

# *Historiography*

in Mass Communication



Volume 7 (2021). Number 5

# *Historiography in Mass Communication*

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This journal publishes essays dealing with the study of mass communication history and of history in general. (It does *not* publish articles about historical events, episodes, people, etc., as one finds in, for example, historical research papers.)

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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](mailto: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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# *Historiography*

## in Mass Communication

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# Explaining Causation

By Wm. David Sloan and James D. Startt ©



Sloan

Readers are fascinated with the question of what caused such-and-such historical event. Some even think answers are easy. Many historians are fascinated with causes, too, as they should be. A few of them even think answers are easy — particularly if they already have a theory or other explanation in mind.

In fact, attempting to explain causes is one of the most difficult issues that historians face. After gathering and evaluating all the primary sources available, historians finally have to ask, “What does it all mean?” They are not satisfied with simply collecting material. They want to understand the subject they have researched.



Startt

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*James D. Startt, senior research professor in history at Valparaiso University, has written several books on Woodrow Wilson and the press and has served as editor of a number of other books. He won the Kobre Award for lifetime achievement from the American Journalism Historians Association in 2000.*

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In general, historians face two tasks: describing the nature of the subject and explaining why it was that way. The first, which involves telling the “what” and “how” of their subject, is, relatively, a piece of cake. It is explaining “why” and “to what effect” that presents the real challenge.

Handling causation is much more complex than some historians might suppose. It involves major problems. Meaningful explanation thus requires much of historians.

They must clearly grasp the purpose behind the investigation: What is the essential question that the research is trying to examine?

They must be familiar with the historiography of the subject and with the explanations that other historians have given. That requires familiarity with the schools of historiography in the field. Who can be a thoughtful historian without knowing about the views of, for example, Cultural historians, Progressive historians, and Developmental historians?

They must understand their own point of view.

They must avoid bias and present-mindedness. In JMC history, the danger of making judgments based on the professional standards of today is ever-present, a lurking form of bias based in the present.

Providing insightful explanation requires mature, critical judgment, for historians cannot rely on simple formulas. Drawing conclusions in history is not as effortless as in, for example, math, where the arithmetician works with formulas and laws.

Historians must recognize that life in the past — just like life today — was complex and hardly ever admits of a simple explanation. The main reason historians reject the rigid use of theory is that the purpose behind theory is to simplify. In history, simple explanations usually are simplistic explanations.

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Thus, historians reject single causation. Rarely in human affairs is there a lone reason for thinking or acting even at the level of the individual, much less of the general. Since there is no single cause for all occasions and since a number of causes can be associated with any important event, historians deal with multiple causation.

That is why historians shy away from monolithic explanations such as economics or politics or race or geography or gender or climate or class or technology or any other lone factor. Explanation usually is concerned with assorted, rather than solitary, causation.

Likewise, we should never make the mistake of assuming, as some people do, that “Explanation in history is based mainly on the historian’s opinion.” It is not. It must be based on facts. Since historical research is concerned mainly with a search for truth about the past, explanation cannot be mere opinion. It must rely on thorough work in primary sources. In fact, explanation can come only from primary sources.

Even when primary sources are abundant, historians must be cautious about assuming too much. Explanation must originate in the sources themselves. If one were examining, for example, the design of advertising in the late 1800s, describing the design would be possible simply by looking at ads. However, if the ads were the only sources the historian examined, s/he could do nothing better than guess at why the ads were designed as they were. For the explanation of why, the historian would need explanations offered by people of the time.

Discussion of causation is subjected to much abuse. In particular, people unfamiliar with the nature of history tend to reduce historical causation to levels of argument or belief that have little lasting consequence. Think of the number of people in our own time who claim to know what caused the Cold War or the American intervention in Vietnam or Iraq or the improvement or decline in the national economy un-

der any recent U. S. president.

Consider the number of explanations offered in most surveys of American media history such as the founding of the first newspapers, the rise of objectivity, the causes of Yellow Journalism, the fall of muck-raking, the decline of mass magazines, the historic changes in radio formats, and the growth of the media as big business.

Ascertaining causes in history is a precarious matter. It frequently must probe into formidable questions. For instance, what caused the New Journalism that became so important in the United States and England at the end of the nineteenth century? Perhaps the Pulitzers and Harmsworths caused it. Or, if they had never lived, perhaps other people like them might have appeared to do what they did. On the other hand, the New Journalism may have resulted from conditions of the time. Perhaps it occurred as the result of the “chance” convergence of many factors at that particular time.

Or consider an explanation that fascinates some historians today. That is the view of Cultural Studies with its claims that the structure of feeling of society as a whole can be explained by mass communication. This explanation was popularized in journalism history by Jim Carey. Cultural Studies historians intend well, but the problems with their explanation can be recognized when one notes the thorny issues that historians must navigate when dealing with causation.

In fact, Carey himself recognized the enormity of the problem of documenting his ideas. In his 1974 article “The Problem of Journalism History” he wrote that it is extremely difficult to “get hold of” the “felt sense” of the past. But some Cultural Studies historians believe they have succeeded, in fact that the task is relatively easy.

On a level that is less challenging than that which Carey proposed, we can get a sense of the problem that confronts Cultural Studies his-

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torians if we think about the cause-effect relationship between mass communication and audience members. Primary source material is scarce that indicates that someone in the past changed his or her mind because of the mass media. There are instances of individuals saying something such as “From the first time I went to see a movie, I was captivated,” but it is rare to find individuals leaving records stating something as simple as the fact that media content persuaded them to alter their views about a public issue.

The problem becomes more muddled when historians attempt to deal not with such matters as views about public issues but with Carey’s “human consciousness.”

Historians who have adopted his concepts have made the task even more difficult by the expansiveness of their reasoning. Rather than focusing on individuals, they have attempted to explain the structure of feeling of society as a whole, or at least of a sizable portion of it. We’ve heard adherents of applying Cultural Studies to history say that it is easier to know the consciousness of the aggregate than of one individual. But that argument seems tenuous at best.

In dealing with the relationship between causes and results, a number of issues present themselves.

Do certain causes *necessarily* produce certain results in history? Did high literacy rates and newspaper reading, for example, as a matter of course bring about the American Revolution? Can we reach a definitive answer? On this matter, G. R. Elton in his book *Political History: Principles and Practice* wrote, “No historical cause ever *must* have a given known effect, namely, the historical event to be explained. The best that historians can say is that it *did have* that effect.”

The distinction he made must be grasped to understand the nature of historical causation. It differs from causal explanations advanced in

the physical sciences and to a lesser extent in the social and behavioral sciences. Scientists sometimes posit that certain causes must produce certain results. In historiography, it is more accurate to describe the relationship between cause and result as one in which causes produced, rather than necessarily produced, effects and consequences.

The problem of causation is complicated further by the understandable tendency to want to make distinctions between causes. Are some causes “antecedent” and others “immediate,” and, if they are, can they be separated?

The idea, for example, that the colonial press was a vehicle for the spread of the revolutionary idea in the decade or so before the start of the American Revolution is usually accepted as true. But what made that press, or a particular part of it, a revolutionary weapon? What caused it to be what it was? Does the work of revolutionary publicists explain that cause, or should one search more deeply and widely? Perhaps the explanation lies beyond the seemingly immediate cause of publicists mobilizing the printed word to achieve revolutionary goals. An indispensable part of the explanation might lie in the gradual growth of a revolutionary mentality, or perhaps it was a byproduct of the development of the press in the American colonies. In fact, there probably were many causes that explain the presence of the revolutionary press at that time.

In all historical events, some causes appeared earlier than others, while some were concurrent. How far back should one go in pursuit of causes? How much should we deal with antecedent causes, and how immediate to an event should we attempt to be in our explanation? Could the immediate causes have occurred without the antecedent ones? When, where, and why did the latter make their appearance? Furthermore, once these decisions are made, should one then affix weights to

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the various causes?

The historiographical discussion of causes involves other concerns as well. What about “paramount” and “contributory” causes? Need they be differentiated? A number of historians claim that distinctions between them are artificial. Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff in their historical manual *The Modern Researcher* warn that making exact distinctions leads to “self-stultification.”

Some historians believe it is useful to discuss various causes of an event separately in order to explain them. This belief does not mean, however, that they are making a substantive distinction between them. Can quantitative distinctions be made between these causes? Most historians doubt that such can be done. So they are cautious about assigning priority to any one cause or ranking an order of causes.

Some causes may be incidental to an event, and common sense impels one to dismiss them from serious discussion in a causal explanation. But full and adequate explanation must be given of all the causes that can be discovered to have had a meaningful relationship to the event.

In resolving such problems in explaining causation — and let us admit that no one can ever resolve them with complete satisfaction — there are a number of considerations to keep in mind. For instance, historical causes exist in time and are conditioned by it. They are products of things created by people — institutions, opinions, interests, and other manifestations of their existence.

Consequently, historians consider *context*. The historian’s own mind must be searched for answers to the following questions: Does one know enough about the times under consideration and the forces acting upon them to probe into the causation of an event? Has one achieved sufficient detachment from present assumptions and presup-

positions to allow that event and the people involved in it the benefit of being understood on their own grounds?

None of the recognized principles that historians employ when dealing with causation are devoid of the personal element. In fact, in many cases causal explanations can run beyond what the evidence reveals. The motives of the people the historian is studying may be blurred. Inferences must be made.

It is at this point that the historian's *intuition* comes into play. Historical intuition is something different from a hunch or guess. It involves advancing reasonable conjecture rather than hastily informed speculation or artful theorizing. It entails suggesting elements of explanation, governed by a grasp of probability that, in turn, reflects available evidence plus wide knowledge of the subject. Relationships and interactions among them often can be discovered only by the historian's intuition.

Finally, consider the matter of evidence. As the British classicist C. S. Lewis observed in his book *Mere Christianity*, "Anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about." No one expects to encounter causal explanations that are not grounded in evidence. Certainly, ones that can be refuted by evidence are unsatisfactory. Furthermore, even the most informed historian must allow for the imperfect nature of historical evidence. Historians also must remember that it is they who select the evidence and attach a causal significance to it.

Any discussion of causation that the historian attempts must depend on available evidence and on the judgment of the historian. Neither is sufficient to produce 100% certainty. Whether we approach causal explanations with contextual knowledge, intuitive judgment, multiple causation, or evidence in mind, it is clear that the historian's professional competency is crucial in the equation.

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Understanding that the causes of important events and changes can never be known in full, we can appreciate that there is no room in historical causal explanation for dogmatic thinking.

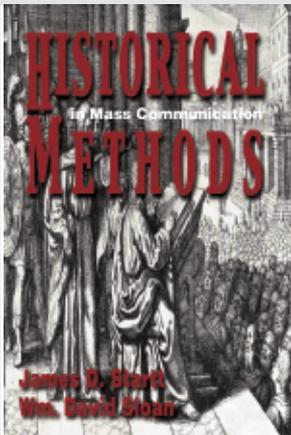
Even if a historian arrives at an explanation in the proper way, conclusions must always be tentative rather than final. Causal discussion must have a degree of prudence, one that allows the debate about causes to remain open. We can never be certain we have the complete evidence or the final answer. Tomorrow, another historian may uncover sources never before seen or use an improved technique for analyzing evidence. Our understanding of the past can always change. To recognize that truth, we only have to look at the variety of explanations that previous historians have offered.

Explaining causation is complicated, and historians should be cautious when handling it. Glib historians deal with it as if it is easy. Good historians recognize its complexity but accept the challenge.

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# James Rutledge “Jim” Martin

November 7, 1954 - September 11, 2021

By Beth Garfrerick ©



Garfrerick



Martin

So many words and phrases come to mind when describing our dear friend Jim Martin. A gentleman and a scholar, a Christian and a preacher, a family man and a friend, a teacher and a mentor, a book lover and a Bible quoter, a historian and a storyteller, a journalist and an editor. Jim died on the twentieth anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attack, after two weeks of hospitalization following a heart attack. So, as we mourned the devastation and loss to our country on that fateful day, many were saddened even more deeply to learn of Jim’s passing.

Jim retired from the University of North Alabama Department of Communication faculty just two years ago, in December 2019.

Jim served a six-year term (2005-2010) as editor of *American Journalism*, the research journal of the American Journalism Historians Association.

In response to the posting of Jim’s obituary on the AJHA’s Facebook page, fellow historians described him as kind, pleasant, jovial, sin-

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cere, compassionate, being wickedly smart, and offering hearty greetings. Other AJHA peer tributes included these three:

Vanessa Murphree: “Jim was an important member of our organization. I remember that he stepped up to the *AJ* editor’s position when we desperately needed him. It didn’t take long for him to help us advance in readership and funding. We’ve lost a great friend and supporter.”

David Bulla: “I once heard Jim defend how we journalism historians do what we do. It was brilliant.”

Bernell Tripp: “No matter how many times I ran into Jim at the conference, I never once saw him without a smile.”

In his first Editor’s Note in the Winter 2005 issue of *American Journalism*, Jim wrote that he “gave serious thought to a grandiose inaugural essay arguing some fine point of historical discourse.” Rather, he opted to offer this single observation:

In the basic reporting classes I teach, my bottom line is “Get it right.” Accuracy is the most important characteristic of any story — front-page news or feature profile. This is also the first duty of the historian. Establish the facts. Give a true account. Get it right.

Of course “Just the facts, ma’am, just the facts” is not history. The facts, even true facts, rarely speak for themselves. Historians must select their facts and interpret and explain them. But in this, the same commitment to truth and accuracy is called for as in establishing the facts themselves.

I would argue that objective historical knowledge is possible and should be the goal of journalism historians.

We’re historians. So here’s a partial recounting of Jim’s history. He

was raised in the hills of southern-middle Tennessee in a rural childhood setting that could've come from the pages of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*. At Jim's funeral service, his younger brother told of their days riding bareback on Shetland ponies and "spooking" Tennessee fainting goats so they could watch them topple over in the field. A favorite childhood gift of spurs, boots, and a cap gun emboldened young Jim to urge his pony on, and the bareback rider was promptly bucked to the dirt in a cloud of embarrassment. The brothers rode in "goat carts."

Jim soon discovered his musical and Bible oratory skills. According to his brother, Jim could recite "copious" amounts of Bible scripture. Jim, his younger brother, and a few friends formed "The Rutledge Lane Gang" band, named for the road on which they lived.

Jim started preaching in high school and continued in college at the Church of Christ-affiliated Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, where he majored in Bible studies.

There, he met the love of his life, Teresa, whom he married at age 20. During their 46-year marriage, they welcomed a son, two daughters, a daughter-in-law, a son-in-law, and three grandchildren into their family. Many of you had the pleasure of spending time with Teresa when she accompanied Jim to AJHA conferences.

Jim took his preaching and printing skills to Sesser, Illinois, where he was owner of Jim Martin Printing from 1980-1994. He was publisher of a weekly shopper, *The Sesser-Area Journal*, in 1984-1985. He served as editor and publisher of the *Bulletin Digest* from 1988-1994, which was a subscription-based church bulletin insert service.

During this time, and at the encouragement of friends and family, he applied to the graduate school at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, earning a master's and doctorate degree in journalism.

The newly minted professor taught a year at Rend Lake College in

Ina, Illinois, and three years as an adjunct professor at Lipscomb University in Nashville, before joining the Department of Communication faculty at the University of North Alabama in Florence, Alabama, in 1999.

Jim loved Teresa, and her cooking. A common phrase after a family meal was Jim declaring, “Oh, mama, that was the best one yet!” When dining out, a Florence-area family favorite was a steakhouse. Once, on the drive there, the three children were arguing in the back seat. Jim warned that if they didn’t stop the verbal fighting, he’d turn the car around and they’d have canned Vienna sausages and crackers (a Southern delicacy) for supper instead. They didn’t stop. Being a man of his word, he turned the car around. While Teresa admired that her husband was a man of his word, she would’ve preferred a tasty steak dinner and a broken promise.

Jim didn’t like to mix work with family mealtime. One of his students was dating (and later married) his younger daughter. During a family meal, he asked Jim a question about a class assignment. Jim replied, “My office hours are in the morning. Come see me then.”

Unlike some families with a cuss jar, Jim’s children had to put their coinage in a grammar jar when they misspoke.

Jim was well-known for his bow-tie collection. While he loved his bow ties, he also had a fondness for the silk ties his brother-in-law brought him from Thailand while serving as a missionary there. Jim’s running class introduction to students was that he was wearing a Thai tie. He asked his brother-in-law to find him a tie from Thailand with elephants on it. An elephant is the mascot for the University of Alabama Crimson Tide athletic teams. Jim explained, an elephant tie would be a Tide Thai tie. Once he tied it, it would then be a tied Tide Thai tie.

Some former student comments that were posted in response to

Jim's obituary notice included references to his bow ties, among other favored characteristics and treasured memories. The students wrote:

"I'll never forget his bowties, his lessons and him singing 'When a Man Loves a Woman' during class."

"Dr. Martin made any class fun to be a part of. And I admired the hell out of his bow tie collection."

"I learned more about journalism than I ever could've imagined from this man. Not to mention, many life lessons from sitting in his office multiple times a week. An absolute wealth of knowledge.... His jokes and colorful bow ties are unforgettable, and his classes were always enjoyable — regardless of the content."

"He was always there with a joke, something to make class fun, and a bowl of candy always stocked on his desk for his advising appointments."

"When he was teaching about satire, he asked the class to anonymously submit satirical descriptions of him. We had such a good laugh at the results, but no one laughed louder than Dr. Martin himself."

"Every day after COM Law, he would say 'Ms. (last name), these are some of the best days of your life.... You just won't realize it until they're over.'"

"Dr. Martin made the biggest impact on me throughout my time at UNA. While his class was far from easy, he was easily my favorite professor.... The world needs more people like Dr. Martin."

"He was one of the kindest, toughest teachers I have ever had. Comm Law challenged me in ways I never knew were possible, and I am forever thankful for the lessons he taught me. I'll never forget the day that his phone rang [in class] and it was a telemarketer. He answered the phone and had a 25-minute conversation with the machine that had every single student rolling with laughter."

Jim was prone to answering phone calls while professing or preaching. Once while he was delivering a sermon at Five Points Church of Christ in Five Points, Tennessee, a church member called him. Jim answered the call on his cell phone, and they spoke briefly before the caller realized Jim was in the middle of a sermon. He later asked Jim why he answered the call. Jim replied, “Because you called me.” Other sermonizing staples from “the bow tie preacher” included saying “Oh, man” when excited and sticking a finger in his mouth and popping it out when tongue-tied.

One of Jim’s closest friends was the UNA Department of Communication chair who hired him. At Jim’s funeral service, he recalled some of Jim’s kind acts, such as giving his textbook to a student who said he’d have to drop the course because he couldn’t afford the textbook. In his speech classes, Jim allowed international students uncomfortable with delivering their first speech in English to instead present in their native language, building their confidence for future presentations.

Jim and his department chair started going to lunch together, once a week, in 2006, and they continued doing so until Jim’s final hospitalization. The chair described these lunches as “the greatest gift Jim Martin could give to me.” Their lives were similar in that both had daughters, and they grew up and married during the same time period.

However, he said, their friendship defied the odds in that they differed on opinions and beliefs related to politics and religion. Yet they listened to each other and offered comfort and advice when needed. He suggested that each of us find a friend like Jim Martin.

While attending the 2004 AJHA Cleveland conference, I had the pleasure of joining a group that toured the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Jim was with us, and it wasn’t long before this buttoned-up, collared,

bow tie-wearing preacher and professor awed us with his knowledge and love of rock and roll. At times it felt like Elvis himself was a faculty peer, while other times it could have been Mark Twain reincarnate in the adjoining office.

One of my fondest memories is working with Jim on a silent auction of his donated bow ties, held in conjunction with his December 2019 UNA retirement party. The proceeds were donated to the department's scholarship fund. There were 32 bow ties (10 pre-tied or clip-on, and 22 self-tie) of varying patterns and colors.

His wit, pun penning, and guffaws came out in full force as we named each tie for the promotional flyer. Among them: Black Tie Affair, Tie-po, High Tied, Tie-phoon, En-tie-cing, Tie-tanic, Tie the Knot, To Tie For, Tie-rific, Tie One On, Tongue-Tied, and Tie Harder. [On the next page is a copy of the flyer Prof. Garfrerick produced for the silent auction showing some of the bow ties. The auction was held during Jim's UNA retirement reception. He collaborated with Prof. Garfrerick on naming the ties.]

As a historian, he shared our love for books and browsing through old bookstores looking for that special book. His favorite book was The Bible, and his favorite chapter was Romans 12 (King James version, of course). It begins, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

As his younger brother observed, Jim's life "became the full embodiment of this chapter."

In his final Editor's Note in the Fall 2010 issue of *American Journalism*, Jim wrote, "Editing *American Journalism* has been far more than

**A** **B** **C** **D**

**1** **2** **3**

**4** **5** **6**

**7** **8** **9** **10** **11**

**Silent Auction: from the private bow-tie collection of Dr. Jim Martin**

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**22** **23** **24** **25** **26**

**During Dr. Martin's retirement reception Monday, December 2, 2-4 p.m. UNA Dept. of Communications Bldg.**

**27** **28**

A. Black Tie Affair	5. The Magician	13. UNA Spirit	21. Tongue Tied
B. Tie-po	6. En-tie-cing	14. UNA All the Way	22. Auburn Tie-ger
C. High Tied	7. Tie-tanic	15. Color of Money	23. Tie Harder
D. Blue Plate Special	8. Mood Tie	16. St. Paddy	24. Southern Comfort
1. Period!	9. Tie the Knot	17. Brad Paisley	25. Purple Reign
2. Tie-phoon	10. To Tie For	18. Black and White	26. Diamond Jim
3. Gray Area	11. Rock 'n Roll	19. Tie One On	27. UT Voluntie
4. The Attorney	12. Tie-rific	20. Dot Matrix	28. The Gold Standard

a job, it has been a labor of love. I am honored to have been entrusted with the opportunity to serve these last six years.”

Jim, we are honored to have shared a part of our lives with you. We are better people because of those friendships.

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# History's Detectives

By Leonard Ray Teel ©



Teel

**W**hen I was an untenured assistant professor I joined the ranks of history's detectives. I had no alternative.

That was when my mentor, Professor Harold Davis, told me that I should write a biography of Ralph Emerson McGill, the renowned editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Davis had worked alongside McGill and had wanted to write the book. Now, about to retire, he *assigned* me to write the biography that became, 14 years later, *Ralph Emerson McGill: Voice of the Southern Conscience*.

The biography required serious research not only on McGill's reputation in Atlanta. In deep shadows were his early years in Tennessee before he came to Atlanta in 1929. My research easily turned up his stories written as sports editor for the *Nashville Banner*. Then I found old friends — a retired sportswriter and a former sweetheart then living in a nursing home.

This and my later probing qualified me to use the term of the his-

*Leonard Ray Teel, professor emeritus at Georgia State University, has published five books, including two journalism histories that won national awards. In 1995 he founded the Center for International Media Education and co-founded the Arab-U.S. Association for Communication Educators.*

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torian Dr. Robin Winks, as among the ranks of history's *detectives*.

In his classic 1969 book, *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, Winks and 25 other historians established models for historical detection. The book had solid authority because of the esteem of its contributors — leading off with the president of the American Historical Association, Carl L. Becker, and including C. Vann Woodward, Allen Nevins and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

“We are all detectives of course,” Winks asserted, “in that at one time or another we have all had to engage in some genuine deductive routine.... By the same token, we are all historians, in that we reconstruct past events from present evidence, and perhaps we build usable generalizations upon those reconstructions. The historian must collect, interpret, and then explain his evidence by methods which are not greatly different from those techniques employed by the detective, or at least the detective of fiction.”<sup>1</sup>

Evidence, Winks asserted, “consists not only of ‘hard facts’ but also of beliefs.... We seek to understand both that real past, as it actually occurred, and also understand the myths that have fed on that past, since the latter are part of our intellectual history as well.... To establish the facts is always in order, and is indeed the first duty of the historian,” Winks noted, “but to suppose that the facts ‘speak for themselves’ is an illusion.”

In discovering Ralph McGill's life — especially his early years in journalism — I benefited from Winks' guidelines for historical detection. “The historian does not make his case ... on the basis of one discovery,” Winks wrote, in introducing the book's essay by historian Christopher Morley. “The historian works by accretion, adding a bit here and a piece there, until a reasonable likeness of the subject of his pursuit begins to emerge. We seek to understand that real past as it

actually occurred.” That task, he believed, was the “most exciting part” of the historian’s work, especially when new testimony or evidence is found.

In researching McGill’s career, the greatest challenge was in following his early trails in Tennessee before he left for Atlanta in 1929 and became famous and thus well-documented. One day, a routine question resulted in what the historian Marc Bloch called “the thrill of learning singular things.” In Chattanooga, where McGill grew up, I asked about him at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. The librarian’s response was: “Was that the McGill who killed one of our students?”

No, Ralph did not kill their student, but his father did. A dive into the 19th century archives revealed that on February 22, 1888, Benjamin Franklin McGill, a freshman acting as umpire in a baseball game, argued with another student, James Columbus Johnson, then clubbed Johnson with a baseball bat, and fled. A few hours later, Johnson died. Lawyers in McGill’s mother’s family got the case delayed a year, at which time the offense was reduced to “assault and battery.”

*Eyewitnesses.* My search in Tennessee found Freddie Russell. A former sportswriter himself, he had credible memories of McGill at Vanderbilt University and then as the leading *Nashville Banner* sportswriter and editor covering everything from baseball to fox hunts. Russell told me McGill could have finished his senior year at Vanderbilt “if he had wanted to. But he had a fulltime job. The degree didn’t mean that much to him.”

McGill demonstrated real initiative to do more than sportswriting. In a dark mood, perhaps when he was drinking, he wrote to his Nashville debutante girlfriend Louise Stevens: “I wonder, sometimes at the seriousness with which we take things — golf, for instance. There are moments when I know it is all silly.” By contrast, in South Pittsburg,

Tennessee, he relished the opportunity to report on union-management warfare and was credited with mediating the settlement that restored peace.

*Love Life.* Among the McGill archives are the heartfelt letters he wrote to Louise Stevens, who eventually married someone in a higher class than a sportswriter, though shortly before her death, during research for the book, she told my graduate assistant, Beth Praed, that McGill was “the love of my life” — a confession that troubled her son.

*Temporary Escapes.* Early on, McGill found ways to escape the routine of daily journalism. In 1925, he persuaded the *Banner* to send him to Kentucky to report on the plight of young Floyd Collins, trapped in Sand Cave. He stood outside the entrance, interviewing anxious friends, loved ones, and crowds of the curious who were restrained by barbed-wire and state troopers with bayonets. On other occasions his enthusiasm could be pumped by testimony in a murder trial as he flipped page after page from his typewriter into the hands of waiting boys who raced on bicycles to deliver his prose to the *Banner* newsroom.

Years later in Atlanta after he rose to become the *Constitution's* editor, McGill found ways to get away from his very public job. A favorite retreat was to share stories with Carl Sandburg, who had moved in 1945 from Michigan to Connemara Farms, 240 acres near Flat Rock, North Carolina. McGill's first trip there in 1951 was to write a magazine article in which he portrayed Sandberg as “drawn to become the greatest scholar and researcher into the life of perhaps the greatest American — Abraham Lincoln.”

Referring back to Dr. Robin Winks' inspirational compendium of historians, one of the last entries is a message from Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Jackson*: “The only antidote to a shallow knowledge of history is a deeper knowledge — the knowl-

## History's Detectives

edge which produces not dogmatic certitude but diagnostic skill, not clairvoyance but insight.”

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Robin W. Winks in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 4.

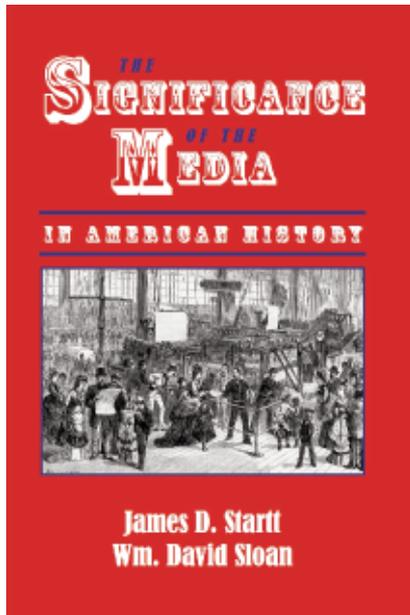
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# Historian Interview

Erin K. Coyle ©



Coyle

**E**rin Coyle specializes in the history of freedom of expression, with an emphasis on press freedom, access issues, and privacy. She is the author of the book *The Press and Rights to Privacy: First Amendment Freedoms vs. Invasion of Privacy Claims* and has published a number of journal articles. Much of her work combines historical and legal research methods. She is an associate professor at Temple University, where she teaches courses in journalism history, mass media law and ethics, and reporting and writing. She

is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Journalism Historians Association and has served as chair of the AJHA's research committee. She has received research paper awards from the AJHA and the AEJMC history division, law division, visual communication division, and magazine media division. At Louisiana State University, where she taught before joining the Temple faculty, she received a variety of teaching awards. While doing her Ph.D. in mass communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she served on the School of Law's *First Amendment Law Review* and also received dissertation-support awards in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication.

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

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**Coyle:** I grew up in Dubuque, the oldest city in Iowa, along the western bank of the Mississippi River. While I lived there, historical architecture, artifacts, and tales were valued by the community and my family. My father worked over 50 years as a lawyer, and my mother worked almost three decades as a speech pathologist. Both helped me acquire and read many books about American history. My parents encouraged my interests in studying law, language, and history.

My older sister is a talented artist with a gift of considering multiple viewpoints. She has shown me how much value can come from asking questions and considering diverse perspectives. She went to Wisconsin for college, which helped give me the courage to leave Iowa for college.

I studied journalism and English at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. While at Emory, I was fortunate to study postcolonial history, Irish history, American history, and the history of the English language in conjunction with poetry, plays, and novels in English, journalism, and liberal studies courses. To prepare to complete a journalism internship in South Africa, I also studied South African history with journalism professor Loren Ghiglione and anthropologist Mark Auslander.

After graduating from college and working as a journalist, I studied journalism history, law, and ethics at the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. Journalism professors Joseph Bernt, Anne Cooper-Chen, Daniel Riffe, and Bill Reader taught me how to systematically study media content via content analysis and how to apply theory in research. My thesis analyzed U.S. news magazines' coverage of U.S. military interventions between 1983 and 2003. The thesis analyzed how embedded journalists provided different coverage than non-embedded journalists provided.

I next studied mass communication law and history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I took courses in the school of

journalism and mass communication, history department, and law school. While completing my coursework, I served on the staff of the *First Amendment Law Review*, which provided me with greater understanding of legal history and legal research. Both of those methods were important in my dissertation, which analyzed how state and federal courts addressed fundamental democratic values undergirding press freedom and privacy in court opinions published after 1989.

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

**Coyle:** I worked as a city government reporter in Dubuque, Iowa, before I went to Ohio University for graduate school. As a journalist, I covered many topics, including transportation, economic development issues, historic preservation, and stormwater management. That job required perusing government documents, reading laws, reviewing archived records, and performing interviews to gain a better understanding of contemporary issues. Simply reading records, ordinances, or meeting agendas or attending government meetings did not provide sufficient context for news stories. It was my responsibility to show what extending an arterial roadway or changing a drainage system could mean for people's lives beyond potentially raising their tax bills. Conveying that information necessitated learning people's stories and historical context.

Working as a journalist also revealed that people sometimes are newsworthy during times of vulnerability, and journalists must carefully consider how to sensitively report stories while respecting humanity, dignity, and privacy. That lesson has inspired some of my research.

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

**Coyle:** I started teaching when I was a graduate student. I taught undergraduate news writing and editing courses when earning a Master of Science in Journalism at Ohio University between 2003 and 2005. When earning a Ph.D. in Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I taught undergraduate mass communication law courses.

Over 11 years at Louisiana State University, I taught undergraduate courses in mass communication law, mass communication ethics, media history, and media writing. I also taught a graduate course that addressed legal problems and issues media professionals have faced. I was fortunate to also complete directed research courses with doctoral students interested in historiography and legal research.

Since I joined the Temple University faculty in 2020, I have taught undergraduate courses in journalism writing and reporting and journalism law and ethics. I currently am teaching a graduate-level course that addresses journalism history, journalism norms and practices, and journalists' rights and responsibilities.

***Historiography:** 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? etc.*

**Coyle:** Undergraduate and graduate-level coursework has been foundational for my journalism history research. Loren Ghiglione's undergraduate journalism history course inspired some of my journalism history scholarship and studies of free press-fair trial rights. The work for my undergraduate history course started in the summer before Ghiglione's

journalism history class started. As I was preparing to complete a poetry program in Ireland, Ghiglione sent me an assignment to study my family history and write about it. Later that summer, a friend and I boarded rusted buses in Ireland to look for records of my ancestors. We primarily found people who spoke Gaelic, which I unfortunately had not learned. After returning home, interviewing family members and searching through family records helped me learn personal stories. That experience provided an idea of the skills I would further develop in history, journalism, and mass communication courses.

Ghiglione's semester-long journalism history course required each student to write a book chapter about a Black journalist who covered the Civil Rights Movement. For that assignment, I interviewed William Fowlkes and colleagues who worked with him at the *Atlanta Daily World*. I went to the newsroom and watched him type on his typewriter as other journalists used computers. I also went to a nearby library to review years of Fowlkes's writings via microfilm. Fowlkes told me how he had to run for his life after he took a flash photograph of a Ku Klux Klan rally on Stone Mountain, and he explained threats he'd faced while traveling to cover the Civil Rights Movement. Others explained that he also worked at a musician to support his family. That assignment taught me how little I knew about racism and journalism history in the United States. That assignment also taught me how to perform in-depth interviews and review records to learn what was missing from history books I had read.

Ghiglione's journalism history course also inspired me to study how journalists and courts have attempted to balance free press and fair trial rights. He drove our entire class from Atlanta, Georgia, to Angola Prison in Louisiana. Wilbert Rideau, an editor of *The Angolite* and award-winning author, showed our class around the prison and talked

to us about *The Angolite's* history. Rideau also explained that the U.S. Supreme Court found he had not received a fair trial due to pretrial publicity and a court's refusal to change the location of his first trial. Without his knowledge or consent, a television station had recorded and then broadcast a law enforcement interview of Rideau, who was accused of killing a white woman in 1961. He was sent to Angola after his second trial. In 2000, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered another trial due to racial discrimination in grand jury selection. After a fourth trial, he was released in 2005 for having served more than the maximum 21-year sentence for manslaughter.

Experiences at Ohio University prepared me to do systematic archival research addressing journalism history and journalism law. Bernt's history of American magazines course taught me how to do archival analysis and textual analysis, and conversations with Pat Washburn helped me draw conceptual connections between contemporary and historical topics. I spent a quarter studying news coverage of the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh's baby and the trial of Bruno Hauptmann, which was called the trial of the century. History also was emphasized in a graduate-level law course that required reading landmark U.S. Supreme Court opinions in chronological order. In that course, and later while serving on my dissertation committee, Thomas Hodson encouraged me to consider how historical events, culture, and the composition of the Supreme Court influenced the Court's opinions.

I next studied mass communication law and history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Mass communication courses with Donald Shaw, Frank Fee, and Ruth Walden required me to perform careful textual analysis of archival records, government records, and court opinions. They showed me how to use journalists' personal records, media content, and court records to study what journalists, at-

torneys, and judges' writings revealed about the history of free expression, privacy, and fair trial rights. History professor John Kasson also taught me how to closely read primary and secondary sources to learn about cultural antecedents for legal rights. Kasson and law professor Anne Kleinfelter specifically taught me to reevaluate typically cited essays, statutes, and court opinions in relation to cited sources and to non-cited sources to gain a broader understanding of legal and cultural antecedents for privacy rights in the United States.

After I earned a Ph.D., mentors graciously have continued my education. Barbara Friedman, Michael Sweeney, Ford Risley, Michael Fuhlhage, Thomas Terry, Carolyn Kitch, David Mindich, and manuscript reviewers have deepened my understanding of journalism history and pointed me to sources that have appeared in neither my reading lists nor searches of library catalogs. Louis Day has asked me to conceptualize historical influences on press freedom from Ancient Greek philosophy and the framers of the U.S. Constitution. Jinx C. Broussard also has encouraged me to complete oral history interviews and go beyond archival holdings to find what is missing from journalism history.

The American Journalism Historians Association and Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conferences also have provided important opportunities to learn from journalism historians. During conversations at those conferences, Gwyneth Mellinger and Thomas Mascaro have generously helped me consider where I might find sources that don't appear in Worldcat or other archival databases.

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

**Coyle:** Jim Startt and David Sloan's *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* shaped my understanding of history as a pursuit of truth that seeks to find and tell a story based on evidence. They have explained that historians ought to compile complete records and use triangulation to assure methodological soundness. They present history as an attempt to explain the past.

As a journalist, I was assigned to answer why anyone should care about a story topic. When attempting to explore fundamental democratic values and rights relevant to journalism history, cultural historian James Carey's work often helps me answer that question. My research often is grounded in Carey's assertions that 1. the passion for democracy is necessary for journalism and the public and 2. journalism is essential for democracy and the public.

Much of my scholarship follows processes journalism historian David Copeland explained in his preface to *The Idea of a Free Press: The Enlightenment and Its Unruly Legacy*. To conceptualize this idea, he explored printed words, events, and social movements. Journalism historians Emily Erickson and Michael Schudson have researched freedom of information and right to know movements in the twentieth century. Their work and legal historian Margaret Blanchard's work have shaped my research on journalists' advocacy for free expression rights.

I strive to follow Blanchard's example of examining judicial and extrajudicial influences on freedom of expression. For example, in a 1996 article, "The Twilight of the First Amendment Age?," Blanchard synthesized scholarship from journalism, history, legal scholarship, and First Amendment theory and evaluated "arguments advocating for freedom of speech." She carefully read court opinions, laws, legislative history, news content, and other sources to learn how journalists, legal experts, and other people have described freedom of expression.

My research addressing journalists' advocacy for press freedom and access to government information also relates to political communication scholar Tim Cook's assertion that the press is a political institution that establishes what is valuable for society. This line of my scholarship incorporates multiple methods and sources, as Erickson did in "The Watchdog Joins the Fray: The Press, Records Audits, and State Access Reform" (*Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 16 [Summer 2014]). Her meticulously researched monograph incorporates content from interviews of journalists, attorneys, and advocates for access to government information. To examine the post-World War II crusade for press freedom, the Freedom of Information movement, journalists' audits, and other attempts to access government information, she also analyzed sources from press councils, government records, periodicals, and court opinions.

My dedication to triangulating research with multiple sources also stems from historian William A. Armstrong's preface to *The Gilded Age Letters of E.L. Godkin*. Armstrong wrote that his volume of edited letters was needed in part due to "the partially distorted view that historians until recently had of the later nineteenth century." He clarified that those distorted views largely came from Godkin, the subject of their scholarship. Armstrong stated that a previously published volume of letters included correspondence that Godkin's family collected but excluded "some of Godkin's most important letters." Family members "screened the collection for controversial letters" before donating it to an archive, according to Armstrong. He explained that providing a more accurate picture of Godkin, thus required examining Godkin's letters from multiple archival collections in this country and the UK. That has inspired me to diligently work to triangulate sources and to draw sources from multiple archival collections whenever possible.

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

**Coyle:** My historical work primarily examines what journalists, lawyers, and judges have written about fundamental democratic values, particularly when legal rights have potential to conflict. I examine extrajudicial and judicial influences upon privacy, free press-fair trial rights, and freedom of expression. One line of my historical research attempts to clarify individuals' expectations for privacy rights and protections. That research recognizes rights to privacy often are presented as conflicting with press rights to report newsworthy information. Another line of my historical research addresses editors' advocacy for specific causes, such as promoting a nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, citizens' rights to receive information, and preventing government officials from limiting access to government facilities, proceedings, records, and images.

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

**Coyle:** Some of my historical research explores Louis D. Brandeis's writings and sources that could have influenced some of his important writings about privacy and freedom of expression. This line of research requires qualitative analysis of archival records, periodicals, Congressional records, and court opinions.

Brandeis and Samuel D. Warren wrote an 1890 *Harvard Law Review* article commonly cited as inspiring privacy law in the United States. That article recognized a need to protect personal dignity from harm by members of the prying press and photographers. I have read Brandeis's correspondence, articles, and court opinions to review 1.

how he conceptualized privacy rights and free expression rights and 2. ways to reconcile conflicts between individuals' rights to be let alone and citizens' rights to learn information in a democratic society.

When reading through the footnotes of Brandeis's co-authored 1890 law review article calling for a legal right to privacy in the United States, I noticed the authors cited a piece E.L. Godkin published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1890. To explore cultural antecedents for the legal right to privacy Brandeis sought in the United States, I subsequently read all I could find that Godkin had published related to privacy and civility before the landmark law review article was published. I also examined Brandeis's letters to see what he had written about Godkin and Godkin's writing. "E. L. Godkin's Criticism of the Penny Press: Antecedents to a Legal Right to Privacy" addresses Godkin's calls for protection against sensational journalistic practices at the end of the nineteenth century.

"Moral Duty of Publicity: Louis Dembitz Brandeis' Crusades for Reform in the Press and Public Affairs" explores a seeming contradiction between Brandeis's involvement with muckraking journalism and his landmark privacy article calling for judges to protect society against uses of cameras and prying by the press. Brandeis's writings revealed that he worked with muckraking editors to promote Progressive causes and to seek more transparency in government and business.

"Sunlight and Shadows: Louis D. Brandeis on Privacy, Publicity, and Free Expression in American Democracy," which uses legal and historical research methods, explores Brandeis's conceptions of privacy and free expression. The article reviews relevant sources from his correspondence, articles, and court opinions to consider how Brandeis suggested balancing free expression interests and privacy interests.

Brandeis's writings also were central to a co-authored study related

to my research stream addressing editors' advocacy for specific causes. "Advocacy, Editorial Opinion, and Agenda Building: How Publicity Friends Fought for Louis D. Brandeis's 1916 Supreme Court Confirmation," which I wrote with Elisabeth Fondren and Joby Richard, explores how Brandeis and his advocates used publicity to encourage U.S. Senators to support Brandeis's nomination to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Legislative histories, correspondence, news coverage, and diary entries were especially valuable for this research. We also analyzed one of Brandeis's law partners' papers for the study.

"Press Freedom and Citizens' Right to Know in the 1960s: Sam Ragan's Crusade to Provide the Public With Access to Criminal Justice Information" examines newspaper editors' advocacy for greater access to information about the investigation and adjudication of crime in the 1960s. Correspondence, speeches, editorials, and reports Ragan and other editors wrote reflected their advocacy for judges to protect fair trial rights in ways that do not restrict press freedom.

"Turning Point: Balancing Free Press and Fair Trial Rights After *Sheppard v. Maxwell*" focuses on a controversial judicial order that Ragan and other editors criticized. Correspondence and news coverage indicated that government employees were misinterpreting a Wake County order two judges wrote to protect criminal defendants' fair trial rights from prejudicial publicity. My oral history interview with one of the judges and review of the other judge's archival records revealed they did not have nefarious intentions to restrict the press. The judges' intentions, however, were not clearly conveyed in editors' advocacy for access to criminal justice information.

"Filtering History: An Historical Analysis of Photojournalists' Access to Photograph the President of the United States from 1977 to 2009" examines how photojournalists perceive access to the President

and the White House as decreasing during the post-Watergate era. For that study, Nicole Smith Dahmen and I reviewed correspondence advocating for greater access, coverage in periodicals, and in-depth interviews. That research indicates journalists have perceived access restrictions as ways to shield governors and government-held information from public scrutiny.

“Encountering the ‘Other’ by Lifting the Iron Curtain: American Newspaper Editors’ Global Campaigns for Bridges of Understanding, 1961-1970,” my most recent research with Elisabeth Fondren, describes U.S. and Soviet journalists’ exchanges during the Cold War. Our research analyzes memos, correspondence, speeches, diaries, photographs, and periodicals to explore how American editors attempted to share their ideals for journalism and press freedom and to encourage greater free flows of information.

“An Embattled Terrain: Women, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Immigrants at the Margins in U.S. Newspaper Stories, 1820-1860,” written with Thomas Terry and Donald Shaw, is based on Shaw’s assertion that newspapers reflect the judgment of the press as well as values of a social system and culture. Using content analysis to review whether and how 3,275 U.S. newspaper stories mentioned women, African Americans, Native Americans, or immigrants, the research analyzes whether people from these historically marginalized groups were mentioned as core, participating, or peripheral to stories or events.

***Historiography:*** *Of the research works you have written, from which ones did you get the most satisfaction?*

**Coyle:** My book, *The Press and Rights to Privacy: First Amendment Freedoms vs. Invasion of Privacy Claims*, uses qualitative research methods to

evaluate state and federal court opinions involving potential clashes between free expression and privacy rights. The book categorizes fundamental democratic values undergirding free expression rights under liberty and audience models. The book also categorizes values for privacy as individual or societal values. Those categories provided a framework for analyzing court opinions and evaluating rare circumstances under which interests in protecting privacy might outweigh interests in protecting free expression.

“Turning Point: Balancing Free Press and Fair Trial Rights After *Sheppard v. Maxwell*” also provided satisfaction on several levels. That research required pushing boundaries of traditional journalism history by interviewing a judge and analyzing legal sources in addition to journalists’ sources. Those steps helped me gain a different understanding of a controversial judicial order than I received from solely reviewing journalists’ papers and publications. Being able to represent multiple perspectives of that order brought more satisfaction than would have come from simply explaining journalists’ frustrations with the order.

I also value articles I have completed with co-authors. Working with students, colleagues, and mentors allows research to draw upon a broader range of research methods, knowledge of literature, and perspectives for interpretation. When working on “Advocacy, Editorial Opinion, and Agenda Building: How Publicity Friends Fought for Louis D. Brandeis’s 1916 Supreme Court Confirmation,” Elisabeth Fondren, Joby Richard, and I strove to have at least two of us read each primary source. We used coding sheets to make sure we sought the same details and took notes on similar themes when carefully reading each letter, telegram, article, diary entry, or Congressional record. Those steps helped us synthesize key information from thousands of pages of records and made me feel more confident in our findings. That research

found Brandeis's supporters attempted to shape public opinion and to persuade U.S. Senators to support Brandeis's nomination to serve on the nation's highest court.

**Historiography:** *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?*

**Coyle:** My most important contributions to the field of JMC history likely come from using multiple research methods and a variety of sources to explore legal rights relevant to journalism history. As “Press Freedom and Citizens’ Right to Know in the 1960s: Sam Ragan’s Crusade to Provide the Public With Access to Criminal Justice Information” indicates, studying journalists’ advocacy for and perceptions of legal rights may shed light on what legal rights mean and how they may evolve in relation to extra judicial influence.

In “E. L. Godkin’s Criticism of the Penny Press: Antecedents to a Legal Right to Privacy,” my study of an editor’s perceptions of the right to privacy suggest that journalism history can shed light upon cultural antecedents for legal rights.

My scholarship on advocacy for free expression rights and extrajudicial influences upon free press and fair trial rights primarily reviews periodicals, government records, court opinions, and professional organizations’ reports. In “Turning Point: Balancing Free Press and Fair Trial Rights After *Sheppard v. Maxwell*,” however, my most important contribution to this field might come from interviewing a judge, analyzing jurists’ archival records, then comparing what judges described to what journalists described.

In “Filtering History: An Historical Analysis of Photojournalists’ Access to Photograph the President of the United States from 1977 to 2009,” Nicole Smith Dahmen and I made a significant contribution by using interviews and document analysis to explore photojournalists’ perceptions of how and why their access to the President and the White House decreased during the post-Watergate era.

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

**Coyle:** Some of my best work is due to working with mentors and co-authors. I wish I had reached out to mentors earlier in my career, asked people to read drafts or manuscripts, and worked on more research with my mentors. Many people generously have helped to strengthen my research and broaden my understanding of journalism history.

Donald Shaw has encouraged me to pursue intellectual history and explore ideas. For years, we have discussed an intellectual history project we would start after he finished another book project and I finished another manuscript. The past year has demonstrated how fleeting time can be and that we might not receive chances to work with others we greatly respect. I wish I had gone to Chapel Hill more frequently to write more with him.

***Historiography:** 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.*

**Coyle:** History is a search for greater understanding and truth. This pursuit requires dedication to check the veracity of what we find. Sound

historical research requires familiarity with what is generally known about significant events or time periods and a willingness to dig deeper. Recent scholarship has shown, however, that historical records are not always complete. Some records reflect biases, particularly as they reflect dominant narratives. Some information selectively has been saved or discarded that may shape understandings of past events or personal motivations. Historical research requires us to ask what records reflect and why they tell a particular story. Historians also may benefit from asking what, if anything, is missing from records and why certain people, voices, or details are missing.

Frank Fee taught me that historians must consider their audiences and the perspectives from which history has been recorded. I almost stopped researching Louis D. Brandeis and the roots of privacy after another professor questioned what could be left to write about Brandeis and his co-authored 1890 article, “The Right to Privacy.” Fee, however, told me that the fact people in some fields knew about those topics didn’t mean that we, in journalism history, knew about those topics. He encouraged me to consider journalism historians as my audience, to evaluate what journalism historians already knew about those topics, and to find information that would be valuable for journalism historians to learn. That led me to try asking different research questions when analyzing sources other scholars previously had read as well as to review sources other scholars might not have found.

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

**Coyle:** Journalism and mass communication scholars are doing excellent research on cultural influences on history. For example, in “The

Voices of Public Opinion: Lingering Structures of Feeling About Women’s Suffrage in 1917 U.S. Newspaper Letters to the Editor,” Amber Roessner examines how letters to the editor reflect “public discourse” and cultural negotiations” related to women’s suffrage.

Scholars also are filling in important gaps in our understanding of journalism, civil rights, and legal rights. For example, Aimee Edmondson’s book *In Sullivan’s Shadow: The Use and Abuse of Libel Law During the Long Civil Rights Struggle* shows how libel laws were used as tools for suppression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *They Came to Toil: Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression*, Melita Garza’s analysis of Spanish and English-language sources sheds light on an important part of U.S. civil rights history. Both books make important contributions to journalism history with research grounded in theory.

Mass communication history wisely has recognized the value of histories focusing on public relations, advertising, documentaries, film, propaganda, journalism, and other communication forms. Research addressing public memories, social movements, civil rights, and biography also has strengthened mass communication history by expanding potentially narrow conceptions of journalism and mass communication history. Our field will be weakened if we adopt more limited conceptions of journalism or mass communication history.

**Historiography:** *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?*

**Coyle:** As a recent American Journalism Historians Association report indicates, learning about journalism history is not an option for too

many undergraduate or graduate students. We need to demonstrate the value of history in history courses and other courses. We can incorporate important lessons from history into courses that introduce students to diversity, law, ethics, journalism, advertising, public relations, and mass communication. As we strive to prepare students to be more forward-thinking, we also could explain how history courses may help students learn to more effectively address social, cultural, and technological changes by exploring how communication professionals previously have effectively or ineffectively addressed such changes.

To improve the status of journalism and mass communication history in the wider field of history, we need to show more historians the excellent journalism and mass communication histories many people are completing. We need journalism and mass communication historians to share our work with historians. Some journalism and mass communication historians regularly attend and present their work at leading history conferences and publish scholarship in history journals.

As communication professionals, we also may raise the status of journalism history by reaching out to historians where we work. In 2020, journalism historian Mike Conway demonstrated how an email could help with this endeavor. He wrote a message about the American Journalism Historians Association annual convention and sent that message to the history department at his university. He also encouraged other AJHA members to share that message with history departments at their institutions. Those messages educated historians about the AJHA and resulted in at least one historian attending the convention to see the high-quality research many people are completing.

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

**Coyle:** Scholars increasingly have faced pressures to publish higher numbers of articles. Of course, scholars must establish strong research records. What constitutes a strong record, however, can vary according to field and methods. This trend requires journalism and mass communication historians to educate colleagues about our methods, why it might take years to gather and analyze data for a single manuscript, and what should be considered a strong manuscript or research record in our field.

Journalism and mass communication history scholars already are being challenged to demonstrate how their research fits within narrow conceptions of what is deemed valuable research. This pushes scholars to justify the relevance and importance of their scholarship. While explaining the importance of our scholarship is a valuable exercise, pressure to push research into narrow channels introduces risk that valuable scholarship might not be pursued. We need to welcome deep and insightful historical research that helps us discover what is missing from history.

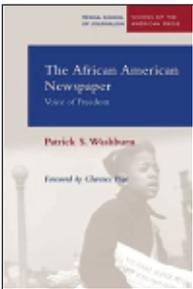
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# Book Award Interview

Patrick S. Washburn ©



Washburn



Patrick S. Washburn was the first winner in 2007 of the AEJMC's Tankard Award, for *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*. The award is given annually for the best mass communication book that breaks new ground. He served in 2002-2003 as president of the American Journalism Historians Association and received its Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2008. He served as editor of the journal *Journalism History* for more than eleven years. He is a professor emeritus at the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University.

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

**Washburn:** This book examines the history of American black newspapers from the first one in 1827 in New York City until the end of the twentieth century. It chronicles how the press struggled, largely because it had few advertisements and many blacks could not afford to buy the papers, until the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* greatly increased the press' power and influence from 1910 to 1950, after which it rapidly dropped

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in circulation and prominence. The major finding of the book is that the black newspapers laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement, and then, as their power declined, they handed off the leadership for greater black rights to ministers and activists in the 1950s. Thus, without the black papers, the Civil Rights Era would have started at a lower level and may not have accomplished as much for blacks as it did.

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

**Washburn:** The idea for the book came from David Abrahamson of Northwestern University. He put together a series of books for the Northwestern Press on mass communication history, and he invited me to do one on the history of black newspapers because that was my area of expertise. His suggestion was something that I had been thinking about researching for about fifteen years. I had done my doctoral dissertation at Indiana University on the federal government's investigation of the black press during World War II, which was published as a book (*A Question of Sedition*) in 1986. While that research gave me a good knowledge of black press history from 1910 to 1950, I was intrigued with what led to the rise of black newspapers before the twentieth century and why they suddenly declined after 1950.

*Historiography: 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?*

**Washburn:** This book used a wide variety of sources, some of which I had used in my previous research on the black press and some of which I used for the first time in this project. They included: books, mono-

graphs, journal articles, newspaper and magazine articles, government documents, theses and dissertations, scholarly papers, a PBS television documentary, and interviews. The largest part of the research was spent reading books by historians that I had never used before, particularly those that dealt with the black press before 1910. From when I started researching the book until it was written, I spent about five years. As academicians can appreciate, I could have done the book much quicker if I had not been a full-time faculty member, which meant that I had a lot of other things to do. However, it was nice having no set deadline for the manuscript; whenever it was done was okay. Abrahamson would check occasionally on my progress, but he did it gently because he was concerned more with having a good book than how quickly it got done.

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

**Washburn:** There was one interview that I would have liked to have done, but it was impossible. It was with John Sengstacke, the publisher of the *Chicago Defender* from 1940 until he died in 1997, which was shortly before I began researching my book on the history of the black press. I had interviewed him in 1983 for my dissertation, and he provided wonderful insights into black newspapers during World War II and why they were not charged by the Justice Department with being seditious. As the publisher of the most prestigious and influential black newspaper in the second half of the twentieth century, he could have provided invaluable information about the sharp decline of the newspapers after 1950. I had other sources for that period, but I feel that what I wrote would have been better if I had been able to tap into his inside knowledge of those years.

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

**Washburn:** Obviously the more sources that you have for a book, the better off you are. This allows you to be more confident in what you write about what occurred and why it occurred. However, more sources occasionally may result in confusion because they disagree on the facts. This appeared at one point in my book. I wanted to write about the number of black papers and their circulation after the Civil War until the early 1900s. I thought that was going to be easy to do, but I quickly discovered that I was wrong. I could not find any lists of the number of papers for each specific year; one historian reported figures for certain years and another historian chose different years; some historians talked about how many papers were started in a certain year rather than how many existed; and no figures existed for how many black papers died in specific years. Information on circulation figures was equally problematic. The circulation of some papers was mentioned for a certain year and there was no data for other papers. Finally, circulation figures did not indicate how many blacks read the papers. Since many blacks could not afford to buy the papers, they were passed around frequently or someone read them out loud to others. Because there was so much conflicting information, it was one of the few times in my forty-year career as an historian where I could draw no conclusions based on the evidence. I simply reported what various historians had written about the number of papers and their circulation and left it at that. It was all that I could do. As an historian, that is hard to admit, but it is more ethical than drawing a conclusion when you have serious doubts about whether that should be done.

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

**Washburn:** As my previous answer indicates, sources on black newspapers sometimes disagreed on the facts. And compounding that problem was a low amount of evidence for much of their history beyond what appeared in the papers because many of them did not exist on microfilm. As for historians, few of them had studied black newspapers in depth; that has only increased markedly in the past twenty to twenty-five years. Thus, I had to hunt hard to find what had been written about the black newspapers, and then I frequently had to decide about the validity of the information. Some of the material, particularly in books, was clearly biased and designed to put the black newspapers in as favorable a light as possible.

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

**Washburn:** In 1986, my editor at Oxford University Press complimented me on *A Question of Sedition*: “We are surprised how non-biased you are in this book.” While presumably she was referring to my skin color and my southern accent, she might have been even more surprised if she had known about my background until I turned 30. Up through high school, I went to public schools but still had only two black classmates for one year. Then, I went to Baylor University, which would not accept blacks. Over the next eight years, four as a newspaper sportswriter in Texas, Virginia, and Georgia, and four more in the sports information field at Harvard University and the University of

Louisville, I was around black athletes, but I never worked with a black person. Finally, in 1971, when I went to Indiana University for a master's, I had a number of black classmates. At Indiana then as well as later when I got a doctorate, it was drummed into us that when you researched and wrote a project, you should always ask yourself at the beginning if there was a reason why you might be biased. If there was, you should constantly remind yourself to be non-biased. Since a big part of my research has dealt with blacks, I have never forgotten that advice, and I have never had a problem with bias.

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

**Washburn:** As I said above, the black newspapers used their power and influence to push blacks upward in America, and then as the papers began declining about 1950, they handed off the baton (so to speak) to black ministers and activists to carry the fight even further. Thus, the Civil Rights Era started at a higher level than it would have if the black papers had not been so successful in pushing for more black rights from 1910 to 1950.

*Historiography: What findings most surprised you?*

**Washburn:** I was most surprised by what I mentioned in the previous question. When I wrote this book, I had been researching and writing about the black press for almost twenty-five years, but I had not made the connection between the black press and what it meant for the Civil Rights movement. Sometimes you simply cannot see the forest for the trees. When I was writing this book, however, I suddenly realized what had occurred, and I was amazed that I did not see it before.

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

**Washburn:** As a doctoral student at Indiana, I was fortunate to take a class from Dave Nord, who went on to receive the Kobre Award from the American Journalism Historians Association, and then have him chair my dissertation. An excellent historian, he continually stressed that academic research must have “significance.” That meant the research could not merely examine something that had not been studied before; instead, it must be on something that importantly adds to our knowledge of mass communication history. Only then is there significance. In all my research, whether it has been papers, journal articles, monographs, or books, this has been my guiding star. When I consider starting a project, I ask myself one question: If someone is teaching or writing about the area of my research, will they have to use what I have done? If the answer is no, then I do not do the research because it does not have significance. That may seem like a harsh way to look at research, but time is too short to spend time on insignificant projects.

***Historiography:** Academicians usually feel a book is important for them, sometimes because of tenure and promotion and sometimes for other reasons. How was this book important for you?*

**Washburn:** In one way, I value this book more than anything that I have written as an historian: it subtly changed me. I was never a racist, and I never looked down on blacks. But until I wrote this book, I never appreciated how important they were in the history of America, and I never truly admired their long struggle to obtain equality, which still continues to this day. Because this book forced me to learn a lot more

## Washburn

about the black experience in America, I found myself slowly looking at things differently. And as the years have passed since this book was published, I find myself a changed person who is no longer basically shaped just by white culture. I like this change; it has made me a better person.

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# Historical Roundtable: Transnational Journalism History

By Debra Reddin van Tuyll, Lisa Bolz,  
Frank Harbers, Mark O'Brien, and Pamela Walck ©



van Tuyll

The transnational paradigm is a relatively new approach for examining the history of news, news practices, news personnel and news technologies. Marcel Broersma, director of the Centre for Journalism Studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, appears to have been the first to propose this approach in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Broersma pointed out that most journalism historians work within national boundaries, and he argues that such an approach poses unnecessary limits on understanding media and press functions. For example, the entire world has been caught up for the past two years in a global pandemic. Most media organizations have covered

Debra Reddin van Tuyll is a retired professor of journalism at Augusta University. She is the author and/or editor of eight books, the latest of which is *The Western Press in the Crucible of the American Civil War*, co-edited with Mary M. Cronin at New Mexico State University. Van Tuyll's primary area of expertise is the Civil War-era press, but her interests have expanded into transnational journalism history with an emphasis on the Irish-American press. She co-edited *Politics, Culture and the Irish American Press, 1784-1963* with Irish colleague Mark O'Brien (Dublin City University) and Dutch colleague Marcel Broersma (University of Groningen).

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the COVID-19 story from a local or national perspective — how many citizens have the virus, how many have died, how many area or state hospitals are working at or beyond capacity. Yet, the story of COVID-19 is one that has crossed national borders almost from the beginning.



Lisa Bolz is an associate professor in communication at Sorbonne University. She earned her Ph.D. with distinction from the University of Münster and Sorbonne University. She previously was a visiting research fellow at Stanford University and at the University of Bremen and worked in the Digital Humanities department at the German Historical Institute in Paris.

Bolz



Frank Harbers is assistant professor at the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at the University of Groningen. He received his Ph.D. in 2014, which focused on the development of journalism in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France since the second half of the 19th century. In 2016 he was researcher-in-residence at the National Library of the Netherlands, where he conducted a digital humanities project of automatically classifying the genre of historical newspaper articles. In 2018, together with Huub Wijffes, he published an edited volume on the history of the press in the Netherlands.

Harbers



Mark O'Brien is head of the School of Communications, Dublin City University. He is the author of *The Fourth Estate: Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (2017) and co-editor of the *Periodical and Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* series (2014 and 2021). He also co-edited *Politics, Culture, and the Irish American Press, 1784–1963* (2021).

O'Brien



Pamela E. Walck, Ph.D., is an associate professor of multiplatform Journalism in the Media Department of McNulty College of Liberal Arts at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Her Ph.D. in journalism history and mass communication is from the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. Her research focuses on newsroom routines and story frames.

Walck

When historians start looking at the many different aspects of media coverage of the pandemic, examination from a transnational approach could offer a much broader understanding of how media coverage contributed to public understanding of the virus, the threats it poses, and the development of conspiracy theories, among other topics. This roundtable brings together scholars from across the globe who have used the transnational paradigm to guide their studies of journalism history.

Note: Regional variations in spelling and expression have been left as originally submitted by the authors rather than imposing Americanized forms.

*Van Tuyll: How would you define transnational journalism history?*

**Bolz:** Transnational journalism history questions the territoriality in journalism and studies how journalism evolved beyond national borders. Many great academic papers and books are on the journalism of one country or on the comparison between two or more countries, but there is an urge to study journalism history with another perspective. International exchanges and cooperations, influences from abroad, new points of view through travel have all shaped journalism and need to be analyzed with a transnational approach that considers journalism or at least certain elements of journalism independently of national cultures. Otherwise, it is not possible to study the circulation of news, concepts, formats, or opinions across cultural or linguistic borders. In recent years, the digitalization of historic newspapers and digital methods made it a lot easier to access journalism from different countries and to conduct research on bigger corpora.

**O'Brien:** Transnational journalism history can be defined as having characteristics that distinguish it from conventional journalism history that perhaps have a tendency to focus on “nation bound” journalism or has a very broad but not detailed international sweep. Transnational journalism history examines — in detail — the flow of journalists, printers, technology, and ideas across national boundaries; and it examines the influence and impact — in both directions — of such flows.

**Walck:** I would define transnational journalism history simply as instances in the historic record where one nation’s media influenced another’s media—and vice versa. This can take many forms from news routines and professionalization efforts within mass communication to the adaptation of mass communication innovations and actual coverage of events.

**Harbers:** I define transnational journalism history as a comparative form of journalism history which looks at the similarities and differences between the way journalism developed historically in different cultural and professional contexts, and how professional conceptions, routines, formats and forms have been exchanged, negotiated, adopted and adapted between these contexts. This approach to journalism history points out the importance of studying the exchange between different journalistic cultures, in which people in and around journalism encounter new and different ways of thinking about what journalism is and how it should be practiced, which they can embrace or reject, negotiate and adapt to the dominant conceptions within the journalistic culture they are part of.

*Van Tuyl:* If a colleague or student asked you how transnational journal-

## Roundtable: Transnational Journalism History

*ism history is distinct from international journalism history, how would you respond?*

**Bolz:** The difference between transnational journalism history and international journalism history is a shift in perspective. International journalism history studies the international dimension of journalism from a national perspective, such as foreign correspondences of a certain newspaper, the news coverage of international news, the relationship between two countries, etc. Many news organizations are doing international journalism such as *Deutsche Welle*, *Al Jazeera* or *Le Monde diplomatique*, but you can always identify the national perspectives when reading/viewing the news. Transnational journalism history would rather emphasize certain elements beyond national borders such as the circulation and transformation of certain news items, photographs or concepts that shaped the development of certain rubrics. Thanks to a transnational perspective, certain aspects in journalism history become more important because they are more visible when national borders are no longer the key element to frame journalism history.

**O'Brien:** My sense is that international journalism history tends to focus on the larger political economy aspects of journalism history that perhaps tend to favour larger nation states or those with a legacy of empire that tends to elide smaller nations and their individual journalistic histories. In contrast, transnational journalism history tends to centre on the interactions between journalists and nation states of every size. What is unique is the “drilling down” into the transnational aspect in great detail — detail that may get lost in focusing on larger picture.

**Walck:** Transnationalism is linked to globalization. Where internation-

al journalism examines a particular event through the lens of one country's media, transnational journalism would look at how media in the nation where the event happened influenced how others recorded the event as well. I think that modern humans would like to believe that globalization is a rather new phenomenon, but the reality is that how media report and adopt and pivot under extreme circumstances has been happening as long as people have been sharing "information" from one tribal village to another.

A good example of this is World War II and press censorship. Britain and the United States may have been allies, but they had different approaches to wartime censorship. So, when major news stories "broke" during the war, how the American and British press covered that event had an impact on what audiences had access to—and how news organizations in both nations reported it. Transnational journalism history looks for such trends and tries to understand them in the larger context.

**Harbers:** These terms are often used in close relation to each other, sometimes almost as synonyms, but a key difference in the approach to journalism history is that transnational journalism history does not take the national level as a self-evident delineation of journalism history as a research object. This does not mean that the national context is dismissed, for it is still a highly relevant context as it is the level on which journalism is for an important part organized institutionally, but it does acknowledge that, depending on your research focus, it is not necessarily the most evident context. Take, for example, the rise of the popular press in the second half of the 19th century in Europe. Studying newspapers such as the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror* in Great Britain, or *Le Matin*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Petit Journal* in France, or *De Telegraaf* and *Nieuws van den Dag* in the Netherlands in

close relation to each other by moving beyond the national context in which they also operated can reveal much about the way new journalism developed through a transnational exchange of journalists in different countries.

Moreover, denaturalizing the national level of journalism as a research context highlights the fact that journalism on a national level is far less coherent and more diverse than often assumed. To speak of a national journalism culture has a tendency to downplay such differences and incoherencies, in which it can be far more fruitful to study certain alternative journalistic conceptions as a transnational phenomenon.

*Van Tuyl:* If a graduate student came to you and asked for research ideas in the area of transnational journalism history, what are one or two projects you might point him or her to?

**Bolz:** Amongst others, I am currently working on the development of war reportages, and I would like to know more about news circulation during war periods and how this genre developed internationally. And: How did the role of war reporter emerge on an international level as this journalistic practice existed before the denomination “war reporter”? What were possible influences across national borders? In this regard, the development of the journalistic signature in the newspapers might be another interesting topic to study. To what extent the idea of signing newspaper stories evolved in parallel or differently between countries? How was this gesture linked to the development of the journalistic profession? And working internationally, I would probably suggest studying the circulation of news with digital methods and to work on tools that facilitate such research on transnational journalism history.

**O'Brien:** One of the most interesting aspects of transnational journalism history is that it provides a mechanism to track the spread of ideas and social change. For example, one might examine the work and impact of journalists who leave their native land, settle in another country, and cast a cold eye on that society. Conversely, “native” journalists can perform a similar task in terms of critically accessing their society by publishing critiques abroad that may not be publishable in their home society. Mapping this — and the reaction that such content prompts — is really revealing.

**Walck:** I think a fascinating project would be looking at how the growing Black population in the U.K. was reported on in the post-WWII years and compare that to U.S. coverage during the same period. I believe that both nations were more familiar with each other’s news reports by the time the war ended. And while I think we are all familiar with studies that examine the portrayal of race in the United States, it would be interesting to see if the same stereotypes or tropes were used in the British press in reference to people of color as well—even though the country did not have the same Jim Crow laws as in the U.S. South. (It was a concept that wasn’t even introduced to England until our troops arrived there in 1942.)

**Harbers:** One project idea I might point them to is a study of the discourse on journalistic innovation (admittedly maybe a bit of an anachronistic term) to trace transnationally where ideas on what is new in journalism, and how journalism should move forward, originated and how they travelled to different journalistic context, including how these ideas were discussed, negotiated, and adapted, and who the key actors were that drove these developments. Such a project would both take in-

## Roundtable: Transnational Journalism History

to account the national context in which journalists operate, but also move beyond it by acknowledging that journalistic development is also driven by the exchange between journalists from different contexts. Such an approach acknowledges that journalistic development is a multifaceted and multilayered phenomenon in which different cultural contexts interact, shaping the way new conceptions and practices of journalism are disseminated, received, interpreted, adopted and adapted in the everyday reality of journalism.

***Van Tuyl:** Transnational journalism history seems a good fit for a place like Europe where many different media systems function side-by-side. What about countries like the United States, Australia, China, or even Russia, huge countries that are geographically isolated or so dominate their regions that their media systems eclipse any others in close proximity?*

**Bolz:** Proximity is not the sole criteria to study transnational journalism history. News could circulate between countries and continents, and considerably faster since the transatlantic telegraphic cables. But other examples such as ship newspapers or bilingual American newspapers are great objects for research in the field of transnational journalism history. There is a long history of early English newspapers in Japan, for example, and it would be interesting to know more about the dissemination of foreign concepts of newspapers in Japan and vice versa — or in other countries as well, as there were travelers even in geographically isolated countries, and therefore exchanges and influences between countries.

**O'Brien:** One of the positive aspects of transnational journalism history is that, regardless of state size or geographical location, it allows for in-depth examination of the flow of media professionals, technology, and

ideas. People always travelled. So whether it's examining the establishment, role, and influence of a diaspora press or the wanderings and writings of a visiting journalist, there's always some aspect of transnational journalism history to be examined.

**Walck:** I would say that, in the globalized world in which we live, even countries like Russia or China influence media in the United States (and vice versa). They may have different approaches to their press industry, in terms of press freedoms, but the way in which mainstream news organizations report in those countries about U.S. policies and politics have found their way into the U.S. media landscape and vice versa.

A more contemporary example is the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, which showed us all how media platforms in Russia and China capitalized on polemic attitudes within our own country and influenced news stories — and even duped some mainstream news outlets looking for stories that confirmed their own biases. Propaganda is nothing new. But because of technology — information can spread faster. These same efforts to cloud the truth existed in the past — it just took longer to reach us and longer to translate.

Similarly, U.S. media impacts other nations. The awarding of a Nobel Prize to two journalists — one from Russia, the other from the Philippines — for refusing to cow-tail to overbearing national policies about how media operate is an excellent contemporary example of how a free and democratic press can in fact influence media outlets in states that are less free.

**Harbers:** I would say that transnational journalism, in the way I have outlined it, would be a great fit for such countries as well, for journalism

in those countries has also not developed in splendid isolation. The historical development of journalism in these countries would also benefit from an approach that acknowledges how journalism is shaped by conceptions, practices and forms that emerged in other journalistic cultures, in which new and alternative ideas are adapted to a specific national framework. At the same time, a transnational approach also draws attention to the fact that journalism within these vast countries and culturally diverse countries is not coherent and uniform as might be suggested. Those national journalistic cultures are made up of a wide diversity of practices and competing professional conceptions that results in a dynamic professional culture in which certain norms, routines and forms can gain or lose dominance over a longer period of time. A national culture can consist of several professional subcultures that can easily get lost in focusing on the national level and the dominant professional culture.

*Van Tuyl:* *What drew you to studies in this area?*

**Bolz:** I studied in Germany, Italy, and in France — and in each country, journalism history was taught differently. Even though I really appreciated diving into different cultures and narratives, I was drawn to aspects that would connect those countries, regardless of language barriers. For my Ph.D., I studied the beginnings of agency journalism in Europe and the international agreements between the agencies that had an impact on journalism in many countries. When working on news circulation I realized that by studying journalism history of several countries and by analyzing historic documents and newspapers from Germany and France, I was able to understand agency journalism as transcultural and transnational journalism beyond national borders.

**O'Brien:** My involvement in the transnational journalism history area grew from my work in the Newspaper and Periodical History Forum of Ireland, which gathers together scholars interested in media and journalism history in relation to Ireland. Organically, this research agenda broadened to a wider — more transnational — research focus which has been really rewarding in terms of meeting new scholars, establishing a new Transnational Journalism History Network, and developing new avenues of research that have been really rewarding.

**Walck:** I think I have always been curious about media in general. And when I started working on my dissertation, I knew I wanted to look beyond mainstream U.S. news outlets during WWII. That search for news stories led me to the Black press in America and major newspapers across the U.K. Once I started reading these newspapers, I was hooked. Around this time, I also learned about the Transnational Journalism Conference that was being held in Dublin. So I submitted a chapter from my dissertation. Luckily, it was accepted for presentation, and eventually selected for inclusion in a book on the Irish-American press. Since then, it has been very fortunate for me and fellow scholars that an increased effort is underway in the U.K. to digitize British papers, which makes this kind of research easier — particularly in an era of global pandemic and fewer dollars for research travel.

**Harbers:** In my Ph.D., I studied the development of reporting and the genre of the reportage in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France, and during this study I experienced the diversity of journalism within these national boundaries and came to see how journalistic development is driven by the interaction between the different levels and contexts in which journalists operate and in which journalism is organized.

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I came to realize that a transnational approach to journalism is the best way to do justice to this diversity and the multifaceted nature of the way journalism develops. At the same time, I experienced how daunting this approach can be as the amount of research material can become overwhelming and acquiring enough contextual knowledge to make sense of the developments in different journalistic contexts feels like an impossible challenge. Acknowledging that you cannot do it all, that you only add one or two pieces to a much larger puzzle, is therefore crucial to stay sane, but is also a drive to keep going, to keep looking for that next piece of that puzzle. And, as a final remark, it also made me realize that this puzzle is and should be a collaborative effort.

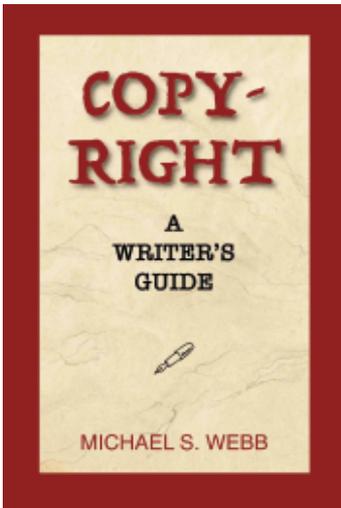
### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Broersma, “Transnational Journalism History,” *M&Z*, April 2010, 10-15.

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# COPYRIGHT

## A WRITER'S GUIDE



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**The Author:** Michael S. Webb is a practicing lawyer who has taught media law at both Georgia State University and Clark University in Atlanta.

# News and Notes

## **Deaths: Gary Whitby and Donald Shaw**

Two important historians have died recently. Gary Whitby, the founding editor of the journal *American Journalism*, died September 3. Don Shaw, the co-author of the agenda-setting theory, died October 9. Both had been in hospice. *Historiography in Mass Communication* will publish memorial tributes to both of them in our January issue.

## **AJHA Elects Tracy Lucht 2nd VP and Three to Board of Directors**

Tracy Lucht of Iowa State University has been elected Second Vice-President of the American Journalism Historians Association for 2021-2022. At the end of her term, she will ascend to First Vice-President and then to president in 2023.

At the end of this year's AJHA national conference in October, First Vice-President Aimee Edmondson of Ohio University became president, and Second Vice-President Mike Conway of Indiana University became First Vice-President. Donna Stephens Lampkin completed her term as president.

Three professors — Erin Coyle of Temple, Matthew Pressman of Seton Hall, and Yong Volz of Missouri — were elected to three-year terms on the AJHA Board of Directors.

Administrative Secretary Erika Pribanic-Smith will continue in her

position under the title Executive Director, following the AJHA's approval of a constitutional amendment of the new title.

## **Symposium on 19th-Century Press November 11-13 in Chattanooga**

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's twenty-ninth annual Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression will be held Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, November 11–13, 2021.

It is not too late to sign-up to attend the symposium, which will be held via ZOOM and in-person. The sessions will begin Thursday at 3:00 p.m. and continue all day Friday. The symposium will conclude Saturday at 3:00 p.m. To register, email [west-chair-office@utc.edu](mailto:west-chair-office@utc.edu) with your name, affiliation, email, cell phone number, and the identification name on your ZOOM account. Also indicate which days you would like to attend. All sessions are free and open to the public. However, all attendees must register.

The purpose of the conference is to share current research and to develop a series of monographs on the 19th century press, the Civil War and the press, and 19th century concepts of free expression. Papers from previous conferences have been published as books.

Following is the schedule for this year's sessions:

### **Thursday, November 11**

**3:00–6:30 p.m.**

**Opening Remarks: David B. Sachsman, University of Tennessee at**

## Chattanooga

“President Lincoln’s Assassination and the Hunt for John Wilkes Booth,” Patricia G. McNeely, University of South Carolina (retired)

“Troy, New York Draft Riot,” Brian Valimont, University of Southern Mississippi

“‘The Recent Infamous Outrages’: Newspapers, Sexual Violence, and the Rise of Lynch Mob in the early Reconstruction South,” Cameron Sauers, University of Kentucky

“Mainstream Periodicals on the Status of Freed Slaves and Emancipated Russian Serfs in the Reconstruction Era,” Mariana Kellis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

“‘Yankees of the Asiatic Continent’: Japan through the Eyes of the U.S. Press during the Centennial Exhibition of 1876,” James Mueller and Koji Fuse, University of North Texas

“Relics From White Supremacy: Why Historians Need to Re-evaluate Their Use of the Word ‘Riot’ to Describe Racial Violence in the South During the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction Eras,” Brett Kunkel, West Chester University of Pennsylvania

## 7:00–9:30 p.m.

“Enormous, Dreadful Wickedness: The Transatlantic Slave Trade through American and British Newspapers, 1800-1808,” Thomas C. Terry, Utah State University, Logan, and Donald L. Shaw, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“Covering Our Boys: Introducing the Heroic Soldier in the Civil War Press, 1861-1862,” Katrina J. Quinn, Slippery Rock University

**Panel: “19th Century Environmentalism: Aesthetic Beauty and Religious Belief,” Lee Jolliffe, Drake University (moderator)**

“Environmentalism in the 19th Century: Art, Photography, and the Garden of Eden,” David B. Sachsman, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

“Egan’s *Panorama of the Mississippi* as an Unintentional Allegory for European Claims to the American West,” Lee Jolliffe, Drake University

“Yosemite Heaven and Yellowstone Hell — or the Power of Narratives to Erase Reality,” Paulette D. Kilmer, University of Toledo

**Friday, November 12**

**9:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.**

“‘We are with the venerable Wesley in his views of slavery’: The Antislavery Coverage of the *True Wesleyan*, 1843-1844,” Matthew Arendt, Texas Christian University

“In Quest of a Denominationally Unifying Hymnbook: Three Baptist Hymnbooks Published in America Prior to the Formation of the Southern Baptist Convention,” Kimberly Arnold, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Making Tracks: Naming and Framing the Underground Railroad,” Richard Bell, University of Maryland

“*The Partisan Leader*: Press Reaction to the Book that Predicted the Civil War,” James M. Scythes, West Chester University

“Patriotic Fervor, the Civil War Press, and the Execution of William B. Mumford,” Andy Haugen, Valley Catholic High School

“‘An Amusin’ Cuss That Will Bear Watchin’’: Artemus Ward and

the Nineteenth Century Press,” Crompton B. Burton, University of Maine

“I Could Be a Better Soldier than He Would: Gender Fluidity in the Writings of Female Civil War Soldiers,” Claire Affinito, Boston University

“Security, Economy, Society, and Complexity: White Newspaper Coverage of Race in the West During the 1860s,” Glen Feighery and David J. Vergobbi, University of Utah

**1:00–1:30 p.m.: Awards Ceremony**

**1:30–3:15 p.m.**

“Ambrose Bierce’s Bitter Thoughts on Life and Death,” Joe Marren, SUNY Buffalo State

“The ‘Ghost at Post 1’: The *National Tribune* and the Supernatural in Civil War Memory,” Amy Laurel Fluker, Youngstown State University

“‘the perfect truth of the facts we shall write’: Two Newspapers, Two Stories about Colfax, Louisiana, Easter Sunday, 1873,” Brian Gabriel, Northwestern State University

“Dreams Deferred: The *Southwestern Christian Advocate* and the Struggle against Segregation in the South, 1877-1892,” Mike Feely, Missouri State University

**3:30–7:15 p.m.**

**Panel: “*Journalism in the Civil War Era Redux*”**

“New Perspectives on *Journalism in the Civil War Era*,” David W. Bulla, Augusta University

## News and Notes

“Revisiting Conclusions from *Journalism in the Civil War Era*,” Gregory A. Borchard, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)

**Panel: “Custer Myths, Media, and Monuments: Remembering the Northern Plains War,” William E. Huntzicker, independent scholar, Minneapolis (moderator)**

“Creating His Own Myth: George Armstrong Custer as the Author of His Last Stand,” James E. Mueller, University of North Texas

“Photographing Custer’s Battlefield,” Warren E. “Sandy” Barnard, independent scholar

“Indians Real and Imagined: Picturing the War on the Northern Plains,” John Coward, University of Tulsa

**Panel: “The Reconstruction of *Gone with the Wind*,” Brian Gabriel, Northwestern State University of Louisiana (moderator)**

“Scarlett’s Web: Feminine Power, Place, and Purpose in Margaret Mitchell’s Seminal Southern Saga,” Dianne Bragg, University of Alabama

“Weaving Myths: ‘Gone with the Wind’ and ‘Birth of Nation’ and Imagining a Nation that Never Was,” tonya thames-taylor, West Chester University of Pennsylvania

“A Tense Past: *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wind Done Gone*, Morehouse College, and the Quest for Redemption of Margaret Mitchell,” Clarissa Myrick-Harris, Morehouse College

“Rebel without a *Lost* Cause: Revisiting Scarlett O’Hara’s Anti-Heroism,” Brian Gabriel, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

**7:30–9:30 p.m.**

**Panel: “The Midwestern Press in the American Civil War,” Debra Reddin van Tuyll, Augusta, Ga. (moderator)**

“The Midwestern Press by the Numbers,” Debra Reddin van Tuyll, Augusta, Ga.

“Worthy of the City and Age in which We Live: Roles and Functions of the Midwestern Civil War Press,” Katrina J. Quinn, Slippery Rock University

“‘Reports Deemed Reliable’: Newsgathering, Distribution, and Audiences,” Mary M. Cronin, New Mexico State University

“The Political Functions of Midwestern Newspapers during the Civil War,” Michael Fuhlhage, Wayne State University

“Shadowy & Vengeful Prowlers of the Woods: Bushwhackers & Other Guerrillas as Depicted in Midwestern Newspapers During the American Civil War,” Simon Vodrey, Carleton University

### Saturday, November 13

9:00–11:30 a.m.

**Panel: “Civil War in Minnesota: News of the Dakota Challenge to Settler Colonialism,” William E. Huntzicker, independent scholar, Minneapolis (moderator)**

“Atrocities, Vengeance, and Justice: Newspaper Depictions of the US-Dakota War and Public Perceptions of a Tragedy,” John A. Hammond, conflict historian

“From the ‘Sioux Massacres’ to the ‘Dakota Genocide’: Minnesota’s ‘Forgotten War’ in the State’s Newspapers,” George Dalbo, University of Minnesota, and Joe Eggers, University of Minnesota

“Military Injustice and the Public Eye: The U.S.–Dakota War Trials of 1862,” Carol L. Chomsky, University of Minnesota

“One Black Dakota, Many Northern Slaves,” Walt Bachman, independent scholar

**Panel: “Agency in the Margins: How Women Negotiated The Journalism Industry and Claimed Space to Affect Change At Century’s Turn,” Amber Roessner, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (moderator)**

## News and Notes

“In Pursuit of ‘the Woman’s Angle’: Nelly Bly Documents the Lived Experiences of Women,” Dianne Bragg, University of Alabama

“‘Side by Side’: Native Women Negotiating Identity and Advocacy in a Changing World,” Melissa Greene-Blye, University of Kansas

“‘Iola, the Princess of the Press’: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the Agency of Journalism,” Amber Roessner, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**12:00–3:00 p.m.**

**Panel: “Presidents and the Press,” Jack Breslin, Iona College (moderator)**

“‘Death is Near’: The Last Days of James A Garfield and Ulysses S. Grant in the Gilded Age Press,” Crompton B. Burton, University of Maine

“Lincoln’s Triumph in the West: How California, Oregon and Nevada played a role in the 1864 election,” Joe Marren, SUNY Buffalo State

“Breaking Up the Party: New York’s Partisan Papers and the 1848 Presidential Election,” Erika Pribanic-Smith, University of Texas Arlington

“Press Coverage of 19th Century Presidential Scandals: Jackson, Grant and Cleveland,” Jack Breslin, Iona College

“A.W. Campbell’s Wheeling Intelligencer and the Loyal Rebellion of Western Virginia,” Linda Lockhart, Marietta College

“Eliza Duffey,” Loren Dann

“Reporting on the Risorgimento: The American Catholic Press and Italian Unification 1848-1870,” William Kaiser, West Chester University of Pennsylvania

The Symposium is sponsored by the West Chair of Excellence, the UTC Communication Department, the Walter and Leona Schmitt Family Foundation Research Fund, and the Hazel Dicken-Garcia Fund for the Symposium.

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## **AJHA President's Awards Recognize Aimee Edmondson and Erika Pribanic-Smith**

Vice President Aimee Edmondson and Administrative Secretary Erika Pribanic-Smith earned this year's President's Award for their hard work and seasoned leadership in facing two unprecedented years of pandemic and a burgeoning crisis in media literacy.

President Donna Lampkin Stephens thanked Edmondson for her wise counsel in navigating the challenges of the covid landscape. That included making the crucial call to hold a virtual conference for a second year in a row — a decision that Stephens is now confident was the right one.

“Your thoughtful, insightful input have been invaluable to me as President,” Stephens wrote. “I always knew you were simply a phone call or a text away, and your support has made my job easier than it could have been.”

Edmondson also joined Stephens in her initiative to add media literacy resources to the website for AJHA members.

“In these difficult last two years, especially, how can media history be separated from media literacy?” Stephens asked. “I am afraid we have

our work cut out for us for years to come.”

Edmondson volunteered to organize and prepare the conference program, which Stephens said was “above and beyond the call of duty.”

“I’ve learned a great deal these past two years working with Donna and learning from her behind the scenes,” Edmondson said. “I’ve so appreciated her mentorship, wisdom and wit. And I am honored to receive one of her President’s Awards.”

Stephens thanked Pribanic-Smith for her essential efforts in sustaining the association through these challenging times.

“Quite simply, I could not have performed my duties as President for the last two years without your help,” she wrote. “While your duties as Administrative Secretary (soon to become Executive Director, I hope) are vitally important, I think even more vital to our organization is the quiet, competent direction you provide the President from behind the scenes.”

Stephens noted that Pribanic-Smith has kept the officers on schedule, sending out reminders that it is time to start planning the conference, especially in covid times; time to send out paper, panel and RIP calls; time to solicit officer and committee reports; and time to finalize the program.

Stephens is the first AJHA President to serve for two years. But she said it takes far longer than that to fully grasp the position.

“Your institutional knowledge and memory in support of the President make you the unsung hero of our organization,” she wrote of the Administrative Secretary. “I always knew over the last two years I could turn to you for advice, direction and assistance, and for that, I thank you.”

Pribanic-Smith acknowledged that the past 18 months have presented some unique hurdles, especially in organizing two consecutive

conferences online.

“It has created extra work, but AJHA has been among my top priorities for many years,” she said. “I am happy to serve.”

(AJHA news release)

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