporate mergers, we would not have Limbaugh, Fox News, and other propagandist networks, nor would the merger of Paramount-Global/Skydance merger be instrumental in the firings at CBS News, the ending of Colbert’s show, and other chilling of news at CBS. The presidential history of Reagan (and Carter) informs the presidential history of future presidents, especially Trump’s propaganda mission.

Winston: Writing about Reagan and the news media appealed to me because I could delimit the research, which would be much harder to do in today’s world. In the 1980s, newspaper circulation was declining, but the power of the press (what we call the legacy media) was still paramount. My book does mention some television and radio reporting, but its focus is print. I imagine that if I had focused on alternative media, my findings would have been different. For example, if I had studied religious media, I likely would have discovered more partisan takes on Reagan’s words, and they would have reflected the religious cast of the publication.

Littlefield: A running thread through all your work is the development of a conservative media ecosystem and strategy. Based on your historical research, who historically holds the agency in these ideological alliances, the president, or the conservative press, and how has the historiography shifted on this topic?

Marshall: The president and the conservative media both hold significant agency within the relationship. I think in the past historiography has leaned toward emphasizing the power of the presidency, but now I believe the conservative media is seen as having increasing agency. In fact, two of our most conservative recent presidents, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, had ample experience within conservative media, Reagan as a syndicated radio commentator, and Trump as a regular guest on “Fox & Friends.” Both of them, of course, also had extensive backgrounds performing in non-political broadcast media. I would argue that their broadcast experience made each of them a more effective communicator and thus a more effective politi-

cian.

Conservative presidents of the past half century have all made a point of acknowledging the influence of conservative media. Reagan once quipped that the “*National Review* is to the offices of the West Wing of the White House what People magazine is to your dentist’s waiting room.” He, both Bushes, and Trump all went out of their way to praise Rush Limbaugh and other talk radio hosts. And with Trump, there has been a revolving door between the White House and Fox News. In his second term we have the phenomenon of social media influencers and radio hosts such as Dan Bongino serving in top positions.

Winston: My book is about the conservative (small “c”) stance of the mainstream media. One of my goals was to demonstrate that the legacy media seeks to preserve the status quo. It does that intentionally and unintentionally. Since the legacy news media focuses on elite sources, its reporting rarely challenges the status quo. Even though some reporters covering Reagan may not have agreed with his policies, their coverage was circumscribed by journalistic conventions that governed what they covered and how they wrote about it.

Mascaro: In 1971, CBS aired the documentary “The Selling of the Pentagon,” which critiqued the military’s press stunts around the country to drum up support for Vietnam. The Pentagon attacked CBS for blending some questions with answers from other questions. The edits did not appreciably change the story, although many considered it bad form. A congressional subcommittee summoned CBS News President Frank Stanton to a hearing and demanded he bring the outtakes of the production. He refused. Stanton narrowly escaped a contempt of Congress citation in part because other representatives knew the power of the press and/or believed in the First Amendment. Bill Paley, chairman of CBS, stood by Stanton. Today, CBS is involved as a property in a merger/takeover in the entertainment industry, and the network has installed a conservative flack to run the news division and another to run *60 Minutes*, current standard-bearer of CBS news integrity. So the power has shifted decidedly away from the press organizations and toward conservative ideologues, including many outside either the White House or the news business. Again, this shift resulted from Reagan-era relaxation of anti-trust enforcement and deregulation by the FCC permitting ownership of massive station groups and without defining journalism or news in the public interest, except to say, it’s what interests the public. In 2017, the Washington editor of Breitbart, told students visiting the Heritage Foundation that journalism was dead. His goal was to end CNN, the *New York Times*. The current ideology guiding the conservatives is to end

journalism and pressure universities and their boards to abet their goal of silencing the press while empowering the chief executive with monarchical powers. Historiography has shifted today in part because of the pace and immediacy of change, rather than the slow documentation of administration actions and records. Plus we have a president who disdains history and public records. We’re going to have to develop ways to create viable sources without relying on records, at a time when half of Congress has utterly abandoned their responsibility to democracy and the Supreme Court is taking communion from the same cleric at the same Mass.

Littlefield: Traditional journalistic history often frames the press as the heroic foil to presidential overreach (e.g., Watergate). Yet, your projects show administrations successfully using the media to promote their own visions. How does your research challenge the traditional, perhaps romanticized, historical narrative of the American watchdog press?

Mascaro: There was nothing “romantic” about the heroism of reporters who stayed on the Watergate story. It was the pinnacle of press courage, not a myth or even mythology. Turn the question around: What are the cases in which reporters were unsuccessful or delayed in telling a story in its times and what were the consequences? The answers to many of those cases indicate there is nothing “romantic” about journalism compared to the romanticism built around presidents. Had the NYT run with their story about the Bay of Pigs, it might have averted a fiasco. If John Scali (ABC News) had not been in a position to mediate sides during the Cuban Missile Crisis, it might have escalated into a nuclear arms exchange. Spiro Agnew was caught by enterprising reporters extorting bribes. Had the story not revealed Agnew’s lawbreaking when it did, and while Nixon faced impeachment, Agnew might have become president and killed the investigation. We should also consider how academics and historians romanticize themselves by redirecting attention away from notable journalism scoops and coups to the academic’s prowess in redefining an event as a “myth,” or by conducting quantitative analyses on presidential eras — *without also analyzing the president’s misuse of information* — that tend to paint journalism in negative light. As with the “pendulum” template (mentioned above) for give-and-take between presidents and the press, I question the wisdom of diminishing journalism and journalists without also searching for and offering ways to correct flawed practices in the future. As college faculty/historians, our jobs should include more than highlighting mistakes, mythology, or common traditions as inevitable. Journalism is at “Dunkirk Beach.” We all need to be highlighting problems by pointing to better methods of

journalism. Of course we are not the ones stranded on Dunkirk Beach getting picked off by naval artillery and strafing fighter planes. We’re cozy in our dry, warm offices while journalists are in the fray.

Winston: As I wrote above, my experience as a reporter gave me a cynical view of the press and its role as a watchdog of democracy. I believe a free and independent press is a safeguard for democracy, and that voters need unbiased information to make wise decisions. But corporate ownership usually hampers the news media’s freedom and independence. That is clear today as we grapple with at least two diametrically opposed media landscapes that have polarized the country. The case studies in my book, which look at coverage of AIDS, the “Empire of Evil” speech, the invasion of Grenada, and the hunger crisis, demonstrate how the news media selectively used phrases, quotes and sources to promote particular interpretations of the events. Scholars, filmmakers, and reporters’ themselves often romanticize the press; most of the public does not.

Marshall: Presidents have always tried to use the press to promote their own visions, some more successfully than others. The Federalists of George Washington and John Adams, for example, sponsored their own newspaper, the *Gazette of the United States*, to advocate for their policies. Jefferson and Madison backed their own newspapers. Andrew Jackson included newspaper editors in his kitchen cabinet, and the *Chicago Tribune’s* Joseph Medill served as Lincoln’s de facto campaign manager. The list goes on. So yes, there’s often a romanticized image of the press. However, there are plenty of instances when the watchdog did indeed bark. In recent years, we see that with Trump and *The New York Times’s* investigation of his taxes, the *Washington Post’s* revelations about his foundation, and *The Wall Street Journal’s* disclosure of his crude birthday card to Jeffrey Epstein.

In the case of Watergate, reporters such as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* did not single-handedly bring down Richard Nixon, which is still a common belief thanks to the enduring power of the book and movie versions of *All the President’s Men*. It’s much more complicated than that romanticized story. The Senate Watergate Committee, the House Judiciary Committee, the special prosecutors, and Judge John Sirica were the ones who took the essential official actions that eventually forced Nixon’s resignation. However, my research shows that these officials were heavily influenced by press coverage of Watergate, which accelerated their actions, provided useful evidence, and helped Democrats to craft a narrative that impeaching the president was a reasonable and necessary outcome.

Littlefield: As media historians, we are inevitably in-

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fluenced by the era in which we write. How has the current climate of presidential hostility toward the press shaped the specific questions you asked of your historical subjects? Conversely, what are the historiographical dangers of retrofitting the histories of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush merely as ‘preludes’ to the Trump era?

Marshall: The growing tensions between Trump and the press during his first year in office in 2017 were what motivated me to write my second book, *Clash: Presidents and the Press in Times of Crisis*. I wanted to ask the simple question, “How precedented or unprecedented was his presidency?” I sought to understand to what degree his hostility toward many journalists, the rancorous partisanship in the media, and the ways that he used new communications technology were breaks from the past or continuations of previous patterns. I tried to understand each of the presidents that I studied within the context of their times and avoid the historiographical sin of presentism. None of these presidents was simply a prelude to Trump; they all had significant impacts on their own eras. Still, I think as long as he remains in office that it would be nearly impossible to study previous presidents without having thoughts about Trump lurking in the backs of our minds.

Winston: As I mentioned above, I began my research during the Obama presidency. When Trump was elected in 2016, I was far enough along in my project that the change in administration did not affect the questions I brought to the topic. Moreover, my experience as a reporter taught me that no matter how progressive a president might be, or how kindly disposed to the press, the two — press and president — are always adversaries (or should be). Reporters want what leaders don’t want to give them — scoops, leaks, conflicts and problems. Reagan helped pave the way for Trump by welcoming the religious right into his electoral coalition and describing his policies in evangelical terms. That said, I believe Reagan would be appalled by Trump’s behavior as president and horrified by Trump’s use of Christian symbols.

Mascaro: I don’t see it as “retrofitting.” Bill Porter saw the evils of Nixon’s assault on the media within two years of Nixon’s resignation. He was ahead of the curve. In my book, co-authored with Porter, posthumously, I extended Porter’s arguments and tried to answer his questions from 1976. The only area I found that Porter was askew was his critiques of journalists and their organizations of not doing enough to fight the assault on the media. In fact many organizations emerged during and after Nixon to protect journalists and many have pressured successive administrations to comply with their own guidelines. Some of Nixon’s people still believed a

free and vigorous press was essential to a viable democracy. None of Trump’s people seem to, or care. So we’re not retrofitting Trump over the Nixon template; we’re seeing Nixon’s history as it unfolded five decades hence. Had the Reagan administration not deregulated media, the FCC, FTC, DOJ, antitrust enforcement, we would be in a decidedly different situation under Trump. Reagan gave us Trump media. That’s historical extension not revisionism or retrofitting. If Reagan had not been shot early in his first term, would the press have coddled him “on bended knee,” as Mark Hertsgaard wrote? Reagan lived in a period in which Congress still believed in checks and balances. The Cold War was still a threat. Reagan still got away with some monumental changes that created Trumpworld, but without the checks on the presidency designed in the Constitution, or, it seems, respected by a large swath of self-absorbed, jingoistic, otherizing Americans. Donald Trump in the same sentence self-contradicts, never says anything that can be taken as truthful, outright lies, puts peoples’ and soldiers’ lives at risk. There have been nearly 200 mass shootings in America this year (as of June). Trump is disinterested. He wants to deport a million refugees. He wants to build a massive ballroom. He wants MMA fighters on the White House lawn. He has single-handedly closed the Strait of Hormuz and imperiled his own economy and the futures of people in many other countries. Donald Trump is not a question for presidential history; his regime is a matter of authoritarian history. He’s not about the presidency and the press; he’s about the most evil villains of history. His fight with the press is a sideshow meant to change the subject away from mass shootings, rising gas prices, firings at CBS News.

Littlefield: Has living through the last decade of media disruption changed your historical interpretation of what constitutes “normal” presidential-press relations in the 20th and early 21st centuries?

Winston: I don’t know what “normal” is. The press and the president, to greater and lesser degrees, must be adversaries. I can’t think of a president who didn’t try to control the press or a press corps that didn’t challenge the president. However, Trump has taken this antagonism to a wholly, new level. The press has responded by applying terms like “liar,” “narcissist,” and “manipulative” to the president. I hope that more normal, gar-

den-variety adversity will be in our future.

Marshall: I am not sure there has ever been a period that could be considered “normal” in presidential-press relations because so much is dependent on the personalities of the presidents, the communications technologies of the era, the shifting economics and norms of journalism, whether the United States is at war or not, and other factors. It is safe to say the history of the relationship is one of nearly constant change and innovation: Woodrow Wilson introducing news conferences, Franklin Roosevelt taking advantage of radio for major speeches, Dwight Eisenhower allowing press conferences to be taped for television, John Kennedy performing live TV news conferences, Richard Nixon creating a White House communications office, Bill Clinton needing to respond to the 24/7 news demands of the world wide web, Barack Obama harnessing the power of social media, and so on. Meanwhile, the size of the White House press corps has grown, the fragmentation of media has increased, and – in recent decades – the number of news conferences has declined. All of these have influenced the way that presidents are covered. With that in mind, I think it is best to think of the relationship as one that is almost always in flux.

Mascaro: I am more frightened than ever about the demise of democracy, democratic elections, the spike in renditions, killings, attacks on other countries, the spending of American human capital sacrificed by soldiers for generations being squandered by someone as ill-equipped as Trump to be president and yet still manages to hold on to his base and frighten members of Congress to bend the knee at a megalomaniacal false idol. When Nixon challenged the press and broke the law, many systems aligned to check his abuse of power, President Ford’s pardon notwithstanding. (What if Nixon had served time in prison for his crimes? Would we have a Trump abusing his power and facing jail?) The conservative labyrinth made it mission critical to kill journalism, and they are gaining strength every week. Yeah, my perspective is changed and I worry about the lives of my children and the future. I believe the damage already done will take several generations to undo, and probably will never put America at the top of any studies about press freedom or democracy. Yeah, my perspective has changed.

News & Notes

*Please note: Announcements are from the activity organizers.
Also, some hyperlinks were not available as clickable links.*

Call for Papers: Britain/Hollywood: Revisiting the Relationship Between British Cinema and Hollywood During the Classical Period

The Film Journal (<https://journals.openedition.org/filmj>) seeks papers for an upcoming issue dedicated to the relationship between British cinema and Hollywood during the classical period, it aims to revisit the complex dynamics of exchange and competition that bound British and Hollywood film industries and their relation to so called classical norm.

Please send your proposals by September 1, 2026, to this address: hadrien.fontanaud@umpv.fr. Notification of acceptance will be communicated by mid-September. Full papers to be submitted by December 22, 2026 (change from November 30 earlier).

Call for Papers Southern Cultures: The Garden

Southern Cultures, the award-winning peer-reviewed quarterly from UNC’s Center for the Study of the American South, encourages submissions from scholars, writers, and artists for a special issue, *The Garden*, to be published Fall 2027. We will accept submissions for this issue through November 1, 2026, at <https://southerncultures.submittable.com/Submit>.

This special issue explores the southern garden magazine as a lens through which to consider the region’s entanglements in broader histories and geographies of colonization with and through plants. Imperial connections link the South to people, places, and plants far beyond it, and we welcome submissions with an expansive view of the region.

We invite authors to address how extraction, dispossession, theft, and violence undergird the aestheticized spaces celebrated in garden magazines. Such publications organize ideas about nature, domesticity, identity, and order, combining up-close images of ornamental beauty with news and features from curated private and public gardens, opulent country homes, and coastal estates. Interspersed throughout are lifestyle articles, food and drink stories, destination pieces, celebrity profiles, fashion and interior design sections, and images of hunting, fishing, and shooting. The garden magazine renders the imperial connections that brought the garden into being palatable and pleasing.

In this special issue, we’ll look beyond the gloss to examine how garden landscapes (and plant life) are inescapably imperial—the plants featured were wrested from Indigenous communities, the stately homes once housed former slave owners and traders, and the regional recipes call for ingredients made accessible through colonial occupation and plantation production, migration, and global exchange. Because garden magazines assume a racialized, classed, and gendered readership, contributions should engage with the naturalization of difference.

This is a creative experiment in which form matters. We welcome submissions that riff on magazine features, as well as scholarly articles, creative nonfiction, memoir, interviews, photo and art essays, and shorter feature essays. Topics can include but are not limited to:

- Tourism and travel destinations, such as plantations, country houses, or gardens
- The art of plants and empire in the South
- Interior/garden design or “lifestyle” pieces
- Alternative atlases and/or mapping of southern plants and empire
- Fashion/style/clothing

Food and drink
Expert interviews/biographies (e.g., southern gardeners or landscapers)
“Invasive” plant species
Public and private gardens and memory
Landscaping (labor and practice) and class in the South
Radical gardening (e.g., guerrilla gardening, anti-hunger gardens, Black-owned gardens, garden commons, and differently abled garden spaces)
Feminist approaches to and/or queering the southern garden and plants
“Green space” and city design
Seed collection/preservation
Plants as markers of regionalism (e.g., coastal plants, inland plants, Appalachian plants)
Public history/historic sites, gardens, museums

As *Southern Cultures* publishes digital content, we encourage creativity in coordinating print and digital materials in submissions and ask that authors submit any potential video, audio, and interactive visual content along with their essay or artist’s statement. We encourage authors to gain familiarity with the tone, scope, and style of [our journal](#) before submitting. For full submissions guidelines, please click [here](#).

Guest Editors: Sarah Besky (Cornell University), Kasia Paprocki (London School of Economics), and Austin Zeiderman (London School of Economics)

Upcoming Conference
**The Past Present and Future of
Southern Jewish History**

The **Southern Jewish Historical Society** will celebrate its 50th anniversary with an annual conference in **Atlanta** from **October 16-18, 2026**, hosted by the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies at Emory University.

To view the complete conference schedule, register, book your hotel room, and sign up for our pre-conference Tour of Jewish Atlanta (Oct. 15) and our post-conference Research Workshop on Southern Jewish Family and Local History (Oct. 18), follow this link: <https://www.jewishsouth.org/upcoming-conference>
For more information, contact: Marni Davis (Georgia State University) atsjhs2026atl@gmail.com; Conference website: <https://www.jewishsouth.org/upcoming-conference>

**AJHA Names
Beryl Dakers as Donna Allen Honoree**

The American Journalism Historians Association will honor broadcaster and documentarian Beryl Dakers

as the Donna Allen Luncheon honoree at the organization’s 45th annual convention in Greenville, South Carolina from November 5-7.

The annual Donna Allen Luncheon celebrates contributions of women to the field of journalism. The AJHA invites a woman journalist local to the convention city as its honored guest and featured speaker for the luncheon.

Dakers began her career as the editor of her high school newspaper at C. A. Johnson High School in Columbia, S.C. and studied journalism at Syracuse University. Dakers became the first African American on-air news reporter for WIS radio in the early 1970s. She went on to become one of the first African American on-air personalities at WIS-TV, the leading station in the capital city market. Later, she moved to South Carolina ETV where she has used her journalistic skills as a host, reporter, producer, and documentary filmmaker. She was nominated for two Emmy Awards.

Dakers has produced or co-produced documentaries including Strom Thurmond -- At the Seat of Power (1982); Makin’ a Way Out of No Way: Modjeska Monteith Simkins (1990), which tells the story of the “matriarch of civil rights activists” in South Carolina; The World of Cecil: Photographer and Photojournalist Cecil J. Williams (2023), who documented the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina; and Sisterhood: SC Suffragists (2020-2021), a three-part series celebrating the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment and the role of South Carolina women. Dakers has also created some of SCETV’s most popular programs, including NatureScene and What in the World Is It?

“Few individuals have done more to preserve, interpret, and share the history and culture of South Carolina than Beryl Dakers,” said Dr. Bobby Donaldson, associate professor of history and executive director of the Center for Civil Rights History and Research at the University of South Carolina. “Throughout a remarkable career spanning more than five decades, she has combined the highest standards of journalism with a deep commitment to research and historical storytelling. Through her reporting, documentaries, and public engagement, Dakers has brought to life the people, places, and events that have shaped South Carolina. Her work has explored the struggle for civil rights, the experiences of women, the cultural and political development of our communities, the state’s literary and artistic traditions, and the stories of countless individuals whose lives illuminate our shared past.

“Beryl Dakers has spent her career ensuring the stories of South Carolina and the people who shape them are preserved, celebrated and shared,” said SCETV President and CEO Adrienne Fairwell. “As a pioneering

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journalist and storyteller, she has broken barriers and inspired countless others through her commitment to excellence in journalism. South Carolina ETV and Public Radio is proud to celebrate Beryl’s remarkable contributions and congratulates her on this well-deserved recognition from the American Journalism Historians Association.” Dakers will be honored during the luncheon at the Westin Poinsett Hotel on November 6.

Call for Co-Editor:
**Historical Journal of Film, Radio
and Television**

The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television is currently recruiting for a Co-Editor to work alongside the three existing Co-Editors and the Book Review Editor. This role is a great opportunity for an academic with a strong research background in the history of audio-visual media, and who also has the commitment, drive and ability to help develop the journal. Applicants with an interest in film, radio and/or television are especially encouraged to apply. As part of this role, you will be responsible for the oversight and administration of a rigorous and proper peer review process that delivers an agreed amount of content of suitable scope and quality within an agreed publication time frame. Becoming the editor of a journal is a rewarding and fulfilling experience where you have the opportunity to build your own networks, develop and promote the research in your field, and be recognized as a leading figure within the academic community. You will receive a two-year renewable contract and an honorarium.

Required Skills and Attributes: * Experience in academic publishing and familiarity with all stages of the process. * The capacity to devote time each week to the role, and to attend meetings with your Co-Editors and (less frequently) with the wider Editorial Board, as well as training sessions as needed. * The ability to ensure all submitted manuscripts are considered in a prompt, consistent and professional manner. * The ability to confidently use an online peer review management system and ensure members of the editorial team do the same. * Experience with working effectively with independent peer reviewers. * The ability to read, summarize, and make decisions based on independent reviewer reports. * A commitment to communicating promptly, consistently, and professionally with authors during the peer review process. * A commitment to engaging promptly and efficiently with Taylor & Francis staff and suppliers to implement necessary processes and improvements, as well as with the governing Council of the International Association for Media and History, to guide the scholarly trajectory of the journal. * A strong commitment to ethical rigour as well as knowledge of the Volume 12 (2026), Number 3

COPE guidelines and commitment to ensure that the journal adheres to strict ethical standards at all times. * A willingness to work collegially and professionally with your Co-Editors, to include arranging and occasionally leading Editorial Team meetings. * Actively involved in growing and developing your academic networks through conference attendance and experience of networking through social media. * Knowledge of and commitment to the open access publishing environment. * Formal and vernacular fluency in English on par with a native speaker. * A vision and enthusiasm for the continuous development of the journal.

Application Details:

Applications should include your CV, a Cover Letter and a Statement of Interest. This statement should be no longer than one page and include: * Where you believe the field is going, and the journal’s place within it. * How you would work in partnership with the Co-Editors and wider Editorial Board. * Describe your thoughts on maintaining a high quality of submissions while increasing opportunities for diversity within our journal. * How you would work with authors. * What you hope to gain as a professional from this position. Applications are due no later than September 30, 2026.

For any questions, please contact: Cynthia Miller at cynthiz_miller@emerson.edu.

Free Webinar:
Free People of Color in the Civil War Era

“Out of This Strife Will Come Freedom: Free People of Color and the Fight for Equal Rights in the Civil War Era.”

A free online lecture and discussion on **Thursday, October 1 at 7 p.m. EST** with author Warren Eugene Milteer, Jr.

In his book, Milteer discusses the role of free people of color in promoting equality and justice as fundamental features of American life during the Civil War era. He explains how free people of color, through their military service and advocacy, used the political and social disruptions brought about by the Civil War to push for a second founding of the nation. Milteer shows how free people of color sought to reshape the United States into a place in which all Americans would enjoy freedom and equal access to a broad spectrum of rights.

The webinar is free and open to the public, but registration is required. The event is sponsored by the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech.

To register, Contact Rachel Stanley, rcstanley@vt.edu

