

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 3 (2017). Number 3

Historiography in Mass Communication

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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.

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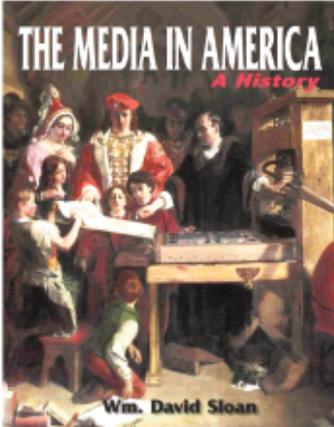
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The Leader



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“If you can write, write” – Byron Price

By Michael S. Sweeney ©



Sweeney

One of my two favorite popular historians is Barbara W. Tuchman. (The other is Doris Kearns Goodwin. Thanks for asking.)

Each year, when I teach historiography to graduate students, I have them read Tuchman’s *Practicing History: Selected Essays*. She mixes samples of her work with practical advice on how to research, analyze, and write history. Students have found the readings worthwhile.

I want to take a page from Tuchman’s book and talk about the importance of writing well when writing history.

Too many significant works of academic research, synthesis, and insight fail to have maximum impact because they are too hard to read. We’re talking highfalutin vocabulary, dry or twisted prose, and weak narrative spine. Four pages in, the brain goes on autopilot, followed by the urge to sleep. For example, I recall reading, “The decision had a non-optimal outcome.” For crying out loud, just say it was a bad thing.

History is fun, dammit.

And so it shouldn’t seem like work to read and understand an

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important bit of writing, no more than it should for a piece of lighter fiction. For every Marcel Proust, Michel Foucault, and William Faulkner (sorry, Mississippi friends, I'm not a Faulkner fan) that we must slog through, we should be rewarded with two Flannery O'Connors, three Dashiell Hammetts, and four Margaret Atwoods.

I contend that if you produce a solid piece of research, but your book is nearly unreadable, then you have cut down a fir in a Siberian forest. Nobody hears it. It did not fall.

Tuchman asks, "Will the reader turn the page?" She advocates a method of writing history using the narrative storytelling method. In particular, she says historians should tell a story chronologically, as that is the way humans experience the world — in linear time, unaware of the future — rather than from the more omniscient perspective of those in the present who know events' outcomes. If a writer provides only the facts known at a particular time by the protagonists (and here I borrow a word from fiction to mean the key figures in the historical narrative), then the narrative can build suspense even when the reader knows the ending. It works on the big screen, *a la* James Cameron's 1997 *Titanic*. And it works between clothbound hard covers, in Tuchman's *The Guns of August* (the French stop the German advance!), Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (the killers hang!) and Goodwin's *Wait Till Next Year* (the Dodgers beat the Yankees!).

When we know something as a result of our research that nobody else knows, our tendency is to want to shout it — put it on the first page, state it in the chapter title, add it to the abstract, etc. I get that. But there is much to be said for building suspense. Tuchman, for example, does an excellent job of putting readers in the minds of generals in northern France in 1914, fearful they cannot save Paris.

I tell my students that my brain likes pictures. I ask, "What does that look like?" in order to get students to focus on concrete detail. As I "plot" the history books I write, I try to create scenes composed of

telling details, from documented sources, to fix readers in space and time.

In my first book, *Secrets of Victory*, I merged a Big Fact That Only I Knew with a narrative hook in the introduction. Byron Price, the director of the Office of Censorship in World War II, asked Attorney General Francis Biddle early in 1942 for an opinion about regulating point-to-point radio communications. Those are the kind used by police patrol cars, taxicabs, and ships at sea, meant for a particular person instead of being “broadly” cast. Biddle said Price could regulate radiophones and radiotelegraphy, and gave his reasons. And then he offered an extra bit that Price had not sought or expected: Price had the authority to seize control of every U.S. radio station, if he so chose. To cut to the chase, Price declined the offer. But I didn’t start the chapter with that. I laid out the facts as they slowly dawned on Price. He could be the czar of radio, and there was a lot to be said for such a decision during the darkest days of the war. I put readers as much as I could into the ambiance of the months between Pearl Harbor and Midway, and I gave them a window into Price’s personality, administrative style, and intellect. As Price figured out what to do, the reader did also.

If you can’t tell, I admired Price. My business cards used to carry one of his quotes from the time he was executive editor of the Associated Press, before the war. He encouraged reporters to stretch their literary muscles. “If you can write, write,” he said. If you fail to pull off a literary delight, you can always go back to the inverted pyramid formula.

Here’s another example in which I applied Tuchman to my own work. I wrote five of the ten chapters of a book commissioned by the *National Geographic* and the Smithsonian Institution to appear in conjunction with a Smithsonian exhibit on transportation. Let’s define the book, *On the Move*, as a social history of transportation, i.e., a study of how changes in transportation have altered how we live our lives. For

the chapter on mass production, I wanted to use a cinematic/literary device to dramatically shift perspective and yet create a unifying whole. I opened the chapter writing about the down side of mass production, highlighting the dehumanizing elements of Henry Ford's assembly lines. I gave this historical essay a "lede" that riffed on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. It began, "It is centuries in the future, and they've cut the tops off Christian crosses, leaving only T's. A world state has replaced God in the year A.F. (After Ford) 632." From there, the chapter moved into details of Huxley's take on Ford's methods, then shifting to how assembly line workers early in the 20th century typically quit after a few months because unusually high wages could not offset the mind-numbing, repetitive nature of auto production. The chapter then moved into the boom in personal automotive use and all that sprang from it, including motels, fast-food chains, drive-in movies, etc., until closing in 1945. Ford's Willow Run plant, which had made mechanization the wave of the future, ends up helping win World War II as it converts from making cars to cranking out planes and tanks like photocopies from a Xerox machine.

So, to reiterate, historians should work harder at being excellent storytellers. Journalism historians have an advantage, I believe, because so many come from mass media jobs in which they report and edit the news. Still, I have read some Saharan works of journalism history in the last few years.

It would be advantageous if historians wore multiple hats. The first hat would be a detective's, to get the facts. The second would be a prosecuting attorney's, to test and, in an ideal world, prove those facts. The third would be a storyteller's. And the fourth would be an editor's. I recommend writing a history paper, monograph, or book chapter, and then walking away from it for a few days. Think of it as an artist turning a painting to face the wall. Let the issues of how you wrestled with your prose fade. Then, come back to the project with fresh eyes. With your

“If you can write, write”

short-term memory wiped clean, you should be able to edit the manuscript as if somebody else wrote it. Don't be afraid to tear it up. Your reader will thank you.

As a thinker in pictures, I approach the arc of a story line the way a movie scriptwriter, cinematographer, and editor construct a scene and cut/dissolve/linger for effect. As an editor reviewing my own work, or another's, I pretend I am watching a movie as it unfolds on a screen. I ask myself these questions:

What was my reaction to the opening scene? Was I hooked? Or could the opening be improved — and if so, how?

Where could the director (author) have made cuts to move the movie along, or added scenes or details to make it better?

What parts seemed rough? Confusing? Why? Should the director reshoot?

What else could I do to improve this movie? (No fair saying, “It's perfect.” It never is, the first time around.)

Where can I make clever transitions to keep the audience engaged?

Did the movie have a satisfying ending?

What kind of soundtrack does this movie suggest? This may seem to be an odd question, but it gets at the heart of mood. Emotions are sometimes difficult to talk about, while songs that suggest emotions may be easier.

When I'm done, I feel I have tried to do all I can to follow Barbara W. Tuchman's tutelage.

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Historical Roundtable: Moving Beyond Ossification: The New

By Debra Reddin van Tuyll, Mary M. Cronin,
David W. Bulla, and Gregory Borchard ©



van Tuyll

Nearly twenty years ago Margaret Blanchard suggested that journalism history risked becoming ossified in the new millennium. So much criticism had been leveled at journalism historians since James W. Carey's landmark analysis of "the problem with journalism history" twenty-five years previously, she wrote, that Blanchard feared future scholars could find it difficult to move forward for fear of more criticism.¹

Yet, journalism history has moved forward, and in a generally positive trajectory, I believe. However, an occasional self-assessment has value. Although historians typically like to wait for anniversaries that end in zeros or fives to do these sorts of self-assessments, there is no requirement to do so. Since we are now nearly eighteen years into the 21st century, the time seems ripe for an assessment of the fate of at least one subfield. Thus, for this roundtable, I asked three of the leading historians of Civil War-era journalism what they see as the current state of scholarship in their subfield and what their crystal balls prophesy for the future.

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Historical Roundtable: Civil War-Era Journalism History



Borchard

The three respondents are well known among their colleagues: Mary M. Cronin, David W. Bulla, and Gregory Borchard.

Van Tuyll: *News and the nature of the press have changed dramatically since the Civil War. That being the case, is this era still relevant for scholarly inquiry or are those of us who work in this area merely engaging in antiquarianism?*



Bulla

Cronin: While I believe it's healthy for scholars to question what research we pursue and the reasons why, I don't think studies of the press during the Civil War era reflect antiquarianism. The war forced Americans on both sides of the conflict to reflect on the



Cronin

Debra Reddin van Tuyll, a professor of communication at Augusta University, is the author or editor of five books. Her most recent work is The Confederate Press in the Crucible of the American Civil War.

Gregory A. Borchard is a professor of journalism and media studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His books include Abraham Lincoln and Horace Greeley, and, with David Bulla, Lincoln Mediated: The President and the Press Through Nineteenth-Century Media and Journalism in the Civil War Era.

David W. Bulla is an associate professor of communication and media sciences at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates. He is the author of three books, Lincoln's Censor and, with Greg Borchard, Journalism in the Civil War Era and Lincoln Mediated. He is also co-editor, with David Sachsman, of Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th Century Reporting.

nature of their identity, their beliefs, and their values. The conflict upended economic and political institutions and fundamentally changed the lives of millions of Americans for good or ill. The era's press is an important source for news and views for historians today who want to examine the era. And, at the same time, the war brought changes to the press that continued long after the conflict ended, including an increased reliance on reporters, a focus on news, an increased reliance on technology, and an increased readership.

A second reason why Civil War scholarship remains important is because the public still views the conflict as an important influence that shaped what our nation is today. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2011 (to mark the 150th anniversary of the war's commencement) found that 56 percent of individuals polled believed the war was still relevant to American politics and the public's lives today. The continued divisiveness that we witness in our political process, ongoing urban and rural divides, and ongoing political, social, cultural, and economic issues demonstrate that many of the concerns relevant in the 1860s continue to resonate today.

Borchard: Among others, Shelby Foote has described the Civil War as a watershed moment in American history. Foote said, "Before the war, it was said 'the United States are.' Grammatically, it was spoken that way and thought of as a collection of independent states. And after the war, it was always 'the United States is,' as we say today without being self-conscious at all. And that sums up what the war accomplished. It made us an 'is.'" In a comparable way, media emerged from originally a collection of individual forms of communication to an abstract entity, all bundled into one. People still have a hard time with the grammar involved (media "has" versus media "have"), but technically, when we speak of "media" after the war, we no longer describe individual publishers or photographers or wire services, or anything else that's

emerged since then — we describe the media as a collective entity, not mediums, but media. I believe the Civil War and all of the deeply entrenched forms of technologies and communications at the time are largely responsible for this, so if we are to understand the basic components of modern media, we need to understand Civil War journalism.

Bulla: In some ways, contemporary journalism is moving *back* toward the journalism of the middle of the 19th century in that American journalism is losing its strong emphasis on factuality, neutrality, and objectivity — the hallmarks of the 20th century. The journalism of the 19th century was far more political and personal than that of the next century. Facts were often secondary in the writing of stories. What mattered more was political spin, vitriol, or sensationalism. With the decline of print and advent of social media in the 21st century, the partisan and personal have resurfaced.

On the other hand, today's news media are also moving away from where the American press was 150 years ago. The movement now is toward fewer newspapers — the decline is at least fifty years old, going back to the rise of television news. At the dawn of the Civil War, the press was in a major growth spurt. Also, the print news media of the mid-19th century were a means for developing an American narrative of itself. The press also was a central agent in making literacy nearly universal. In this descriptive sense alone, we need to keep studying the comparisons and the contrasts because they show us the twists and turns in the development of the American press. For example, in Civil War journalism research, there needs to be a full-blown study comparing freedom of the press in the Union and Confederacy, and interpreting the similarities and differences. I would also say that news was thought of as part of public discourse in the 19th century. Journalists, especially editors, thought they were help building the cultural capital of the country. It was a developmental stage in the political structure of

the United States. News was a fairly hot commodity. No, it was not cotton or tobacco, but it was valuable enough.

Today, the media world is so vast that news has lost its place as a prized commodity. It certainly is worth a lot less than entertainment, its virtual twin. The overwhelming majority of consumers simply are not interested in consuming professionally produced news; rather, they prefer other forms of media that function mainly as entertainment and offer escape from news and the world it mirrors. Ironically, the most consumed news show of recent years was actually a comedic parody.

Van Tuyll: *Where has Civil War journalism history gone during your career that you did not anticipate when you started working in this field?*

Cronin: I came to Civil War journalism history relatively late, in the early 2000s, although the conflict has long fascinated me. My previous research, in the 1990s, focused largely on press coverage of women, minorities, and third-party political groups.

Many subfields of Civil War research already existed by the time I began exploring Civil War themes. And, many of those clearly have been motivated by contemporary events. The civil rights movement and the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s spurred numerous studies of the role of civilian women during the Civil War, as well as the impact of the war on slaves and free black people. Modern concerns about regional identification, including the controversy surrounding the flying of the Confederate flag at public buildings, contributed to the rise of myth and memory studies.

What pleases me is to see a broadening of Civil War scholarship — a more inclusive approach to the war. While initial research focused on the military and political nature of the conflict, current research has broadened to include the war's impact on civilians, the lives of women and the lives of ethnic minorities. More regional research has come to

the fore, as well. Hispanics and Native Americans in the West were severely impacted by the war, as well as by political, economic, and social changes. We're seeing an increasing amount of research on these topics. We're also seeing an increasing amount of important thematic research, including how the press contributed to southern morale and how the press and public defined loyalty (and, subsequently, dissent). Finally, we're seeing more research that questions fundamental assumptions of the press that were put forth by early 20th-century Civil War scholars. We're learning, for example, that there's much more to the role and influence of northern reporters, many of whom past scholars broadly labeled "bohemians." The stereotype of the hard-drinking, cigar-chomping ruffian whose ethics often were suspect has been peeled away by many important studies that have revealed a more nuanced look at the work and influence of these correspondents. Similarly, we're learning that the southern press was far more influential, collectively, than past scholars have acknowledged. The incorrect assumptions that the Confederate press was "backward" — a view that prevailed in much of 20th-century scholarship — also is being challenged and found wanting.

Borchard: The trends I've noticed have brought Civil War journalism history in line with other forms of history, and that is to make local or American history part of larger global trends. The "new history" as it has been called has contextualized events from the 19th century (and other eras) with events in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, as new tools and resources have helped contemporary researchers see links previously obscured by distance. The 1848 revolutions in Europe, for example, had a much larger impact on the course of the Civil War in the United States than previously understood, but we see this now likely only because of the databases available through scanned collections of newspapers, accessible online and with information easily available

through translation and key word searches. With that said, the real “surprise,” I suppose, has been with some of the cheapening of the legacies of historical figures — not with the Civil War alone, but with characters like Abraham Lincoln and others who have assumed the role of comic book status in pop culture books and movies, such as “Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter.” On one level, there’s no point in complaining (as at least there’s some level of appreciation for these people), but on the other hand, it’s indicative of larger trends as a whole, which apparently exchange our past for silly entertainment.

Bulla: This is not specific to Civil War journalism history, but I think there is even less emphasis today on quantitative approaches to journalism history than when I started my graduate studies in 2000. I am not a quantoid myself, but I think we as scholars are making a big mistake in throwing all our weight behind highly qualitative approaches. I am not sure anybody in pre-20th-century journalism history is doing anything quantitative other than David Nord and Donald Shaw, both of whom are retired. We need to be aware of this and think of ways to include more quantitative information in our articles, chapters, and books. I do think there is a certain amount of counting and quantitative analysis needed in Civil War journalism history. Another major shift — and it is a good one — is the sheer volume of this narrow area of mass communication history. One cause of this clearly is Ken Burns’ film, which came out in 1990 and touched a whole generation of 19th-century historians. Another is the Symposium at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, which provides an outlet for dissemination of our work.

Van Tuyll: *What is the future of Civil War journalism history? Are there still unanswered “big” questions?*

Cronin: While the recent sesquicentennial celebrations of the American Civil War produced a bump in scholarship, there are still a number of subfields that are ripe for exploration, including:

- Normative press practices during the 1860s
- How America's foreign-language press covered the Civil War
- Transnational press views of the Civil War
- News coverage by the press in the understudied Trans-Mississippi

Region

- Religious journals' responses to war and wartime conditions

There's also important regional media history work to be done, too. While much of the existing scholarship on the nation's press focuses on newspapers and magazines produced in major metropolitan areas, local newspapers were read and consumed with great interest throughout the country. How did editors in communities far from the conflict, i.e., Burlington, Vermont, or Denver, Colorado, for example, frame the conflict? What local and regional concerns did such publications cover beyond war news? Did rural publishers view the war as a failure of the nation's democratic system? Was their news coverage influenced at all by the major metropolitan newspapers of the time? In other words, the richness of the press in its totality and its influence on the public (and, conversely, the public's influence on the press) await more exploration.

Borchard: I'd like to see continued exploration of the global dimensions of the Civil War as expressed in newspapers around the world. Even without explicit mention of the United States or the war in a particular newspaper, the interrelationships between markets and cultures show up in a web-like fashion. It's possible to read, for example, how the cotton trade affected routes between England and the Near and Far East, and there is apparently a lot of work left to do in synthesizing and interpreting these historic elements (and others like them) into a "big picture" view.

Bulla: One objective should be more emphasis on international/transnational journalism history. The U.S. Civil War did not occur in a vacuum. There are economic, political, and sociological contexts that go beyond the national. Another question I have is the effect of so many newspapers in the middle of the 19th century coming into and out of existence. There may be very important parallels to the fluid condition of today's news media. Yet another issue is the parallel development of a small-circulation, weekly rural-small town press at the same time as a high-circulation, daily urban press. The news media today have become disaggregated and to large degree decentralized, while consumer choice of the media is so vast and varied that news as a commodity has devalued to an extraordinarily low level.

Van Tuyl: *What's the most important "new" finding about Civil War journalism?*

Cronin: I don't see that there's just one important new finding. Instead, I see that the collective work of scholars is expanding our knowledge. I see — and applaud — an increasing number of scholars who are digging into archives and examining Civil War-era newspapers and magazines to set the record straight on press performance. Scholars are producing thoughtful social and cultural history studies that bust many myths. We now know that not all reporters were of the bohemian vein. Many Union and Confederate "specials" (as reporters were then called) hailed from a variety of professions and turned out detailed, careful copy under adverse conditions. Scholars also have demonstrated that the southern press, as a whole, rivaled its northern counterparts in its social and political influence among readers.

Recent scholarship also has expanded the exploration of Civil War media to consider coverage of other non-war related issues in mid-19th-century America that impacted post-war society, including issues

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of freedom of speech, the impact of the war on women and how their experiences ultimately contributed to the emergence of the post-war suffrage movement. Another non-war related issue was the lack of infrastructure in the South and the West, and editors' discussions of the pressing need for such infrastructure led to a boom in transportation and communication development post-war.

Borchard: I've really enjoyed exploring the work on photographs from the era. Every five years or so, someone stumbles into a picture that reveals something previously thought hidden. The pictures of Lincoln at Gettysburg, for example — we'd assumed all along that David Bachrach's photo of the day was the only one in existence, but recent discoveries have, with the help of closer examination and digital technologies, identified two other images of Lincoln at the scene. In other words, just when everyone has thought we've discovered everything we can possibly know about the subject, a new piece of evidence opens up new questions. What is the last known photo of Lincoln, after all? The question has been answered and re-answered for more than 150 years, it seems, not for trivial concerns, but because the images do affect our lasting understanding of the man.

Bulla: For me personally, it was the discovery that Canadian journalists worried about the Union Army being turned on America's neighbor to the north after the rebellion in the South had been put down. The majority of editors in the Canadian press abhorred slavery, but the majority also applauded the rebels. In other words, the Canadian view of the Civil War was complex. We need to study the Canadian press and the war in much more detail. I have always thought about Civil War journalism as Southern vs. Northern newspapers, Eastern vs. Western, weeklies vs. dailies, or newspapers vs. magazines. I have utterly failed to realize that there was a transnational and global context — for exam-

ple, how the Civil War itself was in some ways part of an international trend of revolutions (in various nations in Europe in 1848 and in India in 1857). What were the conditions that led to these revolts? Why did they happen at the middle of the 19th century?

Van Tuyll: *What are the top scholarly works out there that someone contemplating a project in this area should examine?*

Cronin: David B. Sachsman, ed., *A Press Divided: Newspaper Coverage of the Civil War* (2014)

Debra Reddin van Tuyll, *The Confederate Press in the Crucible of the American Civil War* (2013)

Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (2007)

Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds., *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (2004)

Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (2001)

James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (2000)

Karen E. Fritz, *Voices in the Storm: Confederate Rhetoric, 1861-1865* (1999)

Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (1991)

Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (1988)

Borchard: In my own research, I usually turn first to *Lincoln and the Press* by Robert S. Harper (1951) for leads on sources. Harold Holzer's *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion* (2014) is quickly becoming an essential classic. And, of course, *Journalism in the*

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Civil War Era (2010) and *Lincoln Mediated: The President and the Press Through Nineteenth-Century Media* (2015) by David Bulla and me are excellent, too.

Bulla: My *abridged* list of key Civil War journalism books includes:

J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War* (1955)

Gregory A. Borchard, *Abraham Lincoln and Horace Greeley* (2011)

Gregory A. Borchard and David W. Bulla, *Journalism in the Civil War Era* (2010)

Robert S. Harper, *Lincoln and the Press* (1951)

Harold Hozier, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion* (2014)

Richard S. Lowry, *The Photographer and the President: Abraham Lincoln, Alexander Gardner, and the Images that Made a Presidency* (2015)

Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (1991)

Patricia McNeely, Debra Reddin van Tuyl, and Henry Schulte, *Knights of the Quill* (2010)

Ford Risley, *Civil War Journalism* (2012)

David B. Sachsman, ed., *A Press Divided: Newspaper Coverage of the Civil War* (2014)

Louis M. Starr, *Bohemian Brigade: Civil War Newsmen in Action* (1954)

NOTE

¹ Margaret A. Blanchard, "The Ossification of Journalism History: A Challenge for the Twenty-first Century," *Journalism History* 25:3 (1999): 107-112; James W. Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," *Journalism History* 1:4 (1974): 3-5, 7.

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Redefining Women in Journalism History: Studying Those Who Came After the

By Kimberly Wilmot Voss ©



Voss

When Irene Nolan died earlier this year, she was described as a newspaper pioneer for her role as the second female managing editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. It was her role as a “second” that allowed her to influence and make a difference at the newspaper. On her own volition, she eventually left the newspaper and started a new publication, *The Island Free Press*, in the Coastal Carolina communities.

Historians often give significant coverage to firsts — those who took on a role denied in the past — based on gender, race or other differences.¹ As more women were studied, the model of the “great male” was repeated.² While the milestone of first is worthy of acclaim and study, the mere act of breaking a glass ceiling often created additional responsibilities for those making the mark, ranging from media interviews to speeches and other public appearances. Meanwhile, back in the office, the work environment was not always welcoming of the added attention. The end result was often a tumultuous experience.

Kimberly Wilmot Voss, a professor at the University of Central Florida, is the author of The Food Section: Newspaper Women and the Culinary Community and Women Politicking Politely: Feminists Making a Difference in the 1960s and 1970s and co-author of Mad Men & Working Women: Feminist Perspectives on Historical Power,

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Looking to the women who shattered the glass ceilings of newspaper management for guidance on leadership styles or newsroom influence has limited historical significance. For example, Gloria Biggs was named the first female Gannett publisher in 1973 at the *Melbourne (Fla.) Times*, and Carol Sutton was named the managing editor at the *Louisville Courier-Journal* in 1974.³ Significant media attention was paid to the promotions, but neither held the positions for long. (Other female newspaper management firsts — Janet Chusmir and Mary Anne Dolan — also experienced short tenures.)

The short tenure of the “firsts” further demonstrates the need to look at those who came next. The short time that firsts spent in office reinforces the need to study those who came next. They were the ones who carried the torch forward for women in newspaper management.

Sutton was demoted in May 1976 and was reassigned as an assistant to editor and publisher Barry Bingham Jr. Biggs lasted two years in her position before taking on special projects at the company’s headquarters. Biggs’ new position was really just a title. As publisher, she could not make final decisions. Instead, she had to report to the publisher of the *Cocoa Beach Today*. This was revealed in a 1974 *Editor & Publisher* article about Christy Bulkeley being named publisher of the Gannett newspaper *Times-Union* in Rochester, New York. The article revealed that, “Technically, Bulkeley was the first woman to be put in full control of a Gannett Group newspaper.”⁴

The short time in their positions meant there was little time to redefine newspaper missions or newsroom policies. Biggs and Sutton were not mentored. They did not receive management or budgetary training. They had to learn on the job, and being in the spotlight as a “first” highlighted any missteps.

Instead, it was often the ones who came next who made the difference. The previously mentioned Irene Nolan wrote that because Sutton “bore the burden of being first,” Nolan had a very different experience

as a managing editor. There was training and mentoring so that Nolan gained the experience she needed to lead. It meant that her experience as a leader in the newsroom was vastly different.

When she was a part-time news clerk for Sutton, Nolan recalled a time when Sutton told her that she could do some reporting when she finished her other work. She was assigned an important story that would get big play in the Sunday section. Years later, Nolan asked why Sutton had assigned such a green reporter to such an important story. Sutton responded, "Because I knew you could do it and you needed to know you could do it."⁵ She went on to become a full-time reporter in the women's section.

Sutton believed that Nolan was being "groomed" to be the second woman in the management positions. According to Nolan, "We talked about what had happened to her and how I could make sure it didn't happen to me when and if I became managing editor."⁶ Sutton died in 1985 at age 51. Nolan would be named managing editor about eighteen months after Sutton's death.

Just as Nolan's experience as a second was different, the path was different for Gannett's fourth publisher, Marjorie Paxson, than for Biggs, the first. Paxson had been a women's page editor for decades and in that role had not overseen a budget nor had the ability to fire a reporter. Before she was made a publisher, she had the opportunity to be mentored in these areas. The result was a long career as a publisher at two Gannett newspapers.⁷ It was her role as a "fourth" that allowed her to make a difference. It is unlikely that she would have accomplished what she did if she would have carried the burden of being first.

In the role of publisher, she changed policies in the newspaper by reversing the previous publisher's position so that the editorial policy supported the Equal Rights Amendment and alcohol by the drink. Further, she changed the newsroom policy so that women could wear pants. This was in 1980.

The achievements of the “female firsts” should be studied, but in the context of the experience itself. These women continued to face an uphill battle once in the position of power. The person who hired Sutton, Barry Bingham Jr., told a St. Louis newspaper: “The hoopla reminded me of what Dr. Samuel Johnson said about the dancing dog and the woman preacher. ‘It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.’ Well, Carol does it well.”⁸ Despite his platitude, Bingham’s perspective didn’t bode well for Sutton’s tenure.

As importantly, though, it is necessary to look at who came next in order to understand how women succeeded in newspaper management. Women in positions of power at newspapers had an uneven path. Once the glass ceiling was broken did not mean that women were automatically accepted as leaders. The women who came second, third or fourth were often the ones who were able to make a difference in the newsroom and the newspaper thanks to experience, mentoring and a growing acceptance of women. These women deserve to be part of the historical record.

Understanding women’s true roles in the journalism industry allows us to discover how women have made gains and, at times, were limited by their gender. Social change is usually fought on numerous fronts. Female firsts were often the result of forward thinking male editors and class-action discrimination lawsuits. In other cases, it was those women who came next who were hidden pioneers. While not fitting the traditional historical model of the celebrated “first,” these women made a difference. They are worthy of study to further understand the victories and limitations of women in newspaper management today. The study of history needs to be expanded to include women who took various career paths to be more inclusive of a variety of female journalists.

NOTES

¹ Douglas Booth, "Origins in History & Historiography: A Case Study of the First Study of the First Swimmer at Bondi Beach," *Journal of Sports History* (December 2016): 21-36.

² Bonnie G. Smith, "The Contribution of Women in Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France, and the United States, 1750-1940," *American Historical Review* (1984): 709-732.

³ Kimberly Voss and Lance Speere, "Taking Chances and Making Changes: The Career Paths and Pitfalls of Pioneering Women in Newspaper Management," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (2014): 1-18.

⁴ Jane Levere, "Woman Publisher-Editor Appointed by Gannett," *Editor & Publisher*, April 20, 1974, 72.

⁵ Author interview with Irene Nolan, July 10, 2006.

⁶ Irene Nolan email to the author, June 14, 2010.

⁷ Kimberly Wilnot Voss and Lance Speere, "Marjorie Paxson: From Women's Editor to Publisher," *Media History Monographs* (2007-2008). The first person to write a wine column for an American newspaper was Ruth Ellen Church, the *Chicago Tribune* food editor who often used the pen name of Mary Meade. Her column began in 1962. Initially, she traveled through Europe to learn about wine. In 1963 she published the cookbook *The American Guide to Wines*, which included an introduction by esteemed food writer Morrison Wood. She later wrote a book documenting the wines of the Midwest. In 1992 the Midwest International Wine Exposition began giving the Ruth Ellen Church Award for best wine journalists. Material for the paper comes from her columns and her cookbooks, as well as her materials found in the papers of Associated Press food editor Cecily Brownstone at the Fales Library at New York University.

⁸ Lois Timmick, "A Women's Lib Dream Come True," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 8-9, 1975.

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Kobre Award Interview: Wm. David Sloan



Sloan

David Sloan received the American Journalism Historians Association's Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1998. He is a professor emeritus at the University of Alabama. In addition to receiving the Kobre Award, he was selected in 2000 as one of the five "most significant" members of Kappa Tau Alpha on the honor society's ninetieth anniversary. Two of his books have won *Choice* magazine's "Outstanding Academic Book" awards, and his *American Journalism History* in 1990 won an American Library Association "Best Bibliography in History" award.

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

Sloan: I was born in West Texas, in Midland, in 1947, the fourth of six children. My father, Guy Sloan, was a carpenter, and my mother, Fay, was a homemaker. Both my parents were from farming families, and each had a limited formal education. My mother finished the eighth grade, and my father, the seventh. Because my father worked in construction, we moved many times before we finally settled in the small town of Mt. Vernon, Texas. I say "in" when actually we lived about two miles from town. Mt. Vernon, which I consider my hometown, had a population of about 1,400. It is best known as being the hometown of Don Meredith, the Dallas Cowboys quarterback who later was a commentator on *Monday Night Football*. I once caught a pass from him — even though he was nine years older than I. But that — as fascinating a

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tale as it might be — is another story!

Even though my parents had only a few years of education, they were serious that their children do better. I assumed, by the time I finished junior high, that I was supposed to go to college. I have about fifty cousins, and the first of them to graduate from college was my next older brother. I was the third. I attended a regional state university about forty miles from Mt. Vernon, East Texas State University (now Texas A&M at Commerce).

I loved college, and during my freshman year I decided that I wanted to be a professor. Already, I had begun to think that the academic life would be the perfect one. Mainly, I was thinking about working in a setting where one got to deal with ideas all the time. Of course, as readers of this interview know, I romanticized. It didn't cross my mind that one would have to grade papers and attend faculty meetings and deal with administrative paperwork. Ideas were what I imagined the professorial life was all about.

I thought I would be an English professor, for English was the major I had originally planned. My older brother, by the way, became an English professor. But, as sometimes happens, life had something else in store for me.

In the late 1960s, East Texas State had one of the best photography programs in the nation, and it was housed in the journalism department. I wanted to take photography — and since I thought I would be more likely to be allowed to enroll in a photo course if the faculty thought I was planning to be a journalism major, in the fall semester of my sophomore year I signed up for an introductory MC course, as well as an introductory photography course.

It was while I was out on campus for the first assignment in the photo course that I saw someone who would become the most important and influential person in my life: Joanne Stuart. Like me, she was a sophomore. She was majoring in education, English, and European his-

tory. Thinking she was beautiful (an observation that was correct), I made a photograph of her, without introducing myself. As Providence would have it, though, I met her later that week at a Young Democrats party, and we began dating — which led, three months later when we both were just 19 years old, to our being married during the break between the fall and spring semesters. She has told people that she knew immediately upon our meeting that I was the person she wanted to marry. That just goes to show that her strongest suit was not good judgment. But as it turned out, we were very compatible. Our academic interests, work ethics, and various other outlooks were similar — but Joanne had different, good character traits, so that she helped me become, I hope, a better person.

Then, a year-and-a-half later, we had a daughter (Cheryl) born to us — just two weeks before the start of our senior year. Since Joanne and I couldn't afford childcare, we scheduled our courses so that one of us always could be home with Cheryl while the other was in class. I also was working on a newspaper. So that complicated our scheduling. Nevertheless, both Joanne and I graduated on time, in four years, in May 1969.

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

Sloan: When I was in college, when I needed a job for income after Joanne and I married, I was fortunate to work during my junior year as a night reporter and assistant copy editor on a small daily in a nearby town. Then from the following summer through my senior year, I worked as editor of the *Commerce Journal*, the weekly newspaper in the town where East Texas State was located. The paper had a circulation of about 3,500, and so it was large enough to take newspapering seriously. For example, along with the news pages, it had a sports section and an opinion page. Along with editing, I did some specialized report-

ing — and being 21 years old and naturally thinking I knew everything, I wrote a weekly opinion column in which I pontificated about all the problems facing the world, along with their solutions.

I did, though, take the news job earnestly, and the *Journal* was just as earnest. It was not reluctant to deal with issues. One was the condition of streets in the “poor part of town.” I wrote several investigative news stories, as well as a few editorials and columns about the situation. For the work, the paper won the state weekly press association’s awards for editorial writing and community service. By the time the contest results were announced, Joanne and I had graduated from college and moved on, but I’m still pleased — as you can tell from my account here — with the work the paper had done.

I truly enjoyed weekly newspaper work, and if I had planned a newspaper career I probably would have stayed with the *Journal* for a while after graduation. But I was already looking toward becoming a professor and figured that I needed a different type of newspaper experience. So upon graduation I took a job as a copy editor at the *Avalanche-Journal* in Lubbock, Texas. The paper had both a morning and an afternoon edition, with a combined circulation of about 120,000. The news operation was much more complex and sophisticated than that at the two papers I had worked on while a student, and the experience served me well when I began to teach reporting and editing classes.

Nevertheless, before the summer was over, Uncle Sam drafted me, cut my hair, and sent me to boot camp. It was at the height of the Vietnam War, but I wound up spending most of my two service years working in information at Fort Bragg, N.C. Looking back, I see that even my time in the Army was helping me to become a professor. I got more experience that I could use, but most importantly it entitled me to G.I. Bill financial assistance for graduate education.

So immediately upon getting out of the Army, I entered graduate school at the University of Texas, with a major in journalism and a

minor in sociology. After completing the coursework for my M.A. degree, I took a job as managing editor at a small daily, the *Corsicana* (Tex.) *Sun*, and, during the year that I worked there, researched and wrote my masters thesis.

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

Sloan: I was fortunate enough, immediately upon receiving my degree in August 1973, when I was 26 years old, to start teaching at the University of Arkansas. I stayed there ten years, mainly teaching photography but also courses in law (my second favorite subject at the time), history, reporting, editing, magazine editing, and feature writing. The course load was heavy, but I enjoyed it thoroughly.

It was also at Arkansas, from my first year, that I became a chapter advisor for Kappa Tau Alpha, the honor society for mass communication. Along with teaching and history, KTA was my great academic love during most of my college career. After moving from Arkansas, I continued to serve as a KTA advisor for another twenty-five years. When I finally gave up the job, KTA's national executive secretary did some research and found that my tenure as a chapter advisor was the longest in KTA's history, which had begun in 1910. Along with the AJHA's Kobre Award, I suppose the honor I'm most pleased with is one I got from KTA. In the year 2000, the KTA membership, at the behest of the Association of College Honor Societies, chose five people to recognize on KTA's 90th birthday. I was one of them. Among the others, coincidentally, was Frank Luther Mott, the JMC historian who had served as KTA's executive secretary in the 1950s.

Although I enjoyed everything about my job at Arkansas, I realized that a Ph.D. would be valuable. So I entered the program at the University of Texas in 1975 — taking courses in the summer and getting a leave from Arkansas for an academic year. I chose Texas because it was

convenient geographically to Arkansas and because the faculty members were very good to me.

A couple of years after completing my Ph.D., I moved to the University of Alabama, where I taught occasional courses in such subjects as opinion writing, reporting, editing, media issues, and feature writing, but my main subject was history. A short time after I arrived at Alabama, our College of Communication added a Ph.D. program, and I was fortunate to get to teach mostly history, undergraduate as well as graduate. At the graduate level, the courses generally focused on historiography.

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

Sloan: I enjoyed history from as young an age as I can remember, but I never considered specializing in it until I was working on a Ph.D.

I originally had intended to specialize in law in my Ph.D. program, and Texas had an excellent law emphasis. However, during my first year in the program, I decided to change to history. I wish I could say that was because of a deliberate intellectual reason — but the truth is that at Arkansas we hired a new faculty member whose two favorite teaching subjects were law and history. The department chair, Jess Covington, thought we should let him have one of the courses, but he was kind enough to give me my choice of the two. So, almost on the spur of the moment, I chose history. Then, at Texas, I changed my main research area from law to history.

I can't say that my graduate education did anything in particular to prepare me to be a historian. In studying mass communication history, I learned mostly on my own. However, a professor in the history program at Texas, Philip White, introduced me to how historians interpret

history, and those lessons stayed with me. He later served on my dissertation committee, and it was his interest in American history of the early 1800s that influenced my decision to research the national party press of the era.

When I researched and wrote my dissertation, no member of my committee was much familiar with the subject — as was true with nearly everyone else at the time. So my committee essentially gave me a free hand and hardly any guidance. Perhaps that was unfortunate, but it also allowed me to learn on my own.

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

Sloan: Well, I mentioned in answer to the previous question that Philip White introduced me to historical interpretation.

But I can say without hesitation that the individual who most influenced me was Jim Startt. He knows more about historical research than anyone I know. I met him at the second convention of the American Journalism Historians Association, in 1983. From then, I developed a wonderful friendship with him, and he and I collaborated on a variety of books and other projects. I don't hesitate to say that I learned more about methods and the historical mindset from him than I have from anywhere else. The knowledge I gained was worth more than an entire Ph.D. program. If I had not met him, I doubt that I ever would have done much good work. So I owe him a great debt.

Of course, over a career, one comes into contact with a host of people, and in my own professional life many influenced me. I had some wonderful graduate students — I think of, for example, Bernell Tripp, Jana Hyde, Julie Williams, Venessa Murphree, David Davies, Erika Pribanic-Smith, Lisa Daigle Varisco, Butler Cain, Lisa Parcell, Dianne Bragg, and on and on — and their commitment to being good historians chal-

lenged me to try to be better. I could add the entire membership of the AJHA to the list, and I feel fortunate that they crossed my path. If not for the AJHA, I might never have met people such as David Copeland, Debbie van Tuyl, Leonard Teel, Kitty Endres, Ted Smythe, Mike Murray, Tammy Baldwin, David Vergobbi, Berrin Beasley, Jim McPherson, Terry Lueck, Bill Huntzicker, Jean Palmegiano, Louise Benjamin, Mike Sweeney, Kim Mangun, John Ferré, Maurine Beasley, Ford Risley, Jim Martin, Reed Smith, Paulette Kilmer, Steve Knowlton, Carol Sue Humphrey, Bruce Evensen, Pam Brown, Jim Aucoin, Rob Rabe, Jerry Baldasty, Alf Pratte, Pat Washburn, Edd Applegate, Dick Kielbowicz, Don Godfrey, Karen Miller, Mike Buchholz, Ed Caudill, Hiley Ward, Sam Riley, Peggy Blanchard, J Snorgrass, Dick Schwarzlose, Barbara Cloud, Jim Baughman, Tom Heuterman, and a lot of others.

Over the years, I edited a number of books for which professors — including most of those I just listed — wrote chapters. Without the contacts I made through the AJHA, it would have been much, much more difficult to recruit good chapter authors. I don't want to start naming people from that long list, but the commitment that so many professors in our field made to writing good monographs impressed me greatly.

I don't know how we might measure the impact of all the ideas we've studied and books we've read, but I can immediately think of some that did have an impact on me. Several books on historical interpretation influenced me and bear an imprint on my outlook. About the time I completed my Ph.D., I began reading quite a bit in American historiography, and Grob and Billias's two-volume *Interpretations of American History* made sense of the whole body of literature. When I began trying to identify and understand the schools of interpretation in mass media history, their taxonomy proved very useful. In journalism history, Mott's *American Journalism* was the dominant text at the time I began teaching, and I used it for three or four years. Although I disagree with Mott's underlying perspective, his overall scheme of organizing

history influenced mine.

On the other hand, the “philosophers” who sometimes have been in vogue in our field have rarely impressed me. Coming from areas outside history, they seem to have only a superficial understanding of history, and when their ideas are examined by the evidence, they come across as dilettantes. If they had an impact on me, it was simply to make me a little suspicious and to spur me to expect higher standards in historical research.

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

Sloan: Much of my work has been historiographical in nature. That is, it has dealt with how to study history. By the time I finished my Ph.D., I was starting to think about how historians have explained JMC history. As I mentioned in one of my earlier answers, my doctoral program introduced me to interpretations of American history. In the same period, the journal *Journalism History* had begun publication, and its inaugural issue carried Jim Carey’s article “The Problem of Journalism History.” It got a lot of buzz. Carey said that all journalism historians had written within the Whig interpretation. As an aside, I’ll mention that three years later *Journalism History* published an article by Joe McKerns that claimed that all journalism historians had written within the Progressive interpretation. Shortly afterwards, I wrote a conference paper in which I argued that all journalism historians had written within a different interpretation that I identified — but I must confess that now I can’t remember what it was. After presenting the paper, I reflected on how presumptuous I had been to claim that “all” historians had written from a particular viewpoint when I had not read *all* historical works. It was the same mistake that Carey and McKerns had made. Each of us had read a small portion of all works and then leaped to uninformed

generalizations. I was embarrassed to be so superficial.

So I set out to read every book and article about journalism history ever published. About a decade later I had finished what turned out to be a book, an annotated bibliography with about 2,600 entries. That bibliography required a lot of time and work, but I must say that it was the most valuable thing I ever did in getting an education about JMC history.

Once I had read the body of work published about journalism history, I then wrote some conference papers, journal articles, and eventually a book — *Perspectives on Mass Communication History* — that laid out the various schools of interpretation in journalism history.

As part of historiography, I've tried to spend time on historical research methods. In 1989 Jim Startt and I wrote a research manual, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*, that explains the procedures that historical research requires and tries to explain the mindset required of historians. I was clearly the junior author for the book, and it shows the expertise and depth that Jim possesses. After the second edition, Jim retired from teaching, and I've tried to carry it on.

Sound historiography has, I think, *pedagogy* as an important dimension. If a field is to improve, it must do so generation after generation. Sound teaching is essential. In my own teaching, I hope I upheld high standards — or at least tried to do so. Since teaching good history was important to me, I focused a large share of my research and writing efforts on teaching material. The book that, over the years, required the most time was a textbook, *The Media in America*. When I first thought about doing a textbook, my main goal was to produce one that used high historical standards. I wanted it to tell history as accurately and fairly as possible. I immediately realized that acquiring the expertise necessary to explain centuries of material would require a lifetime of study — and that if one person attempts to do the entire job, the result will be a superficial and faulty textbook. So I recruited a different au-

thor for each chapter, an author who was an expert on the chapter topic. If I had tried to develop an equivalent expertise myself, I calculated that I would have to do research for 127 years! The book turned out well and just this year was published in its tenth edition. Jim Startt served as co-editor for the first four editions, and his expertise in American history helped assure that the chapter accounts were grounded soundly. The publisher estimates that 50,000 – 60,000 students have used it. Of course, such numbers make one realize just how important the job of producing a textbook is. That is, I think, the main thing that has motivated me to spend the large amount of time with the book that I have.

Along with historiography, the other main areas in which I've concentrated my time have been the American colonial press, newspapers of the early American republic, and good journalistic writing. I compiled several book-length collections of editorial writing and news reporting, all of which I've enjoyed — and all of which have had a historical, rather than contemporary, dimension. Along with those areas, I've done a few books in research methods and media issues — but they've not held the same interest for me that history does, and as I was doing each of them I was itching to finish so that I could get back to history.

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

Sloan: If I count second editions, I've published around forty-five books. For most of them I served as the editor and a chapter author. Early on, I realized that there are so many worthy books to be done that one could not, alone, write them all. So I decided that, rather than spend several years researching and writing a single book and then complete a handful of books over my career, I would recruit chapter authors and

produce a lot of books, each of which would require less of my own time than it would if I alone had done all the research and writing. Then there have been some books for which I served as the author or co-author. I'm not sure how many historical articles I've written, but the number is probably around twenty or so.

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

Sloan: I found satisfaction in almost every book that I've done, especially the history ones — although I must confess that I did some books, mainly the non-historical ones, almost from a sense of duty. On occasions, publishers approached me, and I did some other books that started as graduate class projects mainly as a way to focus a class and get the students involved.

Of the historical books, I think I found most satisfaction, in the long run, from *The Media in America*. It is intended as an undergraduate textbook, but it means much more to me than just a dashed-off text. From the beginning, I saw it as a challenge to produce a book that undergrads would find interesting but that would, nevertheless, use a high standard of scholarship. I wanted students to come away from it with a sophisticated understanding of history. I also believed producing a history textbook to be a great responsibility. Most of what most JMC students will ever know about history comes from undergrad textbooks. And most graduate students who become historians will be influenced by the first textbook they use. So authors and editors have a daunting duty to produce an honest, accurate account. I've continued to work with the book for almost thirty years mainly because I consider the job so important.

Next to *The Media in America*, I suppose the two books that have given me the most satisfaction are Jim Startt's and my *Historical Meth-*

ods in Mass Communication and my *Perspectives on Mass Communication History*. Both contributed in their own way, I hope, to elevating the level of scholarship in JMC history.

And then, just because of the aesthetic satisfaction I found, my collections of journalistic writing — particularly *Great Editorials*, *Masterpieces of Reporting*, and *The Best of Pulitzer Prize News Writing* — kept me interested. I simply enjoy good writing, and those collections demonstrate that journalistic writing, which almost by definition is intended to be read one day and tossed into the trash or recycling bin, can be so good that it deserves to be read and re-read and then re-read many more times.

Of a very different nature is a book that Julie Williams and I co-authored, *The Early American Press, 1690-1783*. Even though there were two of us working on it, it took several years to research and write, but the immersion into the research and time period was fascinating. It made me wish I had had more time so that I could have done more long-term projects. An added source of satisfaction was that, in the end, I think Julie and I provided some new explanations that have helped historians better understand newspapers of that early period.

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

Sloan: I hope I've contributed — mainly through my historiographical works — to raising the standards in our field. Most people probably want to make a contribution to helping the people with whom we come in contact, but it's hard for most of us to know if professionally we've done anything more than throw a little pebble into a big pond.

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

Sloan: Foremost, I wish I had been a better teacher.

Professionally, there were times when I wished I had majored in history rather than journalism and, later, mass communication. But then reality would hit me, and I would remember that getting a good teaching job in history is much more difficult than getting one in mass communication. Had I majored in history, I probably would have chosen America sometime in the 1800s; or, now with a long view, I would have found it exciting to study church history. That field has such scholarly vitality, and Christianity played an immeasurably important role in Western civilization. I've done some study of its history and found it both challenging and immensely satisfying.

But as for what I've done in mass communication, perhaps if I had gotten into history sooner, I might have done more. But, other than that (and the fact that I spent valuable time producing some non-history books), I'm mostly satisfied with what I decided to do.

Q: Tell us about your "philosophy of history" (of historical study in general or of JMC history in particular) or what you think are the most important principles for studying history.

Sloan: I don't claim to have any original idea. If I proposed a philosophy and claimed that it was original, readers should be suspicious. I would be suspicious even of myself. History is such an ancient field and yet has rigorous standards that today are very modern. The main thing we in JMC history need to do is understand and practice them. My view is simply that JMC historians must perform by the highest principles of good history. That means they must understand the methods of historical research and thinking and then adhere to them. They need to be

familiar with the literature in the field. JMC historians need to be *serious* about history.

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

Sloan: I have mixed feelings. As much as I hate to say it, our field has a considerable number of people who claim to be historians but are mere dabblers. They have little sense of the rigor required of good history. They're the ones who serve on conference panels for which no real expertise is required, and they're enamored of the calls by other dabblers for such things as "new theories in history." As most JMC historians know, many of our fellow professors who specialize in other, quantitative areas of research look down their noses at history. They claim that historical research is not rigorous — like experimental research, for example. For a number of years I taught with one of the top professors in the field of mass communication. He was mainly interested in behavioral theory, but he also had a wide-ranging knowledge. In fact, his undergraduate degree was in history from a respected school. Once, during a conversation whose point I don't remember, he complained that most JMC historians did not practice sound historical methods and were second-rate scholars. We can tend to get huffy about such criticism, but unfortunately JMC history brings the criticism on itself because dabblers populate our field. Some of our JMC "historians" specialized in history in their doctoral programs by default. They weren't good at math, or they thought that historical study would be easier than theoretical studies. And some doctoral programs never required much of them other than flabby "philosophical" musing. As a result, the JMC history field has a number of people who simply are not historians by any true definition of the word.

Fortunately, we have a good number who are, and I hope the num-

ber will continue to grow. When I got involved in history in the 1970s, the number of JMC professors who were outstanding at history probably could be counted on one's fingers. Simple terms such as "primary source" and "present-mindedness" were as unfamiliar as Latin. Today, we have many excellent historians who are doing important research, and our graduate programs are producing more of them each year. The overall quality of our historians and the work they are doing are much better than they have been at any time in our field's history.

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

Sloan: The answer to the first part of the question is easy. *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 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 what-

ever 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. 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 thrive, they must be willing to do the work.

The answer to the second part of the question is just as straightforward. JMC historians need to do two things. *First*, they should be submitting papers to non-JMC history conferences and articles to non-JMC history journals. There are about 110 such journals that have published articles on JMC topics. At least thirty history conferences meet annually. That doesn't count state conferences. Participating in such activities will strengthen JMC historians' ties with the broader field of historians and will increase the respect that other historians have for JMC history. *Second*, but a greater challenge, is convincing other historians that journalism/the media/mass communication had an importance that extended beyond JMC. Historians would need to see, for example, how the press was important in the anti-slavery debate before the Civil War.

Years ago Jim Startt and I tried to provide rationales with an edited book, *The Significance of the Media in American History*, but I don't think many people other than JMC historians read it. Among our historians today, though, perhaps there are some who have better ideas.

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

Sloan: The most obvious is one of which almost everyone is aware. That is the fact that each year sees fewer schools offering JMC history courses. If the decline continues, eventually fewer JMC professors will become historians, and we'll see a downward spiral that will be hard to reverse. JMC history courses, which at one time almost every JMC department offered, will be just an artifact of the past. What an irony that would be.

A further irony is that it is JMC history, the academic field in mass communication that seems to be the most vibrant, that suffers such losses. There may be other subfields in the discipline that have their own organizations and journals outside the AEJMC, but I don't know of any that are doing more than history is.

Despite the decline in JMC schools offering history, right now the field does have some serious younger and mid-career professors who have good scholarly credentials and a strong work ethic. They need to take the lead and spur organizations such as the AJHA and the AEJMC's History Division. Such organizations are valuable. In fact, though, even though organizations are beneficial, they are by nature bureaucratic, and that leads to sluggishness. So you can't assume organizations will be particularly visionary or get important jobs done without energetic leadership. They are, though, an important collective force. That means that, in the best of all worlds, motivated, imaginative, energetic historians will lead the organizations. That will be the soundest way to assure that the organizations spur the actions that JMC history needs.

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Book Award Interview: John C. Hartsock



Hartsock

John Hartsock won the American Journalism Historians Association's award for the year's outstanding book in 2001 for *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Form*. The book also won the AEJMC History Division's award for the outstanding book of the year. Prof. Hartsock teaches journalism at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland.

Q: Give us a brief summary of your book.

Hartsock: I attempted to provide a history of American literary journalism.

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

Hartsock: I had returned to graduate school at mid-career, and I knew I wanted to do a dissertation on literary journalism. When it came time to determine what about literary journalism I wanted to research, I went to the library to gather as much literature on the subject as possible. I decided that I especially needed to find a history so I could get a suitable overview. That's when I discovered that while there had been important historicizing by Norman Sims, Tom Connery, and John Pauly, among others, there was not a history as such. Frankly, I was somewhat discouraged. I went home to think about it, wondering how to get my hands around a subject that, relatively speaking, had been little studied.

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A couple of days later the old newspaper reporter in me said that if there was no history, at least I could contribute to the writing of one. At the time I was not thinking I would write a history per se (and, of course, there can never be “the” history).

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?

Hartsock: Because of disciplinary boundaries, literary journalism really didn't fall into any one particular discipline. Most obviously it falls between journalism and literary studies. Most of my research straddled literature and journalism, although there is also American Studies. Probably there was more of an emphasis, at least initially, on the literary, because my own background is in literary history and my doctorate is in English. But of critical importance was Norm Sims' *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, which introduced me to the scholarship. Equally important was Tom Connery's *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*. Without them I think it is fair to say I could not have written my book. They provided the building blocks, the foundation. Beyond that I looked up every related search term for the subject I could think of, such as literary nonfiction, which was more in vogue at the time. (To some extent creative nonfiction replaced it, but then from my perspective creative nonfiction has evolved in other directions so that today it is something of a grab bag in meaning.) These led me to new primary sources. I also attempted to contextualize literary journalism within the literary movements of the various eras, especially late 19th-century realism and naturalism.

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

Hartsock: Yes. I just wish I could remember all of them. One is David Mindich's book *Just the Facts*. Also, I noted in the history that I undoubtedly left out someone's favorite literary journalist, such as John Dos Passos, who I have since discovered had a profound influence with his early work on writers of a rough equivalent of literary journalism in the young Soviet Union.

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

Hartsock: Hmm Always expect the unexpected. Especially after you finish a book. I discover something new, and say, "Darn. I wish I had known that for the book." It also comes down to appreciating that there really is no end much less beginning to history. Rather, there are always temporary beginnings and endings. That's humbling. Also, be cautious in approaching the contemporaneous moment (however one may define it) in attempting to contextualize it historically. In my research, I wanted to see what other critics were saying about nonfiction, journalism and literature during their own eras. This is when I discovered that Fred Lewis Pattee, who is credited with holding the first chair in American literature, said in 1915 that belletristic "literature" would increasingly be in the form of historical romance ala *Lorna Doone*. He was dismissive of Stephen Crane, who, in addition to being a fictionist, was a wonderful literary journalist. I don't know anyone who reads *Lorna Doone* today. Or, there was Frederic Hudson, who published what is considered one of the first histories of journalism in 1873 (if not the first, depending how you approach it). He predicted that in his near future newspapers would be delivered by balloons. These were cautionary lessons to me.

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

Hartsock: Well, again I was studying an area that was not widely studied in both the journalism and literature academies. You had the pioneering work, but I found I had a lot of latitude, and that can be somewhat intimidating. It felt like I was traveling into parts unknown, and you are always second-guessing yourself as to which trail or trails to take. It's especially challenging because we tend to think of history as linear or chronological, but I would bump up against issues I felt I couldn't ignore, such as sensational journalism that reads like literary journalism. I felt strongly, because of my literary training, that just because it "reads like a novel or short story" it isn't necessarily the kind of narrative literary journalism I was interested in. If anything, solely sensational accounts are the opposite epistemologically in that they seek to disengage a reader's subjectivity. I was highly aware that my chapter on the subject was a side trail to the overall chronology. But I felt it was important. So I let it fly. And this is why I call the book "a" history and not "the" history. But again I learned that there is no such thing as "the" history.

At the same time the kind of latitude I had with such a relatively understudied area I found liberating. I can't think of anything worse than being a Shakespeare scholar given how closely the bard's work has been combed over. And I'm tired of books on the Civil War and World War II that keep repeating themselves. So it was a bit bracing to have this kind of freedom.

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?

Hartsock: Absolutely! After I focused on earlier versions of literary journalism I found myself somewhat disenchanted with the New Journalism of the 1960s. It was because of the New Journalism that scholars

really began to wake up to the existence of literary journalism (soon discovering that there was nothing new about the New Journalism!). I found myself somewhat resentful that the earlier stuff had been neglected by both the journalism and literature academies. Because the New Journalism had been, in the scheme of things, relatively well-covered, I downplayed it. But I feel the opposite today. My disenchantment with the New Journalism began to subside after the book came out. Frankly, I began to rediscover the New Journalism. And I genuinely believe that it represents today the high point of American literary journalism. Of course, that is also a judgment about the contemporaneous moment (however one defines it), and perhaps by the time I die I will have another perspective. In any event, if I were doing it again I would discuss the New Journalism much more.

I think sometimes we have to admit we can't be neutral. For that reason I made a very conscious decision to write in the first person. It seems to me that this was not being done a lot at the time. But I felt I had no choice precisely because this was a relatively understudied area. To me it was more honest to say, Hey, this is just my perspective on a subject that we are really only in the early stages of understanding. I felt to write in a faux omniscience would have been disingenuous. Omniscience is faux anyway.

Finally, I really loved the subject matter. And that can be a problem. Yes, it can blind you, as it blinded me when I became disenchanted with how much the New Journalism overshadowed earlier variations. But the virtue was that I never tired of the subject. I've published three books, and the history was the only one I never tired of working on.

Q: What new insights does your book provide?

Hartsock: How new they are today, I can't say, but I hope there are still relevant insights after seventeen years. I think the most important is

that we have a need for different kinds of journalism. I am an old beat reporter from newspapers. (I know that makes me a dinosaur.) And I respect the old tried and true models. They are a great training ground. However, one thing I hope my book brings out is the virtue of a journalism, whatever its imperfections, that tries to understand other people's subjectivities — or to narrow the gap between subjectivities so that we can have a better understanding of how they feel. That is very central, I think, to understanding literary journalism.

Q: What findings most surprised you?

Hartsock: What surprised me the most was just how much literary journalism or a proto-literary journalism there has been throughout history, and just how much it has been central to how we describe the world around us: Storytelling is natural to how the human brain enquires into the world. In fact, *belletrists* took from a proto-literary journalism many of the tricks of their trade, and not the other way around. (I am still bemused when I hear someone say literary journalists use the techniques of the novelist and short story writer.) A second surprise was just how much literary journalism had been under-appreciated by the academy. I kept scratching my head and wondering: "How could they not see what was right under their noses?" But then I was guilty of that crime, too, for a long time in my early, more conventional literary studies. A third finding was just how much in the last century the literary modernists and the journalism/communication modernists tended to mirror each other epistemologically with their belief that knowledge could be essentialized or idealized. Journalism had its "objectivity," and T.S. Eliot had his "objective correlative."

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

Book Award Interview

Hartsock: That's difficult to say because again my background may be a little different from those who fall strictly within JMC studies. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but I believe history is indeed a story. Of course, history and story both have the same etymology (and I suppose that in having the same etymology I run the risk of a tautology). I attribute my interest in history as story to the fundamental fact that I've always read history. I started reading it when I was in my early teens in the 1960s and 1970s when my grandparents gave me a subscription to the old *American Heritage*, those wonderful white volumes that would show up every couple of months. The writing was so accessible. In the case of my book, what also helped was that when I did my doctorate in English I focused on critical theory. This provided critical tools I found especially useful for applying to a field of scholarship that was still very much emerging from history's fog.

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