

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 2 (2016). Number 1

Historiography in Mass Communication

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

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A School Bus Wreck and a Lesson for Historians

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

Journalists need to be careful about what they write. Their accuracy is especially important to historians, for journalists write, as someone has said, “the first rough draft of history.” The point struck me recently in a way that reminded me of the saddest day in the history of my small hometown in Texas.

I say “someone” because there’s disagreement about who first uttered the phrase “the first rough draft of history.” Philip Graham, the publisher of the *Washington Post*, usually gets credit. Some claim that he coined it in the early 1960s and perhaps in the 1950s. However, a *Post* editorial writer, Alan Barth, had used the phrase in a book review in the *National Review* in 1943. The disagreement about the origin of the phrase simply serves to caution us again not to assume that whatever we read is true.

If you study newspapers or TV news — or if you teach journalism — you know how error-prone news stories can be. Mistakes can crop up anywhere.

In late December my wife drew my attention to a couple of obvious errors she came across. On Christmas day, a tornado struck Birming-

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ham — which is, according to a national evening news program, the “capital of Alabama.” Oops. The next day my wife noticed an error in a newspaper story about a veteran from Tuscaloosa. The story said the man, “who is one of the oldest surviving World War I veterans, was drafted in 1941.”

We realize (and hope) that “World War I” was probably a typo, rather than a reporter’s mistake, but the fact that the newspaper could commit such a glaring error (or a reporter, such an evident historical mistake) should alert historians to be vigilant. We need to be cautious when dealing with newspaper content — particularly cautious, I might say, when dealing with newspapers because we tend to assume that news reporting is factually accurate. As a result, we can accept errors without even thinking about them.

Since November I’ve been reflecting on such matters more than usual. I was doing some exploratory research on the history of newspaper design, and I came across a front page from a New York newspaper that carried an AP story about a school bus wreck in September 1959. A truck ran into the bus at an intersection and killed six students, a teacher, and the school’s principal.

The story brought back memories because the bus was from my school, and I knew everyone who was killed. The two girls were best friends, and they sat at the same table about five feet away from me in our seventh-grade class. The teacher was our teacher, and the principal, our principal. Three of the other students were in the sixth grade, and one was in the ninth. Our town had a population of only 1,400, and so you can imagine how devastating the deaths were not only for the small school but for the entire community.

The reason I relate this story is for the lesson that the AP report can teach historians. Here’s what one of its paragraphs said: “Killed in the crash were Jack Henry, 45, principal of the Mt. Vernon Junior High School and driver of the bus; his son, Billy Max, 12; Melba Meeks, a teacher; Kenneth Hightower, 12, and Rex Weatherford, 12. Three other

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students, Zach Taylor, Audrey Sue Turner, 13, and Waukita Rainey, a sixth-grader, died in a hospital from their injuries.”

That single paragraph has nine factual errors. The school’s name was “Elementary,” not “Junior High.” My teacher’s name was “Meek,” not “Meeks.” Most ages are wrong. The principal was 44, not 45. Billy Max was 11, not 12. Kenneth was 14, not 12. Audrey Sue was 12, not 13. “Jauquitta,” not “Waukita,” was the girl’s first name; and “Raney,” not “Rainey,” her last. She was in the seventh grade with me, not the sixth.

Of course, the problem that simple errors like that present for historians is that it is difficult to realize they are errors. And realistically, if the historian isn’t suspicious about an error, there’s hardly anything to be done.

We can learn, though, some obvious lessons.

The first is that, if a newspaper can make a mistake about basic facts, we need to be careful about assuming that accounts of bigger subjects are accurate. In fact, we should begin by assuming that all accounts contain errors. Chances are, we’ll be right.

A second lesson is that, on any important point, we should never rely on only one source. For substantive points, historians should always investigate them through as many sources as necessary.

After all, historians don’t have the luxury of writing the first rough draft. We need to get it right.

We begin this issue of *Historiography* with an essay that emphasizes the importance of getting it right, especially the big picture. As its author, Joe Campbell, demonstrates, if historians don’t get the basic facts right, there’s little hope for a larger explanation. We follow that essay with Debbie van Tuyl’s reflections on the work of Dwight Teeter, an expert on the history of media law who died last year. In our continuing series of interviews with winners of the American Journalism Historians Association’s Kobre Award, we have a Q&A with Jim Startt. And Ford Risley, an expert on the press and the Civil War, graciously submitted to be the subject for our Q&A with a book author.

Mythbusting and Media History

W. Joseph Campbell ©



Campbell

I'm not really a collector, or connoisseur, of quotations, but I do enjoy a pithy, inspired turn of phrase. Who doesn't?

Here are a couple to which I am decidedly partial:

"We mine the past for myths to buttress our present. The good historian is a myth buster."¹

"... all good history revises and corrects the errors of collective memory, which follows its own muses."²

The former quotation was found in a book review written for the *Washington Post* several years ago by Gerard DeGroot, a California-born professor of modern history at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

The latter appeared last year in the *Wall Street Journal*, in a book review written by Timothy Snyder of Yale University, an historian of modern Eastern Europe.

Both quotations, I find, have considerable resonance and relevance to my research into media-driven myths, those false or dubious narra-

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tives about the news media that masquerade as factual. Mythbusting, as DeGroot and Snyder suggest, *is* at the heart of good history: Striving to get it right, seeking to set straight the record, is the essence of the historian's craft and, for that matter, the journalist's.

It's also an uphill struggle, as several years of researching and busting media myths have made clear. Prominent media myths live on in textbooks, in classrooms, in newsrooms. Some well-known media myths are impressively robust, reaching well beyond media history to insert themselves into popular consciousness. There they live on, proudly immune to thorough and repeated debunking.

To say this is not to lament the hardiness of media myths; it is to point to a reality. Media myths turn up often, sometimes casually and without so much as a nod to sourcing. Not long ago, for example, an essay in the *New York Times* about movies and journalism blithely referred to the Watergate scandal and what I call the "heroic-journalist" myth: The essay declared that the investigative reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein for the *Washington Post* "led to Richard M. Nixon's resignation."³

Their work had no such effect, as Woodward and other principals at the *Post* have insisted from time to time over the years.⁴ The decisive disclosures of Watergate — notably the existence of Nixon's White House taping system⁵ — weren't the work of the *Washington Post*. And yet, the heroic-journalist myth lives on as the most familiar storyline of Watergate, as shorthand for the scandal that produced America's gravest political crisis of the Twentieth Century.

Several months before the *Times* published the movies-and-journalism essay, the entertainer Garrison Keillor was on NPR, telling listeners of his "Writer's Almanac" podcast how newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst once vowed, in a telegraphic exchange with the artist Frederic Remington, to "furnish the war" with Spain. "And," Keillor added, "the Hearst newspapers did their best to promulgate

what came to be called the Spanish-American War.”⁶

The Remington-Hearst anecdote is one of the best known in American journalism, and it almost surely is apocryphal. It lives on, though, despite a near-total absence of supporting documentation, despite Hearst’s denial, and despite the illogic of the purported message to Remington, who was on assignment in Cuba. After all, it would have been absurd for Hearst to vow to “furnish the war” because war — a shattering, islandwide rebellion against Spanish colonial rule — was the very reason Hearst sent Remington to Cuba in the first place.

Another hardy media myth surfaces predictably in the days before Halloween, in the run-up to the anniversary of Orson Welles’ famous radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*. The program, which aired on October 30, 1938, and told of the invasion of Earth by Martians wielding lethal heat rays, supposedly pitched the country into panic and mass hysteria. But had there been such a far-reaching response, the resulting trauma and turmoil surely would have resulted in deaths, including suicides, and in serious injuries. But nothing of the sort — no deaths, no suicides, no serious injuries — were conclusively linked to the mythical program that is still remembered as the “panic broadcast.”

It’s not hard to understand why these and other media myths have taken such firm hold, and have demonstrated such impressive resistance to debunking. They all speak to the presumption of the media as powerful agents, for good or evil. Mostly good.

Moreover, they tend to be buoyed by some or all of these factors:

- *They are too delicious not to be true.* The “furnish the war” vow stands as irresistible presumptive evidence of Hearst’s madcap ways and ethically compromised journalism. The tale is as tenacious as any media myth, in part because it’s too good to be false. A narrative so delectable almost *deserves* to be true.

And it has added value as an easy-to-understand, if misleading, accounting for the causes of the much-misunderstood Spanish-American

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War.

- *They are simplistic tales, not hard to grasp.* The layers of the Watergate scandal — the criminality of the Nixon White House, the multiple lines of investigation that unwound the scandal, the drama and uncertainty of the resulting constitutional crisis — are not readily recalled or well-understood these days.⁷ But what is readily understood is that two young reporters took down Nixon. However simplistic and deceptive, the heroic-journalist interpretation of Watergate has become a proxy for grasping the scandal's essence while sidestepping its mind-numbing complexity.

- *They reverberate with an echo-chamber's effect.* The presumptive “Cronkite Moment” of 1968, in which Walter Cronkite's downbeat assessment about the conflict in Vietnam supposedly brought home to President Lyndon B. Johnson the futility of the U.S. war effort there, stands as one of American journalism's best-known and yet most dubious tales.

It's a myth that has been repeated endlessly since 1979, when David Halberstam presented the anecdote with reverence in his error-riddled book, *The Powers That Be*. Halberstam wrote that Cronkite's program was “the first time in American history a war had been declared over by an anchorman.”⁸ But it wasn't over, of course. Cronkite's assessment had no measurable effect on public opinion, or on Lyndon Johnson, who didn't even see the program when it aired. In any event, the war didn't end until 1975.

- *They are bolstered by the “golden age” fallacy.* This fallacy, in a media context, posits that there really was a time when journalism and its practitioners were virtuous and inspiring. The “golden age” fallacy helps explain the tenacity of the Watergate myth. It also figures in the mythical narrative of Edward R. Murrow's slaying the menacing, red-baiting Senator Joe McCarthy in March 1954, in a devastating report on the CBS program *See It Now*.

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The “golden age” fallacy was boldly in evidence in an essay written recently by Robert Reich, a former U.S. labor secretary. “Years ago,” he wrote, “respected opinion leaders stood up to ... demagoguery and brought down the bigots. In the 1950s, the eminent commentator Edward R. Murrow revealed Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy to be a dangerous incendiary, thereby helping put an end to McCarthy’s communist witch hunts.”⁹

But McCarthy had been revealed as “a dangerous incendiary” long before Murrow’s *See It Now* report. Indeed, the legendary broadcaster took on McCarthy years after other journalists had done so, and at no small risk to their careers. In 1950, McCarthy physically assaulted Drew Pearson after the muckraking columnist had written critically and skeptically about the senator’s allegations about communist infiltration of the federal government. (Richard Nixon, by the way, broke up the one-sided dustup, which took place in the cloakroom of the swank Sulgrave Club in Washington.¹⁰)

- *They are elevated by the cinema.* Hollywood’s adaptation of Woodward and Bernstein’s book about their Watergate reporting, *All the President’s Men*, is an important reason why many people believe them to be the heroic faces of Watergate. The white-knight treatment of Murrow in the 2005 film *Good Night, and Good Luck* introduced a new generation of movie-goers to the narrative of the journalist’s triumph over McCarthy.

Good history and successful cinema quite often are at odds, as Richard Bernstein discussed in a memorable essay, “Can movies teach history?” published years ago in the *New York Times*. “Is it possible,” Bernstein wrote, “to have successful cinema and good history at the same time? ... Perhaps the rule of thumb is this: When artists, intentionally or not, distort the known facts to get an effect, either political or commercial, they are on the wrong side of the line between poetic truth and historical falsification. Artists who present as fact things that never

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happened, who refuse to allow the truth to interfere with a good story, are betraying their art and history as well.”¹¹

Given the tenacity of media myths, given the forces arrayed against their debunking, the question inevitably arises: Why bother taking them on? Isn't it unrealistic to expect that these tall tales ever will be uprooted and repudiated, once and for all?

Perhaps. A debunker's work surely is never complete.

But it's worth doing, because historical accuracy matters, because media myths profoundly misconstrue the news media's capacity to exert decisive influence or bring about dramatic change. Media myths are sustained by an eagerness to find influence and lasting significance in what journalists do. As such, these myths can be very seductive, for they imply that contemporary journalists, too, can reach the heights scaled by Woodward and Bernstein and Cronkite and Murrow, thus offering some reassurance amid the upheaval in their field.

Mythbusting can be an engaging and intellectually stimulating way to understand, and teach, media history. It can illuminate the research process for students, demonstrating the importance of documentation, of weighing evidence, of honing a healthy sense of skepticism, and of developing fact-based challenges to accepted wisdom. To debunk well, context has to be understood; the historical moment or event has to be examined thoroughly, from its many sides and perspectives.

Mythbusting can be an illuminating and even entertaining way of making history accessible, of going beyond an emphasis on names and dates and places. It can be an engaging way of thinking about the news media, their influences, their legacies, and their place in contemporary culture.

By nature, mythbusting is aligned with “unlearning,” the process of shedding of wrong-headed knowledge previously absorbed. Matt Ridley, a British journalist who sits in the House of Lords, had this to say a few years ago about unlearning:

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“We all think that we know certain things to be true beyond doubt, but these things often turn out to be false and, until we unlearn them, they get in the way of new understanding.”¹²

That’s not a bad quote at all.

NOTES

¹ Gerard DeGroot, “When the Iron Curtain unraveled,” *Washington Post*, 6 September 2009: B6.

² Timothy Snyder, “Memoirs of the murdered,” *Wall Street Journal*, 24 April 2015; accessed 15 May 2015 at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/memoirs-of-the-murdered-1429909684>

³ Joe Nocera, “Journalism catches Hollywood’s eye,” *New York Times*, 3 January 2016, AR26.

⁴ See, for example, Michael Getler, “‘Deep Throat’: An Omb’s Observations,” *Washington Post*, 5 June 2005, B6. Getler wrote: “Ultimately, it was not The Post, but the FBI, a Congress acting in bipartisan fashion and the courts that brought down the Nixon administration. They saw Watergate and the attempt to cover it up as a vast abuse of power and attempted corruption of U.S. institutions.” See also, Mark Feldstein, “Watergate Revisited,” *American Journalism Review* (August/September 2004): 62. Feldstein quoted Woodward as saying, “To say that the press brought down Nixon, that’s horseshit.”

⁵ The taping system was disclosed by a former Nixon aide, Alexander Butterfield, in 1973 in testimony before the U.S. Senate select committee on Watergate. See James M. Naughton, “Surprise witness: Butterfield, ex-aide at White House, tells of listening devices,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1973, 1.

⁶ “Apr. 29: birthday: William Randolph Hearst,” *The Writer’s Almanac with Garrison Keillor*, 29 April 2015; accessed 29 December 2015 at <http://writersalmanac.org/note/apr-29-birthday-william-randolph-hearst/>

⁷ See, for example, Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, *The Battle for Public Opinion: The President, the Press, and the Polls During Watergate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 264. In their study of the press, public opinion, and Watergate, Lang and Lang wrote that “since the facts are so quickly forgotten, the folklore is what survives.”

⁸ David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1979), 716.

⁹ Robert Reich, “From the Left: Nation’s circus politics are a danger to us and world,” *Dayton Daily News*, 19 November 2015, A18.

¹⁰ See “M’Carthy in brawl with Drew Pearson,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1950, 72.

¹¹ Richard Bernstein, “Can movies teach history?” *New York Times*, 26 November 1989, sect. 2, p. 1.

¹² Matt Ridley, “A key lesson of adulthood: The need to unlearn,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5–6 February 2011, C4.

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Dwight Teeter: Levelheaded Libertarian

By Debra van Tuyll ©



van Tuyll

Dwight Teeter, emeritus dean of the journalism school at the University of Tennessee who died in March 2015, is best known as an author of the widely used text *Law of Mass Communications*.¹ His scholarly work extends well beyond that one tome, however, and is important on many levels, but one of the most important, yet most overlooked, is the evidence it offers for the indispensable twinning of history and law. American law, after all, is ground-

ed in the legal concept of precedent — which is just another word for history.

History was on Teeter's side when it came to scholarship. He began his academic career at a particularly auspicious time.² Within five years of finishing his Ph.D., the U.S. Supreme Court handed down nearly 30 free speech decisions, many of them landmarks still discussed in media law classes today.³

Teeter's earliest legal scholarship focused on the intellectual history of freedom of expression in America, and it led him into a conflict with one of the First Amendment theory "heavies": Leonard Levy, who argued that press libertarian ideology did not exist in early America.⁴ Teeter's studies of several prominent cases from the period, however,

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showed that Levy had overstated his case. Teeter found citizens and journalists in early America were not always tolerant of an unfettered press, but neither were they completely intolerant.⁵

For example, his studies of 18th century printers Benjamin Towne and Eleazer Oswald found that Americans tolerated Towne, a Tory, publishing throughout the Revolutionary War. His flexibility on political issues helped him escape the sort of harassment and persecution other Tory printers such as James Rivington experienced. Still, that a known Tory, albeit one willing to be malleable in his perspectives, could publish throughout the Revolution indicated a chink in Levy's argument.⁶

Oswald's experience with his *Maryland Journal* also at first glance might seem to support Levy. A mob sacked Oswald's paper in 1779 after he declared "George Washington militarily inept." However, while Teeter agreed that this incident "showed a rather restricted meaning and scope of freedom of the press," he argued that Washington — "first in the hearts of his countrymen" — was a special case.⁷

However, Oswald's trial for seditious libel told a more complete story: as with John Peter Zenger, Oswald was found not guilty. Teeter concluded that Oswald's case demonstrated that not only was libertarian ideology in the air in the 1780s, it was "in print in at least some American newspapers."⁸ Throughout his career, Teeter would find evidence that libertarian ideology resonated with 18th century Americans.⁹

Teeter recognized the need for an aggressive press but also accepted the necessity of some limitations in certain circumstances.¹⁰ His analysis of the state of the First Amendment at its bicentennial in 1992 hints very strongly at this perspective. He characterized the First Amendment as an "18th century guarantee ... stated in absolute terms that have rarely been honored" and that may have been "interpreted into 20th-century irrelevance." Although sedition law had been laid to

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rest by then, Teeter presciently wondered whether its quietude “may be that of an unstaked vampire, especially when times of hysterical super-patriotism come again.”¹¹

Teeter’s scholarship would eventually move beyond the 18th century to deal with contemporary speech and press issues. A good example was the piece he and G. S. Singer wrote in 1978 for the *Kentucky Law Journal* regarding the impact of *Zurcher v. Stanford Daily*, a much-reviled Supreme Court decision. Journalists decried the decision as “disastrous” and an “assault on freedom of speech.” Their objections were because the case appeared to give law enforcement authority to search newsrooms rather than obtain subpoenas.¹²

Teeter, however, took a more measured approach, one grounded in the perspective gained through the study of history. Could a case such as *Zurcher* be a disaster for the press? Of course — but likely only temporarily. The legacy of freedom in America was just too deeply ingrained. Self-righting of bad decisions was a common pattern in the history of media law. Teeter’s scholarship had shown that pattern over and over.

Only once in all of his writing did Teeter despair over an area of law, and that was in the early 1970s when obscenity law was, as Teeter and his co-author W. Barnett Pearce observed, all “(expletive deleted) up.”¹³ Teeter and Pearce agreed that the Supreme Court had attempted repeatedly “to infuse some degree of reason and consistency” into obscenity law but had failed miserably.¹⁴ They believed the court had developed and then moved away from a reasonable four-point test for obscenity in a 1967 case, *Redrup v. New York*. They argued that personnel changes to the court between 1967 and 1971 meant it was unlikely a more sensible approach would emerge.¹⁵

For the most part, though, Teeter was never one to spout doom and gloom about the state of press freedom. He never attributed his perspective on the law to his historical grounding, but his studies conclud-

ed again and again that libertarian sentiment regarding the press was not just in the air in America. It was — and is — engrained in the culture.¹⁶

Appendix

Dwight L. Teeter's History Scholarship

First Amendment theory and history

- 2011 *Freedom of the Press*, Oxford Bibliographies Online, 2011, 40 pp.
- 2006 "Areopagitica" and "John Peter Zenger," in Otis H. Stephens, John M. Scheb II, and Kara E. Stooksbury, eds., *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Civil Liberties*.
- 1998 Dwight L. Teeter, Jr. "First Amendment in the 19th Century," in Margaret Blanchard, ed., *The History of Mass Media in the United States: An Encyclopedia*.
- 1992 "The First Amendment At Its Bicentennial: Necessary But Not Sufficient?" *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 69 (1992), 18-27.
- 1989 "Time to Reclaim: Journalists and the Growth of the First Amendment," in E. C. Caudill, ed., *Twelfth Annual Communications Research Symposium* 12 (1989), i-xxvi.
- 1978 with M. A. Y. Smith, "Mr. Justice Black's Absolutism: Notes on His Use of History to Support Free Expression," in E. E. Dennis, D. M. Gilmor, and D. L. Grey, eds., *Justice Hugo L. Black and the First Amendment*, 29-40.
- 1977 "Decent Animadversions: Notes Toward A History of Free Press Theory," in D. H. Bond, R. W. McLeod, eds., *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth Century Journalism* 237-246.
- 1968 "Press Freedom and the Public Printing, Pennsylvania, 1775-1783," *Journalism Quarterly* 42 (1968), 235-243.
- 1968 "The Printer and the Chief Justice: Seditious Libel in 1782-83," *Jour-*

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nalism Quarterly, 45 (1968), 2.

- 1966 "Three Revolutions Shape Media History," in J. W. Schwartz, ed., *The Publicity Process*, 261-280.
- 1965 "Benjamin Towne: The Precarious Career of a Persistent Printer," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 89 (1965), 316-330.
- 1964 "'King' Sears, the Mob, and Freedom of the Press in New York, 1765-1776," *Journalism Quarterly*. 41 (1964), 539-544.

Press role

- 2008 "Prelude to War: Newspapers and the North-South Tensions in the 1850s," *North and South: The Magazine of Civil War Conflict*.
- 1975 "John Dunlap: The Political Economy of a Printer's Success," *Journalism Quarterly*, 52 (1975), 3-8, 55.

Obscenity

- 1975 with B. W. Pearce, "Obscenity: Historical and Behavioral Perspectives," *Intellect*, 166-170.
- 1971 with D. R. Pember, "Obscenity, 1971: The Rejuvenation of State Power and the Return to Roth," *Villanova Law Review*, 17 (1971), 211-245.
- 1969 with D. R. Pember, "The Retreat From Obscenity: Redrup v. New York," *Hastings Law Journal*, 25 (1969), 445-451.

Search warrants/newsgathering

- 1978 with G. S. Singer, "Some Aspects of the Impact of *Zurcher v. The Stanford Daily*," *Kentucky Law Journal*, 67 (1978), 847-865.

NOTES

¹ Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., and Harold Nelson, *Law of Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (New York: Foundation Press, 1969). Wm. David Sloan, *Makers of the Media Mind: Journalism Educators and Their Ideas* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990), 183.

² Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., "The Supreme Court and Obscene Literature: *Roth v. U.S.*," Master's Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1959; Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., "A Legacy of Ex-

pression: Philadelphia Newspapers and Congress During the War for Independence," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1966.

³ See, for example, *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 408 U.S. 665 (1971); *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969); *Ginzburg v. United States*, 383 U.S. 463 (1966); *Ginsburg v. New York*, 390 U.S. 629 (1968); *New York Times Co. v. U.S.*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971); *Time v. Hill*, 385 U.S. 374 (1967); *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 967 (1964); *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*, 395 U.S. 367 (1969).

⁴ Leonard Levy, *Legacy of Suppression: Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960).

⁵ Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., "Three Revolutions Shape Media History," in J. W. Schwartz, ed., *The Publicity Process*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1966), 264, 265; Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., "Press Freedom and the Public Printing, Pennsylvania, 1775-1783," *Journalism Quarterly* 42 (1968), 235-243; Teeter, "A Legacy of Expression"; Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., "Decent Animadversions: Notes Toward A History of Free Press Theory," in D. H. Bond and R. W. McLeod, eds., *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth Century Journalism* (Papers presented at a Bicentennial Symposium at the University of West Virginia, Morgantown, 1976), 237.

⁶ Dwight L. Teeter Jr., "Benjamin Towne: The Precarious Career of a Persistent Printer," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 89 (1965), 316-330.

⁷ Teeter, "Decent Animadversions," 239-241; Teeter, "'King' Sears, the Mob and Freedom of the Press in New York, 1765-76," 541-544; Leonard Levy, *Legacy of Suppression: Freedom of Speech and Press in America* (New York: Harper Torch books, 1963), xi; Henry Lee, "Funeral Oration on the Death of General Washington" (Boston: Printed for Joseph Nancrede and Manning and Loring, 1800).

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Kobre Award Interview: James Startt



James D. Startt won the Kobre Award for lifetime achievement from the American Journalism Historians Association in 2000. In addition to that Award, he has received a variety of other honors, including a Lilly Endowment Grant in 1983 for the development of a field in journalism history. He also has received numerous research grants from Valparaiso University, where he serves as a Senior Research Professor in history. He has written a number of books and is a recognized expert on President Woodrow Wilson. He has published numerous articles on American and British journalism and diplomatic history. He served as president of the AJHA in 1997-1998.

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

Startt: I still consider Baltimore, my birthplace, my hometown. The Orioles remain my favorite baseball team, and during the season, I read their box scores every morning. The Baltimore of my youth was a busy port city in which commerce and industry flourished. It was also a city of many traditions, not the least of which was its great newspaper tradition going back to the early nineteenth century. I grew up thinking that the *Baltimore Sun* was one of the world's most distinguished newspapers, which it was. Its readership was rock solid, and not even William Randolph Hearst could dent it when he launched the competitive paper in the city.

Looking back on my past, I consider myself fortunate, especially for having a caring and supportive family and for receiving an excellent ed-

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ucation. My father, who fought in France during World War I, was a pharmacist and a lifelong inspiration for me. I grew up working in his drug store starting at age ten. My mother loved to read, as did my brother, which no doubt nurtured my own love of books. Both parents placed a high value on education.

My father and brother were graduates of the University of Maryland. I followed suit by taking all three degrees at that institution, studying under inspiring professors, especially my mentor Gordon W. Prange. He had that rare gift of making history live in his lectures and of instilling in his students the idea that in studying history they were involved in an enterprise of intrinsic worth. Professor Prange was interested in the press as an historical source, and it was he who first stimulated my interest in journalism history.

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

Startt: Since I doubt that working summers in Baltimore's shipyards and breweries qualifies as a profession, I confess that teaching has been my life. Before beginning a career as a college professor, I survived teaching American history and world geography in high school for five years.

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

Startt: After spending two years at Murray State University, I have spent my teaching career at Valparaiso University. Courses taught include Western Civilization, World History, Twentieth-Century European History, The Media in America, British History, British Imperial History, Irish History, South African History, History of Revolutionary Russia, and undergraduate and graduate seminars on Diplomatic History, World War I, World War II, and Presidents and the Press.

Startt

Q: Tell us about your background in history — When did you first get interested in history? How did your education prepare you to be a historian?

Startt: History has caught my imagination since youth. I suspect that the many visits to Gettysburg's battlefield during my teens triggered interest in the Civil War, my first passion in history. Afterwards, I went on to major in history as an undergraduate and later in my graduate studies.

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

Startt: My writing's main focus has been on journalism history and diplomatic history in the early twentieth century, both in an American and British context. And, I have made historical personalities a major focus of most of what I have written.

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

Startt: My publications include three books — a biography of Edward Price Bell, a study of Edwardian journalists and the British Empire, and a study of Woodrow Wilson and the press prior to his presidency. With David Sloan, I co-authored a book on historical methods and co-edited, again with David Sloan, *The Significance of the Media in American History*, the textbook, *The Media in America*, and a seven-volume series, the *History of American Journalism*. Beyond that, I have published fifty articles, essays, and chapters and dozens of book reviews.

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

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Startt: Each one has been a gratifying scholarly experience, each for a different reason. But, if I were to name a favorite, it would be *Journalists of Empire*. It led me to interview interesting people such as Sir Harry Brittain, who was deeply involved in imperial affairs, and Ursula Slaghek, the daughter of the renowned British journalist J. L. Garvin.

Q: We realize that it is difficult to judge one's own work — and that the most accomplished people are often the most modest — but if you had to summarize your most important contributions to the field of JMC history, what would they be?

Startt: I think by stressing the value of primary and original resources in journalism history, particularly co-authoring *Historical Methods in Mass Communications* and the work I have done for *American Journalism*, that I have helped to improve scholarship in the field. I also think that as an AJHA president, I helped to strengthen the association's organizational structure.

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

Startt: I can think of no changes I would have made, except it would have been fun to have developed a field and written a book on the history of railroads in America.

Q: Tell us about your “philosophy of history” or what you think are the most important principles for studying history.

Startt: Remember that history at its best is a narrative about life, that it should conform to the canons of historical inquiry, and that every past has an inner logic that can never be recaptured in full.

Startt

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

Startt: The quality of the work being done in the field has improved during recent decades, and today its best works can take their place among the finest current historical writing.

Q: What do you think we in JMC history need to be doing to improve the status of JMC history in (1) JMC education and (2) the wider field of history in general?

Startt: I cannot speak to the status of JMC education, but I have two suggestions to bear in mind to assure the highest quality of writing in the field: (1) explore topics that intersect with the currents of general history, bearing in mind that the press has been part of every major movement in modern history, and (2) keep in mind that in all successful history, there is a story to be told.

Q: What challenges does the American Journalism Historians Association face in the future?

Startt: First of all, let me say that I am proud of all that the AJHA has accomplished. However, all associations need to be replenished and to grow with the passing of time. Although the AJHA has made important strides in this respect, more can always be done. Consequently, consider (1) reaching out more to scholars in related fields, especially the humanities, by inviting panel and research proposals from members of other historical organizations, large and small, and (2) concentrating more on international and transnational journalism history.

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Book Award Interview: Ford Risley



Ford Risley won the AJHA Book of the Year Award in 2009 for his book *Abolition and the Press: The Moral Struggle Against Slavery*. His most recent book is *Civil War Journalism* (Praeger, 2012), for which he did the following Q&A. He is a professor and associate dean in the College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University.

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

Risley: My book explores the journalism of the North and South during the Civil War. Although numerous works have examined various aspects of the war press, none had chronicled the reporting and editorializing, the photography and illustrations, the press censorship and suppression, as well as the impact of the war on both sides in a comprehensive manner. My book tried to do that.

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

Risley: I have been studying and writing about Civil War era journalism for more than 20 years. I had always thought that a book about the press as a whole was needed because the war was not only such a milestone in American history but also journalism history. John David Smith, a historian who edits a series titled “Reflections on the Civil War

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Risley

Era,” approached me about tackling the project. I liked the other books in the series. So I was glad to be a part of it.

Q: Tell us about the research you did for your book — What were your sources, how did you research your book, how long did you spend, and so forth?

Risley: My main sources were the stories, editorials, photographs, and illustrations that journalists on both sides produced during the war. In the course of various projects over the years, I have examined many, many of these materials, and I looked at even more in the course of writing the book. In many respects this is a work of synthesis. So I also relied on my own previous research and the research of others who have studied these subjects. There has been a resurgence of Civil War journalism scholarship in the last couple of decades, including some outstanding work done by members of the AJHA.

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

Risley: I didn’t use a lot of primary sources — letters, diaries, records, etc. — in part because there are not a lot from the journalists or news organizations of this era, but also because in a short book like this there just was not the space. I wish I could have used more because they are so important in any good work of history.

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

Risley: If you are going to study Civil War journalism, you have to spend a lot of time reading microfilm. There is just no way around it. Although

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more and more newspapers and magazines from the era can be found online, many still are not. Interlibrary loan will be your best friend in finding and getting materials on microfilm. Of course, whenever possible, you should also try to look at original copies. As any historian will tell you, there is nothing like seeing and holding the originals.

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

Risley: The biggest challenge was deciding what to use and what not to use. With such a broad subject, there was no way to use all the great material that is available. Beyond that, I had to decide how to organize the book. I like to write in a narrative style, but that would have been difficult considering what I was trying to do with the book. As I said, the chapters deal with different subjects, and as much as possible, I tried to write in narrative fashion in each chapter. Because of that, there is necessarily some overlapping of events, people and other things.

Q: What new insights does your book provide?

Risley: I hope the book shows that in many respects the American press came of age during the war. Newspapers became essential reading for Americans in the North and South. Magazines saw the foothold they had begun to establish grow, thanks in large part to the outstanding illustrations. The editorial page continued to be a popular place to express opinions. And photography became an important tool to record events, even though photographs could not yet be published. The war unalterably changed journalism in this country as the press tried to cover such a monumental and tragic event.

Q: What findings most surprised you?

Risley

Risley: Although I had a good sense of it, I was still astonished in the course of doing the research to see just how much reporting and editorializing was done during the war. Of course, this was a civil war with Americans fighting against Americans. So that should not have really been surprising. But the sheer volume of work produced by the press on both sides was impressive. It speaks to what a pivotal event the war was.

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

Risley: There are so many important and interesting subjects in mass communications history. So anybody considering doing a book should jump in. It may seem like a daunting task, but if you have the materials, you like to write, and you are disciplined in the way you work, you can certainly do it. Also, once you start writing, don't stop. When I am working on a book project, I find time to write every week even if it's just for a few hours, because I don't want to lose momentum. In the summer, when I have more time, I try to write every day.

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