

# *Historiography*

in Mass Communication



Volume 4 (2018). Number 4

# *Historiography in Mass Communication*

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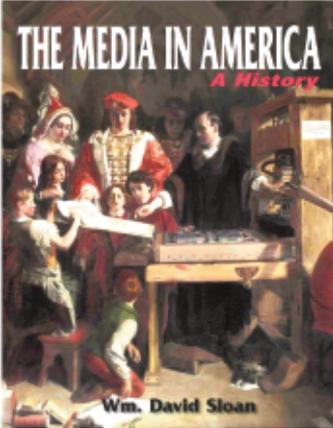
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# Religion and Media Historiography

By David A. Copeland ©



Copeland

Depending upon which index of a book that surveys the history of the media that you peruse, you are not likely to find many entries under the heading “religion.” You can alter your search for particular words like church, synagogue, mosque, or you may search for particular individuals who would be connected with religious movements. If you do, you are likely to find a few more entries. Still, the story of American media, in most instances, almost completely divorces itself from discussions of the relationship between media and religion. It’s as if the concept of the separation of church and state mandated a separation of religion and media, or at least mandates a separation of the explanation of American media from the religious foundations of the United States as a nation and colonies before that.

Of course, that’s simply incorrect. Religion, our understanding of our religious beliefs and traditions currently and historically, religious terms and symbols, and the creeds of the nation that reference the deity will always figure into elements of media, but, more importantly, into the understanding of much of what appears in media. As I said twenty

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years ago in a study of press content in colonial America, there was news about religion, and there was news about other events. Sometimes the two overlapped. At other times, as David Nord noted, news was “simply the news,” and there were no obvious religious implications in the reporting of a story.<sup>1</sup> That does not mean that those who read the story did not view the story through some religiously tinged understanding of what they were reading, however.

If we think about whether religion could affect a media story, we would naturally think that the earlier in the history of the nation that we studied, the more likely we would be able to find stories about religion, stories with religious implications, or with public correspondence to media that discussed religion or contained some religious reference. In her study of eighteenth-century America, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, Patricia Bonomi explained that religion was so entwined with life that it left its mark on all aspects of life, meaning that even if a news story did not have any overt religious implications, the readers of that story were likely to apply their own.<sup>2</sup> We also know that the Bible was the one book found in nearly every colonial home and that learning to read was considered imperative mainly because people needed to read that book.<sup>3</sup>

But what about in the nineteenth century, would the same be true? In the late 1820s, just prior to the beginning of the penny press, David Nord says, “evangelical publishers had become leading innovators of printing technology and national business organization.”<sup>4</sup> There was “faith in reading,” as Nord titled his book on religious publishing in America. Religious societies systematically attempted to place scripture (the Protestant Bible and religious tracts) into the hands of every person in the nation.<sup>5</sup> The results changed printing and media culture in the nation by revolutionizing marketing practices to ensure that inexpensive printed products could flood the nation. Reading would become a necessity, and using the latest technology to produce reading

material would become standard practice. The penny press was a logical outgrowth of this scheme, but so, too, at least in terms of technological usage and the desire of information by the public, would be the large-circulation newspapers of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries and even the development of other media, including those of the digital world.

And, for religious groups in America, the growth and huge popularity of newspapers created a set of concerns related to morality, church attendance, and any number of what many considered to be social ills that were being exploited by the press for monetary gain when newspapers and their editors should have been providing a path to the moral high ground for the public. In *The Struggle for the Soul of Journalism: The Pulpit versus the Press, 1833-1923*, Ronald Rogers talks about the development of the press into the modern source of information it would become and the struggle for how that information would be presented and editorialized. Rogers says that the press had surpassed the pulpit as the source of education and guidance for people.<sup>6</sup>

In the twentieth century, as new broadcast technologies connected people everywhere with the same stories, entertainment, and news, many in America worried about modernity and the progressive movement. In almost all studies of radio in America, we learn of its identical penetration into all parts of the nation, of its entertainment programming, breaking news stories like the Hindenburg disaster, and all of its advertising, but we forget that the airwaves also provided another alternative for millions of listeners. It provided a way to bring a religious message with the same penetration and with a consistent message regularly into urban and isolated rural homes alike. For millions who were not attuned to the modernism and progressive nature of movements like the Social Gospel,<sup>7</sup> religious radio programming provided an alternative. It “resonated with this nostalgic longing for better times and used the language, inflection, and metaphor of rural life.” Ac-

ording to Tona Hagen, “Radio evangelists connected audiences beyond the immediate locale, thus hastening the nationalization of American folk religion and the involvement of mass media in even those parts of life formerly seen as private and sacred.”<sup>8</sup>

After World War II, television’s meteoric rise did not omit the religious, though we don’t find much about it in survey histories of media. With Billy Graham, followed by Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Rex Humbard, Jim and Tammy Bakker, Pat Robertson, and a multitude of others, the same kind of religious messages that populated radio in the first half of the century drew in audiences that were opposed to a modernist approach to religion. Television evangelists tapped into the good /evil dichotomy; tended to be authoritarian figures in the pulpit, which their viewers liked; and they re-emphasized the individualistic nature of salvation versus the good works model of the Social Gospel. This would later lead to a gospel of wealth based upon your relation to God.<sup>9</sup>

The digital age has provided a similar venue for religious expression and sharing among believers no matter their faith tradition. Heidi Campbell in *When Religion Meets New Media* rightly points out what has occurred with media technology since the time of Gutenberg: Technology can and is a tool of dissemination of information, and that always includes religion.<sup>10</sup> In fact the Pew Research Center’s “Study of Religion and Life” in 2014 discovered that nearly half of Americans, 46 percent, saw religion shared online during any given week.<sup>11</sup>

The fact is that if one does a serious search for research on religion and media, a multitude of studies can be found. In actuality, there are more than could ever be listed and discussed in a piece on religion and media for *Historiography* because, as David Sloan stated in the introduction to *Media and Religion in American History*, “Religion, particularly Christianity, has played a prominent role throughout the history of America’s mass media.”<sup>12</sup> And, as Diane Winston observed in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*, media are to

society “what water is to fish: a taken-for-granted yet all-encompassing environment that shapes beliefs, behaviors, and social interactions.”<sup>13</sup> So, despite what we have come to accept as a common position, that rationalism, commercialism, Darwinism, the rise of social science research, technological advancements, secularism, and any number of “isms” have removed religion from what we experience whenever we think of media content, religion and media have never parted company, nor ever will. That’s because mediatization, a process that Friedrich Krotz says ensures that “media in the long run increasingly become relevant for the social construction of everyday life, society and culture as a whole,” will never cease.<sup>14</sup> Pew’s survey that discovered that about 46 percent of Americans see some post online of others sharing their religion affirms this.

So, the following continues this discussion of the published works on religion and media. My list of sources is far from complete and focuses principally on book-length works, though some journal articles are included as well as books with chapters devoted to religion. In addition, the works are almost exclusively Protestant religion focused, though there is research on Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and other religions that has been published and is of great value. Some is even included in the sources I discuss. I fully acknowledge that my research focus has rarely moved past the 1860s, and I am sometimes like that fish out of water when I move into the twentieth century and absolutely into the twenty-first. I suggest that this look at the body of literature on religion and media is only a small start, and recommend that you add to it as you think of works that you know or that you discover in your own research. I would certainly be open to receiving these titles from you. I may know some and simply left them out of this historiography for space or another reason. More than likely, though, they have escaped my research and reading agenda, a *mea culpa* admission.

When looking at books that represent an overview of media’s his-

tory, few, as noted above, devote much space to the role of religion and media's development. Four are worth a mention, however, beginning with Isaiah Thomas' seminal *The History of Printing in America* (1810). In his introduction, Thomas explains fully the relationship between the beginnings of printing in America and religion. It was not solely in Puritan New England that this relationship existed. Thomas explains the connection for the beginning of newspapers up and down the Atlantic seaboard. A century later, James Melvin Lee, who directed New York University's department of journalism, provided several sections in his *History of American Journalism* (1917) on the role of the religious press as vital to the development of journalism. Central to Lee's discussion are efforts to establish religious dailies in the nineteenth century through the establishment of the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1908. Frank Luther Mott's 1941 *American Journalism* devotes fewer than ten pages out of nearly 900 to America's religious press, but there, he acknowledges the importance of the religious press, telling us that it competed successfully with a secular press because the religious papers covered the secular and the sacred. He called the religious press "class periodicals," and he explained that every leading Protestant denomination had "a score or more of periodicals."<sup>15</sup> Sloan's *The Media in America: A History* (2017) deals with religion's role in the formation of the press, extensively in magazines and some with newspapers and radio.

A number of works look at religion and media by gathering together chapters spanning large time periods and topics. *Media and Religion in American History* (2000) looks at the integration of religion with the press in America from its evangelical origins through the 1970s. The research in this book focuses almost exclusively on print media. The *Oxford Handbook of the American News Media* (2012) presents the media-religion relationship differently by discussing various religions and sects, explaining how religion relates to different types of news and international news coverage. It also discusses the religious press itself,

and it places these discussions in historical context.<sup>16</sup>

Dan Stout and Judith Buddenbaum in *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations* take another approach to understanding the religion and media relationship with a historical critique of the relationship from the audience's perspective from the 1930s forward.<sup>17</sup> The study is inclusive and does not depend solely on Protestant religious groups' reactions. The ways religious groups talk about media and how they instruct their members to understand and react to media are central to this study. Stewart Hoover does something similar in *Religion in the Media Age*. He looks at the ways that people use media to discuss the religious and spiritual and what people find religiously and spiritually significant in media.<sup>18</sup> Hoover's approach is especially interesting as it relates to the religious/media synchronization post 9/11 and following the 2004 presidential election. In *Media and Religion: Foundations in an Emerging Field*, Dan Stout discusses the history, theory, cultural context, and professional aspects of media and religion. Stout recognizes a problem that has affected most media historians: not seeing how interdependent religion is upon media and how this dependency can affect media messages. This study is holistic in its approach by looking at media through the lenses of news, entertainment, strategic communication, and the internet.<sup>19</sup> Doug Underwood takes a different approach to the religion and media relationship in *From Yahweh to Yahoo: The Religious Roots of the Secular Press*. He says that religion has always been a part of the newsroom as the nation developed because the religious morals and heritage that founded America are so encased in American identity that they cannot be separated from people.<sup>20</sup> And, Buddenbaum and Debra Mason through a documentary history provide a detailed chronology of religious news in media.<sup>21</sup>

By far most of the research on religion and media is related to print. Both David Sloan and David Nord have demonstrated the religious underpinnings of the beginning of newspapers in colonial America, with

Sloan analyzing the religious uproar and denominational ties surrounding *Publick Occurrences* and the *New-England Courant*, while Nord has explained how printing from its inception in the British New World into the eighteenth century had religious roots.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Nord added religious context to the seminal libel trial of John Peter Zenger.<sup>23</sup> Basic religious content of the colonial newspaper can be found in *Colonial American Newspapers* and *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers*.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most important usage of early American newspapers to promote the cause of religion can be found in “*Pedlar in Divinity*,” Frank Lambert’s study of the preaching revivals of George Whitefield. Whitefield employed a “press agent” to create news stories about his preaching; he used marketing techniques to create a mass audience and turned his revivals into a form of consumerism, something that evangelists would emulate to this day.<sup>25</sup> With *The Idea of a Free Press: The Enlightenment and Its Unruly Legacy*, the way religion entwined with English and American ideas of free expression are explained. Simply, religion cannot be extracted from the development of the ideas of free speech and a free press as those concepts led to the creation of the First Amendment.<sup>26</sup>

As print culture began its massive expansion in the nineteenth century, American religious leaders latched onto the power of the printing press. Nathan Hatch said of the explosion of religious denominations following the Second Great Awakening, “The press swiftly became a sword of democracy, fueling ardent faith in the future of the American Republic.”<sup>27</sup> It is important that Hatch quotes an early religious paper that said, “The PULPIT AND THE PRESS are inseparably connected,” noting that the printed word must be “regarded with a sacred veneration and supported with religious care.”<sup>28</sup> Hatch’s *The Democratization of American Christianity* provides an understanding of how Whitefield’s legacy of using newspapers as an evangelizing tool continued in the next century as does his seminal work on Elias Smith, who began *The*

*Herald of Gospel Liberty* in 1808, perhaps the nation's first religious newspaper.<sup>29</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey's chapter "Religious Newspapers and Antebellum Reform" in *Media and Religion in American History* and Nord's "Evangelical Origins of Mass Media in America" in the same book are critical in understanding the press/religion relationship.<sup>30</sup> Henry Stroupe and Wesley Norton penned bibliographies with valuable introductions as related to the religious press of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> But, essential to understanding the role that the printing press played in the sharing of religious thought in America to the Civil War is Nord's *Faith in Reading*, which has already been discussed. Nord talks of the explosion in printing, but there was also an explosion in visuals, which David Morgan discusses in *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. Much as images changed the press with illustrated papers and then with photography, Morgan sees a powerful connection in religious understanding and images that were mass circulated.<sup>32</sup>

From 1865 into the twentieth century, according to Ronald Rogers, a battle took place in terms of who would be the guiding force for the nation, the pulpit or the press. Many, Rogers says, called for a more Christian bent to the news, but the religious newspaper never superseded the more traditional form of secular paper, though the secular press was not overtly unfriendly to religion.<sup>33</sup> This led to the 1900 attempt to create a "Jesus edition" of a Kansas City newspaper, something that captivated the nation and large parts of Europe.<sup>34</sup> Also during the nineteenth century, the Sunday newspaper arose, which caused controversy among religious groups.<sup>35</sup>

As the twentieth century began, according to John Ferré, the relationship between Protestant religious leaders and the press became uneasy. This fraying related in part to the issue of the Sunday newspaper, which had been an ongoing battle between editors and preachers since before the Civil War.<sup>36</sup> This, Ferré argues, created a new type of

reading material for evangelicals, which began with Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps: "What Would Jesus Do?"*<sup>37</sup>

With the development of electronic media, religion's relationship with them would continue, but change. Radio provided a means of sharing religious messages via sermons and other programming quickly, according to Tona Hagen.<sup>38</sup> Related to Hagen's work is *Airwaves Of Zion: Radio Religion In Appalachia*, which explores the way radio affected and changed worship and religious thought throughout Appalachia.<sup>39</sup> William Fore in *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture* says television became a threat to religion but the religious world found a way to use it to its advantage via the Electronic Church.<sup>40</sup> *Religion and Realty TV: Faith in Late Capitalism* offers interesting perspectives on a genre that is rarely considered faith-based, and it offers a brief but strong history of the relationship between TV entertainment programming and religion.<sup>41</sup> And, Anthony Hatcher has taken all media to demonstrate the way they affect the religious and how the religious affect media, saying "Religion permeates American daily life, such as politics, news, and entertainment, and sometimes all three at the same time."<sup>42</sup>

Heidi Campbell has conducted research into religion and the digital sphere. She explains how the religious use digital platforms as individuals and how they then connect with others into communities. She also explains how religious communities exist and operate online.<sup>43</sup> *Religion and Cyberspace* hypothesizes that religious life is moving from its physical spiritual places of worship to the online sphere, making the digital media world critical to the religious.<sup>44</sup>

The above works are, as noted, simply a sprinkling of those that have some element of their content that discusses religion and media. Much is omitted, even from the Protestant tradition, which this review has focused upon. Almost all of the sources here deal with mainline, Protestant, white religion and mainstream media, which target most of

their content to the cultural and racial majority in the nation. The black press in America that began in 1827 and flourished until civil rights pulled the best reporters to mainline media and began a more positive coverage of the African-American community is noticeably absent. That should not be since the 1999 documentary *Soldiers Without Swords: The Black Press* noted that the same presses that created the Sunday bulletins for African-American churches were used to print newspapers for a black audience. Within many of the newer entries here, the discussion is broader than Protestantism and discusses faith traditions other than Christianity. The bottom line is this: Religion and media are and will always share a relationship in the United States.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David A. Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 203; David Paul Nord, "Teleology and the News: The Religious Roots of American Journalism, 1630-1730," *Journal of American History* 77 (1990): 36.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Readings in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia press, 1979), 75-90; Maris A. Vinoskis, "Family and Schooling in Colonial and Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Family History* 12 (1987): 23.

<sup>4</sup> David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Ronald D. Rogers, *The Struggle for the Soul of Journalism: The Pulpit versus the Press, 1833-1923* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> The Social Gospel movement was a concept developed among many Protestants in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that believed individual salvation was not enough for Christians, that true redemption required a social component, too, a bettering of the developing industrial society for all. The Social Gospel believed in the immanence of God, meaning Christians should be actively working for the betterment of humankind everywhere, that social reform was as important to one's salvation as personal profession of faith. The

movement continued into the 1920s.

<sup>8</sup> Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>9</sup> William F. Fore, *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Press, 1987), see Chapter 5.

<sup>10</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Pew Research Center, "Religion and Electronic Media," *Religion & Public Life*, November 5, 2014), <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/06/religion-and-electronic-media> (March 1, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Wm. David Sloan, "Introduction," in *Media and Religion in American History*, ed. Wm. David Sloan (Northport, Ala.: Vision Press, 2000), vii.

<sup>13</sup> Diane Winston, "'Mapping the Royal Road': An introduction to the *Oxford Handbook on Religion and the News Media*," in *Oxford Handbook on Religion and the News Media*, ed. Diane Winston (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Krotz, "Mediatization: A Concept with Which to Grasp Media and Social Change," in *Mediatization: Concepts, Changes, Consequences*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 24, quoted in Winston, *Oxford Handbook on Religion and the News Media*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 322.

<sup>16</sup> Winston, *Oxford Handbook on Religion and the News Media*.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum in *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel A. Stout, *Media and Religion: Foundations in an Emerging Field* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Doug Underwood, *From Yahweh to Yahoo: The Religious Roots of the Secular Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Judith M. Buddenbaum and Debra L. Mason, *Readings on Religion as News* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Wm. David Sloan, "Chaos, Polemics, and America's First Newspaper," *Journalism Quarterly* 70, 3 (1993): 666-81; Wm. David Sloan, "New England Courant: Voice of Anglicanism: The Role of Religion in Colonial Journalism," *American Journalism* 8, 2 (1991): 108-41; David Paul Nord, "Teleology and the News: The Religious Roots of American Journalism, 1630-1730," *Journal of American History* 77 (1990): 9-38. See, also, Wm. David Sloan and Julie Hedge-

peth Williams, *The Early American Press, 1690-1783* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> David Paul Nord, "The Authority of Truth: Religion and the John Peter Zenger Case," *Journalism Quarterly* 62, 2 (1985): 227-35.

<sup>24</sup> Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content*; David A. Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Frank Lambert, "*Pedlar in Divinity*": *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> David A. Copeland, *The Idea of a Free Press: The Enlightenment and Its Unruly Legacy* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>29</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, "Elias Smith and the Rise of Religious Journalism," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, eds. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, and Richard D. Brown (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 250-77.

<sup>30</sup> Humphrey's and Nord's accounts are in Sloan, *Media and Religion in American History*.

<sup>31</sup> Henry S. Stroupe, *The Religious Press in the South Atlantic States, 1802-1865* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1956); Wesley Norton, *Religious Newspapers in the Old Northwest to 1861: A History, Bibliography, and Record of Opinion* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> David Morgan, *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>33</sup> Rogers, *The Struggle for the Soul of Journalism: The Pulpit versus the Press, 1833-1923*.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Ray Smith, *The Jesus Newspaper: The Christian Experiment of 1900 and Its Lessons for Today* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Smith, "Sunday Newspapers and Lived Religion in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Church and State* 48 (2006):127-52; Rogers, *The Struggle for the Soul of Journalism: The Pulpit versus the Press, 1833-1923*.

<sup>36</sup> John P. Ferré, "Sunday Newspapers and the Decline of Protestant Authority in the United States," *American Journalism* 10 (1993): 7-23; John P. Ferré, "Protestant Press Relations in the United States, 1900-1933," *Church History* 62, 4 (1993): 514-27.

<sup>37</sup> John P. Ferré, *A Social Gospel for Millions: The Religious Bestsellers of*

*Charles Sheldon, Charles Gordon, and Harold Bell Wright* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America*.

<sup>39</sup> Howard Dorgan, *Airwaves Of Zion: Radio Religion In Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Fore, *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture*.

<sup>41</sup> Mara Einstein, Katherine Madden, and Diane Winston, eds., *Religion and Reality TV: Faith in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Hatcher, *Religion and Media in America* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2018), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*; Heidi A. Campbell, ed. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Morten Højsgaard and Margi Warburg, eds., *Religion and Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

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# Historical Roundtable: Beyond Storytelling: How To Turn Oral History into Journalism History Scholarship

By Yong Volz, Maurine Beasley, Bonnie Brennen,  
Mark Feldstein, and Teri Finneman ©



Volz

In recent decades oral history has been increasingly recognized as a vital access point to understanding the plurality yet connectedness of human experiences. Journalists, as witnesses, chroniclers, and sometimes agents of history, have been important subjects in numerous national, regional and institutional oral history collections. Historians have also embarked on this alternative approach and conduct oral histories to explore some of the most unexplored and under-explored topics in the field of journalism and mass communication.

Oral history, however, is often misperceived as storytelling or a mere collection of personal accounts of a historical past. This roundtable brings together media historians who have conducted extensive oral history interviews to discuss the place of oral history in media historiography and how to turn oral history into publishable scholarship and/or transform oral history into public knowledge through various platforms.

**Volz:** *First, how would you define oral history as an historical endeavor?*

**Beasley:** I think it depends on your definition of history. Is there any point in the past where history begins? If history begins yesterday, then

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*Yong Volz is an associate professor and the Roger Gafke Faculty Fellow at the University of Missouri. Her research centers on journalists and their place in different societies and historical times. She is the director of Herstory: JAWS Oral History Project (see <http://herstory.rjion-line.org/>), which documents professional careers, work experiences and associational life of senior women journalists who have participated in the Journalism and Women Symposium.*

Beasley



*Maurine Beasley is Professor Emerita of Journalism at the University of Maryland. She is a leading historian specializing in women's portrayal and participation in journalism. She has published a number of books, including *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia* (2001), *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (2003), *First Ladies and the Press* (2005), *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady* (2010), and *Women of the Washington Press* (2012).*

Brennen



*Bonnie Brennen is the Nieman Chair Professor Emerita of Journalism at Marquette University. She is a pioneering media historian in conducting and using oral histories for research on journalists. She is the author of *For the Record: An Oral History of Rochester, New York Newsmen* (2001) and *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* (2nd ed., 2017). She also edited or co-edited *Newsmen: Towards a History of the Rank and File* (1995), *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography* (1999), *The American Journalism History Reader* (2010), and *Assessing Evidence in a Postmodern World* (2013).*

Feldstein



*Mark Feldstein is the Richard Eaton Chair of Broadcast Journalism at the University of Maryland. He was an award-winning investigative reporter at CNN and ABC News and served as the director of the Journalism Oral History Project at George Washington University. He is the author of the influential article "Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral History" (2004). He wrote the award-winning book *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture* (2010).*

Finneman

*Teri Finneman is an assistant professor at the University of Kansas. Her research primarily focuses on women, media, and politics; and she is the author of *Press Portrayals of Women Politicians, 1870s-2000s: From "Lunatic" Woodhull to "Polarizing" Palin* (2015). She is also the executive producer of the oral-history-based documentary *The Story of the North Dakota Press* (2017).*

## Historical Roundtable: Oral History

oral history certainly is a part of history because it can cover activities that have not necessarily been written down and seasoned by the passage of time. Oral history, if done according to protocol, is a way of making a record and consequently adding to knowledge of history. It obviously is limited in scope because it can only deal with those who are alive so it cannot go back in time more than a score or so of decades.

**Brennen:** Oral History is the recording of personal testimony in oral form. While it has been used to record the lives of elite members of society, these days it is frequently used to build an alternative history from people whose life experiences have not been previously documented. Through the use of open-ended depth interviews, researchers collect personal reminiscences and interpretations of events with a goal of creating a more nuanced understanding of the past. From my perspective, oral history can become a means to transform the content and purpose of journalism or media history.

**Feldstein:** Oral history basically boils down to verbal interviews by the historian of participants or witnesses to events of the past; it is a crucial methodological tool.

This technique of information-gathering closely resembles that used by journalists with one important distinction: while journalistic articles and broadcasts usually publicize only small portions of the interviews that were conducted, oral history projects often make interviews available for public inspection in their entirety. By preserving all of an oral history interview and not just a small portion, scholars and the public can check the material for accuracy, context, and nuance — allowing for a form of independent verification.

**Volz:** *Traditionally, archival research has been a core method in the field of journalism and communication history. From your research experi-*

*ence, what new insights can oral history provide compared to these traditional methods?*

**Beasley:** Oral history can draw on the recollections of those unlikely to have papers that are in archives. It can be a history of the non-elites, of the illiterate, of those who have no personal papers. It broadens our approach to the entire discipline of historical scholarship.

**Brennen:** Traditional journalism and communication history primarily focuses on the lives of the powerful and the rich, using documentary evidence to emphasize the experiences of business and political leaders and constructing institutional histories and biographies of media founders, owners and publishers. In contrast, oral history focuses on giving voice to the voiceless as it emphasizes the stories of everyday people. Oral historians strive to create a richer, more diverse construction of the past and because of this intention they often challenge the “official” version of journalism and media history.

**Feldstein:** Oral history interviews can help scholars gather information that isn’t documented in archives or (often) any other way, and they allow you to ask follow up questions to clarify answers in ways that written documents do not. Oral history interviews may also help avoid some of the inherent race or class bias in much of the written historical record.

**Finneman:** I like how personable oral history is. With a document, there’s more need for interpretation, i.e. What do I think they meant by this? With oral history, I was in the room, I have a recording of the tone, I have the ability to ask follow-up questions if I don’t understand something or need more. To me, archival research is about pulling the past into the present. Oral history is about taking the present and making

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sure it exists in the future. With people not writing letters like they used to, creating written records for the future is ever more important. Furthermore, the use of video and audio opens the door for so many ways to share and use oral history.

**Volz:** *It has been argued that oral history can be used to explore forgotten, neglected and suppressed media histories. What particular kinds of research problems and concerns do you think could best be addressed with the use of oral history?*

**Beasley:** One example might be the use of oral history to analyze the extent of sexual harassment in media operations. This, like racism in general, is a sensitive topic that may be addressed in court papers and newspaper interviews, but often is not covered in documents that may be put in archives. Records may give some factual information, but oral history interviews with individuals flesh out statistics and headlines and add much more depth to discussion of subjects that society in general is likely to sweep under its rug.

**Brennen:** Oral history provides historians with the potential to bring ordinary people into the study of history. It can be used in order to document experiences of rank and file media workers whose experiences may not be part of the institutional record. To be effective, oral historians must learn how to listen. As Studs Terkel has explained, listening is fundamental because it bestows dignity on people. Oral historians must not only listen to the words that their interviewees are saying but also must listen and observe the interviewees' nonverbal communication. In addition, researchers need to understand the context for the interviews and compare what is being said with what is not being said.

**Feldstein:** Race, class and gender issues involving marginalized or

“subaltern” people often aren’t preserved in archives the same way that elite history is. Oral history interviews may help get past what historian Daniel Boorstin called the “survival bias” of much historical evidence, which is more likely to be preserved if physically durable, culturally dignified or respectable, intrinsically valuable, or self-serving (for example, memoirs of the powerful).

**Volz:** *How did you first get into oral history research? What inspired you?*

**Beasley:** I was interested in learning more about local journalists who had exhibited courage by daring to speak out against mistreatment of African Americans in the South during the period before the civil rights movement really coalesced. A colleague and I published a monograph, *Voices of Change: Southern Pulitzer Winners* (1979).

**Brennen:** My first oral history project began while I was an assistant professor at SUNY Geneseo. At the time there were still two daily newspapers in Rochester, N.Y., and as multiple newspaper towns were quickly dwindling, I wondered what it might have been like to work as a rank and file reporter during the twentieth century in that type of competitive news environment. When I began the project in 1993, many newspapers still had morgues that provided great background and contextual information (and original clippings of news stories), but I knew that the most important insights would need to come from newswriters themselves. The interviewees were awesome and their stories have inspired me throughout my career.

**Feldstein:** Before I got my PhD, I spent 20 years as a working journalist and relied heavily on interviews to gather information. So I was surprised to learn in graduate school that historians often didn’t take advantage of this vital tool and even seemed afraid or contemptuous of it.

## Historical Roundtable: Oral History

A course on oral history methodology helped me understand this academic mindset, and I wrote a paper about the subject that I later turned into an article in the *Oral History Review* called “Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral History.” I followed up by conducting interviews for my doctoral dissertation and have continued doing so ever since.

**Finneman:** I first got involved in graduate school when I worked on a project capturing oral histories of women journalists. From there, I launched my own projects creating oral histories with North Dakota and South Dakota journalists. I saw a story that North Dakota was launching a newspaper hall of fame and knew there wasn’t much to it. I worked for many media outlets in the state and knew there were great stories to capture to enhance regional media history. I got started with North Dakota and then introduced the idea to South Dakota a few years later. For me, it’s a chance to be a journalist again: to get out into communities, interview people, and capture their stories.

**Volz:** *What are the particular benefits and rewards for using oral histories in your research?*

**Beasley:** You meet some fascinating people and get a much better sense of the challenges they have faced in their lives than you get from information provided from other sources. Hearing people speak for themselves is most rewarding.

**Brennen:** Once you have built rapport with an interviewee, it is possible for an oral historian to go beyond the surface level and truly understand the experiences of the individuals you have interviewed. The opportunity to dig deep into the human experiences of media workers has been a great part of the oral history experience for me.

**Feldstein:** In my research, oral history interviews have produced huge amounts of new information that had not previously come to light before. Many of the most interesting disclosures from my book *Poisoning the Press* came from more than 200 interviews I conducted while researching my book. That's because the subjects I was dealing with — confidential journalistic sources, sex scandals, corruption in Washington — were generally not written about at the time because of the sensitivity of doing so; but decades later, participants were willing to open up when I questioned them during interviews.

**Finneman:** I've primarily taken a professional approach to my oral history work. I've created a documentary that aired on PBS affiliates in two states, hosted regional theater showings, done interviews with regional media and *Editor & Publisher*, created websites, set up an archive at the North Dakota State Historical Society, promoted my oral histories on social media, and talked at state newspaper conventions. I hope to start turning the interviews into podcasts soon. My goal is to get these stories out to real people/the general public as media literacy tools, as well as to honor the interview subjects themselves and their lifetime of work. One of my subjects died earlier this year and a portion of his oral history was included in the funeral program. This work means a lot to the families involved, too, as they now have a DVD and transcript of their loved one's life and career.

**Volz:** *What were some of the inherent and unexpected challenges of conducting oral histories in your research?*

**Beasley:** An oral history done properly requires extensive cooperation from the person being interviewed. Unfortunately, this may not always occur. I recall one incident in which I went to some lengths to interview a woman who had been a "first" in journalism education. I thought we

had constructed a good document, but she never returned it to me with corrections and kept saying she was “too busy” to review it. I think she has since died.

Also, occasionally someone will think you are appropriating a story that really isn't yours for your own purposes and decline to be interviewed or, if interviewed, decline to give permission for the material to be used.

**Brennen:** To me, an understanding of ethical considerations is central to the oral history process. While both oral history and journalism use open-ended depth interviews, the oral history interview process differs significantly from journalistic interviews. Not only must all oral history interviewees willingly give informed written and oral consent but they also should be told of the intended purpose and use of their commentary. Interviewees have the right not to answer any questions they do not wish to answer, and they must know that they are able to withdraw from the project at any time. In addition, oral history interviewers must respect the authority and rights of all interviewees. They should avoid misrepresentations and stereotypes, and interviewers must be careful not to manipulate the interviewees' words or take them out of context.

**Feldstein:** Gaining the trust of interviewees and verifying what they said were the two most common if expected challenges. More surprising was the discovery that elderly interviewees often didn't want to admit that they couldn't remember information and so would speculate or even guess at answers to try to hide their failing memories. Almost invariably when there was a discrepancy between a contemporaneous written document and the memory of a participant, the document turned out to be more accurate — as the interviewees readily acknowledged under questioning.

**Finneman:** The biggest challenge for oral history is the cost. Hours upon hours of transcription costs add up, as do travel costs to get to your subjects and hiring any additional help. I knew I wanted to make a documentary. So I had a professional videographer do the North Dakota shoots, and that also gets expensive. I've been fortunate that the North Dakota and South Dakota newspaper associations have funded me. I don't know how I would have done it otherwise, as we've spent over \$10,000 in the past four years — and that was cheap since I also had a lot of volunteer help in those four years.

**Volz:** *How do you use oral history as evidence in your research? Do you use it as viable evidence on its own, or combine it with other methods?*

**Beasley:** I try to combine it with standard archival research and use of published sources as a way of checking for accuracy. Obviously, these days a lot of material is available on web sites. The more material one has the stronger the research and more compelling the conclusions.

**Brennen:** Throughout the years I have used oral history interviews in my research in a variety of different ways. Oral history interviews formed the basis for my book, *For the Record: An Oral History of Rochester, New York Newswriters*. I have also used insights from oral history interviews as evidence in other historical research projects and have compiled excerpts from interviews to use on specific media-related topics.

**Feldstein:** It's always better to be able to combine oral history evidence with written documentation for precisely the reasons I mentioned. Interviewing multiple participants is another way to try to ensure accuracy. But sometimes such corroboration is impossible and you have to reach a conclusion with only the partial evidence that exists. So your

## Historical Roundtable: Oral History

final research product should explain these evidentiary gaps so the reader understands precisely what is documented and what is unknown.

**Volz:** *Although some journalism historians have embarked on oral history projects, still, few have used them in scholarship. Why do you think that's the case?*

**Beasley:** I honestly don't know, but I would guess that these projects may not have been completed as soon as they were expected to be. Oral history takes a lot of time and money. Transcriptions are time-consuming and expensive. Also, oral histories have to be used in context and that requires careful thought.

**Brennen:** Oral history projects take a long time to complete – much longer than many researchers realize. When tenure considerations make it more expedient to do research that yields publications more quickly, I think that some researchers put their oral history projects aside and unfortunately they may not return to them. It has been my experience that it is often difficult to interest a publisher in the life stories of the rank and file. Publishers often want a researcher to interpret the interviews and provide extensive commentary, context and background, which can result in the use of shorter interview excerpts and may not be what the researcher has envisioned.

**Feldstein:** Of course, oral history projects are feasible only for researching relatively recent events of the past century; mortality renders it impossible to interview those who lived through the earliest centuries in American history. Still, I think journalism historians are more likely than most other scholars to include oral history in their toolbox if only because so many of us began our careers as reporters

and are so conversant with this methodology.

**Finneman:** Many people don't think historical work is legitimate unless it's based on archival documents. Oral history is often considered more "creative" work than scholarly work for tenure purposes and therefore "doesn't count." Oral histories also take a lot of time to build up quantity, and it's remained unclear how many oral histories one needs to be considered methodologically legit.

I continue to do oral history anyway because this is a personal interest of mine to preserve North Dakota's journalism history and do public outreach, regardless of what it does or doesn't mean for tenure.

**Volz:** *For people who are interested in or considering using oral history in their research, what books, works and other resources would you recommend for them to start with?*

**Beasley:** I urge those beginning the study of oral history to look for works by Donald A. Ritchie, historian of the U.S. Senate. He is a former president of the Oral History Association and has written on using oral history. Also, there are excellent examples of oral history available on the internet including interviews with pioneering women journalists undertaken by the Washington Press Club Foundation. In addition, presidential libraries have extensive oral history collections that frequently relate to the relationship of various Presidents to the media.

**Brennen:** The Oral History Association has a great website with many resources for researchers interested in doing oral history. You can access the site at: [www.oralhistory.org/resources/](http://www.oralhistory.org/resources/)

My favorite book on oral history remains Paul Thompson's *Voice of the Past: Oral History*, and I would encourage anyone interested in oral history to read at least one of Studs Terkel's books — my favorites are

## Historical Roundtable: Oral History

*Working: People Talk About What They Do all Day and How they Feel About What They Do* and *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*. Terkel also won the Pulitzer Prize for his book *The Good War*.

**Feldstein:** The Southern oral history program of my alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has the most comprehensive list I know of scholarly and practical books and guides at <https://sohp.org/files/2012/04/Oral-History-Bibliography-2011.pdf>. There's also a very useful how-to manual to help get you started at [https://sohp.org/files/2013/11/A-Practical-Guide-to-Oral-History\\_march2014.pdf](https://sohp.org/files/2013/11/A-Practical-Guide-to-Oral-History_march2014.pdf). In addition, the Oral History Association offers guidance at <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>, and there's a network connecting oral historians with each other called H-oralhist: <https://networks.h-net.org/h-oralhist>.

**Finneman:** "Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral History" is a journal article by Mark Feldstein that is a must-read. I have my students read this so they understand the similarities and differences between journalism and oral history. I also very much recommend Donald Ritchie's book *Doing Oral History*. The website of the Institute for Oral History at Baylor also has good resources. Finally, contact someone who has done oral history to get more details on the legal forms and logistics.

**Volz:** *Is there anything else you would like to add?*

**Beasley:** There may be an off-hand view that oral history is "easy" to do. It isn't.

**Feldstein:** Consider deploying your students to conduct oral history interviews as assignments for class. I've done this in the past, and my students really learned from and enjoyed researching and tracking down

an interviewee, preparing questions, recording the interview, and then transcribing highlights.

In my case, because I teach in the Washington, DC area, my students interviewed retired journalists in the nation's capital who shared wonderful stories not only about Washington reporting but also what they personally witnessed behind-the-scenes while covering politics and government over the years.

But wherever you teach, your students can tackle almost any subject from that past that was relevant to your community; and if you feel ambitious, you can post their interviews online with pictures and streamed audio or even video.

**Finneman:** I love doing oral histories. I'm happy to see space given to them in this issue as I hope that will help increase their legitimacy and eventually lead to a greater presence in journal articles, etc. The AJHA Oral History Committee (which I'm on) proposed a panel for the upcoming conference that covers a lot of these issues discussed here, so I hope the conversation can continue there.

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# Remembering Hazel Dicken-Garcia (1939-2018)

By Bill Huntzicker ©



Huntzicker



Dicken-Garcia

In this publication almost two years ago, Professor Hazel Dicken-Garcia revealed much about her life while discussing her roots: “I grew up in southern Kentucky, near the Cumberland River, where the family farmed creek-bottom land and brambly hill-sides. The two-mile-plus route to a one-room school led first up a hill on an old trail pounded into the earth by buffaloes and other large animals long ago visiting the salt lick below, according to local lore. From the hilltop, the trail gradually widened along an overgrown, sparsely populated ridge. I loved the colors, especially as seasons changed, and fruit from wild trees and bushes along the way.”

Hazel never stopped walking and enjoying seasonal colors. During her nearly 30 years on the faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota and after retiring, she continued walking daily around Como Lake near her home in St. Paul.

*Bill Huntzicker has taught most recently at St. Cloud State University. His history The Popular Press, 1833-1861 won a Choice Award for outstanding academic book in 1999. He received his ph.d. from the University of Minnesota.*

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## Huntzicker



Hazel as a schoolgirl



In her 20s



As an English teacher in India in 1961-1963

Although I was seven years younger, I often had trouble keeping up with her. She easily made the mile and a half around the lake and then did two more rounds while I'd sip a latte and study in the lakeside café after just one round. She was understanding and would offer to stop if she thought I needed a rest, and she slowed to a pace in line with my asthmatic one. (Nonetheless, the only thing she ever nagged me about was the need to walk more.)

She was committed to her students. As she treated me on walks, she kept pace with her students and encouraged them. She tried to attend every academic conference at which her students presented — and there were many — and if she couldn't attend, she'd ask other faculty to sit in and make some constructive comments on their work.

Nevertheless, she was tough. Several students grumbled about her attention to detail, but they also said their work was often ready for publication because of it. Many of her students published academic research even before completing their degrees.

Students, colleagues and neighbors often walked around the lake with her. Sometimes she was unavailable for a walk because, on that day, she was walking with a student to discuss her dissertation or a colleague to plan a class or discuss a policy. Like office meetings, walking time sometimes had to be scheduled.

And she marveled at the colors of the leaves and their reflections in the water. She pointed out her favorite trees and

plants and noted where the turtles, ducks, and eagles were likely to be spotted.

This story documents her love of the people and places where she lived. For most of her life, she lived with the pain of Crohn's disease, which was not diagnosed for years. The condition put severe restrictions on her diet, but she tried to keep people from knowing that she was in pain. Air travel was particularly difficult.

Nonetheless, she became active in the annual Symposium on the 19th-Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression at the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga and encouraged me to do so. She was so determined to attend the 25th anniversary of the conference last November that we had planned to drive there, but she became too sick to do so.

She supported the conference and often attended with students who also presented papers, some of which she coauthored with them. Several of these were published in the seven books of conference papers edited and published by David Sachsman, holder of the West Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs.

Kate Roberts Edenborg was the last of the students who discussed her dissertation on walks around the lake "probably many, many times, given how long it took me to get it done," said Edenborg, now an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie. She also presented papers at Chattanooga, and she completed her dissertation, "Window Panes and Mirror Frames: Social Constructions of American Girlhood in Children's Pages and Periodicals (1865-1952)," in 2011. Like many of Hazel's students, Kate and Amy Kuebelbeck continued to visit, letting her to get to know their children. Both women also visited her in the hospice.

For several years before retirement, Hazel planned to return to her hometown of Albany, Kentucky, to live near family. After a visit, however, she concluded she would miss Minnesota friends with whom she

regularly discussed current issues and academic questions. After visiting a retirement home solely for faculty in St. Paul, she thought it was too isolated in the other direction, disconnected from the non-academic world.

So she continued living in her single-family home in a diverse St. Paul neighborhood where neighbors, including many children, knew her. Visiting her in the hospice were neighbors who seemed surprised to learn that she was a widely published and highly regarded professor. (She wrote two books, co-authored two others and published numerous academic articles and book chapters.)

A couple who lived across the alley from her visited at the hospice one day after she was no longer able to speak. When I told them that one of our ongoing conversations was whether John Quincy Adams or Jimmy Carter was a better ex-president, I tried to explain the part Adams played in the liberation of slaves on trial after they revolted on the ship *La Amistad*. In my confused memory of the facts, Hazel seemed agitated until I said I would look up the case and send the couple an email clarifying the facts. Even then, she knew much more than she could communicate.

Hazel was proud of her self-reliance and her early work for social justice. After graduation from high school in 1957, she attended Berea College, founded in 1855 (before the abolition of slavery) to provide an integrated education for poor black and white students. The college required work in lieu of tuition.

After graduating in 1961, she spent two years as a student and teacher in the Gandhigram Rural Institute founded on Gandhi's educational values in India. She was sponsored there by the American Friends Service Committee for whom she later worked for three years as a youth program director in four states, organizing programs and conferences on social issues, including poverty, racism, and mental illness.

As a journalist, I'm inclined to include marriage information in an obituary, but a clergyman I consulted said it was entirely appropriate to leave out marriages if the spouse was completely out of her life.

Hazel was someone you didn't press with a lot of personal questions. She occasionally said she was briefly married. After retirement, she changed her name to Hazel Dicken, saying she was married for such a short time that her former husband should not be part of her identity. But when I used her name as Hazel Dicken in email correspondence with a personal and professional friend, she scolded me because she said everyone knows her as Hazel Dicken-Garcia so I should use that name with anything professional. We didn't even know her ex-husband's first name.

After retirement, she regularly attended her church, and she belonged to at least one book club with her neighborhood library. One of her hospice visitors was her hairdresser of 20 years who said Hazel made her feel as important as people with many initials after their names. Someone, perhaps one of the children from across the street, laid a bouquet of flowers on the front steps of her home on the day she died.

When she received her cancer diagnosis earlier this year, Hazel began seeing former students who came from all over the nation to spend a few hours with her. She indicated a great deal of pride in these visits. Even though she had lost the sense of taste, she had fun in lunch meetings — so many that she had to schedule them, a few around the unseasonal April blizzard.

She faced death in much the same intellectual way as she faced nature, life and ethics — as a learning and teaching experience. She accepted few pain killers and, when stronger ones were prescribed, she took the barest minimum of dosages and then she wrote about the experience — pain and death we need to understand and should not fear, she said.

Her CaringBridge entries, almost all of which she wrote, relayed the experience, and her student Amy Kuebelbeck posted them and kept them up to date. On April 3, for example, she wrote:

“The doctor and I shared hearty chuckles as I described my last effort at the ‘lowly art of making my bed’ and my conversation with myself about how long I had done this chore — among the first I learned as a child — without exertion or a thought of the process. And now: How dare this ‘lowly’ chore defeat me!!! Tucking sheets and covers took more strength than I had and sent shock waves of pain through my body — even as I tried sitting flat on the floor to brace my body and to give arms and hands more power. Even as I tried and failed, and tried again, I found the visual image of my absurd struggle hilarious and finally fell back on the floor to laugh (amid some tears, to be sure).”

Despite her desire to be honest, Hazel said she was not seeking sympathy. Instead, she said she was at peace and “grateful for love from those around me, for emotional and spiritual structures that serve me well and for an outlook on life that continually sustains and energizes me.” Believing that laughter is the best medicine, she encouraged people to send her humor, especially cartoons and political satire. (As I wrote this, I had to stop myself from sending the day’s Andy Borowitz, “Trump Makes Pence Watch Him Issue Pardons to See How It’s Done,” to her; she enjoyed such short satirical pieces.)

She rejected any discussion of a funeral, but she agreed to a celebration of life with good friend and neighbor Joe Scovronski and her minister, The Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs.

No one I’ve known seemed to have integrated her intellectual, spiritual, religious, and physical life as completely and peacefully as Hazel.

One of her get-well cards from a friend called her “A good friend, a great teacher, and a wise woman.” Wise Women was the name of their study group within her church, Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul, Minnesota.

## Remembering Hazel Dicken-Garcia

To paraphrase former Vice President Walter Mondale in speaking of Hubert Humphrey, “She taught us how to live and she taught us how to die.”

Hazel was born in a log house in rural Clinton County, Kentucky, near the town of Albany on March 4, 1939, and she died on May 30, 2018, in the Our Lady of Peace hospice, two miles from her home in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was 79.

Hazel’s remains were to be buried near her parents at the Cedar Hill Cemetery in Clinton County, Kentucky.

Memorials can be sent to her favorite charities including:

Hazel Dicken-Garcia Fund for the Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression, c/o David B. Sachsman, 212 Frist Hall, Dept. 3003, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 615 McCallie Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37403. Questions can be directed to [David-Sachsman@utc.edu](mailto:David-Sachsman@utc.edu).

Hazel Dicken-Garcia Graduate Fellowship, which supports graduate students in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota. Contributions can be sent to University of Minnesota Foundation; P.O. Box 860266; Minneapolis, MN 55486-0266; The link:

<https://makingagift.umn.edu/give/fund.html?id=5003>

Berea College, CPO 2216, Berea, KY 40404.

Questions answered at [edwardse@berea.edu](mailto:edwardse@berea.edu). She attended this college, which was founded in 1855 for poor students, both black and white in the days of slavery. Students work to operate the school in lieu of tuition.

Unity Church-Unitarian, 733 Portland Ave., St. Paul, Minn. 55104.

The Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs can be reached at [janne@unityunitarian.org](mailto:janne@unityunitarian.org) and 651-228-1456 x106. Her minister visited Hazel daily at the hospice.

Biographical information comes from the article mentioned above, "Kobre Award Interview: Hazel Dicken-Garcia," *Historiography in Mass Communication* 2:6 (2016), 34-44.

[http://history-jmc.com/2016\\_Issues\\_files/Historiography%20Vol.%202%20%236.pdf](http://history-jmc.com/2016_Issues_files/Historiography%20Vol.%202%20%236.pdf)

And from her autobiographical introduction to *Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Symposium Honoring Mass Media Historian Hazel Dicken-Garcia*, by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, and published by Spokane: Marquette Books, 2010.

Her resumé is at <https://apps.clu.umn.edu/directory/profiles/dicke003>, and her CaringBridge entries are at <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/hazeldicken-garcia/journal>. (CaringBridge requires the viewer to create a login and password.)

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## Historian Interview: Karen Miller Russell ©



Miller Russell

Karen Miller Russell is one of the historians most important in the modern study of public relations. She teaches in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Georgia, where she is the Jim Kennedy Professor of New Media. Her book *The Voice of Business*, a history of the Hill and Knowlton public relations firm, was chosen by the National Communication Association Public Relations Division as the top book of the year in 1999. It helped usher in a new era of scholarly study of public relations history. She won the AEJMC's award for best dissertation in 1995 and the Institute for Public Relations' Pathfinder Award for best research program in 2001. She is a former editor of the *Journal of Public Relations Research*. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin.

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

**Miller Russell:** I grew up a corporate brat, moving multiple times throughout my childhood, mostly in the Midwest but ending up in Georgia. I majored in print journalism at the University of West Georgia and then went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I thought I was going to get a professional track master's degree so I could specialize in public relations, which wasn't offered at my undergraduate school, but it didn't turn out that way.

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

**Miller Russell:** I went almost straight through school, the exception being a year working in a public library between undergraduate and graduate school. I still love libraries, but it didn't take long to realize it wasn't the job for me. My professional public relations experience all came as internships, summer jobs and free-lance work while in graduate school.

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

**Miller Russell:** I'm still in my first job, teaching at the University of Georgia. I mainly teach public relations, especially using social and digital media, but sometimes I also teach the graduate seminar on media history.

*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?*

**Miller Russell:** I owe it all to one man, the late James L. Baughman of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I took his history seminar during my first semester as a master's student, and never looked back. First of all, I should say that I was terrified every week because he was so smart and knowledgeable, with a biting sense of humor, but when I wrote a bibliographic essay about Joe McCarthy and the press he saw promise and never stopped encouraging me to, first of all, stay to get a Ph.D., and second of all, to focus on media history. Neither of these things would have even occurred to me without his prompting.

One of the important ways that Jim influenced me was recognizing the benefit of working in mass communication rather than a history

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department, realizing that understanding current theory and research can inform our understanding of historical events. He was also a demanding task master who read everything and expected his students to do the same. I still feel a little paranoid that I haven't read every single important bit of historical context when I'm working on a project.

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

**Miller Russell:** Aside from Jim, I was lucky to work with Steve Vaughn and Bob McChesney at Wisconsin, and Janice Hume and Jay Hamilton at Georgia. There's also a small but mighty group of PR historians around the world, including three who are now retired — Meg Lamme (Alabama), Tom Watson (Bournemouth), and Jacquie L'Etang (Stirling) — who've who've been so influential and always make me think. Finally, I've been fortunate to be supported by my advertising and public relations colleagues, who understand and appreciate the importance of history even if it's not their own area.

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

**Miller Russell:** I focus on public relations history, although I'm always careful to connect public relations to media history more broadly. For example, I don't just talk about a press release, but also look at press and when possible radio coverage as well. We're in an age of media convergence, but I've found that advertising, public relations, and journalism have been interconnected throughout the twentieth century.

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

**Miller Russell:** I think the theme that connects much of my research has been trying to broaden what's considered public relations, whether asking readers to consider early publicity as part of public relations history, or including people like reformers and activists who were not paid professionals but who developed many of the early strategies and tactics later adopted by the pros for business and industry. I have written about traditional subjects like PR agencies and practitioners, but I don't view them as the only contributors or even the culmination of the development of the field.

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

**Miller Russell:** Well, that's easy as I've only written one, *The Voice of Business* (1999) on the history of Hill and Knowlton. It was based on my dissertation, and was the first book-length institutional history of a U.S. PR firm. I've learned a lot since then, but I think it was a good first effort.

I'm currently under contract with Peter Lang for a second book on the early development of the public relations function at AT&T, focusing on partnerships of president Theodore Vail and PR man James Ellsworth from 1900-World War I and Walter Gifford and Arthur Page from 1927-1945. I trust that in a year or two it will be my new favorite.

*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?*

**Miller Russell:** I hope that I've contributed to making the study of pub-

lic relations history a serious scholarly endeavor, and that I've provided a balanced perspective, looking at both the good and the bad of PR's role in society.

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

**Miller Russell:** Nothing. I have a big gap in my CV when I stopped publishing after the birth of my daughter, but that was a choice I made and would make again. (Although I'd add it would be nice if parents didn't have to make that choice!)

*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.*

**Miller Russell:** Studying JMC history requires a solid grounding in the historical context. Media and media industries are always connected to each other and to events and people outside the industry, and they aren't always the most important actors in a situation. It's important to look beyond our own literature to take a broader view, and to ask why what we're studying is important to understanding history overall.

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

**Miller Russell:** If I could change anything I would encourage JMC historians to ask bigger questions. Sometimes I see very narrow explorations of the "how the New York Times covered \_\_\_\_" variety. While a deep dive may be interesting, it's always more informative to compare, to analyze archival sources along with the press coverage, to ask why it

matters how one source covered one topic.

*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?*

**Miller Russell:** I sincerely hope that people are taking advantage of the historical moment we're in to press for more teaching and research on media history. Citizens with a critical understanding of changing ideas about the role of the media, persuasion, politics, and society are vastly better positioned to understand what's happening today. It seems to me that would also make a clear contribution to the study of history generally.

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

**Miller Russell:** The attack on the humanities is also an attack on the study of journalism and mass communication history, even if it's taught in professional schools or social science colleges. If people don't see the relevance of the humanities, they won't appreciate JMC history, either.

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## Book Award Interview: Leonard Ray Teel ©



Teel

Leonard Teel won the Frank Luther Mott-Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for the year's outstanding book for his 2001 biography, *Ralph Emerson McGill: Voice of the Southern Conscience*. For the book, Dr. Teel received the Georgia Author of the Year award in history. His latest book, *Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists*, received the American Journalism Historians Association's 2016 award for the best book of the year, as well as the AEJMC Knudson Award for the year's best book on Latin America. He is a professor emeritus at Georgia State University.

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

**Teel:** This is a biography of a pre-eminent Southern newspaper editor in the context of mid-twentieth-century journalism and the civil rights movement in the South.

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

**Teel:** I was assigned to write the book. My mentor at Georgia State University, the historian Dr. Harold Davis, had recently published his bio-

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raphy of the *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry W. Grady, and had planned to write a biography of the other renowned editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Ralph McGill, who died in 1969, at the age of 70. One day at lunch, Harold asked me what project I was working on, and when I mentioned my interest in international journalism, he seemed unimpressed. Harold had been the news editor at the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and was accustomed to assigning stories to reporters. That day, he strongly recommended that I take over the task of writing McGill's biography. To him it seemed a natural project for me because I had been a reporter at the *Constitution's* sister newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal*. In fact, biography had been one of my great interests since grade school when I evidently was seeking role models. I was especially interested in what made people famous and how distinguished people lived worthwhile lives. So, I was glad to do what Harold asked, and within days at his house he turned over a trove of books and other materials. I started by writing articles about specific events or stages in McGill's life.

**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?*

**Teel:** Of course, there were McGill's publications — his books, his newspaper columns written as a sports writer in Tennessee in the 1920s, and his columns as editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* from the late 1930s until his death in 1969. He also wrote for the national audience of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Most often he focused on the South and Southerners, notably in politics and civil rights. But, aware that his Atlanta audience could grow weary of serious issues, McGill, like baseball fastball pitchers, had "a change of pace" to columns about humorous or otherwise interesting topics.

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People who had known McGill were very helpful. My thesis director at the University of Miami, Duane Koenig, referred to such interviews as “history on the hoof.” My bibliography lists 30. A few had known McGill as far back as the 1920s. It was my luck to catch Frances “Fannie” Chenie on a day when her memory was unclouded and was quite specific about Ralph’s undergraduate life at Vanderbilt University during Prohibition, when she and other friends would gather along the Cumberland River to drink and read poetry. For political background, I found former Georgia Governor Ellis Arnall very helpful; he had met McGill in Nashville in the 1920s and then, in the early 1940s, often lunched with him on sandwiches at the state capitol. Others had associated with McGill in journalism, in Atlanta and elsewhere. In Miami, while interviewing the widow of one of McGill’s best friends, Bill Baggs, former editor of the *Miami News*, she told me her husband’s personal records were still in her attic; she had not yet found a place to house them. I managed to get the papers housed at the University of Miami, where librarians helped by cataloguing them.

At other libraries, I unearthed secrets not revealed in two previous biographies. At the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, a librarian tipped me off about McGill’s father, Benjamin, who was a student there in the 1880s. One day, serving as the umpire in a student baseball game, Ben lost his temper with an argumentative student and clubbed his head with a baseball bat; the student died a few hours later. A lawyer delayed the case for a year, after which he got the charges dropped on the claim that Ben, having been expelled from the university, had suffered enough.

Then, in the Library of Congress, I located the diary of the esteemed journalist Carl W. Ackerman, who heartily disliked McGill. In 1945, toward the end of World War II, Ackerman and McGill went on a round-the-world tour to promote American journalism. In his diary and letters, Ackerman, who later headed the Columbia School of Journalism

and helped judge the Pulitzer Prizes, wrote disparagingly about McGill's behavior, especially during their interview in China with Chiang Kai-Shek. Ackerman said McGill was drunk and disruptive. In fact, McGill had a low opinion of Chiang as a warlord. In 1959, after Ackerman retired, McGill did win a Pulitzer. More primary sources were housed with the McGill papers at Emory University, walking distance from my home.

Secondary sources on the South during the civil rights era of the 1930s through 1960s were of great value for context, and sometimes for their mention of McGill and his associates in the newspaper and political worlds.

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

**Teel:** Yes. I would like to have learned more from McGill's family. But his wife of many years had died and I had no luck with his eldest son. One unsolved mystery was why McGill never drove a car in Atlanta; he always rode the bus or had a driver. A few years before his death McGill remarried; his second wife was as supportive as possible. When the book was published, one of her friends told me, she loved it and had it read to her over and over.

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

**Teel:** For biography, search out all the living first, before they die. Let everyone know you're working on the book, and do the work.

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

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**Teel:** The biggest challenge was to get his story right. I kept in mind that all knowledgeable Atlantans either had known Ralph McGill or knew of him, whether they liked him or not. One of his dear friends had written a biography which sugar-coated events, such as the Chaing Kai-shek episode. That friend defended McGill, saying that did he go out and get drunk, but only after the interview. When I interviewed that friend-biographer, he was in assisted living. To all my questions, he kept repeating, "It's in the book."

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

**Teel:** Of course, it's possible to get too close to a subject. Even so, you can back away. In my case, I found it natural to maintain neutrality. To begin with, I never met McGill; he died in February 1969, five months before I was hired by the evening *Atlanta Journal*. Certainly, I admired him for his reputation. In 1979, I was impressed when, on the 10th anniversary of his death, many admirers turned out for an evening of celebratory reminiscences. I attended and, as a reporter, wrote a story for the paper. As a journalist, I was trained to be "objective" in the sense of being impartial and balanced, and that sensitivity as a reporter of facts carried over into the biography. I found material on the dark side and included it in the context of the life. The biography involved interpretation but was based on facts.

**Q:** *What new insights does your book provide?*

**Teel:** One insight was that McGill, in the heart of the South, approached the issue of race cautiously, step by step. It seems a minor matter now, but he insisted that the *Atlanta Constitution* capitalize the word Negro.

More importantly, five years before *Brown vs. Board*, he broke silence on the segregation issue by calling attention to the sad state of dilapidated and poorly equipped Negro schools. In referring to the Supreme Court's 1896 "separate but equal" ruling, McGill argued that the Georgia legislature had not obeyed the Court dictate because they did not give equal funding to the segregated Negro schools. This column presaged the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Then, too, McGill wrote less cautiously for a national audience, as he did in the *Atlantic Monthly*, where his friend Ted Weeks was editor.

**Q:** *What findings most surprised you?*

**Teel:** I knew nothing about his love letters to a Tennessee socialite and the perception of her family that he, as a newspaper sports writer, was not in her social class. One of my graduate students unearthed a trove of McGill's love letters. Nearly all were written on stationery of the hotels where he lodged while traveling the sports writing circuit.

On another more serious issue, I was asked recently whether I was surprised at McGill's opposition to a federal anti-lynching law. The current editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Kevin Riley, was writing a column about lynching and had read in my book that McGill condemned lynchings in the strongest language, but opposed a federal law. McGill contended that Southerners were addressing the problem and that a federal law would effectively be reviving anti-Southern sentiments, a seeming return to anti-Southern Reconstruction Era legislation. While he argued that Southerners were turning away from lynching, his argument was undermined with each new murder. I told Kevin Riley that, yes, that aspect of his career, as an apologist for the South, was surprising. On that issue, he consistently surrendered justice to political expediency.

**Q:** *What advice would you give to people in our field who are considering*

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*doing a book in JMC history?*

**Teel:** Considering the new opportunities afforded by the global digital information age, historians would seem to have a field day for retrieving and documenting the past.

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