

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 4 (2018). Number 6

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

We place importance on the credentials of authors and normally expect an author to have published at least one history book. As you consider submitting an essay, please note that *Historiography* does not go through multiple “revise-and-resubmit” stages. In essence, we expect authors to have an expertise and to “get it right” from the beginning.

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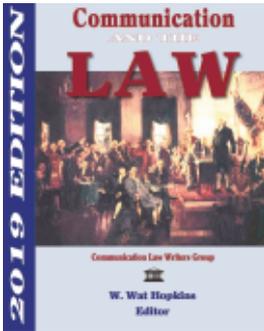
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Grace

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

“Suppose you tell all the truths of science in a way that bores the reader. What is the good? The truths don’t stay in the mind, and nobody thinks any better of you because you have told them the truth tediously.” — Charles Dana (1819-1897), owner-editor, *New York Sun*

Doing my nightly reading, I came across this paragraph:

“The study’s research domain included the entire run of the magazine — 378 issues, from the first issue in June 2, 1917, to the last issue dated December 1927. To conduct the narrative analysis, this study looked at each issue published, for a total of some 6,300 articles. A close reading of 21 issues, or 16 percent of the research domain, was conducted; the selection was designed to capture at least two issues from each of the ten years, with attention paid to varying the months of publication examined and to changes in departments, in types of coverage, and in the nature of the content.”

I must confess that I stumbled as I tried to make my way through it. Perhaps I had mistakenly bumbled into an issue of the journal *Soci-*

David Sloan, a professor emeritus from the University of Alabama, is the author/editor of more than forty books and is a recipient of the American Journalism Historians Association’s Kobre Award for lifetime achievement and of a variety of other awards.

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ological Methodology. So I flipped to the cover. No, sure enough, it was a history journal.

But I will excuse myself for making the mistake. What I was reading didn't *sound* like history.

As Jim Startt reminds us, one of the ways history differs from the social sciences is in writing style. "No one would deny that a strong analytical as well as a narrative element characterizes history," he points out, "but without the narrative element history becomes something other than history."

That's what had happened to the paragraph above. It had lost the narrative element. The author was attempting to force the past into a theory. The result was social science. I'm only repeating common knowledge when I observe that one of the damages that theory inflicts is mechanical writing.

Of course, it is not difficult to find such writing scattered widespread in academic journals. Even researchers who dabble in history imitate social science writing. Perhaps they think it has a beauty of its own, like a concrete patio filled with plastic furniture. They fill their manuscripts with descriptions of their research methods and charts of their numerical findings, assembling articles that read like corporate performance reports.

To quote my late, wise mother: "Don't do that!"

Those problems are the marks of researchers unfamiliar with historical methods, academics who have made behavioral and social science theory and methods the kings of the hill. Such approaches are, while accepted in sociology and psychology, inadequate for history.

Historical method has a long and solid tradition. Historians properly using it face no compulsion to provide minute descriptions of the methodology they employ. The quality of their research is obvious from the properly documented sources, from the soundness of their reasoning, and from the narrative.

Their accounts can be easily distinguished from social science reports. They exhibit some grace in writing.

Such writing is not hard to find. Here are a couple of examples from a recent number (Winter 2018) of the journal *American Journalism*:

“Thanksgiving Day 1957 was cold and blustery in the small mining town of Breckinridge, Colorado. A dusting of snow had fallen the night before, but by the afternoon the town was in the throes of a full-fledged blizzard, and roads were soon impassable. Mayor Frank Brown gave up trying to keep pace with shoveling his driveway and instead settled in to watch college football on Denver’s KOA-TV.” (James Foust)

“An 1841 *Telegraph & Texas Register* editorial lamented that if Sam Houston won that year’s presidential election, the Republic of Texas would be a joke to the world. What a shame it would be, *Telegraph* editor Francis Moore wrote, if Houston met foreign leaders ‘with his robes of office dabbled in the vomit of intoxication and the foul and most horrid blasphemies trembling on his tongue.’” (Erika Pribanic-Smith)

Perhaps “grace” is not the best word to describe “vomit of intoxication,” but one cannot argue that passages such as these are dull.

We’re reminded of something Barbara Tuchman, the American historian, wrote. “Nothing,” she commented, “is more satisfying than to write a good sentence. It is no fun to write lumpishly, dully, in prose the reader must plod through like wet sand. But it is a pleasure to achieve, if one can, a clear running prose that is simple yet full of surprises.”

In this issue of *Historiography* we have some of the accomplished writers in the field of JMC history.

We lead off with an essay by Bernell Tripp, one of today’s leading historians of the African-American press. She argues that JMC historians need to broaden their horizons to include more minority and female journalists in the mainstream study of history.

In our second essay, Julie Williams cautions against the mindset

From the Editor

that history must incorporate theory. Historians need not, she says, feel inferior to either social scientists or *real* historians. We should realize that what we do is valuable on its own merits.

For our Historical Roundtable, Leonard Teel has organized a discussion of the study of international history. His most recent book, *Reporting the Cuban Revolution*, won the American Journalism Historians Association's 2016 award for the best book of the year. He is joined on the panel by Ross Collins, co-author of *The Rise of Western Journalism 1815-1914*; Elisabeth Fondren of Louisiana State University; and Jim Startt, author of a number of books, the most recent of which is *Woodrow Wilson, the Great War, and the Fourth Estate*.

The subject of our historian interview is Carol Sue Humphrey. She is the author of a number of books in JMC history and served for many years as the secretary of the AJHA. She is today's preeminent historian on the subject of the press and the American Revolution.

Finally, Sam Lebovic, a history professor at George Mason University, has done a Q&A about his book *Free Speech and Unfree News*. It won the 2017 Ellis Hawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians.

As with earlier issues of *Historiography*, we hope you will find the articles in this one well worth your reading time.

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Broadening the Scope of History

By Bernell Tripp ©



Tripp

When I first became fascinated with African American women's history, I happened upon the intersection of the works of African American women's historian Paula Giddings and feminist historian Gerda Lerner. Giddings enlightened me with her conceptualization of American black women as the linchpin between the two social movements of African American rights and women's rights.¹ However, it was Lerner's four stages of research on women's history that captivated me the most, and its applicability to all individual groups whose voices fell outside the margins of the mainstream press continues to resonate with media history researchers in modern times.² Lerner's theory came to mind recently when I was approached yet again about translating a media history course into an online survey course.

Provided with my university's guidelines for creating an acceptable collection of learning modules that correlated with a list of learning outcomes, I began to question *who*, as well as *what*, is deserving of a place in online media history. As I perused the long list of do's and don'ts, I recalled what Lerner's words had taught me. Lerner's original

Bernell Tripp, a journalism professor at the University of Florida, is the author of The Origins of the Black Press. She is a former president of the American Journalism Historians Association.

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theory postulated that the stages of research in women's history included *compensatory*, *contributory*, *transitional*, and *synthesis*.

Compensatory history attempted to close some of the many gaps in American historical record by identifying women who made significant contributions in societal progress.³ While biographical in nature, compensatory histories were akin to historian Thomas Carlyle's 19th-century "Great Man Theory" position that history can be largely explained by the impact of heroic men with the ability to rise to the occasion when the country or its people were in need.⁴ According to Lerner's premise, contributory history moved the historian closer to the truth by looking at the subject's achievements within the context and confines of a male-dominated society. The transitional stage uses the research subjects' own words, such as through speeches, oral histories, autobiographies, and letters, to offer greater insight into their roles in history and to reveal new topics and categories for examination. The final stage is synthesis, in which histories blend to form a history of all people, one that is enriched by the contributions of all members of the society and whose experiences provide new avenues for exploration.⁵

Synthesis is the point I've tried to achieve in my media history classroom. Drawing on the research of fellow historians, as well as my own, I have tried to incorporate as much information as possible on a wide variety of voices that contributed to the evolution of the mass media. While my efforts may be more contributory or transitional than synthesis, I think media history needs to include more, not less, information on those voices denied equal access to the mainstream press. Is Elias Boudinot or Jane Johnston Schoolcraft any less important than Joseph Pulitzer or Horace Greeley? Should Isaac Mayer Wise's contributions in his Jewish newspaper be deleted? Is Sarah Mapps Douglass or Maria Stewart less deserving than Ida Wells-Barnett, one of the few names my students have heard (but whose contributions are still an enigma to them)?

Broadening the Scope of History

More than a decade or so ago, one of my former media history students dropped by my office. Considering that she had passed the class a couple of semesters prior to the visit, I was surprised to learn that she had come to thank me for the way I taught the class. She reminded me that she was an education major, and in an education class for that current semester, she and a partner were assigned to compare the content from two sections of the same course taught by two different instructors. The object of the assignment was to calculate how many women and/or ethnic groups were included in the regular lectures.

“My partner’s instructor didn’t mention ANY, and look at all the names of the ones from my class with you,” she bragged as she flashed the list in her notebook. “My teacher was so impressed with you, and I can’t thank you enough for everything you taught us about people we had never heard of in our history class.”

In the years since that visit, I have added even more journalists whose names have disappeared from collective memory or from the pages of history. Not only have I expanded the number of women we discuss, but I have also made the effort to put names and faces to numerous others who struggled to make their voices heard in mainstream America. The list is by no means all-inclusive, but I like to think it’s a beginning.

In his autobiography, African American historian John Hope Franklin commented that he had “regarded African American history as not so much a separate field as a subspecialty of American history.” He added, “Even in graduate school, I was interested in women’s history, and in more recent years I have studied and written papers in that field, although I never claimed more than the desire to examine it intensely rather than to presume to master it entirely.”⁶

Much like Franklin, I believe that those who study mass media’s evolution need to broaden the scope and context of media history, not limit it to a chosen few. As a researcher, I have examined not only the

black press as a whole, as well as the individual experiences of both the men and women who added their voices to its development, but I've also investigated the abolitionist press, the fraternal press, and independent 19th-century presses that welcomed diversified writers.

Perhaps, it was the researcher in me who turned down (for the third time) the opportunity to create an online version of a media history course. While I realize technology and online courses are the future of historical research, the past still holds a richness of information and experiences waiting to be explored in research and in the classroom discussions, and I am unable (or unwilling) to eliminate any of it at the moment. Franklin theorized that broadening historical interests would assist researchers in understanding their own society.⁷ In the midst of our current divisive society, I hope that someone — either as a researcher or as an online course designer — can succeed in achieving Lerner's true synthesis of a U.S. media history that includes all voices.

¹ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. (New York: William Morrow, 1988).

² Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 145-159. Lerner also completed her own study of that intersection of the history of white and black women. See Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). Catherine Mitchell applied Lerner's conceptualization to journalism research. See Catherine C. Mitchell, "The Place of Biography in the History of News Women," *American Journalism* 7:1 (Winter 1990): 23-32.

³ Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, 145-159.

⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History. Six Lectures: Reported, with Emendations and Additions by Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846).

⁵ Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, 145-159. For a succinct overview of Lerner's premise in his own book on African American women journalists, see Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 11-12.

⁶ John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin*. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

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Our Inferiority Complex

By Julie Williams ©



Williams

“You people have an inferiority complex.”

That’s what Sheila, a “pure” historian, observed once among us media historians at the national American Journalism Historians Association convention. She had noticed that I routinely called members of history departments “pure” historians, as opposed to “media” historians in media departments.

I’ve come to believe that’s the reason some media historians are now saying we *always* need to insert theory into our research. I believe it’s because we have an inferiority complex — a complex that we don’t need to have.

Before I go further, I must say that I admire and respect media historians who use theory, including those who presented an interesting roundtable discussion on their use of theory in an earlier issue of this publication. I know their work, and they do excellent work.

But I have been dismayed by something I’ve heard from others: that media historians *must* insert theory into our research. I believe that pressure is based on an inferiority complex. After all, some may argue, journalism/mass communication is considered a social science,

Julie Williams is the author of a number of books, including The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America. She is a former president of the American Journalism Historians Association.

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right? Thus, shouldn't social science standards be applied? Shouldn't we be required to state and conform to theory if we want to play with the big kids in "pure" social science?

This theory-based inferiority complex has tried to smack down both my students and me.

I recall a student undergraduate thesis being submitted for Honors awards at my university. This particular student had written a terrific paper in the field of media history. It was top notch. One sad day, however, the student arrived in my office with a long face. The Honors committee had asked her questions I had never even brought before this student: What theory was she using? What outcome did she predict at the outset? The questions clearly were geared to the concept of theory as a predictor of behavior or a predictor of effects, although I know there are other definitions of theory out there.

I phoned the psychology professor who was in charge of the committee — a highly regarded researcher and an award-winning teacher. As I explained to him, the gold standard as I saw it for a history paper was to ask a research question and then to answer it based solely on whatever evidence was out there. As I explained nervously but stridently, if a student stated up front a theory and/or a predicted outcome, that's exactly what she would find. Instead, I said, she should go in with a blank slate and honestly see what was out there. If, in the end, she felt the findings reflected a mass media theory, that was OK, but that wasn't the goal. The goal was to see with open eyes what was there, not to try to make the research conform to some predetermined theoretical angle.

My colleague was gracious enough to accept this and congratulated the student on a job well done.

It made me recall another student who accepted a theory, which for want of a better name I'll call the theory that the press of the oppressed is always right. This particular student was researching coverage of

Our Inferiority Complex

Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in the local black press and in the local white-owned newspaper. He just assumed that the white-oriented press was in the wrong and the black paper was correct. In fact, a lot of students adopt this theoretical posture as gospel.

The student zeroed in on two different accounts, one by the black-owned newspaper and one by the white-owned newspaper, of a clash over school desegregation that immediately preceded the bombing. The articles in the two publications were indeed different in several key ways. My student said simply in concluding that section, "The *News* [the white-owned paper] was prejudiced." I read it over and said, "But how do you know which account is right?" I meant it literally — had he found evidence that the *News* had bent its coverage a little ... or a lot? The answer wasn't obvious, and I was curious what he knew.

He looked at me in surprise and then said, "I guess we don't really know!" Having cleared out that common "theory" (among my students, anyway) that the *News* naturally had to be in the wrong, he then looked at the material with new eyes. He got quite excited. Once he dropped a predetermined theory about prejudice, he discovered an interesting thing. Despite their different approaches to the news, in the end, the two newspapers were quite close to one another in their repeated messages about the heinous bombing. Both, as it turned out, continually pleaded for peace, peace, begging the residents of Birmingham to seek and embrace peace with each other. As my student concluded, the irony was that if the two races had read each other's newspapers, they would have discovered that they actually had very much in common in the aftermath of the bombing.

Back when that paper was written, our university sent the senior thesis papers out to experts for review, and I sent this one to the head of Birmingham's world-class Civil Rights Institute. The expert was so thrilled by the paper and the conclusion that he actually offered my student a job. I believe this was because the student had cleared out the

standard assumption — the standard theory — and thereby saw what was really there. That honesty impressed an important scholar of the Civil Rights movement.

It's frustrating when adherence to theory stymies a new point of view. I've just published *Three Not-So-Ordinary Joes*, which started as an AJHA paper and grew up to become a book. It's about the three journalists named Joe who stuttered and staggered their way into starting Southern literature. I came by this topic in the media history way — I saw a newspaper from 1862, *The Countryman*, which had been left out on a table in the university archives. I picked it up and was intrigued to see it was published on a plantation in Georgia. I was amused that its editor, Joseph Addison Turner, continually referred to his newspaper as the modern-day reincarnation of Joseph Addison's famous 18th-century newspaper, *The Spectator*. Turner also mentioned often that the Confederate States of America needed its own literature, that it couldn't be a great nation if all it did was make war — and he, Turner, would furnish that literature in the form of his *Countryman* newspaper. *The Spectator*, after all, had passed into the Pantheon of British literature.

I was reading *The Countryman* over many days, when one day the librarian thunked a pamphlet down beside me. It was called *The Autobiography of The Countryman*. As it turned out, Turner had written an autobiography, very brief and never published, but a modern scholar had published it as a tract chock full of footnotes. And one of those footnotes said that Turner's 15-year-old apprentice on that plantation newspaper was Joel Chandler Harris, the author of the famous Uncle Remus tales. The scholar said Harris had gotten those tales from his time living on Turner's plantation and working for *The Countryman*. At that moment, it hit me like a ton of books: Turner really HAD been the father of Southern literature, because surely Uncle Remus was the first widely popular Southern literature. And so it proved as I researched that angle.

Our Inferiority Complex

Fast forward some 15 years, and I had turned that brief paper into an entire book. Naturally I sent out a proud picture of the cover on my Facebook page. One of my old students read it and said, “Hey, contact these people!” and directed me to a call for presentation proposals from a group that studies Southern literature — and even better, they were meeting in my town.

I was a little late to the party — the call my student sent me showed I was past the deadline to apply. But I sent in a hastily written proposal anyway. I got a response. Yes, the man said, I was too late. But then he added something with what I interpreted as gentle disdain: he said that his association had certain ways of studying Southern literature, and my angle probably wouldn’t actually fit into that way.

Foiled by theory, I thought. True, I don’t know theory in the Southern literature field. But wasn’t my point of view valid? I think it is. Others who are willing to see outside the box “get” it. As Steven Donoghue said in a review in *The Christian Science Monitor*, readers of *Three Not-So-Ordinary Joes* would “appreciate all over again how fascinating and unpredictable a course literary inspiration can take. An essay written in a bitter London winter is adoringly read in a steamy, humid Georgia bedroom a century later, and the two give rise to a classic children’s book that was read all over the world for another century. We can never know which seeds will take, or where they’ll flower.”

And that’s indeed my point. The Southern literature fellow apparently was hidebound by some theory of Southern literature, and thus scorned a seed that flowered in an unexpected place.

I don’t bear the man any grudges, but I do worry that we get stuck into boxes when we tie ourselves to theories, while a fresh-eyed approach might see the seed that bloomed outside of that box.

All in all, it seems to me that the reason we media historians think we need to embrace theory is because we are suffering that aforementioned inferiority complex. We think we must embrace theory because

the social scientist reviewing our paper doesn't understand that an honest "blank slate" approach to research also yields valid results.

But it doesn't HAVE to be that way. What was Sheila's advice, so long ago, when she observed that we media historians seemed to feel inferior to "pure" historians?

"Don't feel that way," she commanded. "You all are pure historians, too."

Sheila is right. If our research does mirror a theory, that's fine. But it need not be *required* to adhere to a theory. Historical research that is not driven by theory is not inferior.

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Historical Roundtable: International Journalism History Scholarship

By Leonard Ray Teel, Ross F. Collins,
Elisabeth Fondren, and James D. Startt ©

American journalism historians who focus on the media histories of other countries have contended with complications and expenses of foreign travel, translations, and culturally unique media practices. This Roundtable brings together the experiences and achievements of four journalism historians who continue to conduct research in Britain, France, Germany and the Middle East.

Q: What makes research in international media history important in the field of journalism history?

Collins: It's probably no surprise to anyone that journalism is international. It may be more of a surprise to consider that our familiar concept of "news," the approach to gathering it and the style of reporting it also reaches around the world. "News" as nearly everyone defines it today developed in the West — that is, Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States. Unfortunately, we historians too often pay slight attention to the first three. Of course, the United States has from its inception made journalism a central player in democracy. It is the only profession mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. Its power and influence have grown to reach around the world. This perhaps explains why United States journalism dominates scholarly research. But we need to consid-

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Teel

er that the rest of the world also influenced the United States, and journalism today, as in the past, is interconnected.

Startt: To begin with, international media are an inescapable fact of modern life. That it is an inseparable part of the ever-shrinking world is beyond question. It has also been a part, though an often underplayed or neglected one, in the history of journalism for the last three hundred years. During that time the international

Leonard Ray Teel, professor emeritus at Georgia State University, has published five books, including most recently Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists. It won the AJHA Book of the Year Award for 2016. His textbook Into the Newsroom was published in Arabic (Cairo, 1990). At Georgia State University in 1995 he founded the Center for International Media Education and co-founded the Arab-U.S. Association for Communication Educators (AUSACE.org).

Collins



Ross F. Collins is a professor of communication at North Dakota State University. He has authored or edited six books, including The Rise of Western Journalism 1815-1914 (with Jean Palmegiano). He is 2018-19 president of the American Journalism Historians Association. He holds a Ph.D. in French history from the University of Cambridge, UK.

Fondren

Elisabeth Fondren is an instructor at Louisiana State University, where she earned her Ph.D. in Media & Public Affairs. Her research explores the evolution of German propaganda ideas and institutions during the First World War. She received an M.A. in International Journalism from City University of London and a B.A. in humanities from Heidelberg University in Germany.



Startt

James D. Startt received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland and is senior research professor in history at Valparaiso University. A former president of the AJHA, he received its Sidney Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2000. He has written a number of books, including Journalists for Empire: The Imperial Debate in the Edwardian Stately Press, 1903-1913.

media itself have grown as a factor in world history.

As a field of study, media history should appeal to anyone interested in the interplay of communication and world affairs. Those interested in the history of international relations will find international media to have played an important role in their evolution. It should be remembered that the international mass media were an influential factor in many movements such as the abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of women, the spread of democracy, and the quest for international peace. The history of modern war, of national defense or of the globalization of modern trade and commerce have all involved the international media. And, for the last three hundred years as interest in foreign affairs has grown, so foreign correspondence has grown to become a major, and hugely expensive, part of newsgathering throughout the industrialized world.

It can be said that the history of international media has been bound up in the history of the world itself. The question remains: Has the role of international media had a place in journalism history proportional to its actual role in history? Since the answer to that question is “no,” it can be argued that it should be. Except for some specialized topics, the traditional history of journalism has been far too provincial. More emphasis on international media history would be a natural expansion for journalism history and would add rich interest to its content.

Fondren: Conceptually, ideas on media systems and news cultures are fluid. Journalism and news are influenced by the political and social cultures in which they originate, but national borders do not necessarily confine ideas or practices. There is a certain amount of overlap, which I think is a fascinating starting point for asking more questions. Research on international media history can help to establish broader contexts, moving away from dominant perspectives. A focus on interna-

tional or global journalism, however, is still not a priority in our field. By studying other perspectives, scholars can make comparisons, single out exceptions and draw parallels between countries. Historians interested in the intersection of media and politics will find that international journalism has been a part of revolutions and social causes but that government propaganda also stirred up nationalism and hostility towards vulnerable groups or other nations.

Teel: At its most helpful, international media history documents the global reach and impact of journalism's principles and influence. My first two projects, as a graduate student, documented a British press campaign that exposed a forced labor regime in King Leopold's Congo Free State, and how the British press influenced England to build the Navy's iron-clad Dreadnoughts before the First World War. Since then, I've found that journalism has been an influential factor in numerous countries influenced by British governance — in Nigeria, Pakistan, Nepal, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates — and by French governance — in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon. When I taught in all these countries, I found that journalists and journalism students are keenly interested in the practice of American journalism. I did not “export the First Amendment,” but I did demonstrate how journalism can function to mirror the contemporary world and energize public opinion.

Q: In researching international media history, what do you find enjoyable and rewarding?

Collins: I have published research in both United States and international journalism history, and find all of it enjoyable and rewarding! But it's the international work that for me offers an understanding and perspective I don't as often see in my work from the United States side. The

press of France, in particular, developed its power in a cauldron of revolution, just as America's journalism did. But French revolutionary journalism exploded at the end of an absolutist monarchy of extreme repression. The French revolutionary press ran from stuffy to obscene, timid to violent. We never saw this in the United States. Taking a look at French response can give us insight of how censorship, liberalism, prison and political power can mold a society's mass media. History begins with stories, and to me it's fascinating to see how other nations developed their mass media, and how that development affects ideals of international journalism.

Startt: I always find studying old newspapers fascinating. They give life to past generations, to the challenges they faced and to the achievements they made. My special interest, however, has been in probing into the personal papers of journalists and the public figures who have in some way influenced the course of international media history. Historians owe a special debt to men and women who have dedicated these rich unpublished materials to the public. They make it possible to search out the interaction between the published record and the human activity behind it.

When studying these manuscript collections, historians occasionally stumble upon an unexpected item of significance. I had one such surprise some years ago. While researching Edward Price Bell's voluminous personal papers, I came across a hand-written letter that Varlaan Tcherkesoff had written to Bell in 1904. Tcherkesoff was born in 1846 in Russian Georgia, the son of a noble family who owned hundreds of serfs, the ill-treatment of whom led him to renounce his family privileges and join Dmítry Karakózov's terrorist group. For his involvement in that group's abortive attempt to assassinate Czar Alexander II, Tcherkesoff was arrested and sent to Siberia. There he remained for two years before escaping and making his way to London where he joined

the staff of Peter Lavroff's clandestine journal *The Forward*. For the next thirty years he stayed in London eking out a living writing for various revolutionary journals and, ironically, for that most respectable of newspapers, the London *Times*. Meanwhile, Bell used him as a source for some of his articles in the *Chicago Daily News*. It pays to make a search of such large collections as thorough as possible. In this case, the discovery of the Tcherkesoff letter led to the publication of a short article about this long-forgotten Russian revolutionary journalist.

Fondren: When studying the cultural histories of news and media institutions, I make an effort to look at primary sources and archival materials in their original form. I travel to archives in the United States and Europe and in the process of historical analysis and writing, I work in several languages — English, German, and French. When looking for secondary research and published scholarship, the body of research in a particular country often gives important insights that I can incorporate. In addition, I enjoy working with an interdisciplinary focus and I find that international research projects often open up dialogues between media scholars and historians from different countries or cultures.

Teel: The most enjoyable and rewarding aspect of my Arab journalism history research is the experience of working with communication scholars and journalists in the several countries. They are too numerous to name here. Many will be gathered together for the 23rd annual AUSACE conference, this year in the United States at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In truth, I would be unable to write the book I have in mind without their aid.

Q: *How and why do you choose your projects?*

Collins: My academic background is French journalism history, making it an obvious backdrop to international study. My specific area is World War I. This grew from my master's degree work, in which I studied a British journalist and politician during that period. In France World War I was a black spot on the otherwise glittering era of the Third Republic (1871-1940). We now consider it the golden age of French journalism. Arguably it was also the golden age of international journalism. (If you want to argue, meet me over a drink at the next AJHA convention.) Lately I have tried to reach more broadly into earlier French journalism. I'm taking a closer look at French revolutionary period. It's probably the most well-researched area of French mass media, and most widely known among non-journalism historians. Who hasn't heard of outrageous scribblers like Jean-Paul Marat? But I have tried also to work into areas less familiar, particularly the 19th century. Little on that era is available to us in English.

My other research agenda is frontier journalism. When I began work at North Dakota State, I realized French archives were a long way away and so costly to visit. I began research on a French aristocrat, the Marquis de Mores, who moved to North Dakota during the cowboy era with the aim of building his fortune. (He failed.) That work expended into frontier journalism as a way to take advantage of archives within driving, and not just flying distance.

Startt: In some cases, one project leads to another. Otherwise, I follow the established principles of topic selection such as: Do I have the needed skills regarding language, economics, religion, etc. to complete the project? Is it workable in terms of availability of sources, particularly primary sources? Is it significant? But most of all, do I find it interesting and do I sense that others share that interest?

Fondren: My overarching research interests in history, media and

democracy connect most of my work. By looking at perspectives beyond one country, one dominant news culture or even English-speaking scholarship, I think we can broaden our interpretations of media history. I recently completed a book chapter on the history of the role of the editor and the editorial process in Europe and North America. My analysis shows how media institutions reflect the societies, institutions and structures that produce and sustain them.

There are various approaches for studying historical developments or characteristics of international media: comparative work; biographical approaches; studies of news circulation and the infrastructure of global news networks; the legal and constitutional frameworks; production routines and techniques; and comparisons of norms and values.

Teel: The way I choose projects was established during my 20 years as a daily newspaper journalist. Usually, I wrote stories assigned by editors, but increasingly I initiated projects that I found intellectually and emotionally compelling. My book projects reflect that same pattern: three were proposed by people who trusted me to grow their ideas into a book. Two — plus one project in progress — grew from my interest and fascination with international journalism.

The first book, *Erma: A Black Woman Remembers* (Random House, 1981), was proposed by Helen Knopf, wife of publisher Alfred Knopf. She had wanted to write it, as she told my mother-in-law, Margaret Williams. Margaret volunteered me. Mrs. Knopf recruited as my editor the novelist, Toni Morrison.

The proposal that led to *Ralph Emerson McGill: Voice of the Southern Conscience* (University of Tennessee Press, 2001), came from Dr. Harold Davis, my mentor at Georgia State University. Harold was an early officer with AJHA who had just published his biography of the Atlanta newspaper editor Henry W. Grady and had accumulated papers on Mc-

Gill, which he turned over to me.

The third book proposal came directly from two of our esteemed AJHA scholar-editors — Dr. David Sloan and Dr. Jim Startt. At an AJHA conference, they drew me aside and easily persuaded me to co-author volume five in the series *The History of American Journalism: The Public Press, 1900-1945* (Praeger, 2006). When my co-author had to drop out, I wrote his half as well.

Into the Newsroom: An Introduction to Journalism (Prentice-Hall, 1983) was the first book project of my choosing, written toward the end of my journalism career with co-author Ron Taylor. Ron and I had such a good time telling the truth that our good humor showed and caught one reviewer off guard; he denigrated our work as “a parody of a textbook.” Nonetheless, *Into the Newsroom* had a great life including a second edition (1988) and translations into Arabic, Spanish, Chinese and Armenian — a real benefit when I guest lectured in the Middle East, Armenia and China.

The idea for *Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists* (LSU Press, 2015) grew from my experiences with Cuban exiles in Miami. The book exemplified the dilemma of editors at home when their journalists, in war zones, wrote almost as partisans of revolutionaries. I tracked the work of 13 U.S. correspondents who presented such a positive picture of Fidel Castro and his rebels that Castro on his first trip to Washington awarded the 13 with gold medals engraved with their names and his flourishing signature. The research was enriched by various archives, by the journalists’ print and broadcast stories. I also benefitted from what my university mentor Dr. Duane Koenig called “history on the hoof” — a few key men and women still alive to expand and verify my story. My Spanish was also helpful.

Since nobody has proposed another project, I have turned again to my own interests in international journalism history in the modern Middle East. This book will focus on the practice of journalism in the

years before the widespread “Arab Spring” uprisings in 2011. Among my sources is a collection of 80 stories written by Arab journalists (in Arabic and English) from 1997 to 2004. The stories documented the rising social movement — of civil society organizations — one underlying reason for the coalescence of popular revolt evidenced in the Arab Spring.

Q: *How has the field changed since you began doing your own work?*

Collins: By the early 1990s French journalism history had gone somewhat out of style. The few resources from the 19th century to the 1930s still were available and widely consulted. In the 1960s and 1970s Claude Bellanger and a team of French historians sought to create a veritable encyclopedia of French journalism by compiling a voluminous four-volume study, *L'Histoire Générale de la Presse française* (not available in English). This understandably became the standard reference as it was intended to be, with comprehensive lists of newspapers, developments in technology and press law, important publishers and journalists. Perhaps this historical *coup d'état* intimidated everyone, because for a couple decades little new work appeared. Then a new generation of French historians sparked renewed interest in the late 1980s, perhaps in response to a burst of general curiosity about the press during the bicentennial of the 1789 French Revolution. Today French journalism historians are giving us a rich new trove. Many are part of the Paris-based *Société pour l'Histoire des Médias*, a sister group to AJHA that recently began to allow English-language presentations at its conferences.

In addition, of course, so much more is now online. The basic resource is the French National Library's *Gallica* website. An immense database of the French press from the Old Regime through the end of the Third Republic is available free to anyone, anywhere, and includes

sophisticated search options. Of course, quite a bit is still missing. And many primary documents are not online.

One thing hasn't changed: Except for the revolutionary era, little work on the French press is available in English.

Startt: When I first began writing about journalism history, I found that there were only several textbooks in the field. Other than Edwin Emery's *The Press and America*, which was published in 1954 and regularly updated afterward, most of them were dated. Newer textbooks in the field such as David Sloan's *The Media in America* now offer historians a fuller picture of the media's many facets and how they have evolved and interacted with American life over time. As for general in-depth historical literature in the field, when I began working in it, there was little that could be called authoritative.

In the area of foreign correspondents, my special interest, most of the books were sympathetic biographies or autobiographies. Substantive studies were few. The only general history available was John Hohenberg's *Foreign Correspondents: The Great Reporters and Their Times* (1965). Since then, major works have appeared to enrich the field: Robert Desmond's five-volume history on world news reporting from the eighteenth century to the 1980s, and Phillip Knightley's *The First Casualty: From Crimea to Viet Nam, The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker* (1975), which examines a particular but large area of foreign correspondence. More recently John Maxwell Hamilton's outstanding standard-setting volume *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (2009) offers historians a gold mine of information as well as grist for future studies.

Like the more general field of media history, foreign correspondence has been well served regarding primary sources. Back issues of hundreds of American and foreign newspapers have been made available by the Library of Congress, as well as by other newspaper libraries.

Furthermore, journalists seem to have the habit of keeping everything; consequently, they have left to the public many fine personal records covering their careers.

Meanwhile, today there are numerous internet sites that provide media historians with multiple resources — bibliographic and reference, sources covering every aspect of international media history, and much more. Furthermore, today there are journals. *American Journalism: A Journal of Media History* and *Journalism History* in particular, that are devoted to media history, and an increasing number of articles in international media history are now appearing and bringing balance to their contents. The field of international media history, therefore, has grown, has been enriched, and has become far more inviting to serious scholars than it was some years ago.

Fondren: From my perspective, I have seen a rise of international and transnational media research in the past decade. When I was working on my dissertation on World War I media history I found that the existent literature on public opinion does not sufficiently cover the comparative perspective of some of the major countries involved in the war, notably the United States, Britain, Germany and France. There is still much work to be done. In my field, a decidedly comparative and institutional analysis of these various governments' propaganda and censorship efforts (during the years 1914-1918) could advance the history of government public affairs during World War I.

Teel: When I started working with journalism educators and journalists in the Middle East in the mid-1990s, communications were by phone or FAX. Thus, no change has been more important and resourceful than the internet, useful for searches and for keeping me in touch with the people I am writing about. One downside of the internet in the Middle East has been the decline of printed newspapers. Recently one

of the most prominent journalists in the Arab world, Najia al-Houssari, advised me that her revered daily *Al Hayat* has abandoned its print publication in favor of its online version and asked its staff to work at home.

Another positive change has been the publication of new Arabic-English dictionaries. I am especially thankful for the work of my research colleague Dr. Ahmed Hidass in Rabat, Morocco. His *Unified Dictionary of Information Terms* in English, French and Arabic has been adopted and circulated by the Bureau of Coordination of Arabization at the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization. (Pages 80-82, for instance, give French and Arabic for entries from “new journalism” to “newsy.”)

My research across the Middle East benefits also from the resources of the Arab-U.S. Association for Communication Educators (AUSACE.org). The association was founded in 1995 by Arab and U.S. educators meeting at Georgia State University in Atlanta. In addition to online research and discussions, AUSACE members have since 1996 met for annual academic conferences. The recent 2018 conference was hosted in October at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette.

Q: *What challenges have you faced, engaged in research and writing international media history?*

Collins: The single biggest challenge for me is reach — it’s so far and so expensive for me to get to international archives. Some of the material is online, and that has been to me (and all of us) an absolute game-changer. Some material is also available in United States archives. But much is not, particularly for the World War I era, my specialty.

But I think the challenge goes beyond the matter of physical inaccessibility. It comes to the heart of the reason not many of us choose an international perspective: the language barrier. Many of us just don’t

know another language at a level that makes feasible scholarly research. To be honest, it took years of study for me to reach the level that I could somewhat understand the sophistication of Paris journalism — it is historically more subtle and literary than the press here — and frankly, the reason I learned is academic whimsy. I enrolled in my first French class at age 21, for the then perfectly valid reason that I liked a girl who was in the class. That didn't work out. But I discovered I actually enjoyed prying open that new world we gain in studying a second language and so continued on to finish a minor in French.

Most of us don't have that kind of good fortune, if it was that, and so international journalism study in any depth outside of the English-speaking world is nearly impossible. It also explains why so little international journalism history is published in English beyond British and North American Studies. I don't know what the solution is. Required language study in secondary school? Not going to happen.

Startt: The challenges have involved mainly two things: expense and quantity. Research in international media history can be expensive due to location of source materials. Even at this time when those sources are becoming more available on the internet, travel to libraries and archives is often necessary. Those repositories are located throughout the country, and, with my interest in British media history, in England as well. Due to the extent of materials to be viewed, those trips are often several weeks or even months in duration.

Because of the nature of international media history, the sources to be used can be voluminous. In my recent book, *Woodrow Wilson: the Great War, and the Fourth Estate*, I set out to cover mainstream newspapers and journals in the United States and England. This search also involved various special interest publications, for example, African American, ethnic, labor, religious, socialist, radical, suffragist and anti-suffragist, and trade journals. This required studying 76 American

newspapers and journals of opinion for selected topics mostly from 1914-1920, 11 British newspapers for various lengths of time, and 72 American special interest periodicals. Beyond that, there were dozens of manuscript collections and archival records to consult. It was easy to get lost in a forest of sources, and the effort of pulling them together in a narrative was, I confess, a challenge.

Fondren: International research is expensive, and finding ways to pay for travel and accommodation is perhaps the biggest challenge that scholars, in particular junior historians, face. The ongoing digitization efforts by archives and manuscript collections worldwide have made it easier to access information online, but historians will continue to travel and seek access to government or newspaper archives. Language skills can be challenge because finding aids, newspaper archives or paper collections are rarely translated. In addition, the amount of source material can be quite large and when doing international projects, it can be hard to decide where to start and which types of evidence to include, or even where to start looking.

For my own research field, I have also found that crucial information is either missing or destroyed. There are several limitations, for instance, in studying Germany's World War I information efforts. The availability of archival sources for this period's military records is significantly diminished because the records of the Prussian Army and the German War Department were lost during World War II in a fire at the archive in Potsdam in 1945. This means that historians of the First World War have tried to deconstruct the military side of affairs through the use of carbon copies sent to other agencies and branches of government.

Teel: My persistent challenge has been translation from Arabic. Fortunately, I have been able to consult my AUSACE colleagues and oth-

ers across the region. Also, travel expenses have become a problem since I retired from Georgia State University. As a research professor, our Center for International Media Education (CIME) had funding from the University's College of Arts and Sciences and from federal educational funding.

One eventful challenge evidenced the effect of U.S. foreign policy on U.S. scholars abroad. In Cairo during the U.S. war in Iraq, the director of the famous *Al Ahram* Regional Press Institute, Osama Saraya, planned to cancel our scheduled workshop for Egyptian journalists and civil society organizations. His reason had nothing to do with us, and everything to do with the scandalous news that week about American soldiers' ill treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Iraq's Al Ghraib prison. The director had already canceled a journalism project with a Kentucky university. Negotiating through a mediator I knew, I managed to persuade the director to let us continue. His change of mind was based in part on his remembrance of our two previous workshops. He plainly had enjoyed our journalism workshops, especially the closing ceremonies when we recognized the achievements of all the participants by name and affiliation and gave each a personalized certificate.

Q: *How do you see the contribution that your own work has made to our understanding of international media history?*

Collins: I think compared to my colleagues in international journalism my contribution has been modest. Over the years I have tried to introduce topics in French journalism to readers of our major publications, *American Journalism*, *Journalism History*, *JMC Quarterly* and *Journalism & Communication Monographs*. And working with Jean Palmegiano we now have available my chapter on French press history as part of our edited book. That book is still, I believe, the only comprehensive introduction to international journalism history available in English.

Because little French press history beyond the revolutionary period and Old Regime is accessible to anglophones, these are lonely resources. And spindly. We need more, not only on the French press, but more generally on international journalism worldwide. I hope to continue contributing to that. I hope others will consider joining in.

Startt: The main contribution of my work to the understanding of international media history is found in three of my books. *Journalism's Unofficial Ambassador: A Biography of Edward Price Bell, 1896-1980* (1980) is the only biography of this pioneer of foreign correspondence who more than anyone else was responsible for building the foreign news service of the *Chicago Daily News* into one of the finest of its kind in the history of American Journalism. *The Imperial Debate in the Edwardian Stately Press, 1903-1913* (1991) covers a previously neglected area in international media history. Most historians who had considered the British Empire and the press mainly concentrated on popular newspapers and magazines. *Woodrow Wilson, the Great War, and the Fourth Estate* (2017) offers a more positive interpretation of Wilson and the press than that of most other historians. Unlike other studies in the field, it considers how Wilson used public diplomacy to influence press opinion in England, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia as well as the value he placed on what the newspapers in those countries had to say about his wartime and peace initiatives. It also focuses attention on Wilson's advisor Colonel Edward M. House and the many ways Wilson tried to influence reporters and foreign correspondents. It represents the most complete synthesis of the subject to-date.

Of all the articles I have published about topics and figures in media, two were particularly noteworthy: "American Propaganda in Britain during World War I" (*Prologue*, 1996), and "American Film Propaganda in Revolutionary Russia" (*Prologue*, 1998). Both discuss the work of the Committee on Public Information's overseas activities

during the war. Despite the abundance of writing about the CPI's domestic work, its activities abroad have received scant attention. These two articles cover topics that historians had previously overlooked which were, however, important aspects of the wartime foreign relations of the United States.

Fondren: While scholarship on the history of the German press has a long tradition, few scholars have looked at the origins of early propaganda institutions. In Germany, there are political and historical reasons why there has been such a delay in systematic studies of government information. But even 100 years after the end of the Great War, we perhaps know least about the Germans, whose propaganda efforts have been written off as either negligible or too ham-fisted to be worth studying. Between 1914-1918, both the war's winners and its losers had been active producers as well as targets of propaganda campaigns. In Germany, just as in Britain and France, officials had sought to mobilize mass opinion through censorship, the control of information, the creation of new bureaus, and the telling of half-truths and outright lies.

My dissertation tried to fill this gap. It examined the losers and their ideas about propaganda — in this case German officials and institutions — and showed how a semi-authoritarian and elitist government, characterized by many competing centers of power and by an entrenched federalism in cultural affairs, struggled with the problem of propaganda. Eventually the German government recognized the need for unified strategies that were more modern, inclusive and democratic. For my next project, I am interested in how different countries relied on propaganda (meaning publicity and censorship) in the early information societies of the twentieth century.

Teel: If my contribution to the understanding of international media history is successful it must meet the challenge posed by Gabriel García

Márquez in accepting the 1982 Nobel Peace Prize for Literature.

“The interpretation of reality through *patterns not our own*,” García Márquez stated, “serves only to make us *ever more unknown*.”

To my mind, García Márquez framed the fundamental problem that faces anyone working in international media history. The problem of interpreting reality through “patterns not our own” certainly plagued the American journalists whose erroneous interpretations of international events and personalities I have documented in three books. That has been my main contribution to our understanding of international media history.

This challenge of interpreting “reality through patterns not own” was ever-present in my book about American press coverage of Fidel Castro’s Cuban revolution. The 13 U.S. journalists (overseen by editors back home) published a multitude of misleading reports about Castro’s rebellion. It was clear the journalists and their U.S. gatekeepers misread the revolution by viewing Latin Americans through North American eyes.

In writing *The Public Press, 1900-1945*, I encountered the same problem with “interpretation of reality through patterns not our own.” We have the well-known case of American journalists misunderstanding or otherwise mis-reporting the Russian Revolution in 1917 and afterwards. The famous 1920 study by Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz concluded that the *Times*’ reporting — more than 3,000 stories from 1917 to 1920 — was a “disaster” that had misled the American public. “The news about Russia is a case of seeing *not what was*, but what men *wished to see*.” News was guided not by facts but by “hope and fear in the minds of reporters and editors [at home].” Why? They concluded that at first an optimistic press handled news of the revolution “in a rather uncritically pro-Bolshevik [revolutionary] fashion.” Also, they found, “certain correspondents are totally untrustworthy because their sympathies are too deeply engaged.” Other “improperly

trained men have seriously misled a whole nation.” Lippmann and Merz recommended reform of journalistic standards within the profession.

In writing the biography of Ralph McGill, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, I found the same problem of misinterpretation of reality “through patterns not our own.” While McGill was perfectly on target in writing about his own American South, he seriously misunderstood and misinterpreted for his readers Joseph Stalin’s Russia and the China of Chiang Kai-Shek and Mao Tse-Tung. In 1945 McGill toured Russia and China with a three-man mission to promote freedom of the press. In Moscow, McGill was persuaded that Russians were serious in pledging to support a freer press, and that “a more liberal press policy is in the making in Russia.” In China, McGill disparaged the regime of Chiang Kai-Shek because of alleged corruption, but was attracted by the Communists’ promised social reforms to redistribute land to farmers and abolish loan sharks — “the money-lenders who were, by all accounts, enough to make our loan sharks appear beneficent philanthropists.” McGill concluded that Mao Tse Tung’s government, which by 1945 held as much territory as Chiang, was “not Marxist Communist, being almost entirely an agrarian movement. It has given the farmers land and it manages to hold their affections and loyalty.”

Now in my current work — with universities and media across the Middle East — I have ample challenges of my own with “the interpretation of reality through patterns not our own.” For a while it seemed that I recognized a pattern of press freedom similar to “our own.” That sense of press freedom was personified by Gebran Tueni, the tall, confident editor-in-chief of the prominent Beirut morning newspaper, *An Nahar*.

I met Gebran Tueni in 1999 in his office, from which there was a gorgeous view down to the Mediterranean shore with waves dashing the rocks and sparkling in the morning sunlight. A photograph taken that morning of Gebran with me and my friend Professor Mahmoud Tarabay shows Gebran looking across his office at something that made

him and Mahmoud smile — the cluster of stuffed toy roosters, mascots for his morning newspaper.

Gebran asked me about my work in the Middle East, and I mentioned workshops for journalists in Egypt.

Immediately, he asked, “Why do work in Egypt? Lebanon has the freest press in the Arab world.”

He believed in that freedom, which explains the political license he took shortly afterwards. After he was elected to Parliament, he published an editorial declaring it was time for Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon and stop meddling in Lebanese affairs.

The 15-year Lebanese civil war had ended in 1990, but Syria was maintaining a military presence. Many Lebanese privately viewed the Syrians as “occupiers.” Syrian troops were stationed in various locations. In Beirut, their soldiers were visible standing or sitting in vacant storefronts. Residents referred to them as “the neighbors.”

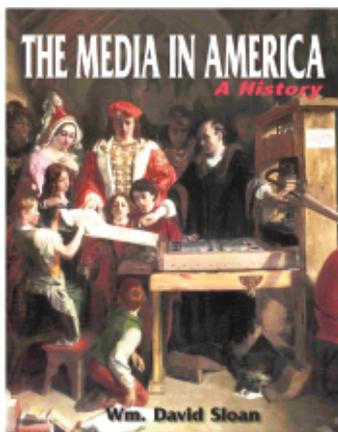
Gebran’s daring proposition now stirred a national discussion. This seemed clearly a declaration of press freedom. He was speaking truth to power. Facing threats, he moved for a while to Paris.

I saw Gebran once again at a celebratory dinner honoring Gebran and his father Ghassan Tueni, the former editor-in-chief and publisher who was the son of the Gebran Tueni who founded *An Nahar* in 1933.

On December 12, 2005, Gebran Tueni was killed near Beirut by a car bomb. Reaction to his assassination was immediate and international, condemned by many countries. Under greater pressure, the Syrian regime withdrew its troops. Yet, without Gebran’s voice, *An Nahar* has never been the same. “Tueni was assassinated,” wrote another voice for reform, “with the intention of assassinating the press in Lebanon.”

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Historian Interview: Carol Sue Humphrey ©



Humphrey

Carol Sue Humphrey, a professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, is today's leading historian on the press and the American Revolution. She is the author of the books *The American Revolution and the Press: The Promise of Independence*; *"This Popular Engine": The Role of New England Newspapers During the American Revolution*; *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*; *Debating Historical Issues in the Media of the Time: The Revolutionary Era*; and *The Greenwood Library of American War Reporting: The*

Revolutionary War. *The American Revolution and the Press* won the AJHA award in 2014 for the best book of the year. It was also a finalist for the Tankard Book Award given by the AEJMC. For many years she served as the secretary of the AJHA. She received her Ph.D. in history from the University of North Carolina.

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

Humphrey: I was born in Lumberton, North Carolina. I grew up all over North Carolina (and three years in South Carolina) because my dad worked for Carolina Power and Light Company and we moved several times. All of my college education was in North Carolina — my bachelor's degree is from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, my

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master's degree is from Wake Forest University, and my doctorate degree is from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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

Humphrey: I went into teaching straight out of graduate school. Throughout high school and undergraduate college, I worked as a waitress in a number of places. My original plan as an undergraduate was to become a high school history teacher, but I decided that would be a mistake. (I figured I would “kill” some of the students when I did my class observations as an undergraduate.) I already had a professor encouraging me to go to graduate school so that is what I did.

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

Humphrey: I have taught at Oklahoma Baptist University since 1985. As a result, I have taught a variety of courses as other people have come and gone. A centerpiece of my course load has been a team-taught two-semester Western Civilization course that goes from the Roman era to the present. The course combines history and literature together, which makes for a very interesting perspective on many things throughout history. I also currently teach the two-semester U.S. History survey, Oklahoma History, Introduction to Public History, Colonial and Revolutionary U.S. History, and American Journalism History. In the past, I have also taught U.S. Women's History, History of the American West, African-American History, The Early U.S. Republic (1800-1848), Civil War and Reconstruction, and The U.S. as a Global Power (1932 to the present).

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?

Humphrey: As I was growing up, my family often went camping during the summer. Each time, we almost always visited some Civil War battlefields because my mom and one of my brothers were really interested in that subject. That sparked a little interest in history, but my interest really took off in the 7th grade when I had an amazing teacher. I knew from then on that I wanted to do something related to history, so teaching was the most obvious option. I also had a great teacher in high school, so that just reinforced my determination to major in history in college. As I said earlier, I originally planned to become a high school teacher, but I changed my mind and focused more on historical research. I had several great professors in college who taught me how to do research and to write research papers. That learning process continued in graduate school. My interest in the American Revolution started while I was in high school, but it really took off in college. (I have often thought that I originally moved in that direction in order to thumb my nose at my mom and brother who were really interested in the Civil War). My education focused on research and writing throughout my college career, and the many papers and theses that I did helped me learn how to search out sources and put primary and secondary sources together to produce a thoughtful discussion of some past event or development (such as the role of the press in the American Revolution).

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

Humphrey: One of my undergraduate professors, Dr. Alan Watson, pushed me to decide what time period most interested me and helped me realize that I really wanted to focus on the American Revolution in

some way. While in graduate school at UNC, I sought out Dr. Don Higginbotham, the American Revolution expert, to discuss possible topics for my research. I was really surprised when he pulled a stack of index cards out of his desk. He told me that he always jotted down research ideas that were ones that he did not want to pursue personally because he thought they might be good ideas for students. The card that gave me my focus was the idea of picking up the role of the press in the American Revolution in the years after the point where Arthur Schlesinger's book stopped in 1776.

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

Humphrey: I focus on the impact of the press (particularly newspapers) on events in history. My primary interest is the American Revolution, but I have also looked at other events and eras in American history.

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

A: I have written two books related to the role of the press during the American Revolution (one focused on New England based on my dissertation and one on the press in the entire country) as well as a book on the American press from 1783 to 1833. I have also put together three books of historical documents (primarily from newspapers) that focus on the Revolutionary Era and one that focuses on the War of 1812. And I have written numerous articles and book reviews related to the role of the press during the American Revolution and the early years of the American republic.

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

Humphrey: I really have gotten satisfaction out of all the books I have written. Of course, I got the most satisfaction out of finally completing my study of the press during the American Revolution when *The American Revolution and the Press: The Promise of Independence* was published by Northwestern University Press in 2013. But I also enjoyed researching and completing *Voices of Revolutionary America: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life* published by Greenwood Press in 2011. This book of documents was aimed at a high school audience, and I hoped that it would spark an interest in history among those students who read it. I also rejoiced greatly when *"This Popular Engine": The Role of New England Newspapers During the American Revolution* was published by the University of Delaware Press in 1992 because it was wonderful to see all the hard work of my dissertation finally be in print.

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?

Humphrey: In general, I have worked (along with many other people) to make historians more aware of the important impact of the press in American history (particularly in the early years when it is not always as obvious as it is today). I believe that my research on the Revolutionary War, while not 100% perfect, has played an important role in raising awareness about the central role of the press in stirring up people to revolt against Great Britain and to keep fighting until they won.

Q: As you look back over your career, if you could do anything differently,

what would it be?

Humphrey: I have always enjoyed teaching undergraduates, and that has been my primary focus because I want to help them see how interesting and important history can be. I would have liked to have been able to be more successful at that and to have possibly come closer to reaching that goal by advising more honors theses that related to the role of the press in history.

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.*

Humphrey: In studying history in any way, it is important to remember to remove our own ideas and feelings from the study as much as possible. As one of my professors once told me, “hindsight is 20/20” so we think it is easy to look back at the past and see what they did right and what they did wrong. That may be true, but the only way to really understand the past is to try to see it from their perspective in order to understand how and why they did what they did. It is easy for us to judge people in the past, but we cannot be sure that we would have acted any differently because we are not in the same situations that they were in. That does not make what they did right or wrong, but it does mean that we need to try as much as possible to understand the past from the perspective of the people who lived through the events we are talking about. Only then will we be able to have a better sense of what happened and why and hopefully seek for changes that will prevent something similar from happening in the future if the topic we are discussing is a bad event.

Q: *How would you evaluate the quality of work being done today in JMC*

history — its strengths and weaknesses?

Humphrey: Overall, the quality of work in JMC history has improved in the last several decades because of efforts to broaden the focus, both in types of press outlets and in the time periods covered. Historians in the past often saw newspapers and magazines as useful sources for good quotes, but did not really deal with the roles played by the press in major events. That has been changing. Still, the focus is more on the modern era, and it would be nice if the study of media would include more work before the 20th century. Part of the problem has been access to sources, and the digitization of many newspapers has been helping with that tremendously — it is actually nice to be able to do some newspaper research without having to travel all over the country each time. Hopefully, the growing access will encourage people interested in media history to look beyond the modern era more in order to provide a fuller understanding of the importance of the media throughout 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?*

Humphrey: We need to continue to work to show everyone the important role that the media play in communication throughout history. Then they will understand why it is important to know journalism history in order for those being educated in JMC to better understand the field they are going to work in and for those involved in the wider field of history to better understand the important role that the media have played in influencing people and what they have done in the past. For the latter goal, it is very important for people involved in studying JMC history to continue to reach out to people in other disciplines who also

are interested in that field. I believe that the American Journalism Historians Association does a great job of that because the people involved come from many different types of departments rather than just all from journalism and mass communication. It is very enjoyable to sit down and talk with people from journalism departments, mass communication departments, English departments, and history departments and discuss common interests that cross over the various disciplines represented. We need to continue to seek out more ways to do this in order to continue to spread the word about the important role that journalism has played throughout history.

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

Humphrey: The biggest challenge that I think JMC history will face in the future is the need to continue to fight to show its importance in education for journalism, communication, and history departments. The discipline diversity of people interested in media history results in wonderful discussions and interchanges, but it can also make it seem like the field is very minor and does not need a lot of focus. We will need to continue fighting to show that one cannot really understand the past unless one sees how people shared ideas and that one has to understand the history of the media in order to see and get how people communicated ideas with one another. JMC history is key to truly understanding the past, and we will probably have to continue to fight to make people understand how essential its study is if we truly want to understand the past as much as possible.

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Book Award Interview: Sam Lebovic ©



Lebovic

Sam Lebovic is an associate professor of history at George Mason University, where he also directs the history Ph.D. program and serves as Associate Editor of the *Journal of Social History*. His book *Free Speech and Unfree News: The Paradox of Press Freedom in America* (Harvard University Press, 2016) received the 2017 Ellis Hawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians. The annual prize, which has been given since 1997, recognizes the “best book-length historical study of the political economy, politics, or institutions of the United States, in its domestic or international affairs, from the Civil War to the present.”

Q: Give us a brief summary of your book.

Lebovic: *Free Speech and Unfree News* analyzes the theory, law, and practice of press freedom in the twentieth century U.S., arguing that the First Amendment right to free speech has been insufficient to guarantee a free press. Although most Americans now consider the right to a free press to be identical to the right to speak freely without government censorship, my work recovers forgotten visions of press freedom based on the public right to access diverse and accurate information. But I show that as Americans debated the meaning of modern press freedom in a variety of settings — efforts to regulate the corporate

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newspaper industry, the drafting of state secrecy and freedom of information laws, the unionization of journalists, Supreme Court cases — they chose to define freedom of the press as nothing more than a right to publish without government censorship. Concerns about the quality, diversity, and accuracy of the news dropped away. The result was a modern American press that is exceptionally free from formal government interference, but constrained by new forms of state secrecy and corporate media consolidation.

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

Lebovic: I was very interested in debates about the political implications of mass culture in modern societies, and was reading broadly in that field. Perhaps my favorite book was Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front*, which explores the politics and labor relations of the mass culture industries during the 1930s, and I kept seeing references in the book to the Newspaper Guild, and their centrality to the politics of the period. I knew very little about labor politics in the newspaper industry, but thought it was a promising place to explore questions about political culture and political economy that were more often explored in the other mass culture industries — television, film, and so forth. So I started looking into the Newspaper Guild, and soon started researching their history in *Editor and Publisher*, the newspaper industry trade journal. As I leafed through the pages of that weekly newspaper — luckily, the University of Chicago Library had bound hard-copies in the stacks — I began to see all sorts of stories about the politics, economics, and regulation of the press that presented a much more complicated story about press freedom than the triumphalist story of First Amendment jurisprudence that I was familiar with. I quickly realized that the Newspaper Guild was just one part of a much broader story of contestation over what a free press should or could mean in the twen-

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tieth century. Once I realized that, I knew there was a story here that would both contribute to broader debates in American history about the development of American democracy, and help answer some deeper questions I had about how it was that despite the spectacular rise of the First Amendment, the American press in the early 21st century was confronted by so many crises.

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?

Lebovic: I spent about 7 years researching the book, with breaks in there for teaching, and applying for jobs, and side projects, and so forth. The core of my research was work with trade journals like *Editor and Publisher*, which provided an amazing record of the issues that concerned the newspaper industry — because they published every week, they often had very detailed coverage. From reading that coverage, I could then identify key archival collections — the National Archives were a key location, but also the Newspaper Guild collections at the Tamiment Library and several presidential libraries. From there, I had the material to better contextualize famous cases, famous treatises, and published commentary, as well as the very helpful published work of the many other scholars who had worked on various parts of my story.

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

Lebovic: I think you always finish a research project thinking there are more things that you could have looked at, so there are plenty! One example does stick out — one part of the book explores an anti-trust case against the Associated Press in the early 1940s. It is a fascinating

and important case, little studied, which went to the Supreme Court, and basically asked whether anti-trust action against the press violated the First Amendment. I wanted to look at the Department of Justice case file, to see how they thought about the tensions in the case. Unfortunately, the only way to identify DoJ case files in the National Archives is to use the original card index; and the index card for the case was missing. More broadly, it would always be helpful to have more information about key players and actors — Elisha Hanson, a newspaper industry lawyer in the 1930s, was a key figure, but seems to have left no records; I didn't try to get access to newspaper corporation records, in part because I had too much else to look at, but also because I suspected access would be difficult. More straightforward access to corporate records would be a real boon to historical research.

Q: Based on your research for the book, what would you advise other historians — particularly those in the field of mass communication history — about working with sources?

Lebovic: I think there are two points, one broad and one particular. The broader point is to cast a wide net. Mass communications exists at the intersection of so many fields — they have an intellectual history, a labor history, a political history, a legal history, an economic history, a social history and so on. So historians should conceive of projects that explore their topics at the intersection of these histories — that's where really interesting material and juxtapositions emerge. That means being open to working with all sorts of records. It also means learning how to read these sources in ways that pass muster with specialists, so ask them for help — I got some excellent guidance from lawyers and legal historians as I worked with legal materials for instance. The more particular and pragmatic advice is to use trade journals. They are remarkable resources that are really underutilized. You can learn an

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awful lot from a trade journal, and find lots of leads for further research.

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

Lebovic: The standard challenges, I suppose — funding for archival research, learning how to navigate new fields of scholarship and new forms of source material. Perhaps the largest challenge was working out how to marshal the various things I had found into a cohesive, tight argument. Luckily I had a close friend, and long-time intellectual interlocutor, help me edit the book — he helped me get rid of details I had unearthed through hard research that I was attached to, but which really didn't belong in the final manuscript.

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?

Lebovic: I'm not sure I care about neutrality, precisely — I think you need to bring to your historical research some moral passion that gives your work meaning, and provides you with a reason to ask new questions about the past. Of course, you need to be open to finding surprising answers to your questions, but that's common to all scholarship — if you go in to cherry-pick evidence, or don't look broadly enough, you won't produce anything worthwhile. But if you have a good, important question that you care about, and you work honestly to answer it as best you can, and follow the sources where they take you, you'll do good work.

Q: What new insights does your book provide?

Lebovic: That's probably a question best asked of others. But the hope was that a broader and deeper history of press freedom would remind us that Americans struggled throughout the twentieth century to expand press freedom to include a positive right to the news alongside the negative rights of free speech. That shows that the current approach to press freedom was not inevitable, and it was not uncontested. By historicizing America's attitudes to press freedom, the book therefore asks new questions about the role of the press and civil liberties in American history, helps to explain the crises that beset today's press during the "war on whistleblowers" and the ongoing death of the daily newspaper, and hopefully provides new frameworks for citizens to think about what they want the press to be like moving forward.

Q: What findings most surprised you?

Lebovic: I was constantly surprised by my research. I was surprised to discover that the highpoint of newspapers in the country was in 1919, and that the first articles about the decline of the daily were being published in the 1920s. I was surprised to see the Newspaper Industry was cynically deploying First Amendment arguments to ward off economic regulation in the 1930s; I was surprised how hostile so many people were to what they thought was the "conservative mainstream media" in the same years. The sheer scale and novelty of the state secrecy regime that was constructed in the 1950s was surprising. I guess I was continuously surprised by how complex and contested the history of press freedom was in the twentieth century; but I also didn't know very much when I started!

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

Make sure that the subject is worthy of a book. The field of academic

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history is structured to over-produce books — but it is an odd unit of scholarship, one that requires lots of work of both the author and reader. So you need to be honest with yourself about whether what you want to write is really the sort of thing that a) you want to spend a serious amount of time living with as you write it and b) is the sort of thing you would want to read cover to cover if you hadn't written it. Lots of books are really clusters of articles; plenty are really an article or two drawn out to book length. Think about the books that spoke to you and stuck with you, and try to write one of those.

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