

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 3 (2017). Number 5

Historiography in Mass Communication

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Essays

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

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

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

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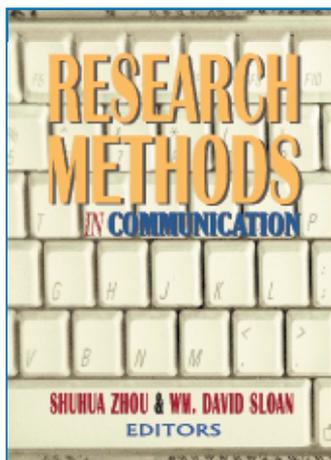
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How To Stop the Bleeding

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

It is not exaggerating to say that the lifeblood of history is draining from the field of JMC education.

We have, as far as I'm aware, no recent numbers on how many universities are teaching JMC history. There are indications, though, that since the year 2000 the number has been steadily decreasing — just as it had been doing for many years previous.

And to compound the problem, many schools that still have JMC history courses are offering them less frequently than they did just a few years ago.

The situation has caused, as it should, worry among our historians, and they have talked frequently about how to stop the bleeding.

Likewise, the American Journalism Historians Association and the History Division of the AEJMC remain energetic in discussing JMC history, but they talk mainly to their own members.

Perhaps, had it not been for them, JMC history might have declined more rapidly than it has. History could have died quickly rather than bleeding to death slowly over decades.

Whatever the unknown and unmeasurable success of the AJHA and

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the AEJMC History Division may have been, today we face the reality that history has vanished from the curricula of a majority of JMC programs.

So after years of JMC history professors and organizations talking about the problem, we're faced with the sobering question, As history slowly fades away, is there any realistic hope that it can be resuscitated?

Since the issue involves individual professors, we can ask, What can professors in JMC history do to improve the status of JMC history?

The answer, believe it or not, is easy.

However, it takes work. Simply talking about possible answers will get nothing done. The point goes for history organizations just as it does for individual professors. The answer really boils down to this: Are professors and organizations interested only in talking — or are they willing actually to act?

Four actions will provide the solution.

First, historians must be very good at what they do.

They need to be rigorous in their research so that their fellow professors will have no reason to criticize their methods. Historical research, when done properly, is much more demanding than most theoretical, quantitative work is. JMC historians should perform at such a level that their quantitative colleagues would be embarrassed to criticize.

Second, historians should be PR professionals.

Anytime they or their students have any achievement — such as presenting a research paper at a conference — they should publicize it among their colleagues. That will increase both the awareness of and the respect for the work that the historians are doing.

Third, historians should teach the general methods courses in graduate programs.

I wrote about this idea in an earlier issue of *Historiography* ["The

How To Stop the Bleeding

Only Way To Make History Important,” Vol. 2 (2016):2]. So I won’t repeat the details. Here’s the gist of the reasoning: Students tend to be interested in the same subjects that interest their professors. In their first semester of graduate school, students tend to accept whatever their instructors tell them they should be emphasizing. If in their first semester they take courses in methodology in which their instructors emphasize the importance and pre-eminence of social science theory and methodology, by the end of that semester most students will have decided that they need to specialize in — what else? — social science theory and methodology.

So the most effective way to promote the study of history is by historians teaching introductory methodology courses, where they could let the students know that history is just as legitimate a research area as social and behavioral science.

Those first three actions are things that historians can do individually. The *fourth* one requires collective effort. It is this:

The AJHA should institute a program that its Task Force on History in the Curriculum recommended years ago.

The Task Force proposed a system that would give the AJHA’s “stamp of approval” to those schools that met its criteria. The system provided a way to encourage schools to improve their offerings in history. (I will add that only the AJHA, and not the AEJMC History Division, has the capacity to institute the program. That’s because the AEJMC limits what its History Division can do.)

Operating such a system, though, requires work, and it’s not always easy to find professors who are willing to commit to the amount of work a big project requires.

If our history professors, though, want JMC history to survive, they must be willing to do the work.

An irony of the decline of JMC history in the college curriculum is that

it is the field in which we have seen the most vitality over the last forty years. It has two refereed journals, *American Journalism* and *Journalism History* — not to mention this online journal you are now reading. It has an independent organization — the AJHA — along with an AEJMC division. It has two national academic conferences, the AJHA annual convention and the Joint Journalism and Communication History Conference; it has a regional organization, the AJHA Southeast Symposium; and it is one of the major areas of research in the AEJMC Southeast Regional Colloquium. It offers a variety of awards for teaching and research. No other area of JMC study can match history.

Another sign that JMC history is alive and vibrant — even if its place in the college curriculum is not — is the articles that we publish in *Historiography*. They show that JMC historians are among the very best thinkers in the field of JMC academia and research. In this issue, we begin with an essay by Prof. Bruce Evensen of DePaul University that shows that, throughout history, Americans have had a sense of the special nature of the nation and that journalists have been largely responsible for creating that idea. We follow that essay with a roundtable of historians that emphasizes the special relationship between the media and religion. Prof. John Ferré of the University of Louisville, an authority on the subject, organized the roundtable. Then, for our book-award interview, Maurine Beasley graciously consented to answer our questions. Her book *Women of the Washington Press: Politics, Prejudice, and Persistence* won the Frank Luther Mott-Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for the year's outstanding book in 2012.

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Journalism and the Story of American Exceptionalism

By Bruce J. Evensen ©



Evensen

For many of the past twenty-five years that I've taught "Journalism and the American Experience" at DePaul University, I've asked my students how many have ever heard of the idea of "American Exceptionalism." I didn't ask them whether they agreed with the idea, presumably advanced by Puritan lay leader John Winthrop at our founding, that America would one day be seen as "a shining city on a hill." Nor did I insist on a show of hands on those asserting Thomas Jefferson's certainty that America as "an Empire of Liberty" would one day show other nations how a democratic republic best protected the rights of men and women in the creation and maintenance of a civil society. I only wondered how many had ever heard this greatest of all American stories about what Perry Miller called the new nation's "errand in the wilderness."¹

The answer might surprise you. Within a single generation the number of students planning careers in the mass media who have heard of American exceptionalism has gone from nearly everyone to nearly no one. This spring only two of twenty-two undergraduates had

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heard of the off-told tale, and both were recently arrived immigrants, one from Eastern Europe, the other from the Middle East, who cited it as the reason why their families had come to America.

A poll released on the eve of the Fourth of July supports the assertion that few Americans now know America's central story. Fewer than one in six believed the Founding Fathers would be proud of the country today. Only half said they were proud of the country, a plunge of 20 points in fewer than twenty years. Nationally syndicated conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer considered it evidence of "a failure in civic education. We're raising a generation that has no idea what our history is. They have no reason to be proud of our history. They're being taught patho-history — all the things we did wrong, all the sins, all the injuries, all the crimes, and none of the glory of it. You raise a generation like that and you wind up being not exceptionally proud of your country."²

Though many in the faculty lounge might today sniff at the suggestion, many in America, including its political leaders, journalists, and historians have long seen the country's central story as the care and feeding of a noble but badly battered political system designed to assure the natural rights and liberties of God-breathed creatures. At the coming of the 21st century, David Wrobel, an historian of American thought and culture, observed, it was already becoming profoundly unfashionable to claim America was anything special. The academy increasingly saw the old story as a canard, requiring a lecture on racial oppression and imperial conquest. As early as the 1970's, Sacvan Bercovitch saw American exceptionalism as little more than "ideological hegemony" used by elites and their media to impose "rituals of socialization" on unsuspecting Americans. In the 21st century, Donald Pease used psychoanalytic theory to brand American exceptionalism a "fantasy" that should be studied as a myth like other "imperial state exceptionalisms." The work of "Americanists," who claim a unique trajectory

to American history, charged Sylvia Soderlind, has led to an endless era of wars on terror. Justin Litke warns this “relatively new imperial American exceptionalism” was behind America’s disastrous decision in 2003 to make war in Iraq. Andrew Bacevich goes further. His view is the insistence that American power be used “as an instrument to reshape the global order” has instead led to “the end of American exceptionalism.” Godfrey Hodgson disparages those who still claim it as a constant. “A largely imagined exceptional America,” he observes, has a dangerous “solipsistic” tendency. It “creates a myth that seems to justify, even demand, domination.” It demonstrates, in his view, “the dangers of self-praise” and is a key cause of much that has “gone wrong in American political life and foreign policy.” David Noble suggests scraping studies of what makes America distinctive in exchange for “post-nationalist American studies.”³

A study of the history of American journalism shows how invested it has been in furthering the narrative of American exceptionalism. Embedded in the classic studies of the history of American journalism, dating from Hudson, Payne, Bleyer, Lee and Mott to more contemporary work by Emery, Folkerts and Teeter, and Sloan, is an understanding that the American experiment in self-governance has a noble purpose, often aided by journalists, who see their job as serving citizens with news they need to know.⁴ This great story set sail in the mid-Atlantic crossing of the *Arbella* in the spring of 1630 as part of a fleet that would bring nearly one thousand of the earliest Puritan settlers to America. The story has John Winthrop, a Puritan lay leader, preaching on creating in North America a “shining city on a hill,” a familiar part of scripture that he had taken from Christ’s teaching in *Matthew* 5:14. It encourages Christians to be the light of the world. America’s story has Winthrop warning in his “Modell of Christian Charity” that “the eyes of all people are upon us.” Winthrop closes his famous prayer for the New World, urging listeners “to choose life, that we and are seed may live, by

obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him, for He is our life and our prosperity.” Winthrop became governor of Massachusetts Bay and his journals, the earliest example of reporting in New England, became the basis of one of America’s biggest stories — its noble purpose and divine destiny. Those journals, however, make no reference to the supposed sermon. In fact, no published version of the sermon existed until 208 years later. That manuscript, found in a dusty corner of the New York Historical Society, was not in Winthrop’s handwriting, but nevertheless was quickly attributed to him. Its publication in 1838 coincided with an era of rapid American territorial expansion, and came a year after the launch of journalist John O’Sullivan’s *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, a weekly Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren hoped would promote Jacksonian Democracy’s appetite for western expansion and the extension of voting rights to all white males. Historians Hugh Dawson and Abram Van Engen have observed how this timing made the sermon “the cornerstone of American culture.”⁵

Both before and after America’s earliest settlements, chroniclers and publicists on both sides of the Atlantic began circulating stories that saw America as a second Eden, where human relations and governance might be done differently. The New World was “altogether more open, more expansive, more equal, more democratic, and more congenial to the aspirations of ordinary free people than the societies of the Old World,” historian Jack Greene says of these publications. Sir Thomas More wrote *Utopia* twenty-three years after Columbus encountered the Americas. More placed his Utopians on an island in the Atlantic, where settlers are “guided by reason.” John Rolfe, an early promoter of Virginia Colony, was pleased in 1616 “to give a good report” that “God’s hand hath been mightie” in the preservation of his people. “What need we then to feare,” he reported in his *True Relation of the State of Virginia*, “but to goe up at once as a peculiar people, marked and chosen by the finger of God, to possess it, for undoubtedly he is with

us.” John Locke saw American settlement as a way to make the world right again. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, published in 1690, Locke argued before corruption came, “in the beginning, all the world was America.” Political pamphleteer and propagandist Daniel Defoe portrayed America as a democratic garden for every able-bodied Englishman. His plea to Parliament in 1704 guaranteed civil and religious liberty in Carolina but not for the slave. “Our colonies in America,” he observed, “could no more be maintained without the supply of negro slaves than London could subsist without the River Thames.” For the European, Scots promoter Thomas Nairne reported in 1710, opportunity to own land and pass it to your posterity meant an end to “the vexation of dependence.” David Hume, writing during the generation preceding the revolution, recognized America’s charter governments were “almost entirely independent of England.” It was therefore natural and lawful to expect they would defend their rights “against every invader.”⁶

Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards — two seminal figures in the creation of colonial journalism and its faith community — embraced this logic. A quarter million American colonists at the start of the 18th century tripled by 1740, and eclipsed one and a half million in the thirty years that followed. It demonstrated to Franklin an extraordinary future. “Since no one remains long a laborer for others, but gets a plantation of his own,” he wrote in 1751, America’s population would double every twenty-five years. He predicted they would make “a garden of a wilderness.” Edwards attached apocalyptic significance in American abundance. America was “changing the course of trade and the supplying of the world with its treasures,” he wrote. This was “a type and forerunner of what is approaching in spiritual things, when the world shall be supplied with spiritual treasures from America.” Edwards was confident America’s Great Awakening of the 1730’s and 1740’s was the “wonderful dawning of that glorious work of God” that

“shall renew the world of mankind.”⁷

On the eve of the Revolution, America’s white population approached two million. Its slave population exceeded half a million. Watching the spectacle from an ocean away, economist and essayist Adam Smith held that “the liberty to manage their own affairs their own way” was as crucial as access to cheap land in driving America’s “wealth and greatness.” No man was inferior to any other man, apart from those “in a state of slavery.” Edmund Burke warned Parliament that Americans would fight for their freedom. “The fierce spirit of liberty is stronger in the English colonies,” he reported, “than in any other people of the world. They are devoted to liberty. The people are Protestants most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. This is a persuasion not only favorable to liberty, but built upon it.” Americans were dissenters directed by “a strong claim to natural liberty. Their very existence depends on the powerful and unremitted assertion of that claim.” America, he argued, was a land “composed of dissenters” motivated by “this fierce spirit of liberty. They read. This study renders men acute, inquisitive, dexterous, prompt in action, ready in defense, full of resources,” who sniff “the approach of tyranny in every tainted breath. Their new government has originated directly from the people.”⁸

Shortly after the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, the Revolution’s chief propagandist, Thomas Paine, wrote *Common Sense* showing how right Burke was. “We have it in our power,” Paine argued, “to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand.” The Patriot Press was not above inserting itself into the center of the Revolution’s story. It would later claim and historians would dutifully record that the *Pennsylvania Journal* first published Thomas Paine’s pamphlet, *The American Crisis*, on December 19, 1776, even though the Second Continental Congress had already

fled Philadelphia, fearing capture by the rapidly advancing British army. The story went on to say that General George Washington ordered the pamphlet read to what little was left of the Continental Army on December 23 before a daring Christmas Evening crossing of the Delaware defeated the Hessians at Trenton. The story suggested the troops were stirred by Paine's published cry that "these are the days that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country, but he that stands it now, deserves the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered, yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph." Like many good stories, it was not particularly true. Paine's own account is that when he arrived in Philadelphia in mid-December he found "the public presses stopped." Editors, too, had fled Philadelphia. The *Journal* seems to have suspended publication on December 4 and resumed it on January 22. The first half of Paine's pamphlet was printed by the *Pennsylvania Packet* on December 27 and the second half on January 4, but by then Washington's survival strategy seemed assured. The Revolution would go on, so long as he and the army lived on.⁹

Beating the British by outlasting them seemed to affirm divine favor in America's destiny. In 1782, a year before the Peace of Paris, Michel-Guillaume de Crèvecoeur, a naturalized New Yorker, noted in his widely read "Letters from an American Farmer," that "the American is a new man. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labor." It was an early iteration of the American Dream, pushed by American publicists on both sides of the Atlantic. America was utterly unlike Europe, where "great lords possess everything and a herd of people have nothing." De Crèvecoeur's years in upstate New York taught him "the rich stay in Europe; it is only the middling and the poor that emigrate." In America, "the poor of Europe have met togeth-

er." In Europe, "they were so many useless plants." Here, they are "all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained because each person works for himself. We have no princes for whom we toil, starve and bleed. Here man is free as he ought to be." As citizens, "they carefully read the newspapers, enter into political disquisitions, and freely blame their governors." It is a nation "of freeholders, possessors of the soil they cultivate, members of the government they obey, framers of their own laws by means of their own representatives." The American is independent, inventive, and pragmatic, and after a good day's labor he has "a decent bed to repose on." Nowhere, de Crevecoeur maintained, had a people "done more in so short a time."¹⁰

De Crevecoeur's argument of America's uniqueness was widely shared by republican advocates in Europe. Nicolas de Condorcet opined in 1783 that "it is not enough that the rights of man be written in books of philosophers and inscribed on the hearts of virtuous men." Instead, "the weak and ignorant must be able to read them in the example of a great people. America has given us that example." That made America's winning its independence, French writer and journalist Abbe Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal wrote, "the cause of all mankind." Fellow Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, a widely quoted diplomat and historian, would one day see the same thing. He found America's experiment in self-governance "quite exceptional," noting "no democratic people will ever be placed" in a similar setting. Here, "men are free. There is nothing to separate men from one another. It becomes evident that the chief cause of disparity between the fortunes of men is the mind." That was why America's "circle of readers is unceasingly expanded, till it includes all the people." Welsh nonconformist Richard Price hoped that progress would soon lead to one-man, one-vote and a government that served its people rather than the other way around. It would be a critical step in "the progressive course of human improvement," leading to

a “revolution in favor of universal liberty.” Adam Smith saw America at the center of that universe. It would be “an extensive empire, very likely one of the greatest and most formidable that ever was in the world.”¹¹

Revolutionary War hero Alexander Hamilton wanted readers to know a “noble career lies before” for what he called this “Hercules in the cradle.” Hamilton penned fifty-one of the eighty-five newspaper articles that became the Federalist Papers, arguing for adoption of the Constitution to ensure this “republican empire” became “the most interesting in the world.” He helped invent the party press aimed at “assuring the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” Federalist friend John Jay saw the same future, writing in New York’s *Independent Journal*, Americans were “one united people, from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion.” They were “western sons of liberty,” who were “designed by Providence” to be “enamored of liberty” in pursuit of a perfect Union that was the source of all its “greatness.”¹²

A sense of American exceptionalism was widely shared by the Founding Fathers, whether they were Federalist or Democratic-Republicans. George Washington’s first inaugural address as president of the new republic, acknowledged “the invisible hand of the Great Author,” who had helped America become an independent nation through his “providential agency” and “divine blessing.” The duty of the new nation was “the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government.” Washington’s successor John Adams wrote in the *Boston Gazette* of the belief that America’s settlement was “the opening of a grand scene and design in providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.” It would beat back the tyranny that attempted to monopolize the press, “forcing liberty to skulk about in corners of the Earth.”¹³

Thomas Jefferson saw American exceptionalism extended over the

whole of the continent. He saw emergent America as an “Empire of Liberty.” Its “self-government” would be arrayed against the dark forces of despotism and “barbarity.” He believed it could “conquer without war” and be guided, as he wrote in 1799, by “the unquestionable republicanism of the American mind.” Jefferson’s inaugural address in 1801 portrayed America as “a chosen country with room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation,” guided by “an overruling providence” producing “a happy and prosperous people.” In a letter to philosopher and scientist Joseph Priestley during the third week of his presidency, Jefferson observed, “We can no longer say there is nothing new under the sun. For this whole chapter in the history of man is new. The great experiment of our republic is new.” He assured James Monroe a future where “our rapid multiplication will cover the whole northern, if not southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws.” Jefferson foresaw a “march of civilization advancing from the seacoast, passing over us like a cloud of light, increasing our knowledge and improving our condition, and where this progress will stop no one can say.” The doubling of the size of the new nation in 1803 through Jefferson’s unexpected Louisiana Purchase from the French seemed to certify America’s great experiment in republicanism had won God’s favor. “The whole continent of North America,” John Quincy Adams wrote his father in 1811, “appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles.”¹⁴

Belief in American exceptionalism, yet the utter inability to reconcile it with slavery followed the new nation into the 19th century. Thomas Paine was a founding member of America’s first anti-slavery society because of his belief that Americans could not be for liberty for themselves and “men-stealers” at the same time. Every slave, he insisted, “is the proper owner of his freedom, and has a right to reclaim it.”

There was something fundamentally hypocritical of Americans who “complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them,” Paine explained, “while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery and annually enslave many thousands more.” America could never be a “redeemer” nation until it dealt justly with “these injured people!” Quaker pamphleteer David Cooper argued now was the time for action “to demonstrate to Europe and to the whole world that America was in earnest and meant what she said, that all mankind came from their Creator equally free.” He warned his fellow countrymen that “as you disdained to submit to the unlimited control of others, you must equally abhor the crying crime of holding your fellow men, as much entitled to freedom as yourselves, the subjects of your undisputed will and pleasure.”¹⁵

Jonathan Edwards had hoped America’s spiritual excitement would lead “whole nations to be awakened,” creating a coming kingdom, where black and white alike would be equal. His grandson Theodore Dwight spent a career in journalism agitating for the end to slavery. “A nation which has led the rest of the world to the consideration of freedom,” Dwight argued in 1794, could not claim its own freedom as long as “the slavery of Negroes is still suffered to exist.” Noah Webster, who had helped Dwight organize the Connecticut Society for the Abolition of Slavery, went on to found New York City’s first daily newspaper, the *American Minerva*. He knew slavery to be “a great sin, but it is not our sin.” He did not think the North could “legally interfere with the South on this subject,” while seeing no contradiction to celebrate in 1802 the 26th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence as a triumph of “natural rights.” It was a victory that should be seen in “the experience of four or five thousand years, and numberless forms of government,” he felt certain, before which the glories of ancient Greece and Rome paled in comparison. “The great secret was reserved for America to discover,” the great educator argued, “a system of government that has eluded all forms of inquiry and nowhere been suffered to prevail but in

America.” This was the message Webster urged educators to impart on younger Americans learning about their collective past, starting with his widely used three volume *Grammatical Institute of the English Language*.¹⁶

Webster’s contemporary Horace Mann, an early leader in the public school movement, believed America’s moral mission had to start with freeing the slaves. They as much as any man had the same rights and must have “an equal chance for earning and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earn.” That was why Mann knew of “no evil as great as slavery” and no greater contradiction to the idea of America itself. Historian Julian Boyd argues that men in Mann’s era believed their preferred form of government might be extended to other nations not through “imperialistic force” but in its appeal to the mind of men seeking their own liberty. Historian Anders Stephanson has argued America’s republican example was bought at a terrible cost and was perpetuated by the proceeds from slavery. That injustice was America’s fundamental contradiction, historian Drew McCoy has noted. A nation committed to republican virtue also sanctioned inequality and poverty.¹⁷

John O’Sullivan, an American columnist and expansionist descended from a long line of Irish expatriates, grappled with this contradiction. He favored “the disappearance of slavery from the present Slave States,” leading to “the ultimate disappearance of the Negro race from our borders.” As America expanded to the southwest he urged the relocation of slaves to Mexico and further south to Central America. He admitted any proposed solution to the problem of slavery risked “exciting or embittering” either side. He urged Northerners and Southerners to realize America had the potential to be “the great nation of futurity. We are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of individual enfranchisement.” Peacefully solving the problem of slavery offered a “boundless future of American greatness.” America would be recog-

nized as “a nation of many nations, chosen for a blessed mission to the nations of the world.” It was “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” O’Sullivan was certain that in a hundred years “our numbers swell to the enormous population of two hundred and fifty millions, or three hundred millions, destined to gather beneath the flutter of the stars and stripes in the fast hastening year of the Lord 1945!” On that day, communication will unite “Oregon and California to Washington, with editors of the *San Francisco Union* and the *Astoria Evening Post*” reporting in the same moment it took for the words of the President’s Inaugural to fade from “the lofty porch of the Capitol.” All this progress would leave no “doubt of the manifest design of Providence in regard to the occupation of this continent.”¹⁸

O’Sullivan’s optimism undergirds George Bancroft’s celebratory ten-volume *History of the United States*. Like Mann and O’Sullivan, Bancroft labored in government to make his vision of American exceptionalism a reality. He became navy secretary in President James Polk’s war cabinet that defeated Mexico and expanded westward “the area of freedom.” Bancroft saw it repeating the Puritan pattern of “taking possession of the wilderness.” Walt Whitman, writing an approving editorial in the July 7, 1846, edition of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, heartily concurred. Whitman could find no alternative to the annexation of the northern half of Mexico. It would inevitably lead to “the increase of human happiness and liberty. What has miserable, inefficient Mexico, with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many, what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the new world with a noble race? Be it ours to achieve that mission!” Like Whitman, Bancroft personally opposed slavery but embraced white paternalism, convincing himself “masters perform the office of advancing and civilizing the Negro,” it leading to “the marked progress of the Negro American.” This inability to transcend the racial

attitudes of their time, historian Seymour Martin Lipset has written, shows the difficulty of American intellectuals in squaring a commitment to “equality and achievement” with the realities of slavery. It mitigated, according to public intellectual and commentator Reinhold Niebuhr, a widely shared “messianic consciousness” in America that it was “the initiator and bearer of the principles of constitutional democracy.” It was, however, that consciousness that made America in the minds of Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan “the last best hope of earth.”¹⁹

Lincoln came to see the scourge of the Civil War as a kind of national cleansing. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation, effective January 1, 1863, freeing three million slaves, without giving them citizenship rights. At Gettysburg on November 19, 1863, Lincoln took the next step. The war had not been about merely saving the old Union, but through that sacrifice creating a new nation that lived up to its central story “that all men are created equal,” requiring “a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Bancroft recognized the historical importance of the statement and received from the President a hand written copy of the speech. In his Second Inaugural Address given six weeks before his assassination, Lincoln noted both North and South “deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.” Ralph Waldo Emerson saw the war as Lincoln did, as a necessary renewal. The successful prosecution of the Civil War ensured “the best civilization will be extended over the whole country.” The post-war period anticipated “a new and exceptional age,” Emerson argued, where America became “another word for Opportunity.” That future would confirm the nation’s central story, how “our whole history appears like a last effort of the Divine Providence in behalf of the human race.”²⁰

Woodrow Wilson similarly saw war as a purifying chapter in

America's exceptional story. "America had the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world," the president gloated after America's entrance into the Great War against Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire helped end the conflict at the cost of a third of a million American casualties. "We went in just in time," he told crowds, hoping to persuade them to support his League of Nations to preserve worldwide peace. "American soldiers saved the liberties of the world." It made America "a determining factor in the history of mankind." *Harper's Weekly*, the self-proclaimed "journal of civilization," captured the enthusiasm nicely in a cover depicting a classroom of unruly children receiving instruction in "Uncle Sam's new class in the art of self-government."²¹

Wilson's war "to make the world safe for democracy" curtailed it at home. Two thousand one hundred and sixty-eight individuals were charged under the Espionage Act, and 1,050 were convicted. Emma Goldman, publisher of *Mother Earth*, was sentenced to two years in prison for her published opposition to American participation in "European mass-murder" that would kill 17 million and wound 20 million others. How could America "make the world safe for democracy," she argued, when she had not "made democracy safe in America?" Victor Berger, editor and publisher of the *Milwaukee Leader*, was given a twenty-year jail sentence because of his opposition to the war. Wisconsin Senator Robert Marion La Follette, whose great-grandfather had fought in America's Revolutionary War, opposed going to war and was vilified for it. As editor of the widely read *La Follette's Weekly*, he observed it was "the poor who are the ones called upon to rot in the trenches, and have no press to voice their will." Wilson charged La Follette was the leader of "a little group of willful men, representing no opinion but their own." Cover art of *Life* magazine showed the German Kaiser pinning a medal on La Follette's chest. "Never in all my many years' experience in the House and in the Senate have I heard so much

democracy preached," La Follette wrote, "and so little practiced as during the last few months."²²

Public intellectual Randolph Bourne, writing in the *New Republic* and *Atlantic Monthly*, lamented, "One has a sense of having come to a sudden, short stop at the end of an intellectual era." The public is daily "flooded with the sewage of the war spirit. War is the health of the state." H. L. Mencken saw the Great War as a sorry stain on the story of American exceptionalism and "personal freedom. The liberty of the citizens has pretty well vanished in America," he noted. "In two or three years, if the thing goes on, every third American will be a spy upon his fellow-citizens."²³

In times of crisis the nation's leaders and those who carefully constructed its news rallied around their common understanding of American exceptionalism. In the midst of the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the erection of the Statue of Liberty by acknowledging Grover Cleveland's previous promise "we will not forget that liberty has here made her home." Roosevelt also saw America as "mankind's second chance." Here, "liberty of conscience, liberty of speech, liberty of the person, and liberty of economic opportunity" fed "the dream of a better life," Roosevelt told his fellow Americans on October 28, 1936, who were listening over radio. American history proved "Providence did prepare this American continent to be a place of the second chance." When war again came, Roosevelt greatly aided by the press, articulated four fundamental freedoms America would fight to preserve — freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These Four Freedoms are engraved on Roosevelt's memorial wall on the National Mall and became the basis of four famous covers on consecutive weeks in the midst of war by Norman Rockwell for *Saturday Evening Post*.²⁴

In the new millennium, story-telling platforms rapidly expanded over the internet producing an eruptive, participatory democracy that

Franklin might well have welcomed. The lapsing, however, of the monopoly over knowledge that newspapers and broadcasters had once enjoyed, created a wild west where there was little consensus on what America's central story was. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 seemed to signal the collapse of the Soviet Union, while creating an opportunity for a "New World Order" that might well imitate America's exceptional story. Instead, Americans learned on September 11, 2001, the world was more complex and threatening than their stories had told them. Nearly two decades later, America remained embroiled in wars on terror across multiple continents.

Andy Rooney, a commentator for CBS News, had heard the radio rise of Franklin Roosevelt and lived to see the election of Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president. Rooney saw the 2008 election as an exercise in American exceptionalism. "I'm a proud American," he told viewers of *60 Minutes*, long the nation's most popular news show, "but I'm embarrassed by our loud-mouthed insistence we are the greatest nation in the world, even though I think it's true." What pleased Rooney about Obama's election was his sense that it had overcome the bigotry and prejudice that had defined so much of America's past. "The fact that the citizens of this country, 80 per cent of whom are white, freely chose to elect a black man as their leader simply because they thought he was the best choice, makes me think that we have every right to be proud of ourselves." Rooney's remarks echoed Obama's own on Election Night in Chicago's Grant Park, the scene of a shocking student protest seen on television forty years before over the Vietnam War. On November 4, 2008, the President-elect could tell his supporters and millions more watching television, cable and the internet that "if there's anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dreams of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."²⁵

Eight years later, however, the unexpected victory of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton, the first woman ever nominated for president by a major party, seemed to put the lie, in the minds of some cultural critics, “to the folk theory of democracy” that rested in the Enlightenment understanding “that citizens make intelligent and coherent policy decisions on which governments then act” or that there was anything “exceptional” in those actions. Those historians, however, who see something exceptional in America’s past appreciate there is much more to America’s central story than its critics admit. David Wrobel notes many immigrants “continue coming to the United States as a place of promise and improvement.” Pulitzer Prize winner Gordon Wood from Brown University believes that hope is not misplaced. In *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* Wood maintains America’s “beliefs in liberty, equality, constitutionalism, and the well-being of ordinary people came out of the Revolutionary era. So too did our idea that we Americans are a special people with a special destiny to lead the world toward liberty and democracy.” That appeal across several centuries, emeritus professor Charles Dunn finds, still “motivates people worldwide to become American citizens.”²⁶

John Kennedy is one of those who embraced America’s unique role in the world. On September 12, 1962, the President told fellow Americans of the founding of the Plymouth Bay Colony in 1620. “William Bradford said that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties,” Kennedy observed, “and must be overcome with answerable courage.” Despite the new nation’s many struggles in creating a more just society, it was that courage that “rode the first waves of the industrial revolution, the first waves of modern invention, and the first wave of nuclear power.” That was why the country now chose “to go the moon in this decade, and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” The country had set its sights on the New Frontier of space, “not to see it governed by a hostile flag of

conquest,” Kennedy said, “but by a banner of freedom and peace.” That same sentiment was expressed by Ronald Reagan the night he accepted his party’s nomination for president. “Can we doubt,” he told the delegates and television viewers nationwide, “that only a Divine Providence placed this land — this island of freedom — here as a refuge for all those in the world who yearned to breathe free?”²⁷

Nearly four decades later, Pew Center researcher Andrew Kohut finds “individualism, self-reliance and unflinching optimism” remain central elements to American exceptionalism. Other nations are unique in their own way, Kohut claims, “but American exceptionalism is important because U. S. power and influence are exceptional.” In his televised farewell address to the nation on January 10, 2017, President Obama celebrated America’s ongoing “bold experiment in democracy.” He echoed Jefferson’s assertion of 241 years before that the nation remained committed to “the conviction that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The pursuit of that “more perfect union” was “the great gift our Founders gave us. The freedom to chase our individual dreams” is “what we mean when we say America is exceptional.” America’s story was not a succession of perfect scenes but instead followed a different text, one that showed the country’s continuing “capacity to change, and make life better for those who follow.”²⁸

Benjamin Franklin shared Obama’s enthusiasm for this kind of American exceptionalism, based on the role of the press in encouraging an engaged citizenry. At the close of the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1787, Franklin at age 81 admitted to misgivings over America’s difficult beginning in achieving a liberal democracy. “I confess that I do not entirely approve of this Constitution at present,” he told fellow delegates. Franklin urged critics “to doubt a little of their own infallibility.” He would support the governing document of the new

nation “with all its faults.” Its unfolding story would inevitably include “the prejudices, passions, errors of opinion, local interests and selfish views.” Franklin saw, however, no better way in giving liberty a fighting chance. Therefore, “I consent to this Constitution because I expect no better,” he concluded, “and because I am not sure that it is the best.” This, however, is not the end of the story. As the old man left Philadelphia’s Independence Hall on September 18, 1787, the last day of the convention, Franklin was approached by a Mrs. Powel of Philadelphia. The proceedings had been closed to the public. Guards had been posted at the door. Its actions had been in secret. Quarreling over the constitution would be in public through its press. “Well, Dr. Franklin,” she asked him, “What have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” The great printer presumably replied, “A republic, if you can keep it.” As a veteran editor, Franklin chose his word wisely. “Res publica,” or “the public thing,” requires, as he well understood, a press to report and a public that acts on what they need to know. That relationship was and remains exceptional.²⁹

America in the minds of Americans is a memory of selected scenes from our collective past. The scenes and the sense of these scenes are largely authored by journalists who are in the meaning making business. Their story-telling helps explain America to Americans. Franklin well understood this too. Late in a long life of public service in one of his last letters, the old editor looked to a future where America’s exceptional experiment in democracy might be extended to every country. “God grant that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man, may pervade all the nations of the earth,” the old man wrote, “so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say, ‘this is my country!’”³⁰

NOTES

¹ Perry Miller describes the “Americanization” of the Puritans on pp. 8-9 of

his *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1956).

² The Fox News Poll is posted at www.foxnews.com/politics/interactive/2017/06/30/fox-news-poll-read-full-poll-results-here.html. Charles Krauthammer's comments were made on Fox News Channel's *Special Edition* on June 30, 2017. Compare to Robert J. Lieber, *Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why the United States Is Not Destined to Decline* (New York: Cambridge University, 2012), 59-64.

³ The case for studying "American exceptionalism" appears in the epilogue to David M. Wrobel's *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 143-146. Sacvan Bercovitch's use of rhetorical analysis in examining American exceptionalism appears in his preface to *The American Jeremiah* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978). Donald Pease's critique of American exceptionalism as a "fantasy" appears in an introduction to *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), particularly pp. 8-9 and 14 and in his chapter, "American Studies after American Exceptionalism? Toward a Comparative Analysis of Imperial State Exceptionalisms," on pp. 47-83 of *Globalizing American Studies*, edited by Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and published by the University of Chicago in 2010.

Sylvia Soderlind's "The Shining of America" is the introduction to *American Exceptionalisms: from Winthrop to Winfrey*, a book she co-edited with James Taylor Carson for Albany's State University of New York Press in 2011, pp. 1-14. Justin Litke's examination is found on pp. 145-154 of his book *Twilight of the Republic* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013). Andrew Bacevich's argument can be found on pp. 7-13 of his *The Limits of Power: the End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008). Godfrey Hodgson's analysis about the dangerous hubris of "American exceptionalism" is summarized in the preface to his *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University, 2009). Also consider Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1031-1055; the first chapter, "The Birth and Death of American History" to David Noble's *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002); and Amy Kaplan, "The Tenacious Grasp of American Exceptionalism," in *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 2 (Spring 2004): 153-159.

⁴ See Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, 1690-1872* (New York: Harper, 1873); George H. Payne, *History of Journalism in the United States* (New York: D. Appleton, 1920); Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927); Alfred McClung

Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1937); Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: a History of Newspapers in the United States through 260 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941); Edwin Emery, *The Press and America; an Interpretative History of Journalism* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1954); Jean Folkerts and Dwight Teeter, Jr., *Voices of a Nation: a History of Mass Media in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1989); and Wm. David Sloan, *The Media in America: a History*, 10th ed. (Northport, Ala.: Vision Press, 2017).

⁵ The text for John Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity (1630)" first appeared in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, printed in Boston in 1838 by Charles C. Little and James Brown. See volume 7 of the 3rd series on pp. 31-48. The phrase "wee shall be a citty upon a hill," appears on p. 47. Hugh J. Dawson's analysis of the text appears in "John Winthrop's Rite of Passage: The Origins of the 'Christian Charitie' Discourse," *Early American Literature* 26 (December 1991), 219-231. Abram C. Van Engen's article "Origins and Last Farewells: Bible Wars, Textual Form, and the Making of American History," is published in *New England Quarterly* 86 (December 2013), 543-592.

⁶ Jack P. Greene's quote is on page 3 of his *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993). That Utopians are "guided by the law of nature" appears on p. 110 of the 1912 edition of Macmillan's *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More* with introduction and notes from William Dallam Armes. John Rolfe's *True Relation of the State of Virginia* is republished in the June 1839 edition of the *Southern Literary Messenger* under the title, "Interesting Account of Virginia, in 1617," on pp. 401-406.

The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence took its inspiration from John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, a book first published in the United States in 1773 by Benjamin Edes and John Gill of the *Boston Gazette*. Section six of chapter two, "Of the State of Nature," in the second treatise argues "the law of nature teaches all mankind, that being all equal and independent," government should protect "the life, health, liberty and possessions" of all men. Section 142 of chapter 11, "Of the Extent of the Legislative Power" makes the case for no power to tax "without the consent of the governed." Thomas Jefferson's application of Locke's work on liberty is the subject of Jack P. Greene, *All Men Are Created Equal!: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Locke's assertion that "in the beginning the world was America" is discussed on pp. 318-320 of Peter Laslett second edition on the treatises, published by Cambridge in 1970. See the analysis of Herman Lebovics, "The Uses of America in Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil*

Government," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (October-December 1986): 567-581.

Daniel Defoe's advocacy for religious liberty in South Carolina is analyzed in John W. Brinsfield, "Daniel Defoe: Writer, Statesman, and Advocate of Religious Liberty in South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 76 (July 1975), 107-111. His quote on the importance of slavery in America appears in the preface of Dennis Todd's book *Defoe's America* (New York: Cambridge University, 2010). John Nairne's quote comes from his pamphlet "A Letter from South Carolina," and appears in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Selling a New World: Two Colonial South Carolina Promotional Pamphlets* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1989), 65-66. David Hume's insight in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, first published in 1739, appears in L. A. Shelby-Bigge, ed., *Hume's Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 563-565.

⁷ Benjamin Franklin's prescient prediction of America's population doubling every quarter century appears in his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, written in 1751 and published in Boston in 1755 by S. Kneeland. Jonathan Edwards muses about America's material and spiritual abundance in item 147 of his manuscript *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, edited by Perry Miller, and published by Yale University Press in 1948. See his text, "The Latter-Day Glory Is probably to begin in America," on pp. 55-59 of *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, edited by Conrad Cherry for Prentice-Hall in 1971.

⁸ Adam Smith's analysis of American prosperity appears in his classic study, *The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. See pp. 560-575 of Roy Harold Campbell and Adam S. Skinner, eds., *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, Vol. 2, an Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1976). For Smith's certainty of America's future might, see Robert Heilbroner, ed., *The Essential Adam Smith* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 278-280. Smith's lectures, first given on Feb. 15 and Feb. 16, 1763, on slavery, appear in Spencer J. Pack, "Slavery, Adam Smith's Economic Vision and the Invisible Hand," *History of Economic Ideas* 4 (1996): 253-269. Edmund Burke's speech on "Conciliation with the Colonies" is found on pp. 464-471 of Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987).

⁹ Thomas Paine's 48-page pamphlet *Common Sense* was first printed in Philadelphia by R. Bell in 1776. "The birthday of a new world" quote appears in the appendix of the third edition. Paine's explanation of how he succeeded in publishing *The American Crisis* in Dec. 1776 is discussed on p. 1230 of the second volume of Philip Sheldon Foner's 1945 edition of *The Complete Writings of*

Thomas Paine, published by New York's Citadel Press. Jett Conner's post in *Journal of the American Revolution* on Jan. 4, 2016 summarizes the role of newspapers in publishing *The American Crisis*. It can be accessed at allthingsliberty.com/2016/01/a-brief-publication-history-of-the-times-that-try-mens-souls/. The excerpt that was published in the *Pennsylvania Packet* appears on pp. 347-352 in *Selections from Early American Writers, 1607-1800*, edited by William B. Cairns for Macmillan in 1909.

¹⁰ "What Is an American?" is the third and most famous of Michel-Guillaume de Crevecoeur's twelve letters written between 1770 and 1778 and first appearing in 1782 as *Letters from an American Framer*, published in London by Davies & Davis.

¹¹ Nicolas de Condorcet's comments appear in *The Influence of the American Revolution on Europe*, first published in 1783. See Durand Echeverria, "Condorcet's 'The Influence of the American Revolution on Europe,'" *William and Mary Quarterly* 25 (January 1968): 85-108 and Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1992), 81-90. The comments by Abbe Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal appear on pp. 171-174 of his book, *The Revolution of America*, published in London by Lockyer, Davis and Holburn in 1781.

Alexis de Tocqueville's take on the "exceptional" nature of Americans, arising from their "Puritanical origin" that created a nation of "readers" is found in the ninth chapter, "The Example of the Americans Does Not Prove that a Democratic People Can Have No Aptitude and No Taste for Science, Literature, or Art" from the second volume of his *Democracy in America*, originally translated by Henry Reeve in 1840, with Arthur Goldhammer's translation from 2004, now widely seen as authoritative. Welsh cleric and pamphleteer Richard Price first published *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and the Policy of War with America* in 1776. The quote on the progressive development of mankind appears on pp. 182-183 of his *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution and the Means of Making It a Benefit to the World*, first published in London in 1785 by T. Cadell.

¹² Alexander Hamilton's first federalist paper, published under the pseudonym "Publius" appeared in *The Independent Journal* on Oct. 27, 1787. A copy of the first federalist essay is at www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The-Federalist-Papers#TheFederalistPapers-1. An analysis of Hamilton's understanding of America as a republican empire appears in Karl-Friedrich Walling's *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Michael J. Rosano's "Liberty, Nobility, Philanthropy and Power in Alexander Hamilton's Conception of Human

Nature," *American Journal of Political Science* 47 (January 2003): 61-74; and Michael I. Meyerson, *Liberty's Blueprint: How Madison and Hamilton Wrote the Federalist Papers, Defined the Constitution, and Made Democracy Safe for the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2008). The Federalist Papers as instruments in telling the nation's central story is probed in Charles R. Kesler's *Saving the Revolution: the Federalist Papers and the American Founding* (New York: Free Press, 1987). American mindedness on its expansive future is examined in Max M. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1783-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014).

¹³ George Washington's first inaugural address, given on Apr. 30, 1789, is posted by the National Archives at www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html. The comments by John Adams first appeared in a series of four articles, published in the *Boston Gazette* on Aug. 12 and Aug. 19, 1765, and on Sept. 30 and Oct. 21 of that year. See the digitized collection at rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=ADMS-print-06-01-02-0052&mode=TOC as well as Robert J. Taylor, ed., *The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams, Vol. 1, September 1755-October 1773* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1977), 101-118.

¹⁴ An examination of Thomas Jefferson's understanding of America as an "Empire of Liberty" and his critics can be found in Julian P. Boyd, "Thomas Jefferson's 'Empire of Liberty,'" *Virginia Quarterly Review* 24 (1948): 538-554. Boyd is the editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Volume 8 (Princeton: Princeton University, 1950), which includes on p. 22 Jefferson's Mar. 21, 1801 letter to Joseph Priestley. Jefferson's letter to James Monroe on American expansion, written on Nov. 24, 1801, is analyzed on pp. 160-162 of Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: the Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University, 1990). His letter to Eldridge Gerry on Jan. 26, 1799 praising "the unquestionable republicanism of the American mind" appears on p. 83 of *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 9*, edited by Albert Ellery Bergh for the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association in 1907. Jefferson's statement about American exceptionalism as "the march of civilization" appears in his Sept. 6, 1824 letter to William Ludlow, appearing on pp. 75-76 of *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 16*, also edited by Bergh for the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association in 1907. Jefferson's First Inaugural Address appears on pp. 134-152 of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 33: 17 February to 30 April 1801* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006).

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The comment by John Quincy Adams to his father about the nation's destiny appears in volume 4, pp. 208-210 of *Writings of John Quincy Adams, 1811-1813*, edited by Worthington Chauncey Ford for Macmillan in 1914.

¹⁵ Thomas Paine's essay, titled, "African Slavery in America," first appeared in the Mar. 8, 1775 edition of the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*. It was reprinted on pp. 4-9 of Moncure Daniel Conway, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894). The admonition of David Cooper that America live out its principles of freedom is articulated in *To the Rulers of America on the Inconsistency of Their Conduct Respecting Slavery, Forming a Contrast between the Encroachments of England on American Liberty, and American Injustice in Tolerating Slavery* (London: J. Phillips, 1783), 6-7.

¹⁶ The ambivalence of Jonathan Edwards over slavery and its relationship to America's millennial role is probed in Nathan O. Hatch's introduction to *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University, 1977) and Kenneth P. Minkema, "Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (October 1997): 823-834. Theodore Dwight's *An Oration, Spoken before the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage* was published in 1794 by Hudson and Goodwin of Hartford, CT.

Noah Webster's *An Oration Pronounced before the Citizens of New Haven: on the Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July, 1802* was published in New Haven by William W. Morse in 1802. Webster's comment on slavery appears in Silvia Florea's "Lessons from the Heart and Hearth of Colonial Philadelphia: Reflections on Education, as Reflected in Colonial Era Cor-

respondence to Wives,” *Americana* 4 (Fall 2010). Webster’s educational materials went through nearly 400 editions during his lifetime. An early success was *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, published in Philadelphia in 1787 by Young and McCulloch.

¹⁷ Horace Mann’s sentiment about equality appears in his 1848 study, “Intellectual Education as a Means of Removing Poverty and Securing Abundance,” and appears on p. 246 of *Life and Works of Horace Mann, Volume 4*, edited by Felix Pecant for Lee and Shepard Publishers in Boston in 1891. Mann’s statement on slavery came on Feb. 6, 1850 and can be found on p. 288 of Mary Tyler Peabody Mann’s *Life of Horace Mann*, published in 1865 by Boston’s Walker, Fuller. See also, Anders Stephanson’s prologue to his *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995). Drew R. McCoy describes the limits of republicanism in creating a civil society on pp. 253-259 of *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980).

¹⁸ John O’Sullivan’s essay “The Great Nation of Futurity” appears on pp. 426-430 of Volume 6, issue 23 of *The United States Democratic Review*. The essay in the July-August 1845 issue of the *Review* (Vol. 17, issue 85, pp. 5-10), on manifest destiny is attributed to O’Sullivan and Jane Cazneau Storm. An excellent summary is found in Robert D. Sampson, *John L. O’Sullivan and His Times* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 2002).

¹⁹ George Bancroft’s confidence in the palliative effects of slavery is expressed on pp. 406-409 of his *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent, Volume III* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841). See the analysis of William P. Leeman, “George Bancroft’s Civil War: Slavery, Abraham Lincoln, and the Course of History,” *New England Quarterly* 81 (September 2008): 462-488; Yonatan Eyal, “George Bancroft: Brief Life of a Public Historian, 1800-1891,” *Harvard Magazine* 110 (May-June 2008): 38-39; and Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009), 168-186.

The observation by Reinhold Niebuhr appears on pp. 12-13 of his book *A Nation so Conceived: Reflections on the History of America from Its Early Visions to Its Present Power* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), co-written with Alan Heimert. See introductions of Seymour Martin Lipset’s *The First New Nation: the United States in Historical & Comparative Perspective* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973) and *American Exceptionalism: a Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

²⁰ Lincoln’s executive action designating “all persons held as slaves within

any State, or designated part of a State” still in rebellion against the United States by Jan. 1, 1863 “shall be then, thence forward, and forever free,” was published on Sept. 23, 1862 in the *National Republican*, based in Washington, and launched to promote Lincoln’s presidency. The exact text of the Bancroft copy of the Gettysburg Address, now held at Cornell University is posted at rmc.library.cornell.edu/Gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm. The text of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address is at www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?=38&page=transcript. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s remarks on Jan. 31, 1862 at Washington’s Smithsonian Institution were published under the title, “American Civilization,” in volume 9 of *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, published by Boston’s Houghton Mifflin in 1904.

²¹ Woodrow Wilson’s words about America as “a determining factor in the history of mankind” were made in a Sept. 6, 1919 address in Des Moines, Iowa and appear on pp. 60-62 of *Addresses of President Wilson: Addresses Delivered by President Wilson on His Western Tour, September 4 to September 25, 1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919). Wilson’s observations on “the liberties of the world” were made in an address on Sept. 24, 1919 in Cheyenne, WY, appearing on pp. 335-346. Wilson’s war message is available at “President Wilson’s Declaration of War Message to Congress, April 2, 1917: Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46; National Archives.

²² Emma Goldman’s advocacy in *Mother Earth* is summarized in Peter Glassgold, ed., *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001). Her quote opposing war comes from “The Promoters of the War Mania” and appears on p. 5 of the March 1917 edition of *Mother Earth*. Victor Berger’s account of his struggle with war-time censorship appears in his *Voice and Pen of Victor L. Berger: Congressional Speeches and Editorials* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Leader, 1929). The *Life* magazine cover art depicting Robert La Follette being decorated by the Kaiser appeared on Dec. 13, 1917. An excellent book on the background of *LaFollette’s Weekly*, which in 1929 became *The Progressive*, is Matthew Rothschild’s *Democracy in Print* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2009).

²³ Randolph Silliman Bourne’s contribution to anti-war sedition is chronicled in James Oppenheim, ed., *Untimely Papers* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919) and Van Wyck Brooks, ed., *The History of a Literary Radical* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1920). See also H. L. Mencken’s essay “On Liberty,” on pp. 74-75 of Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, ed., *The Impossible H. L. Mencken: a Selection of His Best Newspaper Stories* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

²⁴ Franklin Roosevelt’s remarks of Oct. 28, 1936 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Statue of Liberty appear on pp. 540-544 of *The Public Papers and Addresses*

of *Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume Five, The People Approve, 1936* (New York: Random House, 1938). Research on the evolution of Franklin Roosevelt's ideas on the four freedoms speech and their significance in rhetorically framing the war is at <https://fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms>. For background, see Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: Viking, 1946), 279-284 and Laura Crowell, "The Building of the 'Four Freedoms' Speech," *Speech Monographs* 22 (November 1955): 266-283. Norman Rockwell's interpretation of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech is analyzed in Stuart Murray, James McCabe and John Frohnmayer, *Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, Freedom from Fear* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1998); Laura P. Claridge, *Norman Rockwell: a Life* (New York: Random House, 2001), 303-314; and Deborah Solomon, *American Mirror: the Life and Art of Norman Rockwell* (New York: Farrar, Giroux and Straus, 2014), 201-220.

²⁵ The full transcript of Barack Obama's Nov. 4, 2008 victory speech in Grant Park is posted at abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=6181477.

²⁶ Gordon S. Wood's introduction to *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York: Penguin, 2011) examines exceptionalism in light of the central values of the American republic. See also his *Empire of Liberty: a History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University, 2009). Charles W. Dunn's observations appear in the introduction to his edited book, *American Exceptionalism: The Origins, History, and Future of the Nation's Greatest Strength* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

²⁷ John Kennedy's speech on Sept. 12, 1962 is at <https://er.jsc.nasa.gov/seh/ricetalk.htm>. Ronald Reagan's acceptance speech on July 17, 1980 at the Republican National Convention is posted at reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/7.17.80.html.

²⁸ Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes use polling data in their quantitative analysis of American exceptionalism in their conclusion to *America against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 220-225. Barack Obama's farewell address is posted at www.nytimes.com/2017/01/10/us/politics/obama-farewell-address-speech.html?_r=0. Compare this to the introductions of James Oliver Robertson's *American Myth, American Reality* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980) and Jon Meacham's *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

²⁹ James Madison's account of Benjamin Franklin's final speech at the Constitutional Convention is cited in the fourth volume of his writings that were edited by Gaillard Hunt in a seven volume set, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons between 1900 and 1910 under the title, *The Writings of James Madison*,

Comprising His Public Papers and His Correspondence, including Numerous Letters and Documents Now for the First Time Printed. The conversation between Benjamin Franklin and the anxious citizen is summarized by Dr. James McHenry, one of the Maryland delegates to the Constitutional Convention. It appears in Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University, 1937). Franklin's comment made early appearances in the *Baltimore Republican* of July 15, 1803 and the *Salem, Massachusetts Gazette* of Oct. 1, 1811. One of the early academic considerations of the quote appears in the eleventh volume of the *American Historical Review* in 1906, which prints on page 618 a summary of McHenry's notes on the convention.

³⁰ Franklin's Dec. 4, 1789 letter to his friend David Hartley appears on pp. 232-233 of *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, Vol. 6 (Philadelphia: William Duane, 1809).

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Historical Roundtable: Studying Media and Religion

By John P. Ferré, Tona J. Hangen,
Peter G. Horsfield, and Mark R. Silk ©



Ferré

From the Gutenberg Bible to the tweets of Pope Francis, religion has always had a strong presence in popular media. Some contemporary scholars have argued that media shape how people think about God. Others show that media framing of religious groups affects how those groups are treated. Studies of mediatization suggest that changes in the meaning and authority of religion have everything to do with how religion adapts to the characteristics and constraints of media.

The best of these studies are historical. Most readers of this journal will be familiar with Elizabeth Eisenstein's monumental study, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, which, among other things, showed how the printing press influenced religious thought, organization, and experience. They may be less familiar with the significant contributions of the three participants in our roundtable discussion. *Unsecular Media* by Mark Silk used journalism history effectively to answer press critics who complained that American news media are anti-religion. *Redeeming the Dial* by Tona Hangen explained how evangelical revivalists adapted to broadcasting so well that they paved the way for the emergence of the Religious Right. And *From Jesus to the Internet* by Peter Horsfield showed that media were central to the evolution of Christianity from a

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Hangen

local itinerant movement to a diverse global enterprise.

In this roundtable, Tona Hangen, Peter Horsfield, and Mark Silk reflect on the state of historical research in media and religion.

Ferré: *Why is the history of religion and media important today?*



Horsfield

Silk: It's important because of the advent of digital media. A few decades ago, Elizabeth Eisenstein argued for — and perhaps somewhat overstated — the crucial importance of printing in shaping religion in the West in a wide range of ways. As she made clear, printing opened Western minds to an array of religious possibilities, encouraged fundamentalist movements, and facilitated persecution of “others,” be they witches or Jews. The new digital environment is changing the reli-



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Silk

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Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America.

Peter G. Horsfield was formerly professor of communication at RMIT University in Australia. His latest book is From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media.

Mark R. Silk is Director of the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life and Professor of the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College. He wrote Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America and writes a biweekly column, Spiritual Politics, for the Religion News Service.

gious equation in ways we are only beginning to understand. The history of religion and media provides necessary context for understanding and evaluating the current situation.

Hangen: The history of media and religion remains critically underdeveloped and poorly understood in mainstream popular culture. Everything that matters has a history that matters. Religion flourishes in every available medium and in every era — this is all the more true as media are the dominant cultural forms of our own time. “Traditional” religion encompassed face-to-face ritual, material culture, print, and oral transmission through speech and song. As media have grown, including print, broadcast, digital, and social media, so too has religion’s reach and diversity. Every imaginable media platform and format has religious dimensions, both with intrinsic media affordances unique to that particular medium and consistent elements particular to that religion. I’d add that knowing the past of any practice deepens our understanding of it, and that goes for knowing how a religion has used media in the past, and also knowing a given medium’s history when it comes to religious expression.

Horsfield: The influence that media have on religious beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and practices has, until recently, been seen and studied largely as a modern issue. This focus has led to the distorted understanding that the changes taking place in social and institutional religion today are unique. If one applies a broader view of the mediation characteristics of communication as one of the essential aspects of social construction, it becomes apparent that religion, like every social phenomenon, is not simply a given but is constructed historically in the processes of being communicated. Looking at these social construction processes historically gives the more nuanced perspective that the changes currently under way are not unprecedented, but are continu-

ous with changes that have taken place in the past.

Ferré: *Why have you chosen the subjects you have for your own research? What have you hoped to accomplish through your own research in the field?*

Silk: My interest in the field has largely been confined to issues involving the news media and the representation of religion by journalists and commentators. The premise of my research is that journalism is an underutilized resource for social and cultural history in general, and for religious history in particular. With the digitization of newspapers and magazines, it is now possible to explore the journalism of the past far more quickly and efficiently — and inexpensively — than ever before. It's my belief that more than any other source material, journalism discloses the moral architecture of the past — the values and mores of a given time and place. Being able to integrate this material into religious history provides unparalleled insight into the contemporary understanding and reception of religious figures and movements.

Hangen: I've studied religious radio. I'm interested in how radio programming captured religious voices, shaped religious organizations, and informed American culture more broadly. The past of sound is a fascinating topic all its own — sometimes recording technology has allowed us to hear human interactions in real time, but the portion of the past captured using that technology is infinitesimal. I was particularly drawn to the historical moment that opened the era of mass broadcasting, and how that changed or preserved religious traditions. I was surprised to discover how the then-new technology of radio could be transformative, disruptive, and disorienting and simultaneously conservative, placing, and orienting. Religious radio scholarship had fallen into the intersection (or gap) between media studies and religious

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studies, and I hoped to remind scholars of media that religion matters, and remind scholars of religion that media matter. I remain interested in points of intersection between media, religion, and popular culture; the performance of religion in the public sphere; and the scholarly act of making historical subfields legible to one another.

To make a full confession here, studying how early twentieth-century Protestant religious separatists employed emerging new media to share their “old time gospel” message was a stealth way of looking peripherally at my own religious tradition (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormonism). The differences between these two religious families are important to the identity of both and shouldn’t be minimized, but there are certain structural and cultural similarities in the ways they employ (sometimes deploy) religious media that I could easily recognize as I pursued my research across denominational lines.

Horsfield: My interest in historical perspectives on media and religion was sparked a number of years ago when I ran workshops for church leaders and church workers on the impact of electronic media on contemporary society and contemporary religion. Participants resisted thinking about media in anything but negative or critical terms. In preparing for these workshops, I came across an article about a dispute in second-century Christianity over whether Christian teachings should be written down or not (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*). I found it most effective to begin my workshops not talking about modern media, but by exploring why some Christians in the second century were so reluctant to have their teachings written down, what were the consequences of what became the widespread use of writing in Christianity, and why there has been very little questioning of the validity of those consequences. While there has now been extensive research done on the contemporary interactions of media, religion, and culture, there have still been few studies of historical perspectives on media and reli-

gious change, and no one has tracked systematically the part media played in the development of a religious tradition. I decided to do that with Christianity — *From Jesus to the Internet* is the product of that research.

Ferré: *What changes have you seen in the history of religion and media during your career, and how would you characterize the state of religion and media history today?*

Silk: I would say that the major shift when it comes to the history of journalism is the defenestration of the Whig interpretation that saw journalism steadily becoming more professional, comprehensive, and objective. Some of the most interesting work being done today, to my mind, is in the examination of the ways information has been provided to those who required it outside the bounds of journalism as conventionally understood. My sense is that we are still in the beginning stages of exploiting journalistic sources and integrating them into the larger story of religion in society.

Hangen: In my career — which precisely bridged the birth of the internet and personal computers into the dizzying digital world of today — I've watched the emergence of new media with great interest for how they serve religion (and/or serve AS religion). There are new media for starters — internet, YouTube, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Snapchat, Pinterest, Reddit), virtual reality, gaming, streaming, subscription satellite, cable, niche media (e.g., the “long tail” of the web), LPFM local & microbroadcasting, podcasting, and Skype. To all of these new species, religion unsurprisingly and impressively has proven remarkably adaptive. And there are many new tools, methods, and approaches that could be borrowed from digital humanities, crowd-sourced research, and big data analysis to stimulate the study of reli-

gion and media.

The state of religion and media history is vibrant, but uneven. It is highly developed in some areas (theory, televangelism, history of the book, film, and television), but less developed in others (digital media, radio, anything outside American Christianity). The field's a little bit homeless — which has its advantages and disadvantages, as it wanders among conferences and journals in communication, religious studies, literary/rhetoric studies, cinema/film studies, business history, and popular culture. But on the plus side, that means religious media studies engage in ongoing conversations with diverse scholarly threads and have never suffered from being insular.

Horsfield: One of the interesting debates in historical research has been between micro- and long-term historical study. Throughout the twentieth century, with the growth of post-graduate research and the search for suitable new topics, the pressures of publication, and the postmodern suspicion of “grand narratives,” the trend in historical research has been towards greater and greater depth in shorter and shorter time periods and a focus on exceptional individuals or events. This shift towards a short or event view of the past has lost what had been a traditional purpose of historical research: to contribute perspectives of the long term to the public sphere in its thinking about current issues and the future. For many of these same reasons, much historical research on media and religion has focused on specific issues, particular media developments or media characters. A number of my earlier writings did this. In *From Jesus to the Internet*, I deliberately wanted to write a big picture, because I thought it was necessary to show not just big moments, but also the media's constant influence in the shaping of Christianity's development. I acknowledge in my Introduction that there's a risk in attempting something so broad and that it was likely to be open to criticism on every page by specialists who know the partic-

ulars of every instance better than I do. But I think the time was right for such a long-view study that the risk was worth it.

Ferré: *What frustrations have you encountered in your research?*

Silk: Personally, none — other than the usual ones of not having enough time to do it. I do think that the shrinkage of religion reporting within the context of the decline of journalism as understood in the late twentieth century has had the unfortunate effect of turning academic attention away from news coverage of religion. On the other hand, the history of journalism has become far more interesting in recent years.

Hangen: Mine is the common scholars' lament: paucity of evidence! Not enough from the past has been well-preserved and accessible in archives for scholarly use. For example, there's no archive or library devoted specifically to religious media. National Religious Broadcasters is a faith-based lobbying group uninterested in scholarly access to its resources and apparently not maintaining much of an archive of its membership and their work. Denominational archives didn't always preserve media artifacts; media archives weren't focused on collecting religious material. Much of the material I encountered during my initial research in the 1990s was, of course, not in digital formats, but that situation sadly hasn't improved much. Religious media aren't sexy enough for digital humanities or digitization projects (unlike, say, popular music or politics). They're often in obsolete formats not easily upgraded, like for example a flimsy plastic "record" included as a tear-out novelty in a 1970s religious magazine to be played on one's home stereo. A lot of the material I ended up using was purchased from amateur collectors through word of mouth or collectors' forums, having been pirated onto cassette tapes, with murky provenance and probably murky copyright law compliance. What is and isn't in the public domain when

it comes to radio broadcasting is unclear to begin with, and religious radio — often with its dual purpose of being a proselyting message to the world and, simultaneously, an expensive production needing constant revenue streams to continue — complicates this issue even further.

Conversely, however, when one considers how to research religious digital media, it's the opposite problem: too much data, with too little ability to locate, search across, analyze, and archive it. There are abundant digital riches but they often exist in unstable online environments vulnerable to paywalls, deletion, and alteration without evidence of change.

Horsfield: They're not frustrations so much as problems to be solved. The biggest one, and it's a problem with all long-term historical research, was working out how to handle the diversity of the topics involved. Christianity is massively diverse, and I chose to deal with it not through a narrow and restrictive lens of orthodoxy, but through the wide-angled lens of diversity and plurality. Similarly with media. Though the concept of "media" as diversified phenomena is a fairly modern concept, the things it covers — technologies, material artifacts, sensory experience, political, economic, and power relations, reception perspectives, etc. — operated in the same way historically as they do today. Working out how to handle this diversity took me a long time and a number of dead ends before I settled on a chronological structure to uncover the big picture of the development and cumulative effects of decisions made in one period on those that followed, and more detailed case studies to flesh out characteristics of each period and its dynamics. My hope is that other scholars will use this framework to locate more detailed studies.

Ferré: *What lessons have you learned while researching the history of*

religion and media?

Silk: The main lesson is that there's gold in them thar hills. More broadly, I'd say that, in the West, the history of religion is inextricably entwined with the history of media. It is impossible to understand the history of the book (a new and important area of study) apart from the history of Christianity. In this sense, we are, I believe, entering a Golden Age of religion-and-media historical study.

Hangen: One lesson I learned while researching religion and media is that there is a deep vein of nostalgia and affection for this topic, almost as deep and rich as the vein of suspicion, fear, and mistrust about religious media. I wasn't prepared for how much a part of personal, family, and spiritual lives religious broadcasting was and is, nor for how influential it proved on the shape and form of mass media and social media themselves.

Horsfield: For me the study of history is not just about the past; it's also about the present and the questions that our present confronts us with. The context of the present in this area has been the questions and debates arising from the growing interest in the contemporary interaction of media, religion, and culture and the changes that media are bringing to contemporary institutional and social religiosity. For me, the broad question has been, Is what is happening now different from what's happened in the past, or is it yet another manifestation of processes of change in human culture? The specific questions in my latest research were, Have media influenced the way in which Christianity has developed, and what have those influences been? The exciting thing when I set out was, though I had bits and pieces of ideas, I didn't know how they all fit together, so it was a genuine voyage of discovery.

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Ferré: *What new research in the history of religion and media would you like to see? That is, are there unanswered questions that need to be addressed?*

Silk: I'd like to see more focused studies on particular publications, along the lines of Elesha Coffman's study of *The Christian Century*. What's most important, to my mind, is the integration of sophisticated media studies into the more general historiography of society and culture.

Hangen: "Religion" is all too often shorthand for American Protestantism. We need much more work on the full spectrum of religious traditions and practices found today, especially world and non-Christian and hybrid traditions, and on the actual diversity of religious media. We also need more on how media interact, not just studying different media and messages in isolation from each other but as parts of holistic ecosystems of thought and cultural expression. We need more on now-obsolete forms and formats, more recovery of "lost stuff" — think filmstrips (a popular didactic medium in mid-twentieth-century Mormonism, for example), vinyl, cassette, floppy disk, piano and phonograph rolls, obsolete video formats, slides, even View-Master. Just to name a few....

Horsfield: Researching such a long history exposed me to a wide range of people, events, and phenomena that I could only touch on, but are worthy of deeper study and story-telling. For example, many people and movements were written out of the Christian story in the political processes of censorship and suppression that were part of creating an "official" version of Christianity. The history of Christianity will be quite different when those people and movements are seen not as ancillary to the main Christian tradition, but as an inherent part of it. I've also

come out of my study on media and religion with a greater awareness that “religion” is just one ideological way of addressing what really are essential, generic experiences that arise from our human existence together. In the historical development of civilizations, organized religion has been given primary responsibility for giving meaning to these dimensions of human experiences, to the extent that religious ideologies, institutions, and people have had an exaggerated power in society. While alternatives have been present, for historical reasons there has never fully developed an alternative secular language free of religious dogma for giving expression to these transcendental dimensions of our shared humanity. I’d like to see more research focused on that, including its persistence throughout history.

Ferré: *What advice would you offer to young scholars interested in researching the history of religion and media?*

Silk: My advice is to be historians first, communications scholars second. The important questions for our society require seeing media within a larger historical context. We are living in a time of media dominance like no other, but without the historian’s mode of interpreting reality, we will never adequately comprehend the significance of media in our time. Of course, this is an historian speaking.

Hangen: I think the default is still to think denominationally about religion and media. For those interested in these issues, I’d advise resisting this narrowness and instead think syncretically, thematically, and comparatively. We need scholars not to emerge out of the study of an individual religious tradition and look around for fruitful comparative opportunities but to research trajectories cutting across religious traditions from the outset.

Horsfield: I would remind young scholars of a quotation from the Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce: “The documents and other survivals of the past are dead to us until we ask them a question, until we want to know something from them.” So I’d suggest first, have a good question that engages you and recognize that the questions we most often ask of history are not so much about the past but about the present and our future, and that’s alright. A second would be, be open to serendipity. Sometimes in research we make a discovery or come across an event or insight that can change how we think about something, and that requires reworking our past studies and the frameworks we’d been working with. The third would be, have a long-term plan. Historical research requires at times delving into a lot of detail on very specific things. At times that specificity can seem piecemeal and disconnected. It helps if you have a bigger picture of what you want to achieve in the long term.

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Book Award Interview: Maurine Beasley ©



Beasley

Maurine Beasley won the Frank Luther Mott-Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for the year's outstanding book in 2012 for *Women of the Washington Press: Politics, Prejudice, and Persistence*. Along with that book, she has written a number of others, including *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*. Her co-edited book, *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*, received an Editor's Choice Award from the American Library Association. She has served as national president of both the American Journalism Historians Association and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. In 1997 she received the AJHA's Kobre Award for lifetime achievement in media history. The AJHA's award for outstanding research in women's history is named in her honor. She is a professor emerita at the University of Maryland.

Q: Give us a brief summary of your book.

Beasley: This book tells the story of Washington women journalists who have struggled since before the Civil War to cover the political scene in the nation's capital in spite of varying degrees of discrimination based on their gender. It ends by pointing out that women arrived in top jobs after years of being pushed aside only to find the field of journalism facing an uncertain future due to technological change.

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Book Award Interview

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

Beasley: I worked for about 10 years as a reporter for the *Washington Post* at the same time I pursued a graduate degree at George Washington University. I first thought I would get a master's degree in American civilization but then decided to seek a Ph.D in that field. I needed a dissertation topic. My adviser suggested a study of women travelers to the United States from Europe. That sent me to the Library of Congress to read travel accounts written by women. In doing so I discovered 19th century Washington women journalists, who interested me much more than travelers. When I told women colleagues at the *Post* what I had found, they were amazed. "We always thought we were the first ones," they said. I realized that women did not know their own history in Washington journalism, and I decided to tell their story, which also was mine. I did my dissertation on 19th century women journalists with the hope of expanding my study later to the 20th century and publishing it as a book. It took me years, but I finally did.

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?*

Beasley: I used a great many primary and secondary sources, drawing on numerous manuscript collections of the papers of women journalists at the Library of Congress, the National Press Club and other repositories including the University of Wyoming archives, which holds some materials on Washington women journalists. I also did extensive research into the papers of Eleanor Roosevelt at the Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. The Roosevelt material involved Eleanor Roosevelt's press conferences for women reporters only at the White House from 1933 until 1945. In addition, Roosevelt considered herself a jour-

nalist and wrote a daily newspaper column. The Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland College Park proved useful for tracing the careers of women in radio and television. At the time I did my research, relatively little archival material was digitized. There were some oral histories, however, on line as part of the Washington Press Club Foundation's collection. I did dozens of interviews myself with veteran women journalists. I received my Ph.D. in 1974 and it took me until 2012 to publish this book, so I spent three decades doing research for it. Of course, I was busy teaching too and I got somewhat side-tracked, writing and editing books specifically on Eleanor Roosevelt. The research into Washington women journalists proved so interesting I wanted to continue it indefinitely. A good number of Washington women journalists have written their own memoirs, and I delighted in reading them.

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

Beasley: Yes, if I had unlimited time to devote to the project, I would have liked to have spent more time with the papers of members of Congress, particularly women members, to study their interactions with Washington women reporters. Was there a bonding between these two groups of women, particularly during the middle of the 20th century? I also would have liked to have studied in more depth women columnists, especially Mary McGrory and Doris Fleeson, by reading their columns more carefully. When I worked on my book, few of the personal papers of either of these women were available.

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

Book Award Interview

Beasley: The real fun and excitement of writing a nonfiction book comes from tracking down unpublished material as well as doing personal interviews. Secondary sources are essential but represent filtered versions of the subjects being covered. Archival records may be filtered too but probably less so than published materials and perhaps closer to reality.

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

Beasley: I had trouble getting access to some source material, particularly the records of the Women's National Press Club in Washington, D.C., for reasons not clear to me. (I suspect some on the board of the foundation that owns the papers harbored the mistaken idea that I intended to profit monetarily from using the papers.) Also, one or two women with first-hand knowledge of the discrimination women journalists had faced declined to speak to me, apparently intending to tell their own stories at a future date. My biggest challenge, however, by far was finding the time to work on my book.

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

Beasley: It is easy to get too close to a subject or subjects because you spend so much time with their papers that you subconsciously (or perhaps consciously) become their ally (alter ego). For instance, I know that some of those who have written about Eleanor Roosevelt tend to glorify her personal achievements and make her into a saint. To keep from doing that sort of thing I try to look at subjects from the viewpoint of both their admirers and their detractors. Not all women journalists of the twentieth century were heroines by any means. I tried to point

that out but I probably could have done a better job.

Q: What new insights does your book provide?

Beasley: It shows that women have played a part in covering politics in the nation's capital from the early nineteenth century until the present. I would like to think it expands our knowledge of the neglected history of women in journalism.

Q: What findings most surprised you?

Beasley: The importance of the women's and society pages in Washington journalism until they were replaced by "Style" sections in the late 1960s.

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

Beasley: Find a topic that you love — then doing research on it is never a chore, but a joy. Look for a subject that resonates with you personally. I was lucky that I had a dissertation adviser who steered me in a direction that I pursued for many decades in academia. She helped me see the pleasure of digging into a subject that had personal meaning for me.

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