

Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 7 (2021). Number 4

Historiography in Mass Communication

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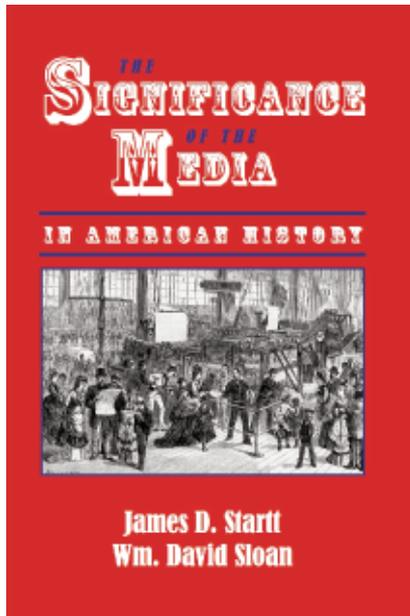
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Does Truth Matter?

By Wm. David Sloan ©



Sloan

If you've not watched the movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, you should. It's the story of a tenderfoot lawyer who rises to become his state's first U.S. senator. He gained prominence because people believed he was the man who killed the brutal outlaw Liberty Valance. IMDb ranks it as John Ford's best film.

When I was teaching graduate courses in mass communication history, I gave the students a breather mid-way through the semester, and we watched *Liberty Valance* while eating pizza. That may seem as if I made courses really soft, but I had a solid reason. A secondary character in the movie is a frontier editor, Dutton Peabody of the *Shinbone Star*, played by Edmund O'Brien. He is something of a sot, but he also embodies the image of the bold frontier journalist who stands up for freedom of the press. He has a number of memorable lines. Here's one of my favorite exchanges. He has just been nominated to be a Shinbone delegate to the territory's statehood convention.

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

Peabody: No! No! No you don't! No! I ... I'm a newspaperman, not a politician! No, politicians are my meat — I build 'em up and I tear 'em down, but I wouldn't be one. I couldn't be one — it'd destroy me — gimme a

Tom Doniphon (played by John Wayne): Bar's closed.

Peabody: Good people of Shinbone, I ... I ... I'm your conscience — I'm the still, small voice that thunders in the night. I'm your watchdog that howls against the wolves! I'm — I'm your father confessor! I ... I ... I'm ... what else am I?

Doniphon: Town drunk?

Why would I take a whole three-hour class to watch a movie? Because, besides being a wonderful film, *Liberty Valance* offers an almost perfect lesson about interpretations of journalism history.

The screenplay was based on a short story by Dorothy M. Johnson. She spent most of her life (1905-1984) in Montana and wrote Western fiction. I don't know if she or the writers of the screenplay were familiar with histories of American frontier journalism, but the Dutton Peabody character epitomizes the frontier editor as pictured by most journalism historians until recently. Those historians presented frontier editors as bold, colorful characters who, though often irresponsible and prone to excesses with the sauce, were key figures in bringing civilization to their communities.

Hardly any historians today share that view. The dominant opinion is that frontier editors were racists.

But does it matter which picture of frontier editors is correct? Does it matter if neither is correct? Perhaps both views have some truth to them. But why should we care?

Does Truth Matter?

In fact, is truth even important when historians give explanations about the past?

In the movie *JFK*, director Oliver Stone contends that Lee Harvey Oswald didn't act alone in his assassination of President John Kennedy, that he was part of a conspiracy. Stone makes his argument through a narrative centered on Jim Garrison, the district attorney in New Orleans. Garrison had published a book making the conspiracy case. Most authorities on the assassination discredit his argument. Nevertheless, Stone in *JFK* presents it as if it is the unquestioned truth. Does it matter if Stone is correct or not?

A few historians argue that President Franklin Roosevelt and some other officials in the U.S. government knew in advance that the Japanese planned to attack Pearl Harbor in December 1941. They kept silent, though, because they wanted America to be drawn into World War II. The conspiracy theory was first propounded in 1944 by John T. Flynn, a co-founder of the America First Committee. One of its aims was to keep America out of the war. Most historians reject the theory. Does it matter who is correct?

Some organizations and many individuals deny that the Holocaust — the Nazi genocide of millions of European Jews during World War II — really happened. They claim that it is a myth or fabrication. The vast majority of historians in the West believe the Holocaust did take place. Does it matter which view is true?

In 2019 the *New York Times Magazine* published a lengthy essay titled “The 1619 Project.” Nikole Hannah-Jones, the reporter who spearheaded the project, won a Pulitzer Prize. The project argues that the main reason behind the founding of the United States was, not liberty or self-government or any of the other reasons traditionally given, but slavery. The project has come in for a great deal of criticism from

historians, including Gordon S. Wood, James McPherson, and other leading experts on the American Revolution. They say the project ignores evidence, falsifies history, and presents an erroneous and misleading explanation of the nation's founding. But does it matter which side in this debate is correct?

These five instances are not the only episodes on which historians disagree. In fact, virtually every major chapter and event in American history has seen its share of dissension. And the same is true, although without as many fireworks, in the history of mass communication.

Several years ago, the *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis wrote that “the press” as an institution has always been the adversary of government. He was attempting to justify newspapers' criticism of President George W. Bush. To buttress his case with historical evidence, he offered the party press as an example. But he misunderstood the nature of the party press. The “press” per se during the party period was not a monolithic institution that opposed government per se. Instead, newspapers aligned with parties, and they opposed government only when it was in the hands of officials from the other party. Does it matter that Lewis got it wrong?

In a 1935 article in *Journalism Quarterly* titled “A Brand Flung at Colonial Orthodoxy,” Chester Jorgensen said that Samuel Keimer, the founder of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, was a deist who wanted to acquaint the public with all the knowledge of science and with rationalism — that is, reason over religion. In reality, Keimer was not a deist, and he did not oppose religion. In fact, he was a member of a group called the “French Prophets,” a faction within the Huguenots. He gave his autobiography the title “A brand plucked from the burning....” That, in modern parlance, translates loosely as “God saved me from Hell.” Does it matter that Jorgensen was so far off base?

Does Truth Matter?

In his textbook *The Press in America*, Ed Emery said Benjamin Harris, the founder of the American colonies' first newspaper, *Publick Occurrences*, intended the paper as a means of liberating Bostonians from the narrow-minded Puritan clergy. The clergy, Emery said, were "scandalized" by the paper and suppressed it after one issue. In reality, Harris was an Anabaptist who started *Publick Occurrences* as a means of supporting the Puritans in their fight against the British crown and Anglicanism. The clergy didn't control press licensing, and it was the Massachusetts governing council that killed the paper. *The Press in America* for almost two decades, from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, was the most widely used college textbook in media history. Does it matter if it got history wrong?

Does truth in history matter?

I imagine most readers of this journal answer "yes."

Truth, in fact, matters for a variety of reasons.

For one thing, it is a normal expectation in our lives. Most humans value truth over falsehood. Truth is important in personal and social relationships. A judicial system, for example, would be meaningless if we didn't expect truth. Trust and cooperation require truth. Communication would be futile if truth weren't expected. Philosophy and religion emphasize the importance of truth. "You shall know the truth," Jesus taught, "and the truth shall make you free." He made the declaration in a spiritual context, but it has been widely adopted elsewhere. Many colleges and universities have it or a form of it as their mottos. At the University of Texas, where I did my graduate study, the sentence is inscribed on the Main Building at the south entrance to the campus.

Of course, relativists can ask "what is truth?" We concur. One can debate the definition of "truth" and certainly whether it is possible to know the truth. In fact, we cannot be certain what the truth is, or even

if there is such a thing as truth, unless there is an Ultimate Truth. If an Ultimate Truth doesn't exist, one claim might be no more true than any other, and we would have no way of knowing. What is "true" would be true only in a finite sense.

But in historical thinking in its limited context, without attempting to deal with Ultimate Truth, most of us agree that there is something we call "truth." We can say minimally that historians must at least have the facts right and then that any explanation they offer must be faithful to them.

Yet, despite the general recognition of the importance of truth, some people who occasionally dip their fingers into historical writing, or who teach media history, often get it wrong. In fact, they don't even get the facts right. We wonder why.

Several reasons suggest themselves.

The problem begins with their graduate training. Most of the masqueraders didn't specialize in history. They spent their time in such areas as Cultural Studies or philosophy-lite as taught in communication programs. Or perhaps they found math difficult and migrated to qualitative studies by default, where at some schools they learned that historical research consists of reading essays by writers with training similar to their own. Whatever the reason, they came out of graduate school with little awareness of the rigorous methods required in historical research.

With perhaps as many as a fifth of those who claim to be JMC historians having gone through wobbly doctoral programs, it should not surprise us when we see conference papers with a feeble grounding in historical facts. And when professors with similar backgrounds serve on journal editorial boards, it is not remarkable to see frail manuscripts occasionally published as articles.

Does Truth Matter?

If one has limited training in historical research, but a high esteem for opinion, is there any reason to expect that the person will place great value on facts? Skeptics may claim that facts are meaningless except for the understanding that humans bring to them. Good historians know, though, that facts are the foundation of history worthy of the name. Without a solid foundation, it is difficult to reach the truth.

A further impediment is the ignorance that some dabblers display of the literature written on their subject. Yet one of the basic and earliest steps in historical research is to become familiar with the body of work that other historians already have done. Most undergraduates learn that principle. At one time, though, and in the not-too-distant past, we could find published articles whose authors seemed unfamiliar with everything except textbook statements. Fortunately, that problem has been resolved for the most part. Yet one still finds occasional conference papers and journal articles in which the authors seem unaware of what has already been written. When one is unfamiliar with what other historians have said, it is easy to fall into error.

When such problems pock the field of JMC historiography, it should not be unforeseen that some in it have a limited appreciation of history as a serious matter. That's a fourth problem. For truth to matter, history must matter.

Finally, we can point to worldviews. All of us have our own life experiences, and we see things from our particular perspectives. Many factors go into creating those views.

Views can amount to biases, and if they're not held in check they can distort our view of reality. Good historians are trained to be aware of their biases and to attempt to control them. Most do.

Some, though, don't bridle them. They don't even try. They are proud of their biases and, in fact, intentionally apply them to their ex-

planations of history.

Most biases aren't so obvious. In fact, some historians seem to be unaware that they have biases. Yet, if read critically, a great portion of the articles that appear in journals in JMC history can be recognized as having an unmistakable underlying perspective. The same is true with conference papers. That subtle bias may be more dangerous than the overt.

Biases can take a variety of shapes. We can recognize them in several isms in almost every generation. They exist today in assorted forms. They can be social isms, political isms, even scholarly isms. Among academicians, Critical Theory is an example. In the field of mass communication, it assumes that the ideas and beliefs of the social power structure determine media content, which supports the status quo. It is ideology-based rather than fact-based. Historians who hold to the theory believe that humans need to be liberated from the existing social order. And they know they are right.

It is easy to see how such a view creates a danger to truth. Yet, there are a number of academicians in mass communication, some of whom claim to be historians, who actively promote it. They select facts that support their biases, bend facts to fit their ideological purposes, and ignore inconvenient ones.

With most other historians being a fairly tolerant group, it is easy for such ideologues to get the upper hand.

Which once again reminds us that truth does, indeed, matter.

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The Richest Experience of My Career: Two Books on Woodrow Wilson and the Press

By James D. Startt ©



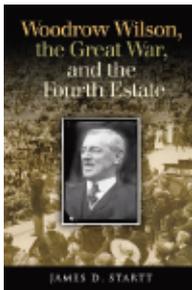
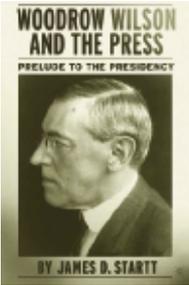
Startt

Growing up in Baltimore, I assumed that the *Baltimore Sun* was one of the world's great newspapers. That opinion was confirmed years later upon learning that both William Randolph Hearst and Frank Munsey launched newspapers in my home-town to dislodge the hold the *Sun* had on the city. Of course, they failed. Suffice to say that it was through my loyalty to the *Sun* that newspaper-reading became an addiction that remains with me to

this day.

In searching for a dissertation topic years later, I looked for one that combined journalism and diplomacy. Woodrow Wilson and the Treaty of Versailles was a natural choice, since it occurred at a time when print journalism was at its peak and at a conference at which open public diplomacy was first practiced. Reading Thomas A. Bailey's two excellent books on Wilson's diplomacy and seeing how he incorporated the press as an essential part of his narrative further confirmed my choice of

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.



topic.¹ In time, it led to the publication of two books: *Woodrow Wilson and the Press: Prelude to the Presidency* (2004), and *Woodrow Wilson, the Great War, and the Fourth Estate* (2017).

Several years ago, when an old friend heard that I was writing a book about Wilson, her reaction was, “WOODROW WILSON, MY GOD, HOW BORING.” Her words were as shocking to me as they were understandable. After all, his opponents’ criticism of him somehow endured over the years. He was “a secular messiah,” “a human thinking machine,” or worse. More important, his rating among the presidents has changed. At the time of my initial interest in Wilson, he was ranked among the top six presidents. But, in the 1970s and ’80s, historical

writing moved away from the political-diplomatic mainstream and toward studies of minorities, race, gender, and civil rights. Consequently, Wilson has not fared well in recent history.

It should be remembered, however, that whatever the historiographical tide of a particular time may be, it is never complete. Consider that along with the current deluge of books on various aspects of social and cultural history, there have been a surprising number of excellent new studies on traditional but always significant topics such as the outbreak of World War One. Furthermore, it is hard to recall a time in which so many outstanding presidential biographies have appeared. Consequently, one will not go far wrong in choosing to write on worthy subjects that transcend any particular time.

There are abundant reasons why a book on Wilson and the press qualifies for such a study. Consider his record in politics. As governor

of New Jersey it took him less than two years to force through a boss-controlled state legislature laws that established him as one of the leading reform governors in the country. As president, it took him just eighteen months to pass three major reform acts that established his party as the progressive leader of the nation.² His greatest achievements, aside from being an inspiring war president, were in the field of foreign relations. Wilson's famous speeches, his "Peace Without Victory" address, in particular, defined liberal thought on foreign affairs during the war while the liberal internationalism he championed became one of the dynamic forces that shaped American foreign policy for the remainder of the century.

The Role of the Press

But what role did the press play in Wilson's political life?

The answer might be surprising, for he viewed it as essential to his philosophy of executive leadership. He believed that public opinion was the bedrock of democratic government and that the press, as its interpreter, was a major force in the deliberative processes of government. That was, of course, much in keeping with the place politicians accorded the press and public opinion in the Progressive Era as they sought to expand the new democracy. Wilson left no doubt about where he stood on that subject when he wrote in his acclaimed *Congressional Government* that he deemed it an "extraordinary fact that utterances of the press have greater weight ... than the utterances of Congress.... The editor directs public opinion, the congressman obeys it." On another occasion, he wrote, that despite their lack of a common voice, newspapers in their "aggregate voice thunder with tremendous volume and that aggregate voice is 'public opinion.'"³ Although historians have tended

either to dismiss Wilson as a president who distrusted the press or was oblivious to it, I believe they have been mistaken. Too much evidence exists to the contrary.

The two books trace Wilson's press relations from the late nineteenth century to the early 1920s, and they underscore the role of those journalists who were central to his gaining and holding high public office. Without them it is doubtful that he would ever have been either governor of New Jersey or president of the United States.

Prelude to the Presidency covers his early association with journalism and journalists, his ascendancy as a public statesman, and his presidency of Princeton. It places special emphasis on his gubernatorial campaign in 1910 and his presidential campaign in 1912.

Woodrow Wilson, the Great War and the Fourth Estate begins with the outbreak of the war and moves through the major national and international issues that dominated American politics and foreign policy during some of the most contentious years in the country's history. Although domestic issues such as Wilson's handling of censorship, propaganda, and dissent are given due attention, the book gives special consideration to the great foreign policy issues. Most of all it covers Wilson's brilliant defense of America neutrality from 1914 to 1917, his negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, and his later defense of it against a brutal Senate opposition.

Both books required extensive research, and each took ten years to complete. It was my intention to anchor the books in manuscript sources as well as in those of the press. Consequently, about 135 manuscript sources of journalists and public figures were used for each book along with equal number of newspapers and journals. The latter covered large metropolitan dailies and African American, ethnic, labor, religious, socialist, radical, suffragist and anti-suffragist publications as well

as film and newspaper trade journals. At certain critical times, Wilson closely followed British, German, and Russian press opinion, all of which are present in the second volume. The press sources were available at the Library of Congress and the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. Many of the manuscript sources used were also at the Library of Congress, but others were scattered across the country, mainly in the Northeast, Midwest, and South. Trips made to these libraries and archives was a pleasant challenge. Using hundreds of reels of micro-filmed newspapers, often in less than mint shape, was not so pleasant a challenge. Nevertheless, the greatest challenge of all was pulling together this mass of collected materials into a readable narrative.

Historians and Wilson's Press Relations

Wilson's press relations over the years have usually failed to receive high marks from historians. They deemed them a failure, or at least flawed beyond repair. That judgment is correct for the last year and a half of his presidency following a severe stroke that left him an invalid. It is also true that Wilson was often at odds with newspapers and reporters for the way they reported his statements and policies. He frequently referred to his irritation with them in his correspondence with friends. However, many public figures in his time complained about how reporters "invented" their news reports and interviews. And, it should be admitted that some of the newsmen's reportorial habits brought no credit to journalism.

Nevertheless, it is understandable that they could be critical of him and of the way he interacted with people. Those who knew him well appreciated his congeniality, charm, and sense of amusement. But to reporters he was a stern, self-confident man who found it difficult to be

affable with strangers. And, as is often said of him, he did not “suffer fools gladly.” Be that as it may, Ray Stannard Baker concluded that “the President held ... the respect and admiration of editors and correspondents who counted in Washington and the country.”⁴ These books reflect that appraisal.

In writing the books, I also questioned three specific ideas regarding Wilson’s press relations. The first involves his press conferences. Most historians consider them a failure.⁵ That thought originated in books correspondents wrote later. However, they were often more generous about those meetings in comments they made at the time. Wilson, it is true, had problems in handling these conferences, but he held them twice a week until it was necessary to reduce them due to the strains of the war. He finally ended them after two and a half years when the *Lusitania* crisis occurred. While they lasted, Wilson used them to convey news that he felt appropriate to share and to correct unappreciated speculations and rumors. He grew more at ease with the correspondents as time went on and as he began to interject humor into the proceedings. And, his tendency to fence with words sometimes involved good-natured sparring with the newsmen.

The correspondents, of course, were often disappointed in the news the president chose to convey. However, it is worth noting that when Wilson ended the conferences, they urged him to resume them. The conferences were important as the first meaningful effort to create an institution that was destined to last, and it can be argued that they were better than other such efforts that preceded or followed them until the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. I also question the frequent claim that Wilson was stubborn and fixed in his views. He seemed to verify that charge when he commented that he had “a one track mind.” However, the editors at that time often complained about his tendency to

change his position and even to reverse course.

Most of all, I question the idea that he paid little or no attention to press opinion. In fact, just the opposite was the case throughout the war years. Since he read only one newspaper and at times none, how did he stay informed about what the editors were saying?

The answer is that he managed to keep abreast of their commentary through his intermediaries with the press, particularly through the efforts of Joseph P. Tumulty and Col. Edward M. House. In the years before there was a press secretary, much less an office of the press secretary, Tumulty filled that role for Wilson. He held regular briefings with the correspondents, and the many friendly gestures he extended to them were a major part of his work. He also scanned newspapers daily, mostly those in the Northeast, for items to bring to Wilson's attention. And, of course, his contacts with the Washington correspondents put him in touch with the concerns of many large newspapers located elsewhere. Col. House, Wilson's confidant par excellence, developed his own private network for collecting and disseminating news and opinion from reporters, editors, publishers, foreign correspondence, and men of business, finance, and commerce.

Beyond Tumulty and House, the president would sometimes meet with editors and publishers in his office. While he considered some of these meetings tedious, others were of real importance to him. Furthermore, he could draw upon the heads of the executive department who had their own sources for press opinion. Most notable among them was Wilson's close friend Josephus Daniels, the Secretary of the Navy and former North Carolina newspaperman. Finally, once the United States intervened in the World War, the Committee on Public Information handled routine press news. Its chairman George Creel met daily with Wilson.

The Role of Interpretation in History

Writing these two books made me more aware than ever of the process of interpretation in history.

As a result, I wish to recommend that young scholars keep this question in mind when they write their own books: Why should anyone have confidence in what you write? There are, of course, the basic canons of historical methodology to follow. In addition, a well selected and comprehensive bibliography will assure readers of the quality of your research. It can be assumed that these essentials of historical writing will be followed.

But history also involves tackling problems of the most perplexing sort, and they must be faced. In Wilson's case, the Treaty of Versailles was such a problem. Historians have often deemed it unfair and too harsh on Germany. Such an interpretation must be clearly grasped and questioned. Suppose, for instance, that Germany had won the war as it expected to do. What conditions might it have imposed on the Allies? German leaders and opinion makers had discussed for years how they would reconstruct Europe. Their basic plan was imperialistic and called for economic and territorial expansion across Europe and into the Middle East.⁶ Furthermore, the treaty Germany forced the Russians to sign at Brest-Litovsk in 1918 was evidence that this was, indeed, what it planned to demand of the Allies. On the other hand, the Treaty of Versailles left Germany the second largest country in Europe, and with its industrial bases far less damaged than that of France or Russia. Consequently, was the Versailles Treaty unfair? Another common interpretation of the treaty holds that the diplomats' efforts to redraw the borders in eastern Europe was disastrous. But as one historian recently observed, "The alternatives were either preserving the Hapsburg Em-

pire, which proved impossible, or domination by Germany or Russia, both of which came to pass with disastrous consequences.”⁷ So, which contention rings most true, and why? In solving such questions, really dilemmas, it can be instructive to follow two rules. Do not accept previous interpretations without questioning, and always examine the alternatives.

Or consider the role Wilson played in negotiating the Versailles Peace Settlement. Many editors of all political persuasions at the time charged that his presence there was a major mistake and that the Allies tricked him into signing an imperialistic peace treaty. Some historians have repeated their claims. On the other hand, consider the presence in Paris of all those national delegations, each with territorial demands to make, and the French determination to crush Germany as well as its lackadaisical interest in Wilson’s league proposal. No problem in writing about Wilson troubled me so long and so deeply. Furthermore, it can be argued that without Wilson’s presence at the conference table Germany’s fate would have been worse and there would have been no League of Nations.

So, which is the more convincing interpretation of the role Wilson performed as peacemaker? In the end, my interpretation was that Wilson won as much in the negotiations as it was possible to win. Others may disagree with that conclusion, but it is an interpretation I believe the evidence supports.

Researching a topic that centers on an historical figure is serious business, but at times it is surprising what tidbits of information it produces. The fact, for example, that Wilson’s favorite poem was Wordsworth’s paean to valor, “Character of a Happy Warrior,” comes as no surprise. Given his own Victorian idealism, it seems reasonable. Most would agree that it reflected his serious demeanor and his sense of duty.

Startt

However, they might be surprised that as a young man Wilson played baseball and followed the game for the rest of his life. As a professor, he helped coach football at two colleges. He loved to sing and dance, usually at home with his daughters. He was a great fan of Gilbert and Sullivan and, especially later in life, regularly attended Keith's Vaudeville Theater on Saturday nights. He loved farcical humor, which he enjoyed sharing with close friends and family. He could dance a Virginia reel or do an Irish jig, and in his early years he could do a fair rendition of a can-can. Once while attending a dinner with New Jersey state legislators that turned boring, he livened up the evening by leading one legislator around the room in a cakewalk. Wilson, it is known, enjoyed the company of a witty and intelligent woman, but it may come as a surprise that some newspapermen referred to him as "Tomcat" Wilson. And, at a time when prohibition was a surging national reform movement, Wilson enjoyed an occasional drink of Scotch whiskey.

Most surprising of all was to learn how many of Wilson's forbears practiced journalism. Moreover, Wilson, himself, not only assisted his father when he was the editor of the *North Carolina Presbyterian* but also submitted articles and news reports to various newspapers both before and after he served as editor of the *Princetonian*.

Writing these two books was the richest experience of my career. Wilson's life was one of triumph and tragedy marked by a sequence of crises, all of which involved the press. It was a pleasure and a privilege to have been allowed to probe into the letters and records of so many public figures, and I am more convinced than ever of the value of these sources. They provide reminders that even those who have risen to great heights are human and sometimes fallible. I urge young scholars to make these sources an integral part of their studies.

It can be further urged that they consider exploring the field of

The Richest Experience of My Career

president-press history, for it abounds in human interest and provides insight into the nexus of two great and historic American institutions.

NOTES

¹ Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace* (Chicago, 1944), and *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (Chicago, 1948).

² The three acts were: the Underwood Tariff Act, the Federal Reserve Act, and the Federal Trade Commission Act.

³ Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics* (1885; reprint, New York, 1956); and Woodrow Wilson, “The Modern Democratic State,” in Arthur S. Link, et.al., eds. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* 69 vols. (Princeton, 1966-91), 5:72-74.

⁴ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, 8 vols. (New York, 1927-1939), 4:233.

⁵ A. Scott Berg’s excellent treatment of Wilson’s press conferences is a notable exception to the negative treatment they often receive. See Berg’s *Wilson* (New York, 2013), 293.

⁶ See, for example, Fritz Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967, 11-24 and 583-608; and Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid For World Power* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 47.

⁷ John Milton Cooper, Jr., review of Larry Wolff’s *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe*, in *Journal of American History*, 108 (June 2021): 179.

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Historical Roundtable: American Cold War Propaganda

By Mark Bernhardt, Nicholas John Cull, Karla K. Gower,
Michael L. Krenn, and Kenneth Osgood ©



Bernhardt

For almost half a century the United States and Soviet Union engaged in a Cold War. Our understanding of its many facets is evolving as new information comes to light with the declassification of documents in the United States and growing access to archives in Russia and as scholars pose new questions and look at the Cold War through new lenses. One important component of the Cold War was marketing it to the public. Through messaging disseminated via political rhetoric, government publications, news reports, movies, television programming, etc., U.S. governmental and private entities put forward their views of what the Cold War was about to convince both domestic and foreign audiences that the United States represented good and the Soviet Union evil. This roundtable discusses the developments that have taken place in historical scholarship about Cold War propaganda.

Mark Bernhardt is a history professor at Jackson State University. His forthcoming book is tentatively titled *American Opportunity, American Hospitality: 1950s U.S. Sitcoms' Cold War Messaging about Middle Class Accessibility and Assimilation for Marginalized Peoples*.

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Bernhardt: *Which authors do you see as having laid the groundwork for the study of U.S. Cold War propaganda?*

Cull: The best-known foundational work on U.S. Cold War propaganda was done by people who were both practitioners and scholars. Hans N. Tuch, Richard Arndt, Alan Heil and Wilson Dizard made especially important contributions to the understanding of the overt/public diplomacy story. This meant that there was an institutional edge to much of the writing with the authors looking to defend their own careers. My own research owes much to the British tradition of propaganda history as pioneered by Philip M. Taylor. I



Cull



Gower

Nicholas John Cull is Professor of Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. His books include *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*.



Krenn

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Osgood

Michael L. Krenn is Professor of History at Appalachian State University. His publications include *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War*, and *The History of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy: From 1770 to the Present Day*.

Kenneth Osgood is Professor of History at Colorado School of Mines. His publications include *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*; *The United States and Public Diplomacy*; and *Selling War in a Media Age*.

Roundtable: American Cold War Propaganda

simply relocated that method to the USA and moved it into the Cold War period. My home organization is the International Association for Media and History and a number of excellent propaganda scholars were also associated with that group including the late David Culbert of LSU and Garth Jowett.

Osgood: As Dr. Cull notes, the first accounts of Cold War propaganda were written by government officials and advisors, who sketched the history with their cold warriors' ethos. More detached and rigorous analyses didn't take hold until the 1990s, when there was an explosion of research on cultural relations and propaganda from a broad-range of perspectives. That new literature was influenced by contemporary affairs — the collapse of communism in Europe pointed to the influence of ideas — and historiographical trends, especially the cultural turn, which came late to Cold War history. The path was also paved in the 1980s by authors who studied topics other than the Cold War but accentuated cultural power, such as Emily Rosenberg in *Spreading the American Dream*; John W. Dower and Akira Iriye on World War II; and Michael Hunt on ideology. Also in the 1980s, the declassification of Eisenhower's records spotlighted the centrality of propaganda to his diplomacy, and by extension U.S. foreign policy generally, as noted for example in Blanche Wiesen Cook's *Declassified Eisenhower* and John Lewis Gaddis's *Strategies of Containment*.

Gower: My interest in Cold War propaganda is focused on how racial inequalities in the United States played into the propaganda both at home and abroad. In that regard, Thomas Borstelmann's 2001 book, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, and Mary Dudziak's 2000 work, *Cold War Civil Rights*, have been influential in helping form my thinking in

this area. Although we tend to think about race in the Cold War as pertaining to Blacks in the United States, it has broader implications. Justin Hart suggested that the interdependence of race and U.S. foreign policy in the period following 1941 ought to be viewed in terms of decolonization, rather than solely through the black-white binary of the civil rights narrative. And Paul Rosier in his 2009 book, *Serving Their Country*, tells the story of how American Indians used the relationship between race and foreign affairs and the discourse surrounding that relationship during the Cold War to argue for their own cultural preservation.

Krenn: My particular focus in terms of the history of U.S. propaganda has always been the role of cultural diplomacy in such efforts and so my contributions to this discussion will revolve around this particular form of American propaganda. Joseph Nye, who introduced the phrase “soft power” into our understanding of propaganda and cultural diplomacy in the 1980s, must certainly be included in any discussion of those scholars who laid the groundwork. Frank Ninkovich’s 1981 work, *The Diplomacy of Ideas*, was one of the first studies I encountered that encouraged me to explore cultural diplomacy in more depth. And I found that Leo Bogart’s work, using his perspective as a sociologist, was also quite useful in establishing some of the parameters for the field, particularly his 1976 book on the USIA, *Premises for Propaganda*. In the past two decades, this work has been enhanced by numerous other scholars including Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Giles Scott-Smith, and my colleagues for this roundtable, Nicholas Cull and Ken Osgood.

Bernhardt: *What drew you to this field and inspired you to focus on your specific area of Cold War propaganda?*

Gower: The Cold War was positioned as a battle for the hearts and minds of people. It was democracy versus communism. It was liberty versus authority. In that sense, it embraced big ideals and philosophical struggles over civil society. I find all those things fascinating. But I am also interested in how the U.S.'s belief in its own moral superiority was called into question during the Cold War. The Soviet Union and China played on what they perceived as American hypocrisy regarding racial inequality, which impacted the government's propaganda response at home and abroad.

The work I did with Dick Lentz was concerned primarily with international condemnations of the U.S.'s racial record and the role the U.S. press played in both publicizing the racial incidents, which alerted the Soviets and others to them in the first place, and helping Americans at home see the effect such actions had on the country's image abroad. The contribution of this study is its exploration of the crucial role the domestic press had in global perceptions of race in the United States and ultimately in U.S. foreign policy as the government reacted to those perceptions. It also explored the social transactions between U.S. publications and their domestic readers.

Cull: My initial decision was to focus on propaganda, and I think that came from recognizing the gap between history as remembered by my parents and grandparents and the version I saw on television and in the official/public history. I was fascinated by the double standards we applied to thinking about the Cold War. Many ordinary people had a nostalgia for the Soviet ally of World War II and never quite slipped into the Cold War demonization seen in the U.S. There was also a psychological need in the UK for a certain balance between the U.S. and Soviet Union, and looking back I think that all opportunities to praise the

Soviet Union and — conversely — to criticize the USA were taken in intellectual circles at least. We Britons were most interested in what the Cold War did to ourselves — with spies defecting and so forth — rather than the realities of life in the East. All these influences intrigued me. My initial (PhD) work was on Anglo-American relations in World War II. I became interested in Ed Murrow's role as an advocate for Britain during the Blitz. When I read into his life, I learned that he had worked for the United States Information Agency in the Kennedy years and looked for the history of that agency. When I found that it didn't exist, I set about writing it. My initial plan was to do a book on crisis propaganda but I came to realize that what really made the difference were long term exchanges and the slow work to get services like Voice of America radio news behind the Iron Curtain.

Krenn: My interest in U.S. diplomatic history was always formed around the idea of using the study of the nation's foreign policy as a means for more thoroughly understanding the United States, its culture, and its people. The pathway to a more specific focus on U.S. cultural diplomacy was somewhat circuitous. While working on my 1999 book, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969*, I soon realized that a very important part of this story involved the U.S. efforts to counter international criticisms of America's race problem. And this led to my first real exposure to the use of culture as a diplomatic tool, as State and USIA utilized African American artists, singers, jazz musicians, and sports figures as unofficial ambassadors for the "American way of life." One aspect that I found to be particularly intriguing was the use of paintings by African American artists and this led, by fits and starts, to my next book, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* in 2005. Through these,

and other works, I discovered an invaluable avenue for dissecting the contradictions in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy as well as the incredibly complex interconnections between America's culture and its diplomacy.

Osgood: I stumbled into propaganda history by accident. I blame Robert J. McMahon. In 1991 he published a brilliant essay in *Diplomatic History* about credibility in U.S. foreign relations that drew my attention to the psychological dimensions of policy making. The idea that policy could be made not so much to accomplish any particular goal but to influence the perceptions of various audiences captivated me. In time, I came to see that policy and propaganda are often interwoven, and that much of modern foreign relations is about influencing the perceptions and politics of others.

Bernhardt: *Discuss how the field has evolved to include different approaches to analyzing this propaganda.*

Cull: The field has diversified in terms of both methods and sources. One of the things I most enjoy are the bilateral studies that look at the specific reception of U.S. programs around the world. I've been involved with a project focused only on Fascist Spain and in anthologies including bilateral studies of different European countries. There is an anthology on Latin America due out later this year. My own research is presently looking at the intersection of Cold War and anti-apartheid propaganda. So interesting and possible really only because the over-arching story has been told.

Krenn: I think there are three areas relating to U.S. cultural diplomacy

that deserve special mention. First, the field has expanded in terms of its geographical focus. This has been accomplished not just by studies that examine U.S. cultural diplomacy efforts in areas other than Europe and the Soviet Union, but also by taking into account some fascinating research into how other nations were reacting to those efforts as well as using culture in their relations with the United States. Thus, instead of simply examining the production and dispersal of culture *from* America, newer scholarship is trying to understand the reception of, and active participation in, cultural diplomacy.

Second, there has also been a concerted effort to push our understanding of cultural diplomacy back beyond the confines of the Cold War. These studies have focused on the 1930s and World War II, the work of the Committee on Public Information during World War I, and even non-governmental activities undertaken by individuals and groups within the United States during the 19th century. This helps us to understand the origins of the Cold War cultural diplomacy efforts, while also suggesting that those efforts did not magically appear during the post-World War II years. For example, although my work in this field began with the Cold War period, I am now pushing back into the 19th century to try to identify some of the antecedents for these later efforts in cultural diplomacy.

Finally, other theoretical approaches are expanding our notion of what cultural diplomacy is, how it is produced, and what it hopes to accomplish. For example, recently scholars have been investigating the applicability and usefulness of the notion of “nation branding” to the study of international cultural relations.

Osgood: Dr. Krenn and Dr. Cull nailed it, but I’ll add a few observations. The vast majority of historical writing on Cold War propaganda

addresses that sponsored by the U.S. government, followed by that of Britain and the Soviet Union. This is beginning to change, with promising new work on lobbying and public/cultural diplomacy by smaller states and non-state actors. Another important issue concerns the overlapping network of state and private actors engaging in influence campaigns, as well as the political and ideological battles between would-be influencers over messaging and tactics. The work of Krenn, Mary Dudziak and others on how race and civil rights were hotly contested in U.S. politics and propaganda is one example. And then there's an increasingly rich literature on the CIA's front groups, such as by Hugh Wilford, Helen Laville, and Giles Scott-Smith, that interrogates the complicated motives and actions of private actors and the intelligence community in cultural-propaganda campaigns.

Gower: I agree with my colleagues. Recent scholarship has expanded from a focus on the public diplomacy of the United States to the efforts of other countries to use soft power techniques to shape public opinion abroad, such as Egypt and India. Similarly, scholars are also exploring the role of non-official actors in the cultural Cold War, especially in Europe. The interaction among sports, race, and foreign policy is also being researched. Nation branding is a growing area in the public relations literature as well.

Bernhardt: *How has our understanding changed regarding the ways in which the United States sought to counter Soviet propaganda and the reasons for doing it?*

Cull: I feel that the response to disinformation has not been understood. My argument is that not only did the U.S. learn to rebut Soviet

lies, to heighten awareness of them and expose them to discredit the USSR, but also they engaged in a process that I call “information disarmament.” The U.S. raised the issue with Soviet diplomats, who to their surprise objected to some Voice of America news stories. The two governments agreed to early alert procedures to avoid accidental publication of errors. Even more significantly the U.S. applied leverage to stop the AIDS libel, threatening to suspend scientific cooperation with the USSR unless the KGB halted its claim that AIDS was a U.S. bio-weapon. This worked, more especially when the evidence of its continuation was presented directly to Gorbachev. It seems clear to me that the solution to an information problem is not necessarily more information.

Osgood: Throughout the Cold War, Americans framed all U.S. “information” activities as countering communist “propaganda,” which they equated with lies or disinformation. This makes it difficult to pinpoint when U.S. propaganda targeted a specific Soviet campaign or allegation — such as the outrageous AIDS allegation mentioned by Cull or the biological warfare campaign during the Korean War — since in U.S. cold war ideology anything and everything said by communists amounted to disinformation or misinformation. This includes, for example, depictions of Jim Crow and American racism in the Soviet press that were derided as propaganda but were more accurate than the reporting found in many American newspapers. Further complicating matters, many U.S. cultural diplomacy and propaganda initiatives revolved around smoothing the climate for U.S. business or other interests, and combatting communism may have provided more of a rationale than a reason. Though U.S. propaganda activities in Latin America had long been justified as meeting foreign threats, for example, arguably

they were more about consolidating U.S. regional hegemony in practice. Here there's a connection with another "lesson" of Cold War historiography: Americans often confused or conflated third world nationalism and communism. It had ruinous consequences in places like Vietnam, but it also hobbled the American ability to respond to decolonization ideationally. All that being said, it's clear Russia, China, and other states weaponized disinformation (and still do), and we need more robust scholarship investigating the issue.

Krenn: In terms of how the United States utilized cultural diplomacy in its efforts to blunt Soviet propaganda, one of the main things we have learned is that this was not merely an anti-communist effort. The belief that the United States was materialistic, militaristic, racist, and lacking culture was not an invention of the Soviet imagination. Both friends and foes shared these ideas, and so America's cultural diplomacy concentrated just as heavily on its closest allies as it did on "enemy" or potential enemy areas of the globe. Thus, the Atoms for Peace program sought to show the ways in which nuclear power could be harnessed for progress and development, rather than simply atomic arsenals. The People's Capitalism program was designed to demonstrate how America's "materialism" was, in fact, a boon for the working and middle classes. African American jazz artists, sports figures, and the touring company of *Porgy and Bess* were sent around the globe to demonstrate America's dedication to racial equality.

What we have also learned is that a major factor in this U.S. cultural diplomacy push after World War II was due to the fact that many American officials came to believe — rightfully so — that their nation was far behind many of the European countries and, in particular, the Soviet Union, in using culture as a potential tool in its diplomatic arse-

nal. We have also learned about the wide—and sometimes wild—scope of America’s cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, which included everything from fine art, opera, symphonies, dance, theater, sports, jazz, and rock and roll, to truly head-shaking examples such as sending a film on boxing monkeys to the Netherlands, to funding a variety show by the African American comedian Nipsey Russell for showing in northern Africa.

Bernhardt: *What are some of the challenges faced by scholars working in the field?*

Cull: Propaganda scholarship has been hurt by the unavailability of archive materials. The Smith-Mundt Act inhibited USIA’s work within the U.S. and prevented access to key materials until the 1990s. There was also a dismissal of media work within the historical establishment. The historical world seems biased towards big-ticket military and the covert world rather at the expense of open-source exchange and cultural work or USIA’s counter propaganda work, but then that reproduces the conditions in which the history actually happened.

Krenn: In terms of the specific challenges to the study of U.S. cultural diplomacy, I would agree with Dr. Cull that the archival materials are often difficult to find and seem to be spread out among numerous collections — unlike the handy, dandy Record Group 59 for State Department records! In addition, anyone working in this field quickly realizes that they must look outside the official records and consult the archives of private institutions, organizations, and individuals—which are not always terribly forthcoming about their holdings. But many of the challenges are somewhat self-inflicted. There is the constant, and

often frustrating, search for “impact.” Exactly what did these propaganda/cultural efforts actually achieve? This is an interesting question, of course, but it is not the only one for scholars using the study of cultural diplomacy as a way to better understand the American political system and society that produced these efforts. And other challenges come from our fellow diplomatic historians, many of whom still tend to marginalize the study of public diplomacy, particularly cultural diplomacy, as mere sideshows to what Dr. Cull pointedly refers to as the “big ticket” items of foreign relations.

Gower: Again, I agree that access to archival materials, not just of governments, but also those of organizations and individuals, can be problematic, as it often is in historical research. I also agree with Dr. Krenn that it can be challenging to determine whether the public or cultural diplomacy efforts were actually effective. We can show what efforts were undertaken and often why. But it can be more difficult to determine whether such soft power resulted in a change in public opinion or in policy.

I also agree that “impact” is not, and should not be, the only question to be considered, but it can be important. In *The Cold War from the Margins* (2021), Theodora K. Dragostinova looked at the cultural diplomacy efforts of Bulgaria to bolster its legitimacy at home and promote its agendas abroad. From her research, she was able to show that its relations with Greece and Austria warmed, and cultural ties were forged with India, Mexico and Nigeria. So, it can be done, but it does remain a challenge, especially when it comes to the public’s opinion of the United States. Any movement of the public opinion needle in Bulgaria’s case would show up. Attitudes toward the United States are more settled and more difficult to change to any significant degree.

Osgood: I don't think I would name a shortage of archival materials as my top problem, at least not on U.S. Cold War propaganda activities. I've found myself drowning in documents. There are gaps, sure — but there's enough to keep historians busy for a very long time (especially if, as Krenn suggests, we look to private sources). But many other countries engaged in Cold War propaganda, including obviously Russia and China, and here scholarship has been limited by restricted access to archives. I think the question of impact is more interesting, but it hasn't been explored with great sophistication. We tend to think of impact linearly. "Were minds changed?" But impact can mean many things. For example, to what extent did the message get out there? Digitized media makes it possible to assess how thoroughly a given story or theme permeated the press. How did private actors appropriate, contest, or disseminate a given message? Propaganda often isn't so much about changing minds, as about mobilizing and empowering allies, or neutralizing dissent. We need more theorizing on these issues.

Bernhardt: *In what ways do you see the study of Cold War propaganda having been influenced by research on government propaganda from earlier eras and influencing the study of contemporary propaganda?*

Cull: For me the entire field grew from the British school of propaganda history. Interestingly the practice of Cold War propaganda by the U.S. also reflected British influence. Britain advised on the setting up of the VOA and OSS and the key man in Eisenhower's propaganda — CD Jackson — spent the war working with the great British propagandist Richard Crossman. I'm a little frustrated that contemporary propaganda is not especially well informed by history but tends rather to assume that the world began anew with the invention of Social Media.

Many of the things that come as earth shattering revelations were very predictable to propaganda scholars.

Krenn: I would start by agreeing with my colleague Dr. Cull that “contemporary propaganda [and cultural diplomacy] is not especially well informed by history.” For many studies, it appears that cultural diplomacy, in particular, started in 1945 or 1946, and ended with the dismantling of the USIA in 1999. In other words, it is portrayed as largely a Cold War phenomenon. There are, of course, exceptions, such as recent works by Justin Hart, Frank Ninkovich, and others that push the timeframe back into the pre-World War II period and even into the 19th century. By and large, however, anything from the 19th century is treated as largely irrelevant precursory attempts by mostly private agencies and individuals. The Committee on Public Information from World War I has still not been analyzed in sufficient depth, and the efforts by the FDR administration during the 1930s and into World War II are also given passing glances by most historians. Even a cursory examination of these earlier attempts at cultural diplomacy reveal fascinating parallels with the work that came during the Cold War. Unfortunately, at this point we are dealing with mostly cursory examinations.

Gower: I agree with both Drs. Cull and Krenn. I don’t think the study of Cold War propaganda has been influenced by research into earlier propaganda to any great extent. It would be natural to look into the Committee on Public Information and the Office of War Information as precursors if you will, but as Dr. Krenn says, the CPI has not been sufficiently analyzed to date. The public relations histories mention the CPI in passing because Edward Bernays, the so-called father of public relations, cut his teeth on the committee. I think PR scholars tend to

stay away from the CPI because they are a little afraid of tying public relations to propaganda too closely.

Going back even further, during the Civil War, the Confederacy and the Union conducted propaganda offensives in Europe using newspapers they controlled. The Union even sent propaganda agents abroad. Ida B. Wells, a Black American journalist, was forced to take her anti-lynching campaign overseas after she failed to generate a sufficient response against it among whites at home. Her jeremiads in Britain in 1893 and 1894 garnered media attention overseas and caused an outcry. The number of lynchings declined as a result. More can certainly be done in these areas.

Recent studies in the history of public relations in countries around the world do show that many governments, especially in former colonial or communist countries, used public diplomacy to further their legitimacy around the world, essentially nation building.

Osgood: Not enough! It's obvious to me that government officials who organized propaganda during the Cold War borrowed heavily from lived historical experience. The Committee on Public Information from World War I influenced the Office of War Information in World War II which in turn influenced the USIA (which in turn influenced U.S. public diplomacy after the September 11, 2001 attacks). Historians have been slower to examine such connections, for the reasons Cull and Krenn note, but that's beginning to change, as for example in Justin Hart's *Empire of Ideas*. There's other really important influences to consider, however. U.S. propaganda activities were shaped by the public relations, advertising, and journalism professions, as well as by the information and intelligence activities of other states, including especially the British government and communist and fascist governments. All of

these fields offered competing lessons and paradigms, and imparted in U.S. propaganda a confused and contradictory approach that reflected tensions over which such paradigms should reign supreme. Should there be a strategy of truth, à la the BBC, or hard-hitting psychological warfare, à la the KGB? Should the U.S. prioritize straight news and information, or hard-selling advertising techniques? Too much existing scholarship looks at government propaganda during the Cold War in a vacuum, rather than exploring it as a product of a rich information society. And there's also much to be learned by looking at propaganda in world history generally. My own field of vision was widened considerably by such sweeping overviews as Philip M. Taylor's *Munitions of the Mind* and Oliver Thompson's *Easily Led*.

Bernhardt: *What are some significant questions in the field that you feel need to be addressed?*

Cull: I feel we need to continue to look at the bilateral stories, to consider the evidence of what really worked and find as many accounts of reception as we can. I think it is important to understand that part of surviving propaganda is to listen to the adversary's claims and make sure that you are as little like that as possible. It is clear from the archive that both Eisenhower and Kennedy were pushed towards speedy responses to Civil Rights by Soviet propaganda on the subject. They needed to reduce that genuine vulnerability. This is why I now talk about issues of "image and propaganda in terms of 'reputational security' and highlight the extent to which a state can be helped or hurt based on how it is perceived by others. Our adversaries understand this which is why so much energy goes into muddying the waters of reputation in today's world.

Krenn: There are many questions still to address in the relatively young field of U.S. cultural diplomacy. As Dr. Cull noted, a more bilateral approach — looking at how America’s cultural diplomacy was received AND how other nations responded with their own cultural initiatives — is vital. In addition, the field as a whole needs to more fully and effectively use the records provided by non-governmental entities. Particularly in terms of U.S. cultural diplomacy, the role of these non-official offices, institutions, foundations, museums, elites, etc., was critical and a narrow focus on the Department of State and USIA will not suffice.

The interactions between the official and unofficial cultural diplomats also needs further investigation. Why did these two groups work so closely when, as was often the case, they were trying to achieve different ends? This leads us to the question of why the United States continued with its programs of cultural diplomacy for as long as it did. They were always controversial, always a lightning rod for Congressional attacks, and suspect in terms of their overall impact. So, why continue to push the cultural programs out to the world? And with such a cacophony of cultural products circling the globe, was there in fact a distinct and consistent “message” being sent by these programs?

Finally, and I have mentioned this issue before, the field of U.S. cultural diplomacy (and propaganda efforts in general) needs a forceful and continual push back into the early-20th and 19th centuries, and forward into the 21st century, to fully understand where such efforts originated and where they stand in post-9/11 U.S. diplomacy. To an alarming degree, the field has been stuck in the Cold War years, with very little research enabling us to clearly see those origins *or* the impact on post-Cold War cultural diplomacy.

Osgood: What else needs to be done? So much! Scholars are really just beginning to scratch the surface. I've hinted at a few areas for growth already, but here's my wish list of things I'd like to see much more work on: lobbying and cultural propaganda by small states and non-state actors, the activities of public relations and lobbying firms the world over, election interference and other activities to meddle in domestic politics, and the intersection of public diplomacy and intelligence operations. I'd also like to see more rigorous analysis of the foreign-directed propaganda, disinformation, and "active measures" activities of formerly communist countries to balance out a historiography overly focused on the United States. In these and other topics, there's much to be learned from other disciplines. My own work was really shaped by scholarship on rhetoric and communication, for example. Attentiveness to such fields as neuroscience, psychology, political science, and sociology may help propaganda historians add more analytical complexity to their work.

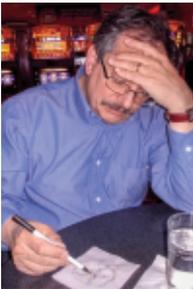
Gower: I agree that more research needs to be conducted into earlier efforts. Similarly, more can be done looking at the role that the news media play in public and cultural diplomacy. Numerous studies have been done on the relationships between the media and public opinion and the media and government, but very little research has been done to connect all three. The communication literature is rich in theories and models of media effects such as agenda setting, framing, and priming, but public diplomacy scholars rarely employ them. Very few studies have integrated media effects with public diplomacy concepts. Entman's (2004) cascading activation model is a promising approach to connect policy, media, and public opinion. He suggested that several actors, including presidents and their chief foreign policy advisors,

elites, and the media are engaged in a battle to shape frames that reach the public through the media and greatly influence the formation of public opinion. The model argues that some actors have more power than others to push frames down the road to the public and, therefore, could help identify when and how the media affect foreign policy making.

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Historian Interview:

By Thomas A. Mascaro ©



Mascaro (photo courtesy Evan Johnson)

Tom Mascaro is a documentary historian and emeritus professor of media and communication at Bowling Green State University. He's the author of *Into the Fray: How NBC's Washington Documentary Unit Reinvented the News*. He's at work on a new book about NBC News documentaries during 1967-1989, "Hard Truths: The Documentary Odyssey of Bob Rogers and Rhonda Schwartz." He received his Ph.D. from Wayne State University. His research has received a number of awards. His book *Into the Fray* won the 2013 Tankard Book Award for the best book in mass communication. He was a co-winner of the 2006 Covert Award in Mass Communication History for the best article of 2005 (for "Flaws in 'The Benjamin Report': The Internal Examination into *CBS Reports'* Documentary: 'The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception,'" *Journalism History*, 31:2, 2005). He was co-winner of the 2020 Wally Eberhard Award for Best Paper on Media and War, given by the American Journalism Historians Association. In 2020 the Broadcast Education Association honored him for his years of service as co-founder and first chair of the BEA Documentary Division.

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.

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Mascaro: History is the edge of tomorrow, a constantly advancing threshold to the future. Not the sepia tableau typified by those who dismiss what has been and despair what's to come. History strives for the future. In a practical sense, historians compare to the protagonists of the movie *Edge of Tomorrow*, striving to achieve a slippery goal while challenging unknowns. Their expeditions fail, they learn, share their expertise, refine questions, and confront problems until deciphering mysteries they hope will serve humanity. In my lifetime, Americans have legislated voting rights for Black Americans, reduced California's pollution, saved animals from DDT, conquered polio and smallpox, and dethroned a corrupt president. History bristles with strategies and successes. It's not the past — it's the latest.

In terms of approaches, I favor asking: Why did *this* happen *when* it did? What events of political history, economics, law and regulation, military and technological history, culture, etc., aligned such that change occurred when it did? The approach underpins my writing, informed my teaching, and amplifies my respect for colleagues.

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

Mascaro: My family resided in Detroit for another ten months after I was born before moving to Lincoln Park on the city's southern border. I was a baseball fan and not-great player through high school but fortunate to live in a city with a baseball historian, Ernie Harwell, as one of the Tigers' announcers. Harwell contextualized baseball history. Cooperstown, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, and Louisville Slugger factory, as well as my sons' enthusiasm, reanimated my appreciation for baseball history. I attended public schools, which offered class trips to

the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, my earliest involvement with artifacts, people, and technology. Those seeds took time to germinate during an eclectic college background: Martin Luther King died when I was a freshman at Wayne State University; Spiro Agnew resigned when I was at Henry Ford Community College; I finished undergrad (in education) at Western Michigan University and remember radio reports of the North Vietnamese push through Ban Me Thuot — where I had been stationed — as the war ended. I was a grad student at Michigan when *Challenger* exploded, and I went back to Wayne State to finish my Ph.D. in '94.

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

Mascaro: I was a motorhead before, during, and after the army and college, eventually becoming an automotive technical writer. American Motors hired me in the seventies — the days of the Gremlin and (*Wayne's World*) Pacer — to develop repair procedures. They promoted me to writer. I booked voice talent and produced recordings for training programs. There was nothing automotive about the recording studio, where suites were decorated like *Casablanca* or *New York, New York*. Observing the engineer record voiceovers and edit audiotape with great flair revealed possibilities in a broader form of communication.

Then I had an epiphany that led me to become a documentary historian. What I did was in the vein of “documentary,” nonfiction based on evidence. What was missing, to use Marc Bloch’s words, was “the scent of human flesh.” I wanted to focus on human rather than automotive stories. I was offered an assistantship at Michigan. My plan was to complete a master’s and return to corporate communications, but my

screenwriting professor invited me to visit the television studio. I peered through the control room window, Dr. Watson waved me in, and I was hooked on media.

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

Mascaro: I taught continuity writing and radio-television production as a grad assistant at Michigan, lecturer at the University of Toledo and Eastern Michigan University, and on tenure track at Bowling Green State University (BGSU/BG), beginning in 1999. Our equipment experienced years of neglect, and I worked with my friend Dr. Jim Foust and the staff of WBGU-TV (PBS) to refurbish technology over several years. I wrote an operator's manual for the studio and intro video course (my technical writing experience came in handy). I built a rolling, modular studio set for the student newscast, convertible for other class projects. It was several years before I could teach media history, criticism, and documentary studies. I developed two documentary history courses, divided at 1968, and others on World War II, civil rights, and American culture. Students researched documentary proposals using the process I gleaned from my research and then wrote a treatment for a documentary of choice. I loved it and found students highly engaged with documentary history. My grad courses included media history and criticism, documentary analysis, and Philosophical Foundations of Communication Theory.

***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.*

Mascaro: I was Dr. Watson's RA as a master's student at Michigan in the mid-1980s. She was writing a television history of the Kennedy years, the high point for documentaries. I researched Robert Drew by blending primary-source research with film analysis. I also transcribed interviews. In 1986, I applied for a (\$1,000) Leo Burnett Scholarship from our Communications department. The networks had announced documentary plans for 1987. I pitched a promise-versus-performance approach and won the grant. I visited the NBC News Washington Bureau to interview Robert F. Rogers, then head of the *White Paper* series.

Later that year I helped Dr. Watson and Dr. Lawrence W. Lichty (who did the documentary research for *Vietnam: A Television History*) organize a conference on "Documentaries of the Sixties" at the University of Michigan. We attracted the documentary pantheon: Erik Barnouw, Burton "Bud" Benjamin, Russ Bensley, Ray Carroll (author of the definitive dissertation on network documentaries), Daniel Einstein (UCLA archivist and author of the two-volume compendia on network documentaries), Reuven Frank, Richard "Ricky" Leacock, Robert "Shad" Northshield, Andrew Pearson, archivist Faye Schreibman, Tom Spain, and Bob Rogers. We screened documentaries on the Kennedy years, civil unrest, and Vietnam, and ended on archival issues. I published "Documentaries Go Stylish" in the trade publication *Electronic Media* (February 1, 1988), which analyzed the 1987 network docs, and "'Eyes on the Prize' Returns to Finish Civil Rights Story" (*Electronic Media*, January 8, 1990), which featured an interview with Henry Hampton. I had found what I wanted to do.

At Wayne State, Dr. Chris Johnson's methods class taught me to work in primary materials. A course in Oral History methods and another on constitutional history also motivated me. My chair, Dr. John

Spaulding, was a documentary historian, as was Dr. Janet Walker, who joined my committee. Dr. Stanley Shapiro was from History, a tough editor but great confidence builder. My dissertation analyzed the effects of Reagan's economic politics on network television documentaries.

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

Mascaro: A. William Bluem (*Documentary in American Television*, 1965), Erik Barnouw (*Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*, 1974), Stella Bruzzi (*New Documentary*, 2000), John Lewis Gaddis (*The Landscape of History*, 2002), and Marc Bloch's *The Historian's Craft* (1953) are foundational, well-worn works in my library. Drs. Watson and Lichty have influenced my documentary history, criticism, and analysis — Mary Ann in terms of the blend of events and people, Lichty in terms of documentary studies. Chris Johnson fostered an academic attitude that has long guided me when diving into a box of primary documents to “listen” to what they have to say. Janet Walker's feminist scholarship has been another ever-present influence, as has the work of Stella Bruzzi (UCL London). Bruzzi challenges critical scholars who misread history and critiques theories that skim realities. She rehabilitates, rather than tears down, documentary history.

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

Mascaro: I analyze the values of documentary producers, processes, production notes, and recollections of crew members as reflected in aired reports placed in historical contexts. I make ample use of close

Historian Interview

readings but have a guarded view of critical-cultural interpretations that masquerade as history, avoid the producer's input, and ignore physical and historical contexts at the sites of production.

Part of my project is to debunk the film community's dismissal of television documentary as "just journalism." This charge stems from similar dismissals of "balance" and "objectivity." My research shows that network documentaries routinely developed arguments, points of view, and challenged status quo powers. I've also analyzed documentary "films" that distorted reality by disguising methods, dramatizations, and editing. I don't think film directors have a lock on "vision" any more than journalists have a singular claim to "argument."

I am also trying to fill in the record of documentary producers, films, and units to foster an expansion of the literature. We don't have much on many producers with substantial filmographies, production crews, women, Blacks, or documentary comparisons on a particular topic. We don't have enough on *FRONTLINE*, PBS, or other documentary series. The proliferation of documentaries, especially personal examinations from diverse creators, is encouraging. We need to catalog these works, examine their cultural/international influences, but also ask whether having so many documentary voices dilutes their power.

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

Mascaro: Most of my work focuses on individual documentaries and/or analysis of documentary-related issues. I have also investigated television images of African Americans. After writing a piece analyzing Black men on *Homicide: Life on the Street*, Gary Edgerton, co-editor of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, suggested I collaborate with Dr.

Jannette Dates (Professor Emerita, Howard University) to co-edit a theme issue on African Americans in film and television. It was wonderful working with Dr. Dates, a leader in Black media history. Even in that project I relied on my documentary sensibilities through interviews with Juan Williams, Gwen Ifill, Callie Crosley, and Stan Lathan, who directed *Say Brother*, WGBH-Boston's answer to America's racial crisis of the late 1960s.

Most of my research, though, has concentrated on the NBC Washington documentary unit, 1961-1989. I've published papers and articles on aspects of the unit: *David Brinkley's Journal*, *Vietnam: It's a Mad War*, *Congress Needs Help*, a report on East Pakistan, profiles of Ted Yates, Stuart Schulberg, Bob Rogers, Rhonda Schwartz, Judy Bird, Lois Farfel Stark, and others. I published one book on the subject and have completed 80 per cent of the sequel. I have also investigated specific documentaries, such as *CBS Reports: The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*, HBO documentaries, the impact of libel suits on network documentaries, and documentary as art.

I hope to have enough years left to effectively define the conceptual differences separating nonfiction from fiction (which is what I'm trying to illustrate on the cocktail napkin pictured on page 41 at the start of this Q&A). I don't believe fiction and nonfiction reside in "silos," to use the buzzword of academe, but they are decidedly different, especially in terms of what we do with one versus the other.

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

Mascaro: I published *Into the Fray: How NBC's Washington Documentary Unit Reinvented the News* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books,

2012) and won the Tankard Award from AEJMC, which was thrilling. I was proud to have documented the career of Ted Yates, including the circumstances of his death in Jerusalem in 1967. I'm working on two books: a reissue of William Porter's *Assault on the Media: The Nixon Years* for University of Michigan Press (I'm writing the foreword and chapter analyses), and "Hard Truths: The Documentary Odyssey of Bob Rogers and Rhonda Schwartz." Porter was deeply concerned about attacks on journalism as an institution. I think he was prophetic. I'm very engaged in the historical links from Nixon to Trump. With "Hard Truths" I have decided to let myself write the book I want to write, which is quite satisfying. I've come to understand the professionalism of Bob Rogers and how he evolved over thirty years. I am also introducing the history of several women who worked in the unit. Rhonda Schwartz, for instance, has worked five decades in documentary journalism. I feel a great deal of satisfaction placing her name in the literature, along with her female co-workers.

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?*

Mascaro: I challenged the findings of The Benjamin Report, which critiqued *CBS Reports: The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*. Although the production was flawed, the documentary showed how the U.S. Army withheld information about Vietnamese troop strengths. I'm also proud of documenting how *Westmoreland v. CBS News* influenced the debate over the financial interest and syndication rules and convinced other networks to settle libel cases. I've written about *Viet-*

nam: It's a Mad War, which I still believe is the most important documentary on the war, because it foreshadowed in 1964 the issues that would come to pass. Finally, I have been developing scholarship on the artistry of network television documentaries. I presented a paper at the AJHA national convention and am developing this analysis further in my current NBC project.

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

Mascaro: Start younger and be more organized (especially filing). I would have liked to teach a timeline methods course on how to merge and analyze primary and secondary sources to reveal patterns, benchmarks, and develop writing outlines.

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

Mascaro: I continue to be enlightened by fellow members of the AJHA, AEJMC History Division, and the Broadcast Education Association in terms of media history, but we are losing ground to the ideological assault on “public” and by being swept into the maelstrom of attacks on public education, journalism, elections, minority rights, and civic enfranchisement. A society that increasingly questions the value of journalism cares even less about its history. I believe the field is losing ground to a conservative media project designed to sustain the manifest destiny of white settlement. I believe the academy should do more to bolster journalism as a solution to problems. The cultural-studies school has failed to check power it sought to diminish. America is more con-

servative and authoritarian than at the outset of that school of thought. I think we are stronger when distinguishing “journalism” from “the media” or even “the news.” Fox, OAN, Breitbart provide conservative “news” but not much “journalism.” To the extent we talk generally about “the media,” “the news,” “the mainstream press,” etc., without qualifying “journalism,” the field throws from its back foot.

***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?*

Mascaro: Those of us who do history compete with the Internet and daily civic life. The conservative media project that reacted to 1960s progressivism has evolved into a propaganda machine that defies evidence; swaths of the population are inured to history, evidence, and reason. I don’t think the answer is a harder sell of “history.” JMC history comprises a body of knowledge and literature, investigative methods, interpretation, analysis, and preservation. I favor emphasizing our method: ask a question, pursue evidence, try to explicate conclusions that inform others. (Many grad students go to sociology or statistics to learn quantitative methods. Why shouldn’t they come to us for investigative methods?) I think struggling journalism programs would benefit by committing to investigative journalism. The approach subsumes the fundamentals, but the method’s specificity and attribution underpin many occupations and fields and can easily embed history.

I would recast some history classes in terms of “Foundations of Contemporary X, Y or Z.” For instance, a journalism class on covering voting rights legislation, gerrymandering, or ideological funding of “safe” candidates can involve passage of the Voting Rights Act, the role

of journalism in the era, the history of how media organizations have covered/addressed voting rights, etc. We don't have to call the class "JMC History" to include history. At the recent AEJMC convention (2021), Carolyn Kitch (Temple) mentioned her class on Media and Social Memory and Linda Lumsden's book *Social Justice Journalism: A Cultural History of Social Movement Media from Abolition to #womensmarch* (Peter Lang, 2019). Our times call for asking, "How did we get here and what are our options?" Casting history as the edge of tomorrow leads naturally to history's ideas and answers.

The wider field of history suffers the problems of academe — silos, pecking orders, confusion about humanities, lethargic curriculum committees. We're like the Soviet Union crumbling from within. To the extent that general historians overlook what we do, it is their loss and, perhaps, our failure to make the larger case for JMC history. Cross-listing JMC classes with general history worked well for me, as does inviting history faculty to classes and panels to reveal our common goals. The challenge of infusing more JMC history into the curriculum is, to me, more important than our place within the wider field.

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

Mascaro: We are outpaced by society, politics, and industry. We want students to get jobs in the industry that exists, so we're not inventing the journalism/media of the future. When organizations and public officials come to us for ideas instead of workers, we'll have met the challenge to JMC history.

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The Historical Role of Communications Networks: A Conversation

By Richard R. John and Gengxing Jin ©



John

Note: This article is an abridged transcript of an interview with Richard R. John that was conducted for the *Chinese Communications Studies Review*. The interviewer was Gengxing Jin, an assistant professor of media and communications at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.



Jin

Dr. John received the 2011 AEJMC History Division's award for the best book of the year for his *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications*. He's also the author of *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (1995). He teaches in Columbia University's Ph.D. program in communications and is a member of the core faculty of Columbia's history department. He teaches courses on the history of capitalism and the history of communications. His research focuses on the history of business, technology, communications, and American political development. He received his Ph.D. in the history of American civilization from Harvard University.

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I: Media and Modernity

Jin: From *Spreading the News* to *Network Nation*, “communications” has been a main focus of your research and writing. How did you first become interested in the subject? And why does it matter for historians?

John: I came to the study of communications largely by accident. As a graduate student in the history of American civilization at Harvard in the 1980s, I was looking around for a dissertation topic. My initial plan was to study how canonical American authors wrote about failure; it occurred to me that a history of bureaucratic fatalism would be a good place to begin. I had written about industrial decline in early-twentieth-century New England in my undergraduate thesis, which I completed in 1981, also at Harvard (in social studies), and I was interested in expanding on this project.

The problem with bureaucratic fatalism was, how did one go about studying its origins? When did it begin? It occurred to me that it would make sense to ask: what was the first American bureaucracy? In a lecture that I attended shortly after I began my graduate studies, the nineteenth-century U. S. historian David Donald observed almost in passing that the first American bureaucracy was...the post office. He was glossing, I later figured out, a monograph on Jacksonian politics by the political scientist Matthew A. Crenshaw. Donald’s observation about the post office intrigued me. Why, not, I asked myself, organize my dissertation around what a large number of contemporaries from various walks of life thought about a single bureaucracy, rather than, as had been my original idea, what a small number of canonical authors had written about a large number of bureaucracies? This is how I decided to write a dissertation about the post office: it was to be a case study

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in the origins of bureaucratic fatalism — a phenomena much in evidence in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s, the America in which I grew up.

I did not immediately give up my interest in the history of failure, but I soon discovered, when I began to work in the sources, that bureaucratic fatalism was most emphatically not the lens through which nineteenth-century Americans customarily viewed the post office. And, so, I lost interest in bureaucratic fatalism, and decided to explore instead what Americans did in fact think about the post office.

While I had decided to write about the post office primarily because of my interest in American culture, I was not unaware that it was a large organization, and that large organizations were the specialty of Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., a historian I very much admired.

Chandler was a comparative institutionalist, a mode of inquiry that I had been introduced to as an undergraduate, but which I had not initially intended to pursue. Chandler's scholarship — in combination with his almost obsessive curiosity, herculean commitment to research, personal modesty, and gentlemanly demeanor — made a great impression on me. I have, incidentally, since written two review essays on his oeuvre: if anyone is interested, links can be found at my [Columbia website](#). Chandler's presence at Harvard was one of the main reasons I decided to stay on at Harvard for my Ph. D. He was the perfect complement to David Donald, the co-director of my dissertation. Chandler got me interested in organizations, while Donald, a consummate literary stylist and a legendary taskmaster, kept me on track.

To help me better understand how giant organizations worked, I sat in on a course on the sociology of communications taught by the sociologist Daniel Bell. The break-up of the Bell System was in the news, and Bell devoted several lectures to this topic. It was here that I

first learned about Harold Innis's concept of the "bias" of communications, a topic that I would write about in *Spreading the News*, and that has remained an interest of mine ever since.

In looking back on my graduate years, I would add that there is at least one additional reason that had nothing to do with my graduate training that helps explain why I ended up writing about the history of an organization, and, in particular, a government agency. And this can be found in the circumstances of my upbringing.

My father was a rocket scientist-turned government administrator (for many years he was director of the Volpe Transportation System Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts); for this reason alone, it is perhaps not surprising that from an early age I had misgivings about histories of the United States that left out, as most did, big business, communications networks, the military-industrial complex, and the state.

My immediate surroundings mattered as well. I grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts, a town famous in the annals of American history as the site of the first military encounter in the American War of Independence. While the trappings of Lexington's colonial past remained, the Lexington I knew was a leafy, well-to-do bedroom suburb for professionals — doctors, professors, and engineers working on top-secret military projects. The colonial past seemed far away. The United States and the USSR remained locked in a Cold War, the Vietnam War raged, and a post-Watergate cynicism pervaded public discourse.

During my high school summers, which coincided with the bicentennial of the American Revolution, I dressed up as a colonial militiaman to give public presentations on the Lexington Common to the thousands and thousands of tourists who had flocked to my home town to learn about the War of Independence. When I drove with tourists to Concord along the "Battle Road," I could clearly see an air force base

through the trees that had been planted to shield the “colonial” landscape from the twentieth-century present. The juxtaposition was jarring: I was growing up in Leo Marx’s military-industrial complex in the garden.

Though *Network Nation* was considerably longer than *Spreading the News*, it honed in on a narrower set of issues. My goal was to tell the history of the formative era of American telecommunication by tracing the commercialization, popularization, and naturalization of two networks, the telegraph and the telephone. When I began my research on this project at the Smithsonian Institution’s Woodrow Wilson Center in 1998-1999, it was conventional to study the early history of the telegraph and telephone in relationship to developments that had taken place in the recent past. As a historian, I chose the opposite approach: instead of looking backward from the vantage post of the millennium, I looked forward from the early republic, a period that I knew pretty well, having recently completed my book on the post office. Though I did not ignore entirely the influence of communications on society — an influence I had written a good deal about in *Spreading the News* — my primary goal was to document how society shaped communications. Twelve years later, I published *Network Nation*.

Network Nation can be read as a supplement to, and even a critique of, a famous argument of Chandler’s. Chandler contended, in a book that he published in 1962 entitled *Strategy and Structure*, that business *strategy* could shape organizational *structure*. Building on, and modifying, Chandler’s strategy-structure thesis, I contended, in *Network Nation*, that political *structure* could shape business *strategy*. Chandler assumed that the influence on business strategy of the political structure had been vastly overrated, and that, at least in the period before the Second World War, governmental institutions reacted to changes that

originated inside organizations. Following the lead of the political sociologist Theda Skocpol, a major source of inspiration from my graduate days onward, I was determined to “bring the state back in.”

Let me now say something about why communications is, or ought to be, a compelling subject for historians. Communications in my view is a field rather than a discipline: it is too capacious to be studied in a single way. In the English language, as a colleague who specializes in the Greek and Roman classics has reminded me, the words “communications,” “communion,” and “community” are etymologically linked. Each is an expression of a mysterious process: action-at-a-distance. Etymology, of course, is not destiny. Yet these associations remind us that communications has long been associated with some of the most profound dimensions of existence.

Action-at-distance is a metaphor not only for the mysterious gravitational force that holds the planets in their orbit, but also for the communion of souls. The “annihilation of space” that the poet Alexander Pope wrote about referred to the power of divine intervention to bring together distant lovers. John Durham Peter’s *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* makes this point particularly effectively: to be credible, any explanation for action-at-a-distance has to reckon with the mysteries of the universe. The affinities between communications, communion, and community may help explain why so many media scholars are deeply religious. This was true, for example, not only of Peters, a devout Mormon, but also of Marshall McLuhan, James Carey, Walter Ong, Jacques Ellul and, with qualifications, Harold Innis.

Yet communications is not only an otherworldly practice. For it also exists in the here-and-now. It is for this reason that I prefer to write “communications” with an “s” rather than “communication” without

The Historical Role of Communication Networks

the “s.” The latter term, “communication,” is used more typically in English to refer exclusively to the interpretation of a message, rather than to the means by which the message is shared.

Historical methods are useful for some communications-related projects, but by no means for all. Even so, I do believe, given the remarkable expansion of information technology since the mid-eighteenth century, that the historically grounded exploration of communications networks offers great promise for anyone interested in understanding the rise of capitalism and the emergence of the nation-state. The study of communications networks can also provide rich insights into nationalism, democracy, scientific research, military strategy, social psychology, literary culture, mass society, religion, reform movements, and many other topics. Historians who are interested in these topics would be well advised to pay more attention than they customarily do not only to the networks that circulate information, but also to the medium in which the information is conveyed. You don’t ask a fish about water, McLuhan once quipped. The same has long been true of communications. Only now, with the emergence of new forms of digital media, is it becoming possible to begin to understand the media ecology of the past. The owl of Minerva, as Hegel once wrote, flies at dusk. So too do historians of communications.

Jin: In *Spreading the News* and *Network Nation*, you show how the post office and telecommunications, as agents of change, helped to make America. How do you understand the historical role of “communications” in the nineteenth century? For example, do you build on Daniel Bell’s concept of an “information society”?

John: In *Spreading the News* I contended that the creation of a spatially

extensive communications network in the period between 1792 and 1835 helped to shape a nascent national identity for the inhabitants of a far-flung commercial republic. Many people were left out of the imagined community, a point that I was aware of, and wrote about, but that I would say even more about if I were writing this book today. But this imagined community did exist, and it did not just happen: it was a deliberate political achievement. Between 1835 and 1861, however, the same network would create a cultural dynamic that would drive Americans apart — laying the groundwork for a horrific civil war.

Daniel Bell's concept of the "information society" does not provide much insight into this story. I am quite certain about this, since I knew him slightly, and attended two of his lecture courses, one in college and one in graduate school. Once I even once got up the courage to ask him if my own project could in any way fit into his "information society" model. Bell responded that it could not. The reason was simple. For Bell, information could not become an agent of change at any point prior to the twentieth century, since it was only at this time that knowledge supplanted industry and agriculture as a mode of production.

I regard Bell's perspective as unduly narrow. And I am not alone. Economic historians such as Joel Mokyr have long emphasized that the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment was a kind-of "information society"; others have made comparable claims for early modern Europe.

In retrospect, I have come to recognize in Bell's tripartite stage-model a variant of the stage-based model of technical change that Chandler popularized in *Visible Hand*, a topic that I reflected on in two essays that I published on Chandler's oeuvre in the *Business History Review*. And, while I am on the subject of historiography, I might take the liberty of adding that I tried, in a 1995 essay on "American His-

torians and the Concept of the Communications Revolution,” to fit Bell’s “information society” into the broad sweep of American history. In this essay, and, in more detail in *Spreading the News*, I sketched some of the main features of a pre-electric telegraph “communications revolution” that had been organized around the mail, the stagecoach, the optical telegraph, and the newspaper. It was this communications revolution that the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville observed when he toured the United States in 1831-32, and that he would later write about in *Democracy in America*. In so doing, I helped to reintroduce the concept of an early nineteenth-century “communications revolution” to the lexicon of American historians; it would later be picked up by Paul Starr in his *Creation of the Media*, before becoming a centerpiece of Daniel Walker Howe’s Pulitzer-Prize-winning *What Hath God Wrought*.

Jin: I am impressed by your contention that the invention of optical telegraphy in the 1790s and the establishment of postal distribution centers in 1800, rather than the commercialization of the electric telegraph in the 1840s, marked the epochal separation of communication from transportation that James W. Carey and others have written so much about. Do you think Carey would agree with you? Will our current view of the history of communications be revised accordingly?

John: Carey was one of the first media scholars I read, and one of the first scholars of any kind to write expansively about the electric telegraph as an agent of change. For these reasons, I own him a great debt. Our relationship is not merely intellectual: When he died, I took his position at the Columbia Journalism School, where I now teach.

I only met Carey once. It was at a communications conference

somewhere in the United States, I can't remember the city. The media sociologist Michael Schudson — who, like myself, currently teaches in Columbia's Ph. D. program in communications — facilitated the introduction, aware of our shared interest in the history of electric telegraphy. I asked Carey about the priority of the optical telegraph in the separation of communications from transportation. Carey responded that he was aware of the existence of the optical telegraph, but remained convinced that the electric telegraph marked the key turning point. We agreed to disagree. I can't remember if we talked about the postal distribution center.

I have found it gratifying that my revisionist arguments about the optical telegraph and the postal distribution center are slowly being accepted, beginning with the publication in 2000 of Headrick's *When Information Came of Age*. In my view, Carey was unduly influenced by Lewis Mumford, whose *Technics and Civilization* had been organized around the historical significance of different kinds of motive power as agent of change (wind, steam, electricity). Energy transitions matter, but so too does state-building, a factor that Carey downplayed. For Carey, the “transmission”-binding bias in American communications was a cultural imperative rather than the byproduct of political fiat. In *Spreading the News*, I made the case for governmental institutions as agents of change.

The rediscovery of the optical telegraph owes something to national pride. The French government built the biggest optical telegraph network, and, perhaps not surprisingly, French historians have long assigned the optical telegraph priority in the honor role of telecommunications breakthroughs. I agree. As the field becomes more cosmopolitan, and we are less swept up in what Carey himself termed the rhetoric of the “electrical sublime,” I would guess that a new consensus might

well emerge, in which the optical telegraph assumes its rightful place in the annals of communications.

Since you asked about the postal distribution center, let me say a bit more about this important yet often ignored institution. To transmit the mail around the country, administrators found it necessary to create a network in which certain offices were, in the language of network theory, nodes. These nodes were the distribution centers, which had been formally established by the Federalist postmaster general Joseph Habersham in 1800. Their establishment marked the decisive juncture at which the transportation of the mail was distinguished from its circulation, or what we could call its communication.

The millions and millions of pieces of mail that circulated in the nineteenth century depended on the administrative coordination that the managers of the distribution centers provided. For this reason, I would call them the nation's first middle managers — a claim that Al Chandler accepted as a revision to his contention that middle management originated in mid-nineteenth century railroads.

If we are serious about recognizing the role of communications networks as agents of change, then it would seem hard to deny that the mail, and not the telegraph, was the true “Victorian Internet.” When this analogy becomes more widely acknowledged, then I would imagine that even the postal distribution center will finally get the recognition it deserves.

Jin: You object to “imputing agency” to technology and argue that to contend that technological inventions led in some predetermined way to the establishment of a particular organizational structure or business strategy is to “obscure the historical process by imputing agency to electrical equipment, batteries, and wires.” Yet I also notice that, in the

introduction to *Network Nation*, you mention that the mail, the optical telegraph, the electric telegraph, and telephone were so different that they were organized in different ways. Could you please remind us what you mean by this?

John: The communications networks that I wrote about in *Spreading the News* and *Network Nation* were organized differently primarily because of the institutional arrangements in which they were embedded. These institutional arrangements had little to do with the motive power that facilitated the circulation of information, or what media scholars sometimes call messages. It was, for example, entirely possible for an optical telegraph to be owned and operated not by the state, but by merchants, as was the case in the United States and Great Britain.

Political economy, and not motive power, held the key. In the United States, the optical telegraph and the post office emerged in a republican political economy; the telegraph in an anti-monopoly political economy; and the telephone in a progressive political economy. That is, the independent variable was not the motive power, but the political-economic rules of the game. Technology proposed; political economy disposed.

II: Bringing Institutions Back In

Jin: Historical writing on telecommunications has been informed by different interpretative traditions. The first is associated with the so-called Toronto School of Harold A. Innis and Marshall McLuhan and their U. S. epigones James W. Carey and Neil Postman; its central concern is the challenging of counter-mythologies and the crafting of a media-centric grand narrative. I wonder if Thomas Hughes's *Networks*

of Power could be put into this tradition, given his expansive understanding of agents of change? Then there is the comparative institutional analysis approach, into which I would put your *Network Nation* and Paul Starr's *Creation of The Media: Political Origins of Modern Communication*. In the closely related field of legal studies we can also think of *The Master Switch* by Tim Wu, although as you wrote in your foreword to the Chinese edition of *Network Nation*, Wu's book relied on outdated secondary scholarship. The third approach is phenomenology, a tradition that can be stretched to include Claude Fischer's *America Calling*, Carolyn Marvin's *When Old Technologies Were New*, and Thomas Streeter's *The Net Effect: Romanticism, Capitalism, and the Internet*.

John: Can we bring together these three quite different approaches? Much depends on what questions you are asking. If you are interested, as I am, in communications networks, then it seems to me that comparative institutionalism holds the most promise. In fact, when I was in graduate school, I had hoped to work with Paul Starr (a Daniel Bell student); unfortunately, Starr didn't get tenure at Harvard, which precluded me from having him on my committee. I have already commented on my indebtedness to Innis's concept of communications "bias." Phenomenology is trickier. Communications networks have indeed been shaped by cultural norms, as Marvin and Streeter documented, and users matter, as Fischer demonstrated. Yet none of these works really engages with political economy. This is not necessarily a problem, though it does point up some enduring, and very possibly unresolvable, tensions in the field.

Where Hughes fits is an interesting question. Though he regarded himself as a contextualist, which in your tripartite scheme would prob-

ably align him with the phenomenologists, the causal significance he assigned to technological momentum has affinities with the internalism of Innis and McLuhan.

I would classify Hughes as a comparative institutionalist, though it is a tribute to the breadth of his vision that he might be put into either of your other two categories.

Let me say a bit more about Hughes, whom I met several times, and with whom I had numerous opportunities to exchange ideas. Hughes is best known for writing about big-city electrical power stations, which he termed “systems.” I have learned a great deal from him — but, perhaps above all, he taught me about the importance of the city as a unit of analysis.

Hughes’s approach to the history of technology was quite different from my mentor, Alfred Chandler. Chandler was ultimately less interested in the *context* in which large-scale organizations operated than in their *internal* workings. In the useful terminology of John Staudenmaier, author of *Technology’s Storytellers*, this made Hughes a *contextualist* and Chandler an *internalist*. I have found the distinction between internalism and contextualism useful in my own research. Like Hughes, I am a contextualist, even though I am drawn, as was Hughes himself, to the internalist agenda that preoccupied Chandler.

Hughes was more interested in language than Chandler, or, at least, he was more willing to talk about it. One year, at an annual meeting of the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT), Hughes and I were on the same panel. In his presentation, if I remember correctly, he told the audience that he was a “systems” person and that I was a “networks” person. I am quite certain that he confided this to me in private. Even though I had earlier written a book with “system” in the title, when he made this comment he was right. I remain sensitive to the problems

with the “network” concept — problems that Leo Marx, Rosalind Williams, and many others have written about. Even so I find network to be the best metaphor to describe the institutions that we have devised to circulate information from person to person over large distances and at high speed.

As Hughes’s comments suggest, he and I have a lot in common. But in one regard we are quite different. In my writing, I have emphasized the causal agency of the political economy, while Hughes has remained committed to the organization — which, famously, he called the “system.” For Hughes, the regulatory environment was an afterthought; for me, it was constitutive. Price-and-entry regulation was a precondition for the rise of the big-city telephone exchange, not a consequence of its rise. Politics for Hughes mucked thing up; I regard it as generative. Even so, Hughes — who, after all, was an exemplary historian in every regard — definitely influenced my thinking about units of analysis. Following his example, I have come to conceive of the urban telephone exchange as a *system* embedded in a larger regional, interregional, and, eventually, even national *network*. My characterization of the mail as “system” in *Spreading the News* also owed something to Hughes — though, as I noted above, I have since become more of a “networks” person than a “systems” person.

Wu’s *Master Switch*, while influential, is quite derivative and lacking in analytical heft, as Paul Duguid and Paul Starr documented in devastating reviews. While Wu wrote in a fluid and engaging style, he overplayed the importance of maverick inventors, neglected the key role of municipal governments in the regulatory process, and echoed Bell public relations hype in his characterization of Vail, whose prescience he overstated, and long-distance telephony, whose significance he exaggerated.

Fischer made too much of the conversational habits of housewives in explaining the popularization of the telephone, a common mistake in much of the scholarship published around the time he completed his research. The telephone, not the telegraph, was the first electrically mediated communications medium to have been configured as a mass service for the entire population, rather than a specialty service for an exclusive clientele. The concepts “mass service” and “specialty service,” incidentally, pay homage to the distinction that historian of technology Phil Scranton made between “mass” and “specialty” production.

But the question remains: who did the configuring? The key actors were not the users who discovered new ways of communicating by telephone — by inventing, as Fischer put it, “sociability” — but, instead, the managers of the big-city operating companies who recognized that they could make money — and, not incidentally, insulate themselves from political pressure — by aggressively marketing telephone service to the entire population. In both Chicago and New York City, this shift occurred around 1900 — long before Fischer’s California housewives began gossiping on-line.

The most intriguing challenge to my argument in my view has come not from Fischer, but from Robert MacDougall. In his splendid book, *The People’s Network*, MacDougall has made an intriguing case for the agency in the 1890s of telephone users in mid-western U. S. cities in convincing the managers of non-Bell independent telephone operating companies to popularize the new medium. Users matter. Even so, the kind of technical, administrative, and political challenges that these independent telephone companies confronted were far less complex than the challenges that faced big-city telephone companies in Chicago and New York City. For this reason, I regard 1900 — a convenient date, since it ushered in a new century — as a landmark in the

history of telecommunications, since it marked the approximate moment at which big-city telephone companies shifted from providing a specialty service for an exclusive clientele to providing a mass service for the entire population. Popularization and sociability are not the same thing. And even if you find MacDougall's account of telephone popularization more compelling — in my view it is a matter of big cities (John) versus middle sized towns (McDougall), with the most important technical, administrative, and marketing innovations originating in the former (John) — the shift he described had nothing to do with Fischer's California housewives.

Five books that you didn't mention, but that, in my view, make notable contributions to our understanding of communications networks in the period between the 1840s and the 1910s, are Ben Schwantes's *Train and the Telegraph*; Simone Müller's *Wiring the World*; Christopher Beauchamp's *Invented by Law*; Heidi Tworek's *News over Germany*; and Robert MacDougall's *People's Network*. I can also recommend, as a very readable general history of the U. S. post office, Winifred Gallagher's *How the Post Office Created America*.

Jin: The “romantic individualism” narrative that foregrounds a hero or inventor has long enjoyed a privileged place in the history of technology. *Network Nation* is a corrective to this narrative. The “romantic individualism” narrative continues to dominate today's tech media coverage and popular discourse, except that we now focus not on Samuel Morse or Theodore Vail but on Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. Why do people at different times find “romantic individualism” so compelling? How does *Network Nation* counter “romantic individualism”?

John: Romantic individualism sells books, and, by no means incident-

tally, wins patent battles. This is particularly true in the United States, where, until recently, the patent office recognized as the rightful inventor not the first to file, but the first to invent, a topic that Beauchamp explored with great sensitivity in *Invented by Law*.

The almost always laudatory, and, indeed, often fawning, preoccupation of today's journalists and tech insiders with the current generation of high-tech moguls is a byproduct not only of the influence they wield as owners and managers, but also of public relations hype. PR is part of history, and historians have an obligation to do all we can to describe it, explain how it works, and prevent it from distorting the historical record.

Hype is a neglected factor in historical writing, not only because publicity has and can shape the course of events, but also because it can inform historical interpretation. The idealization of Jobs and Zuckerberg is but the most recent chapter in the long history of the influence of corporate public relations on business history. Morse needed publicity to sell his telegraph patent rights; Vail used the press to blunt calls for government ownership. Individuals matter in history, but they don't always make history as they please. If, however, they have a capable enough PR team, they can do their best to make sure that their version of events ends up in the history books. The same, needless to say, can be said of corporations, political parties, and nations.

To underscore my point about hype, let me retell a story that I recounted in *Network Nation*. The inability of Samuel Morse to secure a market for his invention helps explain why his backers (including the patent commissioner) praised it to the skies. How else could he win the congressional support he needed to convince Congress to buy him out?

Morse's electric telegraph became famous not because it was the first to be commercialized: it was not, having been preceded by the

commercialization in Great Britain of an electric telegraph that had been invented by William Cooke and Charles Wheatstone.

Why then do we remember Morse and not Cooke and Wheatstone? In large part, because of the influence of hype on the course of events — and on history writing.

Morse had no choice but to publicize his telegraph. This was because, unlike Cooke and Wheatstone, Morse lacked a reliable market. Cooke and Wheatstone had discovered that railroads would pay to use the electric telegraph as a signaling device. This was not true of railroads in the United States, as Ben Schwantes demonstrated in his prize-winning *Train and The Telegraph*. And so Morse was stuck: he had to publicize the telegraph, since, unlike Cooke and Wheatstone, he didn't have a reliable user that was willing to foot the bill.

To tempt investors, Morse's silent partner Francis O. J. Smith praised Morse to the skies (even though Smith personally despised Morse as a charlatan and a fool). Morse's invention also received lavish coverage in patent commissioner Henry Leavitt Ellsworth's annual reports. Morse's invention helped Ellsworth not only to boost the reputation of the government agency over which he presided, but also to advertise American inventive genius in an age in which Great Britain proclaimed itself the "workshop of the world."

Another consideration may well have shaped Ellsworth's decision. Morse had fallen hopelessly in love with Ellsworth's daughter, Anne — as Ellsworth well knew — raising the possibility that, by boosting Morse, Ellsworth may have been helping to try to secure for his daughter a handsome dowry. Anne is best known as the woman who is credited with choosing for the first telegraph message the Biblical phrase "What Hath God Wrought." For Morse, she was, or so he hoped, his future bride.

Morse's "romantic individualism" was very different from the aura that has come to surround Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg. Morse was an artist and not a promoter and he had no interest in commercializing the new medium himself. Instead, Morse hoped to sell his invention to the very government that had awarded him his patent. Ellsworth — the patent commissioner — did everything he could to close the deal. Nice work if you can get it. The only problem was, Congress wouldn't go along — and much to Morse's chagrin the telegraph was commercialized as a private enterprise.

What began as hype became history, and, over time, a publicity campaign gone wrong became transmogrified into a simple-minded fairy tale about Morse's genius. In this retelling, Morse fought single-handedly against all manner of adversaries, and Anne Ellsworth became not Morse's love interest, but merely a star-stuck little girl in the presence of the Great Man.

Morse was by no means the last American telegraph promoter to turn to publicity to improve his position. In the 1870s and 1880s, Jay Gould, then the nation's most notorious financial speculator, manipulated the press on numerous occasions to affect the price of Western Union shares — another media event that I documented in detail in *Network Nation*.

Publicity was, if anything, even more consequential for the history of the telephone. To blunt public pressure for government ownership, Bell publicists popularized the idea that long-distance telephony was one of the technical wonders of the age. If the public identified Bell as innovative, lawmakers would be less inclined to buy it out.

Jin: We cannot, of course, ignore the importance of culture in the popularization of the telephone. As we know, Carolyn Marvin's *When Old*

Technologies Were New emphasizes cultural determinants such as gender. In *Network Nation* you mentioned that office clerks in Chicago gossiped about sports on the telephone, yet Claude Fischer thinks that women in small towns in California drove the popularization of the telephone, and in my research, I found that women in Shanghai were quite enthusiastic about shopping by telephone. What then was more important, culture or institutions?

John: The one-sentence answer is that institutions and culture both matter, but that I have found, in my research, that institutions matter more.

I am not surprised that Shanghai women liked to shop by telephone. Many women in the United States did too. Yet I have not seen any evidence that telephone shopping posed a problem for operating company managers. Women rarely lived in big-city commercial centers, the epicenter of telephone congestion. Telephone managers in the 1890s and 1900s devoted a great deal of thought and resources to reducing the call-connection delay. Office clerks clogging telephone lines to gossip about sports and their personal affairs was one of the most disruptive factors that they could not control. Fischer mostly wrote about the post-First World War period, long after the initial popularization of the telephone in Chicago and New York City, which, as I observed in my response to a previous question, occurred around 1900.

The business strategy of big-city Bell-affiliated telephone companies helps to explain why telephone managers in the 1890s occasionally blamed women for gossiping on-line. Garrulous male office clerks posed a more serious operational problem, since the most congested telephone exchanges were located in the downtown business district, which was in this period an overwhelmingly male preserve. Blaming

women for a problem that had in fact been caused by men helped telephone company officials maintain good relations with their most valuable customers — that is, the businessmen who paid for flat-rate telephone service. The vilification of women as loquacious gossips helped to discredit flat-rate telephone billing, hastening the shift in Chicago, New York, and several other big-city exchanges to measured service. Operator-assisted switching was expensive, impeding telephone popularization. Local flat-rate service would not return until several decades later, following the widespread introduction of the automatic telephone exchange.

Jin: Specialists in media and communication studies are often fascinated by the *newness* of a particular technology, especially if it can be plausibly characterized as path-breaking. People tend to constantly project too many unrealistic aspirations onto new media objects and turn a deaf ear to the institutional or cultural contexts embedded in technology. Since both the postal system and the telephone were once “new media,” how does *Spreading the News* and *Network Nation* deal with “newness”?

John: The novelty of the telegraph was a problem for its first promoters, since, at least at first, they had no reliable market. This circumstance goes far toward explaining, as I have already discussed, why there was so much more effusive commentary about the telegraph in the United States than in Great Britain, and why we remember American telegraph inventor Samuel Morse and not the British inventors William Cooke and Charles Wheatstone. Cooke and Wheatstone had the railroad: Morse looked to Congress to buy him out.

The telephone was less novel than the telegraph: it was basically a high-end message delivery service. It is worth recalling, for example,

that the average distance of a telephone call originating in 1900 in Chicago (then the second largest city in the United States) was a mere 3.4 miles. This is one reason, among many, that the telephone was less hyped. Merchants, professionals, and industrialists had a pressing need to remain in touch with their suppliers and customers. If the call-connection delay could be reduced — a big “if,” at least in the 1880s, given the limited state-of-the-art of switchboard design — and the network was built up enough to connect the right kind of people, business users were willing to foot the bill.

Newness, in short, is not only or even primarily an intrinsic attribute of a network; no less significant was the political, economic, and cultural setting in which the network evolved. In some instances, indeed, newness can be little more than promotional hype.

III: Politics Had Artifacts

Jin: In one passage in *Network Nation*, you include a very important phrase: “politics had artifacts.” How do you interpret that? Is this a reversal of Langdon Winner’s “Do Artifacts Have Politics?”

John: I was indeed thinking of Winner — a political theorist whose work I much admire. Winner’s basic unit of analysis was the technical artifact — such as a bridge or a nuclear power plant. He is concerned with the effects of these artifacts on political forms and cultural norms. My unit of analysis is the political economy. The telegraph and the telephone evolved differently for reasons that had less to do with technology or economics than with politics and culture. Winner is less interested in this relationship, which is why I found useful his provocative question “do artifacts have politics?” By recasting it, I highlighted a contrast

in emphasis and in method.

Jin: Your book argues that though the telephone is technically indebted to the telegraph, organizationally it is closer to the mail. How do you distinguish innovation from invention, and what do you mean by that distinction?

John: The telegraph and the telephone both rely on electricity as a motive power. But they are otherwise quite different. The first telephone operating companies had more in common with message delivery services and gas works than with telegraph companies. When Theodore Vail became president of Bell, he built on his experience at the Post Office Department. Innovation is the scaling up of invention, through its commercialization. When an invention became widely used, it became a genuine innovation, making it for the comparative institutionalist, the more appropriate subject for inquiry.

The maintenance of communications networks is also, I might add, a worthy topic for research. Though I didn't write about maintenance much in either *Spreading the News* or *Network Nation*, it has been drawn to my attention as a historical subject by Lee Vinsel and Andrew L. Russell in their influential recent book, *The Innovation Delusion*.

Jin: We know that technology is a central force and driving mechanism in capitalism, with the business firm as its primary institutional unit. How did *Network Nation* place itself at the intersection of three different academic genres: the history of technology, business history, and comparative institutionalism?

John: *Network Nation* explored the relationship between the political

economy and the certain technically advanced business enterprises, of which the largest and most powerful were Western Union, the Bell System, and the largest big-city telephone operating companies, including the Chicago Telephone Company and the New York Telephone Company. I tried to identify key decision makers (as is *de rigueur* for a business history), and to show how technical artifacts, such as the telephone switchboard, evolved (as is customary for a history of technology). I was also interested in the political economy in which these organizations operated (a keynote of comparative institutionalism).

A fourth subfield that I drew upon, incidentally, is known as American Political Development (or APD). This subfield, which originated in political science, emphasizes path dependence, heuristics, and institutional legacies. Each of these concepts has proved very useful in my thinking about communications networks.

Jin: I read *Network Nation* as part of an academic dialogue between you and your mentor, Alfred Chandler, Jr. In *Visible Hand*, Chandler charted the rise of the salaried managerial class in organizing and running large-scale enterprises, and contended that the corporation's organizational structure developed in response to its business strategy. You argue, in contrast, that the business strategy of communications firms such as Western Union and Bell had been shaped by political structures (governmental institutions and civic ideals). But I notice that the final chapter of *Network Nation* affirms the value of managerial capitalism, as you refer to the rise of Bell's managerial elite as a self-perpetuating class that resisted the financial pressure of investors, while they negotiated and compromised with the government. This elite was the coordinator that made the Bell System work. Does this go back to Chandler's argument?

John: This question gets to the heart of a topic that, in retrospect, I have come to regard as central to the argument I made in the final chapter of *Network Nation*: the legitimization of the managerial corporation. It is a topic that I have returned to now in my current project on anti-monopoly thought.

When I began my research for *Network Nation*, I assumed, following Chandler, that the railroad was the first managerial corporation, and that the managerial corporation originated in the 1850s, when the four East Coast trunk lines crossed the Appalachian Mountains. Middle management in government, it bears repeating, had existed in the Post Office Department since 1800: someone had to staff the distributions centers. In business, however, middle management — and with it, the managerial corporation, would not emerge until mid-century.

Chandler wrote more in *Visible Hand* about the railroad than the telegraph. Yet when Chandler wrote about the telegraph, he followed Robert Luther Thompson's *Wiring a Continent*, which had characterized Western Union as a “natural” monopoly following its takeover of its two primary rivals in 1866. Thompson reached this conclusion, I am convinced, because he was trying to find a convenient way to wrap up his book, which had devoted many chapters to the pre-Civil War period. To justifying ending his book in 1866, he mystified the history of the telegraph for the rest of the century.

For Chandler, then, the managerial corporation had been legitimated in both transportation and communication by 1866.

My research led me to raise questions about both of these claims. Though the railroad did have multiple layers of management, it would only slowly acquire legitimacy as a managerial enterprise, that is, an enterprise that, while ostensibly owned by its shareholders, was in fact operated by and for a self-perpetuating managerial elite. Richard White

has made this point quite effectively in *Railroaded*, his recent history of the transcontinental railroad, in which he shows how financial insiders, rather than expert managers, dominated the inner circles of the first railroad corporations to span the continent.

Similarly, while Western Union was the dominant network provider in 1866, no one regarded its ascendancy as apolitical.

For these reasons, I would now date the ascendancy of the managerial corporation to the 1910s, rather than to the mid-nineteenth century. For it was only at this time that the managerial corporation became widely accepted as a legitimate form of business enterprise.

Chandler sidestepped the question of legitimacy by downplaying the influence on the business enterprise of governmental institutions and civic ideals. In addition, he wrote virtually nothing about the public relations campaigns that corporate managers launched to legitimize their enterprises. Bell managers invented corporate public relations in the 1910s to forestall a government takeover, and ramped up their efforts following the U. S. entry in the First World War in 1917. PR matters, even if its significance is often downplayed, forgotten, and repressed. Roland Marchand's magnificent *Creating the Corporate Soul* — which brilliantly dissected Bell's 1910s PR campaign — showed how the process worked.

IV: The Long History of Anti-Monopoly

Jin: In your study of the history of telecommunications you demonstrate that anti-monopoly has fostered innovation, and that market segmentation, municipal franchise regulation, and government entrepreneurship have led to a series of highly innovative communication systems from the Post Office Department to the Bell System. Why is a net-

work organization like Bell more likely to acquire a monopoly than other firms? Why were policies such as uniform rates (or what today might be called “net neutrality”) counterproductive?

John: The willingness of contemporaries to invest great significance in what economists today call network externalities can help explain why the Bell System took the form that it did. By 1907, for example, telephone experts agreed that rival big-city telephone operating companies were wasteful, a huge win for Bell. This outcome, however, was a consequence not only of technology and economics, but also of politics and culture.

Municipal franchise law established the rules of the game, and it could be very expensive to obtain the urban rights-of-way necessary to string telephone wires. Political corruption was endemic and many city officials were in on the take.

The specter of corrupt city aldermen profiting from municipal franchise politics greatly troubled reformers. Ending intra-city telephone competition was one way to limit graft. Telephone company managers agreed. By re-envisioning telephone service as not a privilege but a right — a shift that hastened, and was in part hastened by, the rapid expansion of their user base — they built an electoral bloc interested in good telephone service that was large enough to enable them to prevail against corrupt city officials.

What deserves emphasis, in short, is the creative role of government regulation, and in particular, in the case of the telephone, municipal franchise law. Regulation can foster innovation that makes the fruits of invention accessible to all. In the case of the telephone, it hastened its popularization — which I defined as the reconfiguration of a specialty service for an exclusive clientele as a mass service for the entire popula-

tion.

The telegraph was more lightly regulated than the telephone: predictably enough, it was much less innovative. The only exception was a brief period of hothouse growth in the 1870s that had been spurred by the anti-monopoly National Telegraph Act of 1866. The National Telegraph Act had been intended to promote competition among telegraph network providers, and for a brief period, it worked. Taking advantage of the act's provisions, rival telegraph magnates William Orton and Jay Gould squared off in an epic contest to gain control of patents held by the inventors Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. In a remarkably short period of time, the Edison-Bell rivalry led to four blockbuster inventions: broadband telegraphy, the telephone, the phonograph, and the electric power station.

The telephone was always highly regulated, and, with a few exceptions, such as automatic telephony, the Bell System would remain for much of the twentieth-century — and especially following the establishment of Bell Labs in 1925 — a world leader in churning out blockbuster inventions of all kinds. Telegraph rates varied by type of user (news brokers got lower rates than merchants); telephone rates varied not only by user type (business versus residential) but also by various other criteria (including quality of service). Beginning in 1910, Congress declared the telegraph and the telephone to be common carriers under federal law. Common carriage did not oblige network providers to charge the same price for the same service, as proponents of “net neutrality” would later advocate; rather, it fostered a byzantine array of cross subsidies that would remain central to the Bell System until its court-ordered dissolution in 1984.

Net neutrality is not neutral. On the contrary, it is biased in favor of information-intensive Big Tech platforms such as Google, Amazon,

and Netflix to the disadvantage of information service providers, brick-and-mortar retailers, and the press. Telephone rates were always regulated — first at the municipal level and for much of the twentieth century at the state level. No one regarded these regulations as neutral; on the contrary, they were intended to promote a particular vision of the common good.

Jin: How is the monopoly power of today’s Big Tech platforms different from the monopoly power of the industrial trusts of a century ago, such as Standard Oil and the Bell System? How can the historical tradition of anti-monopoly in telecommunications help us critically think about monopoly today?

John: These are searching questions that lie at the heart of the “new Brandeisian” critique of Big Tech platforms that FTC commissioner Lina Khan has embraced, drawing on the work of non-neoclassical economists, historians, and journalists.

Let me highlight a few comparisons that may help to provide a perspective on current events. First: my premise. Big Tech publicists have repeatedly tried to convince the public that we are living in a brave new world in which all the rules have changed. This is simply not true. Big Tech continues to operate in a political economy that was built up over the decades. By challenging the hype, historians can underscore the merits of longstanding principles such as common carriage, market segmentation, and even municipal price-and-entry regulations.

Common carriage — that is, the presumption that a network provider has an obligation to provide access to a service on a non-preferential basis — is a cornerstone of American communications policy. Common carriage is not the same thing as net neutrality: cross subsi-

dization has been the norm, with different classes of information paying different rates. Within a class, however, all information has been treated alike.

Market segmentation has shaped U. S. communications policy for over one hundred years. The 1913 McReynolds settlement, for example, which is often misleadingly called the Kingsbury Commitment — thanks in large part to Bell public relations hype — forced Bell to sell off its shares in Western Union, which it had acquired in 1909. Though the McReynolds settlement is rarely featured in histories of U. S. communication policy, it had far reaching consequences, since it doomed Vail’s vision of “universal service,” which Vail understood to embrace low-cost short-distance telephone service and low-cost long-distance telegraph service. To put the first great Big Tech anti-trust settlement in terms that might be easier to grasp, the McReynolds settlement cost “AT&T” its second “T”: AT&T, after all, stands for “American Telephone & Telegraph.”

Anti-trust pressure in the 1920s blocked Bell from becoming a player in radio broadcasting. In 1956, the justice department obliged Bell to license its patents on a non-preferential basis, and to exit the computer business; in 1984, it chose to give up its operating companies to settle yet another antitrust suit, opening up the market to rivals that in the years to come would hasten a great deal of experimentation in the telecommunications sector. Anti-trust is not the only regulatory tool that the government has at its disposal. Yet it reminds us that the future of telecommunications need not resemble its past.

Municipal price-and-entry regulations were of enormous significance in the early years of the telephone business, and in the United States would remain in place until 1996. The absence of such regulations in Canadian cities — as Robert MacDougall has demonstrated —

slowed the popularization of telephone service, a nice illustration of the analytical potential of comparative institutionalism.

V: Toward a Digital Future

Jin: It has been over ten years since the publication of *Network Nation*. The past decade has seen the emergence of a global point-to-point digital interconnected society, and the invasion of our daily lives by the Big Tech platforms. If we were to extrapolate from your argument, we might conclude that these changes have been “products not only of technological imperatives and economic incentives, but also of governmental institutions and civic ideals.” Given the upcoming publication of the Chinese translation of *Network Nation*, why is the U. S. experience important for readers in different institutional and cultural contexts, such as China?

John: Though the U. S. political economy is very different from China’s, political interventions in both countries have powerfully shaped the institutional order. Big Tech platforms are, in one form or another, here to stay. Yet their power can be constrained.

Decentralization can be planned, as Chandler reminded us in his pioneering books and articles on the American corporation. Planned decentralization is also, of course, a hallmark of federalism — a cornerstone of the American experiment in self-government.

In the years since the publication of *Network Nation*, it has become increasingly evident to thoughtful lawmakers from across the political spectrum that Big Tech imperils the constitutional order that has traditionally fostered the common good. Amazon, Facebook, and Google — to name but three of today’s High Tech behemoths — have become

powerful actors on the global stage, with a raft of implications for innovation, inequality, and civic norms.

The U. S. experience can help Chinese leaders recognize that markets are politically constructed. Anti-monopoly laws have proved effective in segmenting markets to promote what contemporaries called “fair trade,” while common carriage regulations have bolstered insurgent new entrants and restrained incumbents. Municipal regulation, a regulatory tool that is often disparaged by policy analysts, has proved surprisingly effective in popularizing new media, such as municipal broadband.

Jin: In the introduction of *Network Nation*, you wrote that “the network metaphor highlights the spatiality of early American telecommunications.” Chicago and New York played a crucial role in the early history of American telephony. Similarly, the port cities Shanghai and Tianjin have played an important role in Chinese telecommunications. My question, then, is twofold: on the one hand, what does a city mean to a telecommunications network? on the other hand, what does the telecommunications network mean to the city?

John: Cities have for centuries been seedbeds of innovation not only in business, but also in public policy. Nowhere is this more true than in telecommunications. Spatial propinquity can help create a fertile ground for the implementation of new methods and techniques. Recurring contests over rights-of-way created incentives that hastened popularization, especially if municipal price-and-entry regulations remained in place. Unfortunately, historians of telecommunications routinely assume that the nation is the most relevant unit of analysis, putting at center stage an actor that, at least in the formative era of the tele-

phone, properly belongs in the wings.

The critical role of the city as an agent of change was one of the most important discoveries that I made in the course of researching *Network Nation*. I had not initially intended to write about big-city telephone operating companies; in fact, when I discovered how prominently they figured in the documentary record, I initially felt demoralized. How was I possibly going to finish a project that had already taken me more time than I had anticipated? I had two small children at the time, and I was eager to get on with my life. And so too, perhaps needless to say, was my wife!

Once I discovered how important cities were to the early history of the telephone, I had what one might describe as a gestalt shift. A subject that virtually every other historian of communications had regarded as peripheral, with the notable exceptions of Robert MacDougall, Meighan Maguire, and Robert Horwitz, turned out to be absolutely central. Spatial propinquity mattered, not only for telephone managers coping with the unprecedented challenge of shortening the call-connection delay in big-city telephone exchanges, but also for telephone inventors.

Chicago and New York City were the key sites of innovation, with Chicago being ground zero. In both cities, municipal franchise law set the stage. Yet people mattered too. In Chicago, the popularization of the new medium owed much to the visionary leadership of Angus Hibbard, the manager of the Bell-affiliated Chicago Telephone Company. In the 1890s, Hibbard introduced innovative high-speed operator-assisted switchboards, experimented with new kinds of telephone sets — including the pay-as-you-go nickel-in-the-slot — and devised new billing schemes that helped to shift telephone users from flat rate to measures service. Hibbard's strategy effectively mobilized the city's dense network of technical expertise: the Chicago Telephone Com-

pany's downtown telephone exchanges were located a short distance from the massive factories of Western Electric, Bell's equipment supplier. Flat rates were regressive: they favored big-business users and impeded widespread adoption. With the introduction of measured service, it became for the first time commercially feasible to provide at least a basic level of service to the entire population. By 1900, a new age had begun.

Jin: My last question relates to the history of technology. The global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the indispensability of information and communications technology (ICT) for parcel delivery and social interaction — e.g. in academic conferences organized through Zoom and Tencent. ICT is fast becoming a focus for research throughout the humanities and the social sciences. One is reminded of this statement by Mark Poster: “One cannot but see earlier developments from the situation of the present.” Are institutions today different from the institutions you studied?

John: In the United States, China, and many other nations, Big Tech poses lawmakers with a modern-day variant of the *imperio in imperium* problem that perplexed political theorists in the Middle Ages. In the present, as in the past, politics have artifacts and political structure shapes business strategy. But what is the relevant political unit? The political economy that shaped the telegraph and the telephone in the United States was at once national, subnational, and transnational. When we think about ICT today, we might want to keep this in mind: the nation is not the only, and in some instances not even the most consequential, unit of analysis.

More communications is not necessarily the same thing as better communications either now or in the past. Historical inquiry can show

how mutual understanding has strengthened essential social bonds, promoted worthwhile innovations, and fostered moral progress. Yet nothing is certain and, if things go badly, poor communications is, as an independent factor, rarely to blame. In interpersonal relations, as well as in our fleeting attempts to glimpse eternity, misunderstanding is a feature and not a bug.

Let me add, as a final observation, that I am very grateful for the care you have taken in reading my work and posing such searching and well-informed questions. I have learned a good deal from this exchange, and look forward to learning more about your own promising research on the history of Chinese telecommunications.

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Julie Williams Named 2021 Kobre Award Winner

The American Journalism Historians Association has announced Julie Hedgepeth Williams of Samford University as the recipient of the 2021 Sidney Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Journalism History.

Since joining the AJHA more than 25 years ago, Williams has been one of the organization's most active and dedicated members. She served on the board of directors from 1999-2001 and was AJHA president in 2008-2009. She served as the host for the 2009 convention in Birmingham, Alabama. She also chaired the Publications Committee from 1997-2006 and served on the Dissertation Award Committee from 1998-2003.

David Sloan, who nominated Williams for the award, wrote that her work in media history and her contributions to the AJHA comprise exactly the type of record that the Kobre Award was established to recognize.

"She is a truly outstanding historian, and hardly anyone in the history of the AJHA has contributed more than she has," Sloan said.

He nominated her because, along with her other achievements, she has written several popular books that began as AJHA papers.

"It's so gratifying that my work counted so much and made such a difference," Williams said. "I'm so touched that my work with AJHA was the spark that gave rise to my books, and that my books gave rise to this award."

Several AJHA stalwarts — including past presidents and Kobre Award winners — wrote letters supporting Williams’s nomination, noting her excellence in research, service, and teaching. Additionally, they cited the numerous public speeches and performances Williams has given based on her historical work.

“From 1997, the year she won the AJHA’s first doctoral dissertation prize, to the present, Dr. Williams has shown great enthusiasm for making the fruits of journalism history available to a wide audience,” Maurine Beasley wrote.

Those supporting Williams’s nomination also mentioned her dedication to the AJHA Southeast Symposium, an annual winter conference for student research. She has brought many students to the conference, several of whom have won awards and had their work published in the AJHA’s student research journal, the *Southeastern Review of Journalism History*.

“She is a skilled and innovative teacher who has conveyed her love of history to her students through teaching them how to undertake and successfully complete significant research projects,” wrote *Southeastern Review* editor Debbie van Tuyl.

AJHA Service Awards Chair Tom Mascaro said the effusive praise for years of service by so many past Kobre winners is a testament to the esteem AJHA members hold for Williams.

“Julie is being welcomed into an exclusive club holding the most demanding admissions criteria,” Mascaro said. “She has shown herself to be selfless in giving her time, talents, and expertise to history, cultivating others’ careers, outreach to the larger community, and with a demonstrative personality that inspires others to do good for the field.”

Call for Papers: Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression

The steering committee of the twenty-ninth annual Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression solicits papers dealing with U.S. mass media of the 19th century, the Civil War in fiction and history, freedom of expression in the 19th century, presidents and the 19th century press, images of race and gender, sensationalism and crime in 19th century newspapers, and the antebellum press and the causes of the Civil War. Selected papers will be presented during the conference Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, November 11–13, 2021. The top three papers and the top three student papers will be honored accordingly.

For readers of this journal, the Symposium coordinator, Dr. David Sachsman, has extended the paper deadline to September 6, 2021.

The Symposium will be conducted via ZOOM (for both speakers and participants). If possible, it will also be conducted in person. The Symposium meets at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

The purpose of the conference is to share current research and to develop a series of monographs. This year the steering committee will pay special attention to papers and panel presentations on the Civil War and the press, presidents and the 19th century press, news reports of 19th century epidemics, and coverage of immigrants, African Americans, and Native Americans. Since 2000, the Symposium has produced eight distinctly different books of readings: *The Civil War and the Press* (2000); *Memory and Myth: The Civil War in Fiction and Film from Uncle Tom's Cabin to Cold Mountain* (2007); *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism* (2008); *Seeking a Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19th Century Press* (2009); *Sensationalism: Murder,*

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Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting (2013); *A Press Divided: Newspaper Coverage of the Civil War* (2014); *After the War: The Press in a Changing America, 1865-1900* (2017); and *The Antebellum Press: Setting the Stage for Civil War* (2019). The panel presentations from last year's Symposium were recorded and aired on C-SPAN.

The symposium is sponsored by the George R. West, Jr. Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Communication Department, the Walter and Leona Schmitt Family Foundation Research Fund, and the Hazel Dicken-Garcia Fund for the Symposium, and because of this sponsorship, no registration fee will be charged.

Papers should be able to be presented within 20 minutes, at least 10–15 pages long. Please send your paper (including a 200–300 word abstract) as a Word attachment to west-chair-office@utc.edu.

For more information, contact:

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<https://new.utc.edu/arts-and-sciences/communication/west-chair>

PR Museum Founder to Receive AJHA Distinguished Service Award

The American Journalism Historians Association will recognize Shelley Spector with its Distinguished Service to Journalism History Award.

This award is reserved for those generally outside the field of academe who have made major contributions to the preservation of journalism history. It has been given only four other times in the AJHA's 40-year history.

AJHA Service Awards Chair Tom Mascaro said Spector's effort to create the Museum of Public Relations and preserve primary sources that inform the history of the field stands as a singular contribution to journalism history.

"What I find most compelling, though, about the committee's selection of Ms. Spector to receive the rare honor of AJHA's Distinguished Service to Journalism History Award is their recognition of the museum's vital contributions by Black, women, Latinx, Asian American, and Pacific Islander pioneers and their robust heritage within public relations," Mascaro said. "This DSJH Award will open eyes and archives for scholars to ask questions of the documents Ms. Spector has secured for posterity."

Spector is founder and director of the Museum of Public Relations, a non-profit in New York that serves researchers, educators, students, and practitioners with a large collection of rare documents, oral histories, photographs, and film highlighting the impact of PR in American culture, business, and politics.

Janice Hume, who nominated Spector for the award, noted that the museum does more than just maintain its collections; it presides over myriad activities that support scholars and practitioners, including a free lecture series, webinars, and book publishing. In her letter supporting the nomination, Karla Gower added that Spector promotes diversity and brings forgotten voices in public relations to the forefront.

"It is clear that Shelley has done more to make public relations history accessible through her extraordinary effort than any other individ-

ual,” Gower wrote. “Even more important perhaps, she has brought it to life for a whole new generation of students.”

Spector said that students love poring through the museum’s soon-to-be-digitized historic newspapers and magazines — some from the early 19th century — as well as its collection of communications technologies like stereographs, manual typewriters, telegraphs, and candlestick phones.

A journalism major herself, Spector said she long has had a passion for media history. As a child, she started collecting old magazines and newspapers and recording TV news reports on her reel-to-reel tape recorder. These became some of the first artifacts to be preserved in the Museum of Public Relations when it launched in 1997.

“Even though we are a museum dedicated to teaching the history of public relations, we realized long ago the importance of teaching journalism history right alongside it, and we applaud AJHA’s call for more ‘J’ classes to teach media history,” Spector said.

John Maxwell Hamilton Wins AJHA Book of the Year Award

The American Journalism Historians Association has selected John Maxwell Hamilton of Louisiana State University as 2021 Book of the Year winner for *Manipulating the Masses: Woodrow Wilson and the Birth of American Propaganda*.

The other three Finalists for this year’s award were Stephen Bates of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for *An Aristocracy of Critics: Luce, Hutchins, Niebuhr, and the Committee That Redefined Freedom of the Press*; Erik S. Gellman of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for *Troublemakers: Chicago Freedom Struggles through the Lens of Art*

Shay; and Patrick S. Washburn of Ohio University and Chris Lamb of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis for *Sports Journalism: A History of Glory, Fame, and Technology*.

The American Journalism Historians Association Book of the Year Award recognizes the best book in journalism history or mass media history published during the previous calendar year. For the 2021 award, the book must have been granted a first-time copyright in 2020.

Hamilton's book is "a brilliant exposé of the machinations of misbegotten missions of George Creel, his cronies, his Committee on Public Information and their impact on Woodrow Wilson," explained AJHA member Susan Swanberg. "The throughline from the Creel/Wilson era to our era is unmistakable — right down to the rifling of one's opponents' communications. Now, however, we apply Creel's dark arts to own domestic 'enemies,' too. The manufacture of consent continues ..."

Fellow association member Dianne Bragg added that "the importance of this book cannot be overstated," while Patrick File described it as "sweeping in scope but detailed in delivery."

Hamilton said he was delighted and fortunate to receive a second award for a book. He won his first award in 2010, for *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*.

"But this one is different," Hamilton said, "in the sense that I hope that the award helps draw attention to the threat posed by government propaganda. It is a thorny subject, not easy to address effectively. But given the threat it poses to democracy, it cries out for attention from scholars and journalists."

Award finalist Stephen Bates said that he has been fascinated with the subject of his book — the Hutchins Commission — ever since the '80s, when he first came across its report, *A Free and Responsible Press*,

in a used bookstore. When he started on his research, he was particularly interested how the committee sought to make social responsibility for the press somehow enforceable, given the protections ensured by the First Amendment.

“Finally, I was interested in the reputation of the report in journalism schools, which (the report) sharply disparages,” Bates said. “Journalism teachers mostly hated it at first, but gradually it became part of the canon. A major reason, I think, is that journalism faculties shifted from practitioners to academics. In other words, journalism professors increasingly respected the report as they became more like the people who wrote it.”

Erik Gellman, another award finalist, said he had an opportunity to meet Art Shay, who is well-known for his celebrity photographs, and was surprised to learn that Shay had a largely unpublished and massive archive of social movement photographs of Chicago from the 1940s through the '60s.

“Our subsequent collaboration turned out to be a perfect pairing because he supplied the incredible photographs that depicted the dynamic energy that erupted on Chicago’s streets, and I knew and further researched their history to give these photographs specific context and significance,” Gellman said. “... They show us the ecstasy and agony, frustration and satisfaction, and militancy and repression that sprung up from the streets of Chicago a half century ago.”

Finally, Pat Washburn and Chris Lamb said that a great deal of long, hard work went into their book on sports journalism. “And the award means that it was worthwhile,” Washburn explained. “It would be a disappointment to write a book that went unnoticed and no one cared about.”

“This book was written because no one had ever done an in-depth

examination of the entire history of American sports journalism,” he added. “Various parts of it had been focused on, such as: radio and television and sports journalism; biographies and autobiographies of famous sports journalists; different sports, such as baseball and boxing, and sports journalism; and the contributions of black sports journalists and women sports journalists. But no one had written the entire story and showed how and why sports journalism changed in this country over almost 300 years.”

Lamb said the journalism profession doesn’t give sports reporting the respect it deserves, or there would be a Pulitzer Prize category for sportswriting.

“I hope that someone who has never given much thought to sports or sports journalism will pick up this book, read it, and have a change of opinion about sports and sports journalism,” he said.

Top Papers Selected for 2021 AJHA Conference

Scholars representing five North American universities will be honored for research papers they will present at the American Journalism Historians Association (AJHA) 2021 National Conference. The 40th annual AJHA convention will take place virtually Oct. 8-9.

Madeleine Liseblad of California State University, Long Beach, and Gregory Pitts of Middle Tennessee State University won the Wm. David Sloan Award for Outstanding Faculty Paper for “‘A Good Honest Journeyman Newspapering’: Billboard’s Lee Zhito Exposes EditorIALIZING at George A. Richards’ ‘Station of the Stars.’”

Both the Jean Palmegiano Award for Outstanding International/Transnational Journalism History and the Maurine Beasley Award for

Outstanding Paper on Women's History went to Elisabeth Fondren of St. John's University for "When Paris Hears the 'Alerte': *New York Evening Sun* War Correspondent Leonora Raines, Military-Press Tensions, and Reporting the French Home Front (1914-1918)."

Alexia Little of the University of Georgia also won two awards, the Robert Lance Memorial Award for Outstanding Student Paper and the Wally Eberhard Award for Outstanding Paper on Media and War, for "Unconquering the Banner: The Negotiation of Civil War Memory in Confederate Displays."

The J. William Snorgrass Award for Outstanding Paper on Minority Journalism History went to Michael Fuhlhage, Darryl Frazier, Keena Neal, and Anna Lindner of Wayne State University for "If Ever Saints Wept and Hell Rejoiced, It Must Have Been Over the Passage of That Law': The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act in Detroit River Borderlands Newspapers, 1851-1852."

David Stephen Bennett Wins 2021 Blanchard Dissertation Prize

The American Journalism Historians Association has announced David Stephen Bennett of the University of North Florida as the winner of the 2021 Margaret A. Blanchard Dissertation Prize.

Bennett, who completed his dissertation at Michigan State University under the direction of Michael Stamm, was recognized for "Framing Atlanta: Local Newspapers' Search for a Nationally Appealing Racial Image (1920-1960)."

"The AJHA is one of the most important voices in contextualizing the media's relationship with our society," Bennett said. "When I began my doctoral studies, I set out to contribute to this discussion, and I am

awed and emboldened by the AJHA's recognition of my scholarship."

The AJHA has granted the Blanchard Prize to the best doctoral dissertation dealing with mass communication history annually since 1997.

Three other scholars received honorable mention from the Blanchard Dissertation Prize Committee.

Rosalyn Narayan has been recognized for "Slavery in Print: Slaveholding Ideology and Anxiety in Antebellum Southern Newspapers, 1830-1861," completed at the University of Warwick under the direction of Tim Lockley.

"My fascination with the southern newspaper press of the antebellum period increased significantly as my research progressed throughout my doctoral studies, and the AJHA has played an important role in strengthening my interests," said Narayan. "I look forward to publishing further articles and a monograph from my doctoral research."

Marama Whyte earned her Honorable Mention for "The Press for Equality: Women Journalists, Grassroots Activism, and the Feminist Fight for American Media," completed at The University of Sydney under the direction of Michael A. McDonnell.

"I am delighted to have my dissertation recognised by the AJHA," said Whyte. "The activism which women journalists undertook to reshape the news media during the 1970s was meaningful and significant, and it is gratifying to have this research commended by an association that has fostered such important work in histories of women in media."

Stephan R. Pigeon earned his award for "Scissors-and-Paste: The Labour, Law, and Practice of Circulating Journalism in the British Newspaper and Periodical Press, 1842-1911," completed at McGill University under the direction of Elizabeth Elbourne and Jason Opal.

“Scissors-and-paste journalism was commonplace throughout the press but it is nevertheless a challenging phenomenon to capture beyond the fact of textual reuse,” Pigeon said. “To really understand what this practice was all about, my methodology has been to identify ‘flashpoints’ — where the disagreement over a particular use of scissors-and-paste journalism was substantial enough to generate debate among journalists, the reading public, and lawmakers — and use them as case studies.”

Bennett explained that he began his study with a desire to understand how American media “has framed our discussions of race within our public spaces.”

“Many scholars talk about Jim Crow as the physical segregation of our communities, but segregation has left a major fingerprint on our media industry as well,” he added. “Our country has a long and shameful history of silencing discussions about racial issues in the media, and framing Black arguments to meet white audience expectations.”

Bennett said that one of the most disturbing things he learned when he began exploring the history of Atlanta’s urban racial images was how invested the city’s media was in obscuring local racist attitudes. He saw that in the original imagining of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial during the 1920s.

“Atlanta’s major media industry professionals were some of the first to sign on to the project, and they were integral in shaping the memorial’s problematic public relations campaign,” he said. “The same thing happened again for ‘Gone With the Wind,’ from the local media industry’s coverage of the novel and film to the city’s racist and Lost Cause-inspired memorial plaque campaign. In many ways, Atlanta’s white media professionals played a key role in shaping our national debate on race by laying the groundwork for a false, middle-ground ‘white mod-

erate' rhetoric which still exists today and which consistently undermines the true achievement of full Black equality.”

Aimee Edmondson Receives 2021 Best Article Award

American Journalism, the peer-reviewed quarterly journal of the American Journalism Historians Association, has awarded its 2021 Best Article prize to Aimee Edmondson, professor and director for graduate studies in the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University.

This annual award honors the best of the best scholarship that was published in *American Journalism* between Summer 2020 and Spring 2021. Edmondson's study, “‘Pure Caucasian Blood’: Libel by Racial Misidentification in American Newspapers (1900-1957),” appeared in the Winter 2021 edition of the journal.

“Before critical race theory became a punching bag for the far right, it was mostly confined to academic circles, as members of the AJHA well know,” Edmondson said. “This body of legal scholarship helped me critically examine U.S. libel law as it intersects with issues of society and race. The CRT framework provides that all-important context as we work to situate our legal scholarship within the larger societal picture throughout history.”

Edmondson thanked *American Journalism*'s editors and reviewers — especially Ford Risley, Barbara Friedman and Gwyn Mellinger — for their time, patience and expertise in helping her make the article better.

American Journalism editor Pamela Walck said Edmondson's article hits squarely on the mark all the things the journal strives for — timeliness, relevance, rigorous research, and engaging writing.

“It sets a high bar that *AJ* strives for each issue, and I am thrilled she chose our journal to publish her work in,” Walck said.

Among the comments from the advisory board members judging this year, one noted that through careful legal research, Edmondson illuminates how, during the first half of the 20th century, arguments in newspaper libel cases contributed to the construction of different definitions of citizenship and value for Black and White Americans.

“This article provides a compelling exploration of the role of news-reporting errors in broader debates that perpetuated institutional racism for decades,” the reviewer wrote. “Edmondson’s work sheds new light on an under-researched chapter of not only journalism history but also American history.”

Another voter observed that Edmondson’s article is strong on both evidence and ideas, contributing to our understanding of race and libel law and to our broader understanding of what it means to say that race is socially constructed and racism is systemic.

“It’s a good example of what critical race theory might mean in journalism/legal history,” the reviewer wrote.

Rich Shumate Receives 2021 Rising Scholar Award

The editors of *American Journalism*, the peer-reviewed quarterly journal of the American Journalism Historians Association, have announced Rich Shumate of Western Kentucky University as the winner of the 2021 Rising Scholar Award.

Shumate receives this honor and \$2,000 award in recognition of his ongoing research titled “Style, Spin, and Strategy: The Kennedy Press Conferences,” which is a scholarly examination of the ground-breaking

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biweekly press conferences during John F. Kennedy's presidency.

"I very much appreciate AJHA's support for my research and this project, and I'm honored and pleased to have been selected," Shumate said.

Nicholas Hirshon, associate editor of *American Journalism*, said Shumate has an impressive track record of successful projects.

"Dr. Shumate's book would shed new light on the unprecedented adoption of television news conferences by one of the most significant political figures in American history," Hirshon said. "We are proud to support his travel to the JFK Library and look forward to reading his research."

The Rising Scholar Award winner is chosen annually by the editors of *American Journalism*. The award is designed for scholars who show promise in extending their research agendas.

Three Receive McKerns Research Grants

Three scholars have received Joseph McKerns Research Grant Awards from the American Journalism Historians Association (AJHA) to support their research.

Peter Gloviczki of Coker University, Kevin Lerner of Marist College, and Yong Volz of the University of Missouri each will receive grants of \$1,250.

Gloviczki will use the grant to visit the Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville to further work on his third scholarly book, which is focused on the history and culture of new media technology.

"I'll be using the archives to study coverage of school shootings, coverage of loss and trauma, and coverage of the aftermath of crises in

new media culture, spanning about 1989 through 2021,” he said.

He is grateful to receive the grant, which he called “a celebration” of his mentors. “Their enduring support and encouragement has made my journalism history research possible,” he said.

Lerner is beginning work on a book project about the impact three former *New York Times* reporters had on perceptions of journalism. After leaving the *Times* in the 1960s or 1970s, each journalist “went on to make indelible marks on how we think of what journalism can be, and how gigantic institutions like the *Times* can be limiting to that vision of what is possible,” he said.

The grant will allow him to visit the archives of one of these journalists, David Halberstam, at the Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.

“I’m really thrilled to have the support of the McKerns grant,” Lerner said. “The grant will give me a full week to spend with those papers, which is a huge luxury, particularly in a year when institutional research and travel budgets are so tenuous.”

Volz will use the grant to conduct archival research and oral history interviews with founders and key members of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) as she documents the organization’s development in the 1980s and 1990s. She was appreciative of the AJHA for seeing the value of her project.

“I hope the study of AAJA can contribute to a better historical understanding of the relationships between professional identity and racial-ethnic identity, between objectivity and activism, and between the journalistic institution and broader social movements. By recovering the history of AAJA, I also want to promote Asian American journalists as an important research area in the broader historiography of American journalism,” she said.

Ira Chinoy to Receive AJHA Teaching Award

Ira Chinoy has been selected to receive the 2021 American Journalism Historians Association (AJHA) National Award for Excellence in Teaching. He is an associate professor in the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland in College Park.

The annual AJHA Teaching Award honors a college or university teacher who excels at teaching in the areas of journalism and mass communication history, makes a positive impact on student learning, and offers an outstanding example for other educators. Chinoy will receive the award during the 40th annual AJHA national conference, which will take place virtually Oct. 8-9.

“I believe that while not all students may arrive at college with a love of history, we can help them understand why history matters – especially journalism history, and especially right now. It is so much fun to watch them explore that history and make those connections,” said Chinoy.

Chinoy’s innovative plan for teaching media history during the pandemic won over the judges for the AJHA award. His compassion for students also was particularly striking.

“I have long believed that the secret sauce to teaching is to care about your students. Everything else flows from that,” said Chinoy.

Audrey Widodo, one of Chinoy’s former students and his teaching assistant, wrote in her nomination letter, “Professor Chinoy has the biggest heart, and I cannot imagine my time at Merrill without his unwavering support, kindness, and encouragement.”

Lucy A. Dalglish, dean of the Merrill College, also touched on Chinoy’s compassion for students. “To my knowledge, Dr. Chinoy was also the only Merrill College teacher who kept track of his Covid-strick-

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en students daily and sent repeated memos to the new president of the University of Maryland reporting on the issues faced by quarantined and isolated students,” she wrote.

Chinoy expressed appreciation for his colleagues in the Merrill College and for university leaders for their support during the past year. “As the pandemic raged, we brainstormed for months before the start of the fall semester, sharing ideas about best practices and how we could deal with the challenges we were sure to face. I feel certain that as a result, we provided our students with the best possible remote learning experience under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Having engaged students also played a huge role in the way things turned out. I am so proud of them,” he said.

Chinoy spent 24 years working for four newspapers. A graduate of Harvard University, he earned his Ph.D. in Journalism Studies from the University of Maryland in 2010. He received the 2011 AJHA Margaret Blanchard Prize for his dissertation. He also was awarded the AEJMC History Division’s 2021 Jinx Coleman Broussard Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Media History.

“I am so grateful to the AJHA not only for this award, but for fostering an environment in which teaching is valued and for providing a platform for us to share ideas about the best approaches to helping students learn and thrive,” said Chinoy.

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