Historiography in Mass Communication

The Latest News by Lorenzo Valles, c. 1880

Volume 12 (2026), Number 2

An historian's guide to the hows, whys, methods, schools of thought, and evolution of media history.

Historiography in Mass Communication

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Historiography
in Mass Communication

Volume 12 (2026) Number 1

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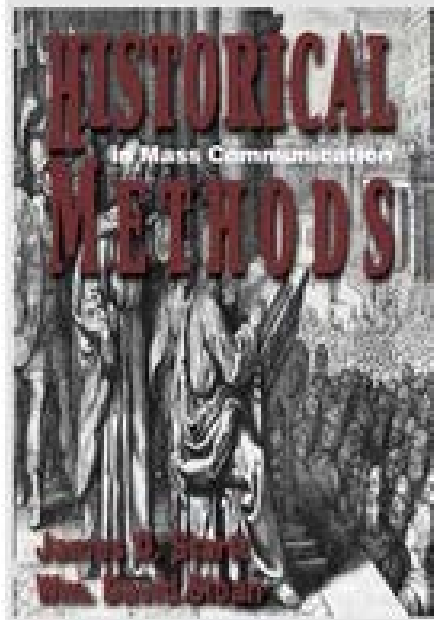
THE HISTORIAN'S GUIDE (4TH EDITION)

With its first edition, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* quickly became the standard manual for research in the field.



This highly praised book guides historians and history students in the methods of proper research. Its underlying concept is that communication historians must master the well-prescribed methods that have proven themselves in the general field of history.

The fourth edition retains the qualities that made the earlier editions so successful, but it adds features that make it even better. You will find substantial revisions in several chapters, an expanded chapter on Internet research for historians, an updated bibliography, an expanded index, and other improvements.

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From the Editor

Scholarly Genealogy

By Debra Reddin van Tuyll

As I write this editor's note, we are just past the 140th anniversary of Frank Luther Mott's birth. I remember his birthday, April 4, because it is just two days before my husband's and also because the dean of journalism history has a unique place in my academic journey. He was dead long before I had any inkling about history as a field of study, much less the history of journalism.

My first introduction to Mott was as a master's student at the University of Alabama in my first journalism history class, but I paid him little heed until years later when was working on my doctoral dissertation under Ronald T. Farrar. Dr. Farrar was one of the co-editors with John Stevens of Mass Media and the National Experience: Essays in Communication History. In a sense, that book could well be considered a progenitor of journals such as this one, but that is a topic for another day. Dr. Farrar encouraged me to include a close reading of the relevant chapters in *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690-1940* as I delved into my research.

On the one hand, I was awed by this massive work that laid out the history of American journalism from *Publick Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestic*, to the 1960s. The references indicate he must have spent months, if not years, in archives reading old newspapers and even more time with secondary sources. On the other hand, I was unimpressed with his treatment of the nineteenth century political press and also the Confederate press, the two main topics of my research. He referred to the rise of the political press as benighted. He also maintained that "A stricter control of the press was maintained in the South than in the North, and in general Confederate censorship was more consistent and effective," which was absolutely not true. Mott did cite James Randall's study of Civil War-era censorship, so in a sense, he had an out for getting it wrong. Randall mistook the cooperation of Southern journalists with the military and government in publishing misinformation as evidence that newspapers only published what the government dictated. He did note that one of the biggest leaks of the war came from Confederate Jefferson Davis himself. Speaking in Macon after the fall of Atlanta, Davis revealed that an alarming number of men had deserted, and he called on them to return to the ranks so as to defend Georgia from Sherman's invasion. The Macon Telegraph duly reported on the president's speech, and a copy of the paper made its way into Sherman's hands, and, as they say, the rest is history.

I, too, had read Randall's article by then, as well as Davis's correspondence and the journals of the Confederate Congress, both of which revealed a hands-off policy regarding press censorship, so I took Mott to task in one of my chapters for overlooking important primary sources. When I went to discuss corrections to the chapter with Dr. Farrar, he gravely told me that I needed to think seriously on my criticism of Dr. Mott, for he was a big name, and I was a mere graduate student. Did I really want to take him on? In that conversation, Dr. Farrar revealed that his dissertation director had been . . . Frank Luther Mott. I didn't change my opinion on Mott or my contention that he needed to wade in to some additional primary sources, but I did start thinking about how the generations of scholars unfold. That's something I still think about from time-to-time, and I'd like to propose that perhaps it's time for those of us with an interest in historiography to give some serious attention to the topics of scholarly biography and genealogy.

A website called "The Academic Family Tree" documents scholarly genealogy primarily in the sciences at least up to 2021. The site doesn't seem to have had much action since then, but still, the idea is a good one. It is broken down by academic fields that are searchable by name and that show relationships between scholars, usually dissertation directors and their students. One of the more interesting academic family trees I've seen is that of presidents of a psychometric society. Wouldn't it be interesting to create such a family tree for the AJHA, the AEJMC History Division, or the ICA historians?

Debra Reddin van Tuyll is professor emeritus at Augusta University. She is the author or editor of a number of books that focus on the Civil War-era press. She is co-editor of the newly published *Handbook of Transnational Journalism History*. Her current research interests focus on the earliest Irish American Press. She also is a recipient of that organization's Kobre Award for lifetime service to journalism history.

While creating such a tree for journalism historians seems like a worthwhile project, what seems even more interesting and potentially fruitful is a project of academic biography that records the essential facts of a scholar's life but emphasizes his or her most important works and perhaps includes mention of their graduate students who went on to distinguish themselves in the field. Whether this would be a book or perhaps start with a special edition of a journal – perhaps a regular feature of this journal until enough are done to republish in book form – is a question that needs to be addressed. So, too, is whether these studies would be best completed by former graduate students (as far as possible. I suspect, for example, that most of Mott's graduate students are no longer with us.)

Based on my own experience, there are four, possibly five, generations of academic journalism historians. I suspect that's an over-simplification, but it's a starting place, accepting that there will be overlap. I've already had a conversation about whether Dwight Teeter would be first generation or second. I'm still thinking about how to explicate the generations in a way that makes sense. The first generation – Mott's generation -- would include names like Sidney Kobre, Edwin Emery, Fred Siebert (equally known as an expert in media law), J. Cutler Andrews, Willard G. Bleyer, Hiley Ward, Dwight Teeter, John Stevens, and Alfred M. Lee.

The second generation would include legendary names such as Mary Ann Yodelis, Maurine Beasley, Peggy Blanchard, David Sloan, David Sachsman, Hazel Dicken-Garcia, Ted Smythe, Cathy Covert, Don Shaw, Jean Folkerts, Wally Ebberhardt, Ron Farrar, Pat Washburn, Mike Murray, Jim Startt, Leonard Teel, David Nord, and others yet to be identified.

The third generation would include those of us who studied under second-generation scholars – those of us who are in the later stages of our careers and for whom retirement is just a few years over the horizon or has already happened. These would be among the authors I hope to recruit to write the biographies, perhaps even of their own professors from the first and second generations, or in perhaps their professors' professors. An excellent template is available in a remembrance of Louis Starr from *The Oral History Review*, volume 8, published in 1980. The title is "Louis Start: A Remembrance," and you can find it online here.

I am certain that I have left out dozens of people who should be included. Please feel free to let me know who I have left out and also if you would be interested in contributing to this project. I can see the possibility of a transnational/international volume for those who have been important in preserving the journalism history of other countries. I think a transnational volume could be fascinating as it examines cross-pollination of ideas among global colleagues. I am not so ambitious as to be proposing that idea; I am merely tossing it out there for some other enterprising soul to consider taking on. For now, I'm going to concentrate on the American version that will, perhaps, be a model for other projects.

Please contact me at dvantuyl@augusta.edu if you have questions or ideas for this project, or if you'd like to take part.

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Recognizing and Responding to History Washing

How Historians May Ensure Accuracy

By Erin Coyle

In *What is History*, E.H. Carr asserted that historical facts do not exist objectively. Facts are subject to selection regarding what is worth preserving, what is important enough to remember, and what is valued enough to interpret and explain. Historians traditionally have turned to sources such as media reports, government records, oral history transcripts, and individuals' narratives to seek human understanding of specific events, issues, and time periods. While some degree of selectivity is an inherent part of preserving and interpreting historical records, it is important for historians to consider whether history washing—intentionally changing the historical record—has erased, misconstrued, or unevenly presented information. Historiography sheds light on how historians may acknowledge and account for such factors to ensure accuracy in historical research.

Historians are devoted to providing accurate accounts about people, events, ideas, and time periods. They typically triangulate sources and use contextualization to ensure accuracy, as they attempt to understand conceptions from a specific period, according to James Startt and David Sloan in the 2003 edition of their book *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*. This process may be challenged by intentional selectivity in the preservation, presentation, or even the erasure of historical information. Selectivity traditionally has been a human-centered process that could influence three elements of history that Startt and Sloan have identified as critical elements of history: evidence, interpretation, and narrative. The potential influence of selectivity becomes especially challenging when people, institutions, or technologies have been empowered to change what information, interpretations, and narratives have been valued, presented, or erased.

As powerful individuals and institutions recently attempted to remove controversial information from the historical record, ideological, economic, political, and technological influences shaped what information has been valued and how information could be interpreted and presented. For example, in a March 2025 "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" executive order, U.S. President Donald Trump stated that previous efforts to rewrite history had distorted historical narratives to fit ideology rather than truth. The order announced a policy to restore truth in American History and "remove improper ideology" that presented the nation as "inherently racist, sexist, oppressive, or otherwise irredeemably flawed" in federal museums, monuments, and other properties.

Nonprofit organizations recently have highlighted such attempts of powerful people and institutions to sanitize or scrub the historical record—a process this essay refers to as history washing. Through the process of history washing, individuals, institutions, and even technologies determine what may be available to the public and how information may be interpreted, presented, or erased to ensure data is presented in manners that reflect decision-makers' preferences. History washing places greater value on the information and individuals that are emphasized in the historical record and decreased value on information and individuals that are deemphasized or removed.

The Black Heritage Trail in New Hampshire recently pushed back against the removal of exhibits in museums and national parks in an essay on its website titled "The Danger of Sanitizing History: Preserving Truth in the Smithsonian." The essay criticized this form of intellectual suppression. Written by staff member Bonnie Ward, the essay described government entities' sanitization of the historical record as "altering, omitting, or reframing historical content to make it more palatable, less controversial,

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or aligned with populist ideological trends." Sanitization would distort the historical record, erasing some people and information while making others look better than they actually were.

After National Park staff removed the Freedom and Slavery in the Making of the Nation exhibit from the President's House at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia in 2026, the Organization of American Historians condemned this action and rejected "federal actions and the systemic efforts to distort the historical record and impose through executive orders and actions a narrow vision of the American past." The OAH statement, published on its website, called on all people who care about history to push back against such acts and "to defend the integrity of historical interpretation wherever it is threatened."

In addition to records, artifacts, and exhibits, people's memories may shed light on history. History washing, however, may also influence what people recall about people, events, and periods. In the *Routledge Companion to Journalism History*, historian Janice Hume stated in an essay titled "Journalism, History and the Contorted Nature of Memory," that collective memory scholarship has recognized public memory serving "the needs of the present more than the past," which relates to power, politics, and culture. Throughout history, powerful and elite members of society have emphasized themselves, their connections, and their experiences while overlooking the experiences, activities, and influences of more vulnerable members of society. Such actions have skewed understandings of people, actions, issues, and events in accordance with the preferred interpretations of individuals, institutions, technologies, groups, or entities who select what facts to preserve, present, or erase. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, Michel Foucault recognized that such selectivity may relate to ideology, repression, and power.

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes history as what has happened in the past as well as what is said to have happened in the past. Trouillot explains that collectivities deem certain events and narratives to be credible due to the collectivities' determinations that these are valuable and are either true or false. Historical narratives are constructed unevenly, according to which people, events, and narratives are deemed valuable. Silences may reflect imbalances of power, particularly when voices are deemphasized or missing. Trouillot explores what these uneven reflections and silences reveal to expand historical knowledge beyond one-sided histories.

Historians Kathy Roberts Forde, Sid Bedingfield, Gwyneth Mellinger, and David T.Z. Mindich have looked beyond dominant narratives from the field of white journalism to recontextualize and correct past interpretations of journalism history. Analyzing mainstream white publications and Black publications in *Journalism and Jim Crow: White Supremacy and the Black Struggle for a New America*, Forde and Bedingfield revealed how powerful white journalism leaders promoted racist and undemocratic policies and practices in the post-Reconstruction United States while black journalism leaders focused on building a more democratic country. Through extensive interviews and reviews of archival journalistic records for *Chasing Newsroom Diversity: From Jim Crow to Affirmative Action*, Mellinger shed new light on cultural factors that contributed to the dominance of white straight men in American journalism, even as professional organizations set goals for more diversity in this field. In *Just the Facts: How Objectivity Came to Define American Journalism*, Mindich showed how differences between information presented in mainstream news coverage of Ida B. Wells's writings reflected different facts, interpretations, and narratives.

Journalism historians also have applied Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to conceptualize social and power relations that influence how information is valued, preserved, presented, or erased. For example, Michael Fuhlhage, Tracy Lucht, and Kelsey Batschelet have applied field theory to journalism history. In Fuhlhage's dissertation *Blowing Embers*, he applied the notion of habitus, exploring the field in which historical actors have operated within historical institutions. In "'That Was What I Had to Use': Social and Cultural Capital in the Careers of Women Broadcasters," Lucht and Batschelet applied notions of field and capital to explore practices of media workers. Field theory recognizes inherent power inequities and tendencies for dominant actors to seek dominance. Each field is structured by the social positions of actors and the symbolic positions they occupy within it. These positions are shaped by economic, social, cultural, and other forms of capital, which together determine the hierarchies within each field. Symbolic positions are relational, with meaning and value resulting from interactions with others' positions.

Political, cultural, and social factors also have restricted what journalism historians may research and teach in the United States; thus, the American Journalism Historians Association created a Defense of History Committee. This committee aims to preserve stories that reflect contemporary history washing efforts. To do so, committee members are researching laws, policies, and practices that are influencing what topics are being dissuaded, collecting published stories about erasures of history, and inviting colleagues to engage in oral history interviews. This committee hopes that contemporary records of history-washing efforts ultimately will help historians to contextualize and interpret this period.

While the Defense of History Committee is focusing on history washing in the United States, it will be important for additional historical research to explore how ideological, political, economic and technological factors are challenging how historical information may be preserved, interpreted, and presented beyond this country. In 2026, the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem) reported that freedom of academic and cultural expression has decreased in 41 countries, as countries around the globe have moved toward having autocratic governance. With these shifts, media self-censorship has increased in 39 countries and government efforts to censor media have increased in 44 countries. Such factors ultimately could significantly limit the availability of historical evidence, skew narratives, and empower those who engage in history washing.

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What Do We Know, If Anything, about the Media's Historical Influence?

By Wm. David Sloan

A historian friend who comes out of cultural studies once told me that it's easier to show that the mass media have an influence on a grand scale than to show that they change a single person's opinion.

My friend's view fits well with the cultural studies approach. It argues that the media have a pervasive influence on societal values. How satisfying it must be to be able to attribute such influence to the media without having to document it. But is there evidence? Studying history would be much easier if we didn't have to provide it.

Nevertheless, my friend's argument raises the question of how we can judge if and to what extent the media may have influenced views in the past. It's not an easy question to answer. One thing, though, is certain. Because of the uncertainty about the answer, we need to approach the issue with humility — simply because we don't know, and probably can't know fully, the extent or limits of media influence.

In the face of such a predicament, can we do anything to give us confidence when we deal with the issue? Are there fundamentals we can rely on? Good historians want principles that can help them whatever the task may be. Without sound principles, it's hard to do sound history.

Recently as I've been studying the party press of the early 1800s, I've come across a number of historians who've had difficulty with the issue. Their views — but coupled even more importantly with those of journalists and politicians of the same period — can help enlighten us about how to deal with the question of media influence when we study history.

In fact, they suggest several principles.

Wm. David Sloan is editor emeritus of *Historiography in the Mass Media* and professor emeritus from the University of Alabama. He is author or editor of dozens of books, including *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* and a mentor to many, if not most, working journalism historians in the United States. He is presently working on a project dealing with the party press of the Early Republic.

• *Principle 1: Don't glibly accept general views about the media's influence.*

On the question of the party press' influence, historians have for the most part been complimentary. The media, most say, had considerable power.

It isn't unusual for historians with little background in persuasiveness theory and research to attribute influence to newspapers of any period. For years— until the middle of the last century or so, that is, until about 1950 — hardly anyone subjected the idea of media persuasiveness to rigorous critique. Thus, it isn't surprising that historians should have accepted the popular idea of party press influence.

Two of the most important historical works on the Federalist-Republican (1789-1816) press — those by Donald Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (1969) and Jerry Knudson, *Jefferson and the Press: Crucible of Liberty* (2006; from his 1974 doctoral dissertation) — were both written after research had begun to question the persuasiveness of the press. But both still accepted the idea of influence. Stewart did so wholeheartedly, and Knudson endorsed it with some reservation. Each offered reasoned explanations. We can note, though, that each based his conclusions more on logic than on documented evidence.

"[I]t is evident," Stewart surmised, that "the Republican press generally was largely responsible for the 'revolution' wrought in 1800. About 1790, American leaders commenced the policy of deliberately securing newspaper support. These gazettes, more than any other agency, achieved the radical change of mind during the following decade. Much of what they printed was distorted and some deliberately false, but they were effective. Republican strength was mostly in the rural areas, where newspapers were the party's chief support.... [The Republican press] largely accounted for Jefferson's coming to office.... In most cases, they [newspaper attacks on Federalists] accomplished the object of weakening whatever veneration for those in power that might have prevented the overthrow of the Federalist party in 1800."

The reasons the press was effective, Stewart explained, were the following: "Possibly the press owed some of its sig-

nificance to America's physical size, which limited means of obtaining information and led people to form their political opinions from the journals they read. Ninety-five per cent of the nation's population was rural and depended primarily upon newspapers for knowledge of governmental affairs. Frontier gazettes were indispensable in linking together scattered groups of settlers; they were equally essential in forming and maintaining genuine political parties.... With property qualifications still the rule, papers were read by practically all voters.... Their educating influence operated in even the most sparsely settled areas and was more potent than all institutions of higher learning.... Printers definitely affected community opinion. Cheapness, brevity, timeliness, and readability made gazettes the chief reading matter of general interest. The 1790s witnessed a steady increase in the number of votes cast in elections, though the suffrage didn't widen appreciably. Obviously, interest on the part of the electorate was growing, and the press could claim credit for much of the growth. In molding public opinion, both urban and rural, these four-page sheets were tremendously effective."

Knudson stated a more cautious opinion. Basing his judgment primarily on the power of editors' arguments and on the changes in editorial positions they took as issues developed, he concluded that newspaper influence varied. If, for example, Federalist newspapers became defensive on an issue while Republican newspapers more and more took the offensive, he reasoned that the Republican press had emerged the victor on the particular issue. On the issue of Tom Paine's return to the United States from England in 1802, as an illustration, he concluded that the Federalist press succeeded in anathematizing Paine with its attacks on his religious views. Similarly, on the election of Jefferson in 1800, he concluded that the Federalist press' only accomplishment was antagonizing "Republicans to the point that reconciliation was impossible."

Stewart's and Knudson's arguments seem sensible. But as we can see from their varying opinions, the question of press influence may be intriguing but the answer's problematic. Both historians relied on their own thoughtful reasoning, but we simply can't find enough hard evidence on the party press to resolve the issue.

• *Principle 2: Be careful about taking contemporaries' statements at face value.*

As evidence of media influence, historians have relied heavily on politicians' and journalists' statements. But like historians' logic, these statements also are inadequate. Federalists and Republicans alike had a virtually unwavering belief, as many people do today, in the persuasiveness of the press. That outlook should make historians cautious.

In attributing reasons for the Federalists' fall from power in 1800, for example, both John Adams and Fisher Ames, a prominent Federalist politician from Massachusetts, singled out Republican newspapers. "If we had been blessed with common sense," Adams wrote, "we should not have been overthrown by Philip Freneau, Duane, Callender, Cooper, and Lyon, or their great patron and protector [Jefferson]." Could Americans, he asked at another time, "endure that Callender, Duane, Cooper, and Lyon, should be the most influential men in the Country, all foreigners and all degraded characters?" Ames concluded, "The newspapers are an overmatch for any government. They will first overawe and then usurp it. This has been done; and the Jacobins owe their triumph to the unceasing use of this engine."

Jefferson also credited the Republican press for preserving American ideals of liberty and equality and for aiding in the eventual downfall of the Federalists. After Washington confronted him in 1793 about his relationship with the *National Gazette*, Jefferson wrote: "I took his intention to be, that I should interpose in some way with Freneau, perhaps withdraw his appointment as translating clerk to my office, but I will not do it. His paper has saved our Constitution, which was galloping fast into Monarchy, and has been checked by no means so powerfully as by that paper. It is well and universally known, that it has been that paper which has checked the career of the monocrats...."

During the crucial period of the late 1790s when government prosecution for sedition was at an all-time high, Jefferson declared that opponents would have vanquished "republicanism" without Bache's *Aurora* and Matthew Carey's *United States Recorder*. Reflecting on events of the era, Jefferson later wrote of the *Aurora's* service under William Duane: "This paper has unquestionably rendered incalculable service to republicanism through all its struggles with the federalists and has been the rallying point for the orthodoxy of the whole Union. It was our comfort in the gloomiest days, and is still performing the office of a watchful sentinel.... [W]hen our cause was laboring, and all but lost, under the overwhelming weight of its powerful adversaries, its unquestionable effect in the revolution produced on the public mind ... arrested the rapid march of our government toward monarchy."

Despite such affirmation of press influence, even if it seems well-reasoned, historians should be cautious about accepting contemporaries' declarations as gospel. For one thing, media influence on a mass audience doesn't seem to be as cut and dried as people of any historical era believed.

Views from contemporaries about press influence can be extremely oversimplified. One "Observer" in the *Independent Chronicle* in 1801, for example, declared that "the principles of many thousands have been determined in support or opposition of federal measures, by the accidental perusal in youth, of a federal or anti-federal paper." James Callender in 1802 claimed that the editors Duane and William Coleman alone determined the political beliefs of thousands of Americans.

• *Principle 3: We think other people are more susceptible to influence than we are.*

Although Republicans and Federalists agreed on the power of the press, they attributed it to different reasons. Federalists generally were more worried about the influence of the opposition papers than confident of their own because Republican editors, they believed, could easily mislead the general populace. Ames expressed Federalist fears in these words: "[The press] has left the understanding of the mass of men just where it found it, but by supplying an endless stimulus to their imagination and passions, it has rendered their temper and habits infinitely worse. It has inspired ignorance with presumption, so that those who cannot be governed by reason are no longer to be awed by Authority."

Similarly, the *Federalist and New Jersey Gazette* explained that the Republican press "puts words into the mouths of stupid and malignant Jacobins, and completely dulls the gaping simplicity of many honest people." The "people," other Federalists declared, could be led to believe even false and malicious newspaper charges because many people didn't have either the ability or the inclination to attempt to get true information about issues.

Even if people didn't at first believe falsehoods, some Federalists reasoned, constant repetition of them finally convinced the public. Hamilton explained that belief this way: "It is a maxim deeply engrafted in that dark system, that no character, however upright, is a match for constantly reiterated attacks, however false.... Every calumny makes some proselytes, and even retains some; since justification seldom circulates as rapidly or as widely as slander.... The public mind, fatigued at length with resistance to the calumnies which eternally assail it ... is apt at the end to sit down with the opinion that a person so often accused cannot be entirely innocent."

In the end, the reasoning went, people truly believed Federalist officials were corrupt and monarchical, and they lost confidence and veneration for them.

Federalists occasionally expressed some optimism in the ability of their papers to reason with the public and encourage respectable men to voice their opinions, but their fear of the corrupting influence of the Republican press overshadowed this confidence.

Republicans, on the other hand, while sometimes wary and anxious of the persuasiveness of Federalist newspapers, were certain that their own papers — if enough could be established and circulated — would have a tremendous influence. They based their confidence primarily in the ability of the press to inform the public.

One of the paramount concerns of Republicans thus was increasing the circulation of their newspapers, for they believed simply that if readership were general, as the *Richmond Examiner* explained, the Republican press would open "the eyes of the misinformed, and [give] them the true state of affairs." As Jefferson philosophized, the best way to run a country was "to give [the people] full information of their affairs thro' the channel of the public papers, & to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people.... [E]very man should receive those papers, and be capable of reading them."

If that could be done, the Republican press as a natural consequence would persuade the public to move to the Republican side.

• *Principle 4: Hardly any records exist of people saying they changed either their opinions or their actions because of media content.*

One commonality we find in all these observations is that the writers always commented on how the press could change the thinking of other people. They never indicated that they themselves were susceptible. The party faithful feared the influence of the opposition press on other peoples' minds — but it's extremely rare to find statements from individuals that reading opposing newspapers changed their own mind.

Such clear instances of media influence are unusual. George Washington, for example, gave as one of his reasons for not seeking a third term his desire not to be "buffetted" any longer by the Republican press; and Alexander Hamilton admitted his love affair with Mrs. Maria Reynolds after James Callender exposed it.

Despite such instances, politicians' and editors' declarations that the press could influence people were almost always made in regard to people other than themselves. A confession from anyone that he changed his mind because of newspaper articles was rare. This point doesn't mean that people didn't change their minds. In fact, it's possible that we have records of statements only from people less susceptible to persuasion. But Jefferson may have been correct when he observed that even though some people "betray a secret pleasure in the possibility that some may believe them [slanders] ... they do not themselves."

• *Principle 5: The media historically have been only one factor in a multi-factor situation.*

In attempting to evaluate the historical influence of the press on general opinion, there's always the temptation to examine the media's stands on issues and then look at the outcome to attempt to correlate the results with the media positions. It's fallacious, however, to attempt to assess the influence of one factor such as newspaper opinion in a multi-causal situation without carefully considering other influences. Historians need to keep in mind that rarely ever is there a situation in which only one factor's at play. One must question the efficacy of making judgments, especially *post hoc* ones years afterwards, about media influence in any situation without studying other possible causal factors.

Yet historians especially have been prone to speak of press influence on larger events — to attribute election victories to the press, for example, either because of the writings of individual editors, the circulation of newspapers among widespread or select audiences, or the number of papers supporting the winning candidate — without taking into consideration other factors that were in play.

We confront obvious problems, however, with using such information as evidence of a causal relationship between the press and events or changes in opinion. One difficulty in the party period is that in many situations, behavior and attitude didn't accord with the preachings of editors. Many times editors proposed one thing and the public and politicians did something else. You can find similar situations throughout history.

Another problem is that election results, to use that example again, often didn't correspond either to the number of newspapers supporting particular candidates or to the aggregate circulation of the two parties' papers. Jefferson won in 1800 despite the fact that most newspapers were Federalist. Not until 1812 did Republicans enjoy support from a majority of the nation's papers. Something other than simple media influence must have been at work.

Finally, even the faintest familiarity with research on the persuasiveness of the mass media should make the boldest historian shy away from conclusions about the impact of

the press when additional factors may have been involved. Even if one grants that a different media-audience situation existed decades or centuries ago than does today, sufficient historical evidence is unavailable with which to separate media influence from the influence of other factors.

• *Principle 6: Various factors — such as the nature of media content, personal predispositions, education, personal connections, religion, moral and ethical values, knowledge, literacy, our own opinions, peer groups, and interpersonal communication — mediate media influence.*

Research in the second half of the 20th century showed that factors other than mass media may influence people's opinions and that the media rarely have such a strong direct persuasiveness as people prior to the 1950s imagined. Granted that the information complex was different in the society of the party era, it still seems unlikely that readers automatically would have accepted statements that appeared in the press. As today, mediating factors — such as individuals' values and predispositions — probably limited newspaper influence.

Even during the party press era, not everyone believed that the press was influential. The reasoning of the critics is as convincing as the logic of the believers. They questioned the persuasiveness of the press on two accounts: (1) the nature of newspaper content and (2) the character of the people.

A number of observers believed that the falsity and scurrility of articles and the overzealousness of editors actually hurt more than helped, causing the press to lose any influence it might have had otherwise. Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper, a U.S. Senator from Maryland, in 1798 concluded, "[I] had always despised the base calumniators, believing that a man's propriety of conduct would always be sufficient to shield him against slanders. When [I] saw the President of the United States and the Government of the Union defamed, [I] still despised [the calumniators], and … believed also that the people were not affected by them, because … they did not rise in insurrection against the Government." Similarly, Boston's *Independent Chronicle* observed in 1801, "The constant strain of defamation against the 'Constituted Authorities,' in the Tory papers, has become so flagrant, that they have lost their effect."

Even Jefferson, who spent so much time and effort encouraging Republican newspapers, on occasion was a severe critic. "[An] administration," he said in 1807, "conducting itself with integrity and common understanding cannot be battered down, even by the falsehoods of a licentious press…. The press is impotent when it abandons itself to falsehood."

One can see that both Harper and Jefferson not only recognized that various factors were at play but that, in their own reading of newspapers, they, probably like most people, resisted the potential effects of those papers because they brought their own values and outlooks with them.

• *Principle 7: The more we know about a subject, the less the media influence about that subject is likely to be on us. Conversely, the less we know, the greater the media influence.*

Skeptics during the party era reasoned at times that the press couldn't sway a populace that possessed knowledge of public affairs and public characters.

Jefferson, in an 1804 letter to John Taylor of Caroline, wrote: "The firmness with which the people have withstood the late abuses of the press, the discernment they have manifested between truth and falsehood, show that they may safely be trusted to hear everything true and false, and to form a correct judgment between them…. [T]he steady character of our countrymen is a rock to which we may safely moor; and notwithstanding the efforts of the papers to disseminate early discontents, I expect that a just, dispassionate and steady conduct [by Republican officials], will at length rally to a proper system the great body of our country."

Like Jefferson, other skeptics believed the public's knowledge of officials to be more important than criticisms editors might make. After Philip Freneau attacked George Washington, a writer in the *Gazette of the United States* asked, "Can this infatuated man suppose that the boldness of his impertinence and abuse, will deserve or acquire the applause of the people more than the inestimable services of their old, approved, patriot and fellow soldier, Washington?"

One reason the Republican press had such injurious potential, complained the *New York Gazette*, was its ability to mislead "the good yeomanry of our country." Opposition papers were "read by a class of people who never do, or have not the time to investigate their contents." As a result, concluded the *Gazette*, innocent citizens had become "open enemies of our constitutional government."

• *Principle 8: People who already have strong views are unlikely to be influenced by contrary views appearing in the media.*

If the press during the party era had difficulty swaying the general public, skeptics certainly thought it had problems influencing partisans. When James Madison heard of a proposal for a new newspaper, he declared that "it concedes too much to a remedial power in the press over the spirit of party." Albert Gallatin, the Secretary of the Treasury during Jefferson's presidency, considered it improbable "that abstract reasoning or even a statement of facts already known … will make converts of men under the influence of passions or governed by self-interest." The content of newspapers during the party period suggests that the most likely response of partisans to press arguments wasn't a change of attitude but publication of counter arguments because of the ire the original article created.

• *Principle 9: People tend to read and watch media whose opinions agree with their own. This is the phenomenon known as "selective attendance."*

During the party era, it's unlikely that members of the general public, if they had a choice in newspapers, frequently read papers of the opposition party. Even as Federalists in the late 1790s strongly feared the effect that "seditious" newspapers might have, those who examined the papers for seditious material seemed not to have had their attitudes changed in the least. Except for such examination, apparently many partisans simply refused, as John Adams observed, to read opposition papers.

• *Principle 10: People who have only one source of news or views (such as today's ABC, MSNBC, Fox, etc.) tend to agree with the views from that source, which reinforces audience views.*

A writer in a Vermont's *Green Mountain Patriot* in 1798 expressed this concept exactly. He reasoned that people reading only one partisan newspaper couldn't always get the truth and eventually would accept the ideas of the paper.

Along with these ten principles that we can derive from documents from the Federalist-Republican era, historians need to consider others. Without them, a historian can easily go down the wrong path in making assumptions about the influence that the mass media wielded.

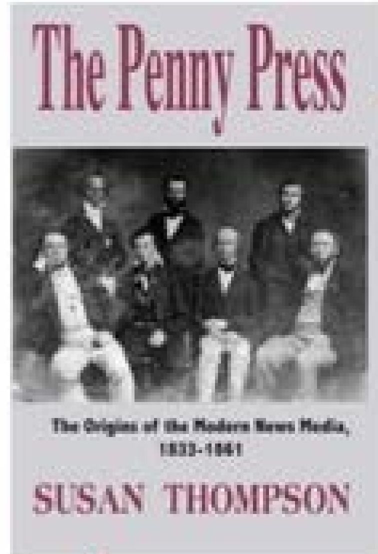
• *Principle 11: Some people (based on age, mental health, predispositions, grounding in values, etc.) are likely more susceptible to media influence than others are. Likewise, some are more resistant.*

• *Principle 12: The pervasiveness of particular media perspectives (such as stereotypes — racial, religious, gender, class, age, etc.) probably has an impact on the audience's views, especially if an audience member has no other source of knowledge about the subject.*

• *Principle 13: We can't measure and don't know the impact that exposure to media over a lifetime has. However, we do know that people of other cultures have different perspectives than we have, and so it's reasonable to assume that the media over a lifetime played a part in influencing those perspectives.*

• *Principle 14: Before drawing conclusions about media influence, the historian must have adequate evidence. As with all historiography, we must remember that historical inquiry into media influence is an evidence-based discipline.*

• *Principle 15: Of course, the thoughtful historian will keep in mind that there may be even more principles than these.*



The Penny Press

Scholars have lauded this book as the best ever written focusing on the cheap press before the Civil War.

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Historian's Interview

by Mary M. Cronin

Mary M. Lamonica (who publishes as Mary M. Cronin), a professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at New Mexico State University, is the author, co-author or editor of seven books, more than two dozen journal articles, and several book chapters. She is the recipient of the 2022 Ray and Pat Brown Award for Best Edited Collection (Book) in Popular and American Culture from the Popular Culture Association along with co-editors and authors Katrina Quinn and Lee Jolliffe for their book titled *Adventure Journalism in the Gilded Age: Essays on Reporting from the Arctic to the Orient* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Publishing, 2021). She is also the recipient of several top paper awards at national conventions, including from AEJMC, the American Journalism Historians Association Annual Convention, and the Annual David Sachsman Symposium on Nineteenth Century History.

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

CRONIN: I was born and raised just north of Boston, Massachusetts. My family stressed books, music, history, education, and an appreciation for the world's cultures. Both my parents were the first in their families to go beyond high school and attend universities. While my father did not finish (he joined the Army to see the world and ended up in a war!), my mother obtained her M.A. degree (unusual for a woman at the time) from the Harvard School of Public Health. Although my father died quite young (at 42 years of age), my mother kept our budget tight so that we could travel each year. History and culture were two of her favorite things, thus my brother and I saw many of the major history sites up and down the East Coast, including Civil War battlefield sites, President's Houses (Mount Vernon, Monticello, etc.), the homes of authors and artists, and visited many museums. Weekly library visits were a must in our family, as were several trips a year into Boston to see theater.

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

CRONIN: I did my undergraduate and M.A. degrees at the University of Miami in Florida and my Ph.D. at Michigan State. I worked at newspapers in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Florida in various positions, including as a reporter, a copy editor, and an assistant news editor. I also worked for public radio and for a computer magazine. Like many journalists, I did a great deal of freelance work to newspapers and magazines around the country. The diversity of topics that I covered as a reporter really helps inform my teaching to this very day.

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

CRONIN: I began my career at Washington State University where I was tenured. I taught news writing, reporting, media law, media history, and media ethics while employed there. But as my mother aged and needed help, I returned to Massachusetts and worked for six years at what was then called Bridgewater State College (now University). My classes were similar in topic but I also was asked to teach public speaking and introduction to public relations. But Massachusetts was and is an expensive place to live. When my mother passed on, my husband and I made the decision to move back West with our daughter. I applied for an opening at New Mexico State University and was hired. My courses here are similar in focus.

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.*

CRONIN: While I developed a love for and appreciation of history due to family travel in my youth (and continued

visits to history sites and museums as an adult), much of my M.A. and Ph.D. programs focused on social science research. I had to seek out historians in their department at Michigan State University. I took extra classes beyond what was required for my degree so that I would have training in historical methods. And I must give a big thank you to Maurine Beasley. When I went to my first conference (an AJHA conference) and presented my first research, I was so nervous to be around such well published and well respected historians. I was still a graduate student, but Maurine came up to me, praised my paper (probably beyond what it deserved) and invited me to join her and other historians for lunch. They were so friendly and welcoming that I knew that I had a home in the world of media history research. I am grateful to this day and have tried to pass that kindness on to other young scholars whom I meet.

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

CRONIN: The many media history professors who were working in the 1990s and doing wonderful work were the individuals who influenced me the most. I not only read but studied the work produced by such wonderful historians as Maurine Beasley, David Sloan, Patrick Washburn, Barbara Cloud, and MaryAnn Yodelis Smith. I looked at their arguments, their sources (primary and secondary), and studied how they wrote, as well. I did not have as much history training as I would have liked as a graduate student, so I tried to read widely and study the best articles. Then, too, historians tend to be a friendly bunch, and so I learned a lot from just attending conferences, listening to research, and speaking with people after sessions.

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

CRONIN: I initially was interested in how marginalized voices—women, minority members of society, advocates for causes—used media in the nineteenth century to have a voice, to have agency. Then I attended the wonderful symposium on the civil war and the nineteenth century press that was established by the (late) David Sachsman at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Not only did I get to really get to know far more media history scholars, but my research broadened to include studies of press performance during the U.S. Civil War, as well as a few studies of nineteenth century First Amendment issues. I've long pursued social and intellectual history but I also have used the wonderful work of James Carey to embrace cultural history, as well.

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

CRONIN: My historical research focuses largely on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century media history (up through World War II). I have been published in *Journalism History*, *American Journalism*, *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly*, *Journalism Monographs*, *Military History of the West*, the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, and *Historiography in Mass Communication*. I have a number of chapters on the U.S. Civil War, women's publications, and nineteenth-century media humor that have been published in various edited works. My books have largely been collaborative efforts. I love collaborating with other media history scholars because I believe that the research—and the finished product—is so much stronger because of the brainstorming, curiosity, discussions, and final editing that goes into such works.

The books that I have published (with the exception of my first work, which was a textbook) are largely focused on Civil War and nineteenth century media history, although my most recent book focused on a World War II photographer. I wrote chapters for all of the books in which I am listed as a co-editor. They are: Mary M. Cronin and Bruce Berman, *Homefront: Alfred T. Palmer's World War II Photography* (London: Fonthill Media, 2025); Debra Reddin van Tuyll and Mary M. Cronin, eds., *The Midwestern Press in the Crucible of the Civil War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2022); Mary M. Cronin and Debra Reddin Van Tuyll, eds., *The Western Press in the Crucible of the Civil War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021); Katrina Quinn, Mary M. Cronin, and Lee Jolliffe, eds., *Adventure Journalism in the Gilded Age: Essays on Reporting from the Arctic to the Orient* (Jefferson, N.C. McFarland Publishing, 2021); Mary M. Cronin, *High Private: The Trans-Mississippi Correspondence of Humorist R. R. Gilbert Conscience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018); Mary M. Cronin, ed. *An Indispensable Liberty: The Fight for Freedom of Expression in the Nineteenth Century* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016); and Charles Scholz and Mary M. Cronin, *The Mass Media: Invention, Development, Application and Impact* (Dubuque: Great River Technologies), 2014. I also produced a lengthy monograph: Mary M. Cronin, "The Liberty to Argue Freely: Nineteenth-Century Obscenity Prosecutions and the Emergence of Modern Libertarian Free Speech Discourse," *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2006).

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Of the books and articles that you have written, from which ones did you get the most satisfaction?*

CRONIN: My most recent book on World War II photographer Alfred T. Palmer has been the most joyous to write. I co-wrote the book with my photojournalism colleague at NMSU, Prof. Bruce Berman. Our brainstorming sessions were wonderful, as was our co-writing and discussions. But what really made the book such a joy was the fact that our subject's surviving daughter, Julia Palmer Gennert, was (and is) still alive and she opened her home and her father's archives to me. I spent some wonderful time away from New Mexico's summer heat visiting her in southern Oregon a few years ago. Her father and mother had saved (and archived!) all of his letters, military orders, and other ephemera from World War II. Although I've been to many archives throughout the years, I've never had so much access to so great a variety of historical sources. I felt that the book practically wrote itself since I had so many letters written during wartime, diary entries, military orders, and a couple of post-war interview transcripts. Two other publications that I really enjoyed working on (both for the co-editor camaraderie and for the topics on which we wrote) were the books on nineteenth-century adventure journalists and their exploits in the post-Civil War era and the book that I worked on (writing and editing) with Prof. Debra Reddin van Tuyll on the Western press and the Civil War. Prof. van Tuyll and I realized that both the Midwest and Western regions of the nation contributed many men and materials to the war, yet little had been written concerning how the press in each region covered that war.

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 journalism/mass communication history, what would they be?*

CRONIN: Oh, goodness. I have always just tried my best to write about topics in media history that have yet to be explored—individuals, themes, publications. I don't feel as though my research is as important or impressive as much that is produced by some of the major researchers in our field. I guess my biggest contribution is exploring the importance of regional publications to readers. I recognized early on in my career that although many people who lived in the nineteenth century received newspapers by mail from other regions and shared newspapers with friends and neighbors that they also read their local newspapers. I assumed those newspapers had an impact on their lives. Letters and diaries that I have read over the years from various individuals strongly suggest as much. I encourage scholars to be curious, look for important but often forgotten people and publications and tease out their stories and influence.

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

CRONIN: While spending even more time with historians in graduate school would have benefitted me even more methodologically, the training I received gave me a very useful, if broad, perspective on media law, policy, economics, and theory. That training is still beneficial. I can't really think of anything that I would truly do differently. Reading the journals, studying them for how to engage in good quality research, being curious about media history and the world around me, and paying close attention to other scholars and their research at conferences have all been beneficial. I feel very fortunate to have spent a career doing what I love and constantly learning new things in the process.

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.*

CRONIN: Curiosity, a willingness to try and find the truth, patience (to go through masses of material in archives), and a willingness to question one's assumptions are always important to a historian. I tend to be slow and careful in my research and assessment, and I tend to go to the primary sources first to look and see what people of the time were saying before I go to secondary sources to see how scholars have analyzed their work, if there are previous analyses, even tangentially, of what I am working on for a study. I think it's important to examine marginalized voices but, on occasion, important, influential people have sometimes gone understudied. And I think it's important to really think about media's influence on the public and the role that it actual did—or did not—play at various points in time.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *How would you evaluate the quality of the research in journalism and mass communication history — its strengths and weaknesses?*

CRONIN: Historical research among media historians has seen quite a shift in recent years to using a great deal of theory to guide research studies. I was trained by historians who were meticulous in their methodological approach but eschewed theory as being too limiting. If the findings did not fit the theory, the study was no good. I think there's a balance. Theory can certainly be used and is used successfully but I think we also need to consider the value of rigorous methodological assessment. There's room for both approaches and I hope that both will be welcome since, ultimately, as scholars we are all engaged in trying to give true assessments of the media's history, influence, and impact. I also think that media historians need to make better use of archival materials. I see a lot of studies that look largely at newspaper or magazine content (and sometimes advertising content or photography). A number of important archives throughout the U.S., Canada, and other nations have been collecting journalists' work, as well as the work of photojournalists, advertising executives, and individuals from the broadcasting and public relations fields. There are treasure troves waiting to be examined.

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

CRONIN: I think we need to ensure that journalism history remains a viable course in media programs across our nation. Some schools require media history as a core course, while many others do not. But even in our non-media history courses I think professors need to make students see how our current media practices had antecedents and discuss why those were important.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What challenges do you think journalism and mass communication history faces in the future?*

CRONIN: Funding is always among the challenges. Archives around the world are increasingly filling with wonderful resources for historians but unlike the science fields, there's little money for historians to travel, and we often have to do so out of our own wallets. A second point: Is

the audience there for what we produce? Outside of the scholarly articles that we tend to write for ourselves, can we produce more books with commercial publishers on interesting media topics that the public can afford and will read? Finally, I think that current scholars who are mentoring the next generation need to encourage them to explore so many media topics and personalities and issues that remain unexamined. For example, my current location in New Mexico has long made me realize that numerous Spanish language newspapers have been preserved yet we have so few studies on the influence and impact of the Spanish-language press. Many immigrant newspapers in a variety of languages sit languishing for lack of someone with the interest or ability to assess them. We also need more research on photojournalism and visual media, on important broadcasting, advertising, and public relations history topics. And we need to take stock of our current studies to assess what methodologies and approaches have been popular and what approaches could use more study. For example, as media history scholars we produce few (but high quality) studies of media economics and the impact of finances on media industries. Social and intellectual history often predominates, understandably so because journalists are in the idea business.

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Book Interview

Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern America

By Julia Guarneri

Julia Guarneri is an associate professor of American History at at the University of Cambridge. She is a historian of everyday life and culture in the late-nineteenth and twentiety centuries. A native of Oakland, California, she earned her doctorate at Yale University. She talks with us in this piece about her 2017 book from the University of Chicago Press, *Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern Americans.*

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

GUARNERI: My book is a history of mainstream daily newspapers and the cities they served. Much like cities themselves, turn-of-the-century urban newspapers became more colorful, commercial, and potentially overwhelming to readers. Filled with advertisements and "features"—sections such as the sports page, the metropolitan section, the Sunday magazine, and the comic strips—Sunday papers swelled to 80 or 100 pages. Where nineteenth-century editors had usually addressed a white male (voting) public, twentieth-century editors crafted their papers to appeal to women and men, young and old, immigrant and native-born.

The book shows that newspapers did not just report on cities, but truly helped to build them. Newspapers hosted marketplaces, and boosted urban growth. They waged civic campaigns, and defined urban communities. They taught readers new urban habits, and eventually began to teach them a more nationalized, mass culture. In other words: cities made newspapers, but newspapers also made cities.

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

GUARNERI: Early in graduate school, I wrote a research paper on the Fresh Air Fund, a charity that sent New York City tenement children on countryside summer vacations. The Fresh Air Fund raised money through its sponsor newspaper, the *New York Tribune* (and then later the *New York Times*.) I noticed that journalists tried very hard to make *New York Tribune* readers feel connected to and responsible for these poor children, and how coverage of the charity made the city feel like a big, generous community—even though the articles ran during a period of extreme wealth inequality and social stratification. This research helped me see that newspapers did not just report events. They changed cities, and also changed people's perceptions of their cities. From there I started investigating different sections of turn-of-the-century newspapers to see what functions they served for readers and for cities.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What was the state of the historical literature about the topic at the time you began work on your book?*

GUARNERI: I found deep literatures on the evolution of the role of the reporter, the rise of the ideal of objectivity, and other questions mainly to do with front-page news. However, I was determined to write a history that focused on the sections beyond the front page. I argue that, between 1880 and 1930, this is where the most dramatic transformations took place within newspapers. I also argue that read-

ers themselves spent a great deal of time with, and sometimes developed great affection for, feature sections such as the comic strips and the women's page. Other sections behind the front page might not have been lovable, but they served essential functions within cities: real estate listings, classified ads, commodity prices, movie schedules.

Monographs on individual newspapers and of newspaper publishers helped me piece together these histories. Thinking methodologically, I appreciated books that analyzed newspapers as businesses, such as Gerald Baldasty's *The Commercialization of News*, and I admired work that cast newspapers as actors within their communities, such as David Paul Nord's collection *Communities of Journalism*.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Tell us about the research you did for your book: What were your sources, how did you research your book, how long did you spend, and so forth?*

GUARNERI: I spent the majority of my research time simply reading through newspapers. I wanted to see how newspapers directed readers' attention, the proportion of space they gave to different kinds of content, and the way that advertisements interacted with the news. I spent a lot of time on microfilm. I had to develop a sampling method, since the potential source base was unworkably large. I ultimately decided to study a different news phenomenon, and a different city, in each chapter. This helped make the reading more manageable.

Very few newspapers from this period have existing archives, but I was able to research in the papers of Joseph Pulitzer, the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Milwaukee Journal*. The trade press was also invaluable, especially *Editor & Publisher*. It was there that I learned how newspaper publishers described their audiences to advertisers, and also where I could chase up more information about news syndicates.

I did my first piece of writing on newspapers in 2006 and published my book in 2017. I've since published an article, "'The Melancholy of Women's Pages': Readers, Features, and the Rise of Ad-Sponsored Media" in *Modern American History* (March 2025) which furthers my book's focus on advertising and its influence on news. I am currently finishing an article on the Hearst chain and syndicate, inspired by book research I did on the way that newspaper chains and syndicates transformed local journalism.

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

GUARNERI: I dipped into German-language newspapers for a few chapters of my book, to see how certain phenomena (real estate advertising and news syndicates) functioned in both the English- and foreign-language press. I realized that I couldn't do the foreign-language press justice in a book that was also trying to cover so much ground in the English-language press, but there are many wonderful research projects waiting for Gilded Age/Progressive era scholars who read German, Yiddish, or Polish, which were the most common newspaper languages after English.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Based on your research for the book, is your advise for other historians in our field about working with sources?*

GUARNERI: Don't assume that the media that are important now—or the media that are most easily available for research—are the media that were important in the past. With newspapers, I used Rowell's and Ayer's newspaper directories (now helpfully digitized by the Library of Congress) to learn which papers were the most widely read in my period, and researched those. The *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* (German language) outsold the *New York Times* in the late nineteenth century; Hearst's *Washington Times* outsold the *Washington Post* in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet many projects turn to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* by default, because they are major papers now and because their archives are fully digitized. Radio and television continue to be under-researched because access is more difficult and the research requires more patience than print media.

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

GUARNERI: I wanted to write a history that told a big, national story about newspapers, but I could not research the newspapers of the entire nation, due to the sheer volume of sources. I decided to focus on cities with innovative newspapers that developed influential genres, techniques, and business models. This concentrated my research in the Northeast and Midwest. My focus lent my research coherence, while sacrificing my ability to tell a story that mapped perfectly onto the U.S. West or South. I try to make clear that many patterns that I study held across the country, and also point out important regional differences.

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

GUARNERI: The work I do is not biographical, nor is there really a "protagonist," so I have not felt swayed to turn anyone into a hero or a villain. Perhaps the bigger challenge for me has been to position my work in relationship to established historiographical debates. Because my research has been led by sources, rather than by a sense that prior historians have gotten something wrong, my writing rarely fits neatly into a single historiographical topic. My research speaks to the history of Progressivism, suburbanization, consumer culture, and mass culture, but it is difficult to distil it down to just one historical field or argument.

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

GUARNERI: First, my book clarifies the consequences of a commercial (rather than a partisan) press. On the one hand, a more commercial business model incentivized publishers to diversify their readership. Partisan papers had had no real reason to cater to women, children, or recent immigrants, for example, since they were not voters. Commercial papers did try to reach those audiences, because advertisers wanted their attention. On the other hand, when publishers tried to attract and accommodate advertisers, they commercialized newspapers' content. Editors created many new sections—travel, gardening, home decor, radios, automobiles—just to accompany advertisements.
Second, my book shows how media fueled urban and suburban growth. Real estate sections, features, and advertisements showcased the appeal of new housing developments and suburban living. Publishers then incorporated suburban and regional news into their urban papers, so that far-flung readers would subscribe. Newspapers acted as glue that kept a metropolitan area and its wider region functioning as a unit, all concentrated on the urban center.

Lastly, my book shows that local media were not always very local. By the 1910s and 1920s, newspapers functioned as mass media without most people realizing it. Nearly all city papers included a high proportion of standardized content that their publishers purchased from news syndicates. Syndicated features taught readers across the country to use the same vocabulary, follow the same sports, wear the same fashions, and laugh at the same jokes.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What findings most surprised you?*

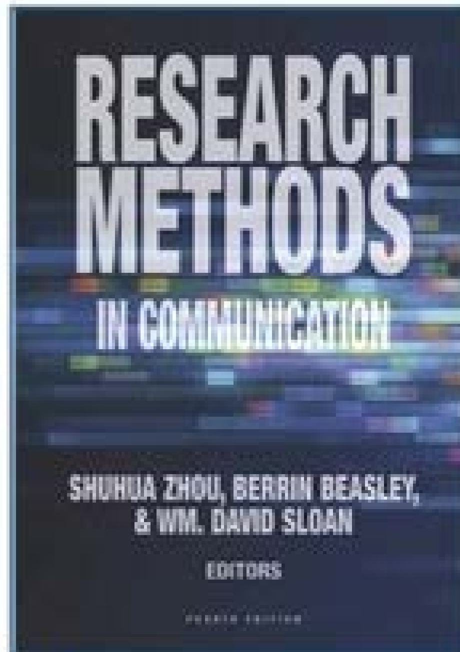
GUARNERI: My book has five chapters and two of them were surprises; I had not included these ideas in my dissertation prospectus at all.

The first surprise was that urban publishers took their non-urban circulations very seriously, catering specifically to suburban, small-town, and rural readers. My chapter on city papers as regional institutions examines Chicago's widening, and ultimately uneven, circulation radius. Publishers used each new delivery technology to widen their reach, but they only wanted readers who could buy goods advertised in the papers. So technologies such as mail order and chain stores helped to determine a city's circulation radius just as much as newspaper trains and delivery trucks.

The second surprise was syndication. I kept seeing the same columns and cartoons in many different newspapers. So I researched the effect of syndication, and also of chain newspapers, on local journalism. Readers sometimes benefitted from these changes, since syndicated features could be much better than what the publisher of a small local paper was able to commission locally. But syndication eroded the regional focus of even the most committed local newspapers.

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

GUARNERI: I would recommend that JMC scholars ask themselves, early in their projects, why their research matters to people who are not intrinsically invested in journalism. This might sound heretical—many historians of journalism are themselves former journalists, and many teach in journalism and mass communication departments. But I think we sometimes limit ourselves to those audiences when we don't have to. A great example of recent wide-reaching scholarship is Kathryn McGarr's book *City of Newsmen*, which argues that reporters' exclusive culture in the 1940s and 1950s led to them withholding information from the public and reporting favorably, or at least discretely, on disastrous foreign policy decisions in the 1950s and early 1960s. Doing deep research in journalistic culture and practice lets McGarr tell a story that matters deeply to the history of the Cold War, policymaking, and the U.S. in the world.



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Book Interview

Making the Liberal Media: How Conservatives Built a Movement Against the Press

By A. J. Bauer

A former journalist, A. J. Bauer is an assistant professor in the Department of Journalism & Creative Media at the University of Alabama. His Ph.D. is from New York University. Bauer researches historical and contemporary right-wing movements and political identities and movements through the prisms of media activism, press criticism and ideological journalism. He talks with us about his new book, *Making the Liberal Media: How Conservatives Built a Movement Against the Press*, which was published earlier this year by Columbia University Press.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Please give us a brief summary of your book.*

BAUER: The book tells the story of how conservatives in the United States came to distrust the mainstream media. It starts in the 1930s–1940s, back when conservatism was politically unpopular and so-called "Old Right" activists were struggling to win people over to their belief in free market capitalism and the maintenance of traditional social hierarchies. During that period, political common sense held that most major newspapers were biased against the New Deal—President Franklin Roosevelt was fond of claiming that some 85 percent of newspapers were against him. Roosevelt famously circumvented this hostile press with his "fireside chats" over radio. By the late 1940s, in response to rampant "reactionary" bias and increasing consolidation within the news industry, a coalition of progressives, leftists, and liberals pushed for reforms. Their efforts ranged from the Hutchins Commission for Freedom of the Press to Federal Communications Commission limits on broadcast ownership and editorialization.

Around the start of the Cold War, members of this progressive media reform movement were among the first targets of the Second Red Scare. George Seldes, a journalist who had created the first mass-circulation newsletter focused on press criticism from a left/labor perspective, *In Fact*, had been spreading word of a "domestic fascist press conspiracy" with *Reader's Digest* at the helm. Seldes was the first target of new initiatives, funded by the right-wing anti-communist Alfred Kohlberg. American Business Consultants, later publishers of the infamous radio and television industry blacklist *Red Channels*, pulled together a research file on Seldes and provided it to the journalist Eugene Lyons—then a writer for anti-Stalinist socialist publications like *New Leader* who, by the late 1950s, would join the masthead of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s conservative magazine *National Review*. Lyons redbaited Seldes in the pages of a new right-wing anti-communist journal *Plain Talk*, accusing him of toeing the Communist Party line. By 1950, Seldes and other progressive media reformers had been pushed to the margins of public life. Meanwhile, anti-communists like Lyons were finding new opportunities in a rejuvenated right-wing publishing industry. I show how structural press criticism followed them from left to right.

A key moment in that shift occurred in 1951, when the Texas oilman H.L. Hunt founded *Facts Forum*, the first grassroots mobilization of what we now call the modern conservative movement. Facts Forum started out as a series of loosely coordinated local discussion groups, designed to debate "both sides" of issues of public concern. Hunt scaled up the concept by creating a series of radio and television programs, which leveraged the affordances of the newly issued Fairness Doctrine, an FCC regulation that required broadcast license holders to cover issues of public controversy in a way that balanced both sides. Facts Forum's goal was, through fostering discussions, amateur public opinion polling, and letter-to-the-editor writing contests, to encourage conservatives to express their beliefs publicly. By 1953, Facts Forum was being broadcast nationwide. That winter, Ben Bagdikian (then a reporter at the *Providence Journal*) published a series exposing Facts Forum as a right-wing

front group. From 1954 until it folded at the end of 1956, Facts Forum found itself a routine target of criticism from the mainstream press and increasingly engaged in meta-commentary accusing that press of Communist sympathies. This, I argue and show, was the beginning of a conflictual relationship between the mainstream media and the modern conservative movement that gave rise to a distinctly conservative critical disposition toward the press.

The latter half of the book tracks how this critical disposition toward the press shaped modern conservative movement strategy and political identity. It contends that understanding the origins of belief in "liberal media" bias requires attending to the less reputable corners of the modern conservative movement. It shows how John Birch Society activists in Birmingham, Alabama criticized local newspaper coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, cultivating antipathy toward both the national and local chain press among the conservative grassroots. It shows how Accuracy in Media (AIM), a conservative press watchdog with roots in anti-communist organizing of the previous decade, capitalized on Spiro Agnew's famous denunciation of the media in late 1969. It shows how AIM both contributed to and leveraged growing journalistic anxiety about audience trust, using the short-lived National News Council to launder its right-wing critiques of media in the 1970s. It shows AIM's complicated relationship with the New Right of the 1970s and depicts the Reagan years as a threshold moment in conservative media activism. Some, like AIM's Reed Irvine and the anti-ERA crusader Phyllis Schlafly, advocated for strengthening the Fairness Doctrine, which they had used to get conservative viewpoints onto mainstream television news. Others, most notably Heritage Foundation founder Paul Weyrich, dreamed of conservative television networks. The Fairness Doctrine was lifted in 1987. In 1988, ABC Radio syndicated Rush Limbaugh nationally. My book explains why he immediately took off, not to mention the growing right-wing media sector that followed. It took decades of activism to build an audience of conservatives, disaffected from the mainstream press, and hungry for alternatives.

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

BAUER: My first research project was an ethnography of the Tea Party movement. After college I worked briefly as a journalist, but in the fall of 2009 I started a Master's program in American Studies at New York University, where I rode out the Great Recession. After a semester reading theory and historiography, I missed talking to regular people. I spent the summer of 2010 in Greater Boston, Massachusetts and Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, attending Tea Party rallies and meetings, and interviewing as many participants as would talk to me.

One thing I noticed was that Tea Partiers were very critical of media but most did not exclusively watch Fox News and listen to talk radio, which was the common assumption at that time. I noticed that far from living in an "echo chamber," these conservatives were active and critical consumers of media. That said, I quickly became exhausted by interview-based methods. Many of my informants wanted to debate me for hours, on top of the hour-long semi-structured interviews I had planned. When I subsequently pursued a PhD in American Studies, I decided to shift gears to archival research. The dead can't argue back and, besides, I wanted to know how conservatives came to distrust the mainstream media so much.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What was the state of the historical literature about the topic at the time you began work on your book?*

BAUER: The historiography of the modern conservative movement blossomed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, after Alan Brinkley wrote an influential 1994 literature review remarking on how historians had so focused on the New Deal order they had neglected the long rise of modern conservatism. My book stands on the shoulders of dozens of historians who heeded his call to research the right—especially works by Bethany Moreton, Joe Lowdnes, Kim Phillips-Fein, Heather Hendershot, and Niki Hemmer.

In 2017, Rick Perlstein—the historian whose four books set the broad narrative structure for the study of modern conservatism—wrote an important *New York Times Magazine* piece noting that the prevailing meta-narrative was insufficient to account for the rise to prominence and power of Donald Trump. John Huntington's subsequent work on the longstanding connections between so-called "respectable" wings of the modern conservative movement, like William F. Buckley, Jr., and more disreputable wings like the John Birch Society, inspired me to focus more on the media activism of the latter.

My book also builds on the work of journalism and mass communication historians and sociologists who have situated journalism, and journalistic professional ideology, within its proper political contexts, most notably Victor Pickard, Michael Schudson, Todd Gitlin, Daniel Hallin, David Mindich, Gwyn Mellinger, Kathy Roberts Forde and Sid Beddingfeld.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *Tell us about the research you did for your book. What were your sources, how did you research your book, how long did you spend, and so forth?*

BAUER: I started the research for what became this book in 2011 and submitted the final draft in spring 2025. When I started, the Tea Party movement was winding down and Donald Trump was still little more than a reality television star. When I finished, Trump was in the early days of his second term as U.S. president. The book looks very different from the dissertation that preceded it because history unfolded and gave me a different vantage for interpreting what I found in the archives.

Research-wise, my first moves sought to find how the problem of right-wing media shaped the early days of mass communication research and activism. I spent time at New York Public Library and Brooklyn College, researching the interwar educational initiative the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, which had spent considerable time criticizing the rhetorical flourishes of fascists and their sympathizers in the run-up to the Second World War. From there I became interested in the Federal Communications Commission's regulation of broadcast editorials—the Mayflower and Fairness Doctrines. While at the National Archives and Records Administration-II in College Park, Maryland, looking at the transcripts and ephemera pertaining to the Mayflower Hearings, I stumbled upon the name Fulton Lewis, Jr. Lewis was a conservative radio commentator from the 1930s up until his death in the mid-1960s. I found his papers at Syracuse University, which helped me better understand his battle against the Consumer Cooperatives movement, which unwittingly shaped the debates that gave us the Fairness Doctrine.

My research into conservative press criticism mostly focused on the *Counterattack* Research Files, located at Tamiment Library at New York University, and the papers of Accuracy in Media, located at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Additional context, about Facts Forum, the end of the Fairness Doctrine, and mainstream journalism's response to Accuracy in Media, took me to the Reagan Library, the Library of Congress, and archives at Duke University, the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan, the University of Texas, and elsewhere. Lastly, this book wouldn't exist, as such, without James Gilbreath providing me with access to the unprocessed research files of his grandfather Jimmy C. Jones, a John Birch Society chapter leader in Birmingham, Alabama and amateur anti-communist journalist. That collection introduced me to the *Birmingham Independent*, which was the basis of the book's crucial middle chapter, and will be a source for future works as well.

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

BAUER: I would have liked to have spent time at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, which holds the archives for many important conservative movement figures. I should probably have spent some time with William F. Buckley's papers at Yale as well, although my choice to avoid them was rooted in a desire to narrate modern conservatism beyond his vantage, and I do think I succeeded there. Mostly, I wish that H.L. Hunt had a publicly accessible archive. The book's Facts Forum chapter would have been easier to pull together if I hadn't had to cobble together published material and ephemera from a half dozen libraries and archives.

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

BAUER: Never satisfy yourself with one archive. No archive exists in isolation. The real work is in piecing together how and when different archives speak to one another. Look at the archives that are already well-represented in the historiography. Find the under-explored archives that those archives speak to and keep expanding the puzzle. Raid the footnotes and visit the archives of the historians you respect the most. Ask different questions than they did and keep adding new patches to our collective quilt-work.

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

BAUER: I don't think neutrality is as important as clarity of purpose. What questions are you trying to answer? How did you arrive at those questions? Why are you uniquely positioned to answer them? Let's not pretend that impartiality is possible or even preferable. Tell the story that you, and only you, can tell.

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

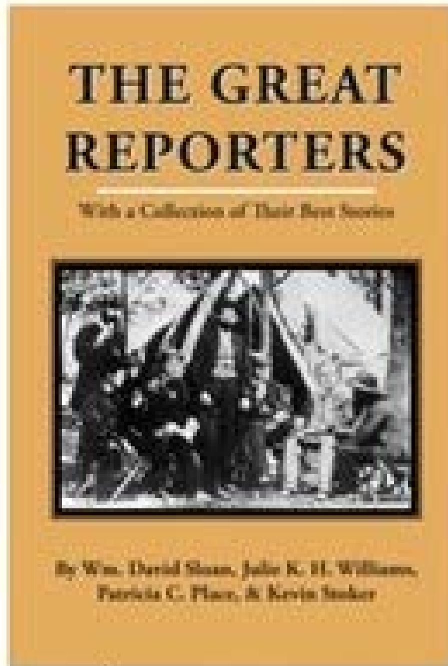
BAUER: That conservatives aren't merely "working the refs" when they criticize media for "liberal bias." The conflict between the modern conservative movement and the press is mutual and has existed since the early 1950s—before what we tend to think of as the formal start of conservative media activism, the founding of the *National Review* in 1955. I find that conservatives started developing a critical disposition toward the mainstream press in earnest as early as 1951. I find that structural press criticism originated on the left and migrated rightward during the Second Red Scare, which first set its sights on progressive media reformers and press critics. Modern conservative identity originates in conflict with the press. You can't have the former without the latter.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: *What findings most surprised you?*

BAUER: I didn't expect to find bridges between the progressive media reform movement, chronicled by the historian Victor Pickard, and the modern conservative movement. I knew from Victor's pathbreaking work that leftists, progressives, and liberals had developed structural press criticism in the 1930s–1940s. What I didn't know, and was surprised to find in the archive, is that right-wing anti-communists were particularly attuned to the efforts of progressive media critics, especially George Seldes, and that they borrowed rhetorical tactics and critical discourses from the left, even as they marginalized progressive media reformers that originally developed them.

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

BAUER: Journalism exists within a broader political, social, and cultural terrain. Journalism and mass communication is especially important because they help constitute that terrain. Don't let the trees distract you from the forest.



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Historical Round Table:

What's Real and What's Fake? Visuals in Media History Scholarship

By Kevin Grieves,
featuring Jennifer Moore, Mark Dolan and Thierry Gervais

As I write this, military conflict in the Middle East is spurring a large wave of postings of photos and video to social media. That in itself isn't so remarkable. What is notable, though, is the growing segment of that imagery depicting things that didn't actually occur. "Deepfake" videos and photos also emerged after the capture of Nicolás Maduro and after ICE killings in Minnesota, both in January 2026. The newest AI-powered tools can create visuals that are increasingly convincing and more difficult to identify as AI-generated. The rapid advancement of AI technology, with its ability to create realistic images and video, has been nothing short of stunning.

The impact of this new technology is prompting many to rethink their trust in media visuals as exact depictions of reality. "For years, people could largely trust, at least instinctively, that seeing was believing," one journalist wrote regarding the early 2026 deepfakes. "Now, what's fake often looks real and what's real often looks fake."[1]

Yet as media historians know, the idea of photographic "truth" has long been contested. This present public reaction to the AI-driven creation and alteration of photos and video provides a good opportunity to reflect on how mass communication historians engage with visual material in their research, and how we might think about our current moment in light of that research.

Dr. Kevin Grieves is associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. His research areas include transnational journalism history, Cold War-era journalism and the German-American press. He is author of two books: *Cold War Journalism: Between Cold Reception and Common Ground* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and *Journalism Across Boundaries: The Promises and Challenges of Transnational and Transborder Journalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). In addition, he is author of a number of articles published in journals such as *American Journalism*, *Media History* and *Journalism Studies*. He received his Ph.D. from Indiana University Bloomington in 2009, entering academia after a previous career as a television news producer and writer.

Dr. Mark K. Dolan is associate professor of journalism and integrated marketing communications at the University of Mississippi. His background includes feature writing for newspapers such as *Savannah Morning News* (GA), and *Biloxi Sun-Herald* (MS), and he has interviewed authors Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, playwright Tom Stoppard, and music legends Doc Watson and Buddy Guy, among others. He studied photography at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography. His ongoing research focuses on advertising and the cultural history of the Black press, and his academic writing has appeared in *Southern Cultures*, *Journal of Illinois History*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, *Discourse & Communication*, *Sociological Forum*, and the *Howard Journal of Communications*.

Dr. Thierry Gervais is professor and director of the Film and Photography Preservation and Collections Management MA program, and head of research of The Image Centre (IMC), Toronto Metropolitan University. He was the editor in chief of *Études photographiques* from 2007 to 2013 and is the author of numerous articles on photojournalism in scholarly publications. He wrote (with Gaëlle Morel) *The Making of Visual News. A History of Photography in the Press* published by Bloomsbury in October 2017 and co-edited, with Vincent Lavoie, *Facing Black Star* published in 2023 by the IMC and MIT Press. His current research focuses on retouched press photographs and the use of AI in photo histories.

Dr. Jennifer E. Moore is associate professor of journalism at the University of Minnesota Duluth. She received her Ph.D. from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Her research interests include journalism history, visual communication, participatory news

practices and digital news preservation. Moore's work on the nineteenth-century illustrated press appears in issues of *Journalism History*, and several chapters in media history collections, including *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting* (Transaction Publishers, 2013) and *After the War: The Press in a Changing America, 1865–1900* (Transaction Publishers, 2017). An essay about her participatory news scholarship appears in the forthcoming *Journalism Research that Matters* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Her research awards include funding from the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and two National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Scholar Awards. She teaches courses in media history, digital journalism, social media and media ethics. Prior to academia, Moore worked as a radio reporter and as a digital content producer and manager.

Editor's note: The original Canadian spellings in Gervais' responses have been maintained.

GRIEVES: How would you characterize the overall importance of visual forms of primary source material (photos, film, video) in mass communication history research? In your own research?

MOORE: Visual primary sources are essential to fully understand mass communication history. For example, as my research on *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* shows, the pictorial content in nineteenth century American newspapers reached audiences and spoke to community concerns in ways that the written word alone did not and could not. Historians Joshua Brown and Neil Harris have warned most historians would rather study language than images to define their subjects and provide evidence. This fundamental neglect of visuals has consequences that linger today. All visual materials, including the work I've done with the nineteenth century illustrated press, endure and should be interrogated for their own meaning-making power -- independent of written language. To borrow from visual scholar Paul Messaris, my research asks what are the fundamental characteristics that distinguish visual images from other modes of communication. In my own work, the interrogation of visual materials reveals meaning beyond a surface-level reading of images. If images appear in historical research, they are often there to merely accompany a text and to be more or less decorative. The wholesale neglect of images as primary objects of study has left us with an impoverished understanding and a wanting vocabulary for analyzing news visuals today. When we treat photographs, film, and video as mirrors of reality rather than carefully crafted representations, we lose the critical tools needed to interrogate how those images shape public understanding, reinforce ideologies, and, in our current moment, identify fabricated or algorithmically generated imagery from images created by humans as evidence of reality.

GERVAIS: Still and moving images are key to understanding mass communication, but I am biased, considering that I spent the last three decades studying the role of photographs in the illustrated press. Since the mid-nineteenth century in Western societies, the use of images in the press has ceaselessly grown to become the main vehicle of news: on paper, in theaters, on TV and of course now on portable devices. I think images are paradigmatic in the field of mass communication and have impacted journalists and press tycoons, media, content, readers who have also become viewers, cultural industries, politicians and now historians who are revisiting histories from the last two centuries with the help of images. This is why I have made a point to put photographs at the centre of my own research dedicated to visual news. I have been studying press photographs as historically anchored visual objects that reveal, beyond their content, cultural and aesthetic choices, technological innovations and beliefs, and financial investments. In other words, I consider photographs and other images as archival sites to address and discuss visual mass communication.

DOLAN: Visual forms are vital, as primary source material, vital. Photography, as well as videography, allows audiences to witness, with the eye, events in all their immediacy. Visual communication in general offers a heightened level of engagement – from the quick, notational glimpse, to a leisurely gaze, from the narrative of the photo essay, which requires time for engagement, to the gallery exhibit of images, culled from daily coverage, intended now for meditation and revisitation. Such is the multi-tiered function of visual communication, within news and information industries historically. Photojournalism, for example, is rooted in Matthew Brady's images of the Civil War, as well as Timothy's O'Sullivan's unhospitable landscapes of the American West, when he in 1867 joined geologist Clarence King's survey of the fortieth parallel—the first federal expedition in the West after the Civil War. Both form a fabric of American photojournalism rooted in realism, and the beginning of a journalistic tradition of great importance to media historians.

The tangible photograph is something mass produced, and mass consumption, along with technology, has always been the goal of the photography since its beginnings. O'Sullivan, for example, an apprentice working at Brady's New York studio, understood the business side of photography. It's helpful in thinking about this question to consider, as contrast, the many paintings depicting the American West in lush, Edenistic brushstrokes. Both Brady and O'Sullivan provided primary source material that anticipated tabloid realism, or even Diane Arbus' provoking images of heroin addicts, strippers and carnival workers. Such are the primary source documents of the American visual; at its core is a realism, but a realism mass produced and consumed. For media historians, a key concern is considering how the meaning of, for example, an original print, changes as it is replicated, distributed. Is its original meaning diluted or expanded through audiences engaging with it? Is its commodity value changed depending on whose hands hold a primary, original image, as well as subsequent copies? This line of inquiry anticipates the proliferation of online images, especially in social media, in which to "tag" someone suggests a shift in meaning, or possession. The photograph is also important as it relates to the technology of the camera. Speed and mass dissemination relate to the evolution of camera technology.

GRIEVES: What are some methodological challenges of using image sources versus written documents?

GERVAIS: I think the main methodological challenge is that you don't read images, you look at them. This sounds like an old adage, but in order to be used in an historical argument, images need to be described and translated into words, which requires skill and attention. Pictures should also be approached as both an image and an object, i.e. a representation conveying a subject and an artifact. The subject is usually the centre of attention for historians at the expense of the other aspects — especially when they discuss photographs. Indeed the "reality effect" of photographs tends to make the medium disappear and gives the feeling of being a first-hand witness. But this "reality effect" is an effect resulting from many choices, starting with those made by the photographer: the scene, the camera, the film (B&W or Colour), the frame, and the composition — choices that induce the understanding of the subject. Then, a picture is a three-dimensional object whose analysis reveals important information: a photographic print can show retouching marks on its recto, while its verso might feature a caption. These elements provide insight into the "social biography" and the circulation of an image from one context to another. A photograph is also made public in specific contexts, like a magazine spread containing other images and text, or the white wall of an art gallery. Finally, when you have seen beyond the subject and taken all of these aspects into consideration, you need to trust your findings, even though they might contradict written sources—a last step that proves to be challenging.

DOLAN: What challenges exist when using image sources make them interesting and lend scholarly grist. Photography is a form of writing, only with light. And so, what language is it in? Who is its author? In the case of archival newspapers, at times we do not know who took a photo unless there is a credit, though this is sometimes the case for written copy, too – stories without bylines. The writerly tools of the photographer, and for that matter the videographer, come into play. How a still image is cropped, or a clip shortened – such actions shape the meaning of what is said. These are all part of a language that speaks in terms of negative space, implied motion, line, color and other elements. Such would seem an initial challenge – the acquisition of some basic understanding of the language of visual communication. A second challenge exists in considering the interplay between images, whether still or moving, or with text. The ways in which one medium in a sense converses with another creates a new narrative. Photojournalists are often celebrated away from their publications, in gallery exhibits and in photo books, as well as photographic archives. An important challenge, possibly an opportunity, is to research the discourse between and among images within magazines and newspapers, thinking about how the writing shapes and cajoles visual content. Perhaps a possible challenge though is in thinking of the inherent subjectivity of the photograph. As photography sought to supplant painting with immediacy, it retained all of the subjectivity of the artist's easel. To this day in newsrooms, the photo department is less bound by objectivity and accuracy; it's more whether one likes a given image better than another. That's the starting point. The visual becomes a separate conversation amid one governed by the language of words. All of this points to a central methodological challenge, one discussed by Robert Park, Walter Benjamin and others: the permeability of media to legions of influences, and influencers. To consider media as a collision of impulses is to situate the challenges around visual materials with a context that calls for an understanding of concepts like collective memory while at the same time letting us think about the subjectivity inherent in, say, the photograph.

MOORE: One of the central methodological challenges is to understand that images hold meaning well beyond their face value, or what some might call a "gut" reaction of what you think you may see. It's important to approach the study of visuals with an understanding that there is no natural or fixed meaning embedded in a picture any more than there is into a word. This makes visual analysis interpretive work that likely makes scholars seeking empirical certainty uneasy. Visual scholarship requires going beyond the manifest content to reveal latent, or implicit, meaning. At first glance, it is what may seem obvious in pictorial content that captures one's attention, but the real work comes from deeper interrogation. Methods of studying images as primary sources, when done well, are deeply interpretive work that likely makes social scientists and other scholars seeking empirical certainty uneasy. That skepticism is understandable but also reflects a broader misunderstanding of the study of visuals as primary "texts." It is the interpretive challenge that is also what makes visual analysis methodologically necessary: not unlike written documents, images activate prior knowledge, cultural memory, and ideological assumptions in ways that demand the scholar account for what the viewer brings to the text, just as the image must be situated within the social, political, and technological conditions of its production.

GRIEVES: What are some non-visual types of primary sources to complement visual materials that you have found helpful in your research?

DOLAN: I've analyzed the copy that accompanies race record advertisements in the *Chicago Defender*, exploring how the illustrations explicate or in some cases deviate from the word narratives. Then, to triangulate, I've brought to the fore the songs themselves, and heard how the lyrics and catharsis of emotion in the song is, at times, at odds with the promotion of the records. This was great fun, because it allowed me to research three mediums – writing, visual, and aural.

MOORE: This question is perhaps best answered through a specific example from my research. In my research on 19th century illustrated newspaper entrepreneur Frank Leslie and his investigative reporting on a public health crisis as a pictorial exposé, a number of written primary sources were essential for contextualizing the illustrations and understanding how meaning was made for original

audiences. Leslie's own editorial language, such as his letters published and text-based advertisements he placed in other newspapers, was essential to understanding how he approached visual images as breaking news. Captions on his illustrations were also important for context, and what journalism historians Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone call "amplification." Both were essential to help reconstruct how the illustrated newspaper guided readers toward particular interpretations of the images. Scientific reports and the writings of reform movements, such as the work of Robert M. Hartley and John Mullaly, helped to establish the public health framework that Leslie drew upon and visually translated into illustrations for his readership. Contemporary newspaper accounts at the time, from the *New York Tribune*, the *New York Herald*, and other papers, provided important complementary and critical context as well in order to reveal how print-only outlets rhetorically framed the same crisis. Public health records, city aldermanic reports, and other municipal documents of committee work offered an important, contextual institutional perspective. These sources span several categories: the publication's own editorial and textual content, reform literature and scientific writing, competing newspaper coverage, and official government and public health records. Together, these written sources helped reveal the ideological and political forces shaping both the production of Leslie's images and their reception in antebellum New York.

GERVAIS: First, I would say that visual sources complement each other: looking at newsreels, as well as historical paintings and caricatures, is important to understanding press photographs (and vice versa), as all of the choices described above are made in order to fit (or not) the visual culture of a time and place. The objecthood of the studied images is also resourceful: the film stock, the paper of the print, the marks and deteriorations on a picture, the film canister, the painting canvas, the type of pigments, the magazine page, etc. To this, it is important to add the analysis of where these objects are being accessed: a public archive, a library, a museum, or a house attic. Complementing sources vary according to the medium studied and their usage. In the case of press photographs, a lot of written information can be found on the verso of a print, like captions, dates, agency stamps, and editorial codes. Diaries, personal and professional correspondence, and work notes say a lot about a photographer's, and any other intermediary's, goals in the dissemination of images, and the expectations of the targeted public. Finally, the context of dissemination can provide exhibition labels and wall text, scientific data, accompanying articles, design, etc.

GRIEVES: Our current AI moment threatens to erode public trust in visual journalism. Yet while alteration and manipulation of photos and video have become much easier now, it's not a new phenomenon. How have audiences in the past navigated interpretation of altered visuals? Are there lessons from the past that can be drawn by today's audiences?

GERVAIS: Indeed, it is not a new phenomenon. Since the publication of illustrated news weeklies in the mid-nineteenth century, images have carried a lot of expectations. The mechanical and indexical nature of photographs has always been used to support a discourse regarding their authenticity and credibility. But news images are the result of a construction that goes beyond taking a photograph and which involves a picture editor, an artistic director, and a retoucher. In spite of photo-retouching practices developed early in the analog era and made easy and common in the digital era, the general belief in photographs has remained. We will see if this belief persists in the generative AI era. I think the lesson here consists in encouraging audiences to be critical of the media images they look at, to not only see the subject of an image but its construction, and to gauge the impact of the context in their understanding of this image. This critical approach is necessary to fully appreciate news images and potentially trust them. The trust in visual journalism does not solely rely on a medium but on a contract involving all the actors participating in the dissemination of images. This contract has always been revisited and renegotiated.

MOORE: Nineteenth-century audiences were well aware that the wood engravings appearing in illustrated newspapers like *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* were interpretive. For authenticity, these "artists-reporters" sometimes inserted themselves into their own creations for transparency purposes and to provide a sense of authenticity. When photography emerged, it carried the burden of mechanical objectivity that was vulnerable to manipulation. By the early twentieth century, darkroom manipulation, composite photographs, and staged images were well-documented practices that critics and others regularly exposed. Some may be familiar with famous, prize-winning photojournalism that was later found to be manipulated for aesthetic reasons, for example.

It is equally important to guard against the assumption that audiences in the past were more gullible or more easily swayed by sensational illustrations and manipulated imagery. That position deserves scrutiny. In our current moment, I would argue that decades of educational shifts in the U.S. that have privileged STEM over the arts and humanities have eroded the kind of critical thinking and media literacy that prepares the public to recognize when they are being manipulated. So, the threat to public trust can be traced to not only technological change but also shifting pedagogical priorities. There are striking parallels between the laissez-faire, market-driven values of the nineteenth-century Gilded Age that prioritized profits over civic welfare and the neoliberal values that are shaping educational policy today that privilege "workforce readiness" over critical inquiry.

A lesson for today is that trust in visual journalism was never simply about images. It has also depended on trust in the social institutions, like media organizations, and their practices surrounding image (re)production. Rebuilding that trust in the AI era requires much more transparency about process, robust editorial standards, and an informed public willing to ask how an image was made and by whom.

GRIEVES: In what ways could the current rise of AI-driven image and video generation/manipulation alter how scholars think about authenticity in relation to historical visual records?

DOLAN: In my view, the current rise of AI-driven image and video generation and manipulation should allow scholars to question more deeply and rigorously the authenticity of visual records. In an age when not only manipulation, but generation of images is changing photography as we have known it, an opportunity for research arises: Algorithmic information used to generate images tells us much about collective memory, i.e., what flowers or a mountain stream look like, but also what peace or a cessation of war is to be, and from whose point of view.

GERVAIS: Generative AI is already producing photographic-looking images of fictional and historical events, which are visually difficult to identify. Like the general audience of news images, scholars must deconstruct the image-making before looking at subjects and validating their authenticity. Determining the process from which an image results, recognizing a visual syntax from a cultural era, identifying a maker and their background, tracking down an original print or a RAW file, locating where they are archived or collected, and visiting these places to look at the original and not only its reproduction available online, have always been the necessary steps to properly use visual sources. As said above, the medium itself is not enough to guarantee the authenticity of an image's content. Beyond validating the accuracy of a photographic subject, the analysis of the image-making is very fruitful. It allows us to discuss how imaginaries lead to technological developments, how news images inform and distract audiences, how our belief in images relies on their aesthetics, and how image industries control the chain of choices from the making to the public dissemination of an image, etc. It is our role as scholars to open the black boxes producing images and to contribute to the renegotiation of the contract regarding visual authenticity.

1 Angela Yang, "AI is intensifying a 'collapse' of trust online, experts say," NBC News, January 9, 2026, https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/experts-warn-collapse-trust-online-ai-deepfakes-venezuela-rcna252472

News & Notes

Please note: Announcements are from the activity organizers. Also, some hyperlinks were not available as clickable links.

AJHA Call for Papers

The American Journalism Historians Association's 45th annual convention is set for November 5-7, 2026, at the Westin Poinsett Hotel in Greenville, South Carolina. The call for papers, panels, and research-in-progress is now open.

AJHA welcomes original work across journalism and media history: print, broadcasting, advertising, public relations, transnational research, and more. There are three ways to participate: 1) a completed research paper, 2) a panel proposal featuring scholars exploring a shared topic, or 3) a research-in-progress abstract for work still taking shape.

See the full call here: https://ajha.wildapricot.org/call_for_papers_2026

Accepted papers are eligible for several named awards recognizing outstanding work by faculty and students, including international history, minority journalism history, women's history, and media and war.

The deadline for all submissions is June 15, 2026. Authors can expect notification of acceptance by late July.

Questions can be directed to Jennifer Moore, AJHA Research Committee Chair:

mooreje@d.umn.edu

CFP: Media, Press Freedom, and Cultural Production in an Authoritarian Age

The Union for Democratic Communications, Project Censored, and the Park Center for Independent Media, in a spirit of collaboration and coalition-building, seek to bring together activists, artists, researchers, and legislators to foster critical approaches that support reimagining an infrastructure rich in equitable and democratic possibilities, where a healthy media ecosystem can thrive. We invite communication researchers, journalists, cultural producers, policy analysts, academics, and activists to submit abstracts that examine our theme, Media, Press Freedom, and Cultural Production in an Authoritarian Age.

Founded in 1976, Project Censored celebrates its 50th Anniversary in an era of misinformation, where press freedom and media independence are under unprecedented attack. At this critical juncture, Project Censored's advocacy for freedom of the press, media literacy and critical thinking, and the Union for Democratic Communications' critical analysis of communications industries and the fight to democratize them are more crucial than ever. Together, we are proud to co-host the conference "Media, Press Freedom and the Fight for Democracy in an Authoritarian Age," October 23-24, 2026, at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York.

UDC, which held its first conference in 1981, has worked to overcome concentrated political-economic power in order to contribute to a world based on economic justice, equality, and peace. Project Censored, founded in 1976, has made its mission to expose and counteract modern-day censorship. Launched in 2008, the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College is a national center for the study of independent media focusing on news outlets that create and distribute content outside of corporate systems. Together, UDC, Project Censored, and the Park Center for Independent Media hope to contribute to a more democratic society and world by sharing our scholarly and activist projects.

UDC and Project Censored conferences have long spotlighted the march toward totalitarianism—we now find ourselves in it. The historical present is marked by an expansion of violent imperialism and genocide, accelerating climate and ecological crises, the silencing and criminalization of dissent, censorship and government control over the press, the globalized spread of mis- and disinformation, and a pandemic spread of oligarchic capitalism.

All this is being sustained by an oligopolistic media system whose ready acquiescence to the Trump regime's preferences reflects that our communications channels have been co-opted to support an increasingly repressive state. Government interference in free speech and media autonomy is no longer covert, as the U.S. president regularly threatens media outlets, creatives, and journalists critical of his administration. An increasingly consolidated industry has enormous interest in serving the political aims of authoritarian governments in the US and abroad, as mergers have wrought historic levels of consolidation of media power and wealth at a global scale.

Our shrinking media ecosystem has led to a drastic shift in which voices are considered prominent and whose voices count and matter. It has become increasingly difficult to garner visibility through algorithmic bias and inequity. Privilege has unfairly been afforded to content that promotes increased levels of hate, violence, and division. Content from independent news outlets reporting critically on issues of war and peace, civil liberties, economic inequality, racial and gender oppression, and environmental degradation are being greylisted or blocked entirely. Meta, TikTok, Google, and Amazon, among others, continue to be vehicles which enable the few to hold the majority in this bid for control. Platforms that were championed as arenas for social gathering and understanding have now been co-opted as agents under an authoritarian regime.

Media platforms are increasingly central to shaping contemporary political discourse and are not neutral actors but remain embedded within capitalist, elite-dominated political-economic systems. As such, these infrastructures enable reactionary political projects and the circulation of extremist content, leading to further societal division. These tech monopolies have contributed significantly to sowing the seeds of discord, distrust, and discontent.

Through these attacks, we continue to see the decimation of public trust and the erosion of democracy through the erasure of local stories and voices and the muzzling of the press. This has produced what Naomi Klein describes as a "mirror world": a parallel version of our reality, where distrust of institutions and authority are mobilized in the service of authoritarian interests. As mainstream and publicly funded media outlets and the legacy press are decimated, independent media is more important than ever. However, the mirror world presents challenges to the definition and political implications of "independent media." The spaces for distribution, such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are owned by reactionaries, and algorithmic logics work in the interest of the Silicon Valley techno-fascists to incubate far-right subcultures and figures.

Now, we must ask how do we protect what is left of democratic communication[s]? How do we sustain our social movements in the fight of/for our lives?

Please find the conference announcement and this call for papers at democraticcomm.org. More information on our co-sponsors Project Censored and the Park Center for Independent Media by clicking on their links.

Submissions will open on May 1 and close on July 5.

We encourage you to share this call to help ensure myriad and diverse voices can be in conversation with one another and enrich our time together.

Topics may also include, but are not limited to:

- Critical communication pedagogy
- Race, class, gender, feminisms, indigeneity
- Media literacy and critical media theory
- "Fake news," disinformation, misinformation, conspiracy
- Forms of propaganda
- Censorship and attacks on press freedom
- AI and the media
- Debt, precarity, austerity
- Immigration, refugees and migrants
- Intersectionality, CRT, racial capitalism
- Imperialism, colonialism/post-colonialism and/or the primitive accumulation of capital
- Slavery, incarceration and detention
- Arts, culture, and preservation
- Neo-fascism
- Alt-global visions
- Left-state alternatives
- Media reform and communication policy
- The neoliberal assault on higher education, radical scholars, and academic freedom
- The state of education, childcare, eldercare, and healthcare in the U.S. and beyond
- Militarism, genocide, femicide, war, conflict, erasure
- Eco media and communication
- Surveillance and data collection
- Media workers, labor and unions
- Cultural studies and critical studies of cultural policy

Individual Submissions

Abstracts for papers should be 400-700 words.

Enhancing Chance of Acceptance for Individual Submission: * Don't reveal your identity in the title, abstract, or cover page * Make sure your abstract relates to either the conference theme or the organization's mission (and ideally, to both) * Describe clearly and concisely (400-700 words) what your submission does. * Make sure it is well-edited.

Abstracts for Panels, Workshop, Working Groups, and Roundtables should be around 700 words and include the following:

- One submitter, ideally the session organizer, submits an overall abstract for the panel, workshop, etc.
- The abstract should also include presentation titles and their presenters
- All panelists should also be listed as authors on the data page following the submission of the abstract
- Make sure all abstracts relate to either the conference theme or the organization's mission (and ideally, to both)

Deadlines, Dates & How to Submit

Submit your proposals here: udc2026.exordo.com/

You'll need to set up a free account in Ex Ordo.

- Abstracts due by July 5
- Notification of acceptance: Aim to distribute by July 19
- Applications for travel award due: July 31
- Application for the Brian Murphy Student Paper Award due: July 31
- Early-bird registration begins: May 1
- General registration begins: August 1

Conference Details

- Dates: October 22 - 24
- Location: Ithaca College, NY.
- Hosts: Park Center for Independent Media and Project Censored

We look forward to reviewing your submissions. Please be on the lookout for additional conference information, awards, and logistics. Please save the date and know that we look forward to gathering everyone at Ithaca College in October.

Graduate students should submit full papers and abstracts to be considered for the Brian Murphy Student Paper Award.

- Submit de-identified papers to support@democraticcomm.org. Include "Brian Murphy Student Paper" and title of the paper in the subject line

- All submissions are given a double-blind review.

Call for Papers for Printing History Themed Issue: Printing Across Borders

Printing History 39 will spotlight print practices that engage critically with the theme of borders and border crossings. The topic can be approached literally and/or conceptually. We are particularly interested in articles that challenge, upend, or otherwise interrogate notions of national identity, imagined communities, and borderlands.

We invite interested researchers, professionals, and practitioners to share work engaged with the following topics:

- Print production straddling geographic and/or figurative borders
- Printed materials that resist xenophobia and challenge nationalist impulses
- Activist print cultures: posters, broadsides, zines, ephemera
- Anticolonial, radical, revolutionary printing
- Print as political and cultural critique
- Print practices of under-researched and/or marginalized groups and individuals

In general, Printing History follows the Chicago Manual of Style.

Submissions should be emailed to **editor@printinghistory.org**. If you have questions about this issue, the process, or the journal in general, do not hesitate to write. We do not solicit proposals for articles, but we are happy to discuss ideas and abstracts via email.

Submission deadline: June 12, 2026

Technologies, Medias, Film & the City

A conference call on the future of life in TOWNS, CITIES, REGIONS

The history of cinema is rich in examples of film as a vehicle to document, critique, and explore the urban phenomenon, whether that be life in cities, the construction of towns, or the urban environments as a backdrop or protagonist. While the city symphony is the most obvious example, the history and present of filmmaking continues to demonstrate a critical and insightful eye on the urban condition today.

Beyond film, gaming, video, and animation all have their particular perspectives and uses for the urban environment which, in and of itself is getting ever more cinematic – buildings display moving imagery, photogrammetry projects live onto architectural facades, and the contemporary city is now fully intertwined with video surveillance and real-time data analysis and visualization at every level.

Reflecting on this entwined relationship between technology, visual media and the 'city', this strand call welcomes contributions from filmmakers, artists, digital technologists, animators and more. The aim is to get a better sense of the past, present and future of this relationship and to encourage debate and knowledge sharing between the various disciplines engaged in it, whether from the arts, design, technology, planning or the social sciences.

Place: Dublin, Ireland (+virtual)
Dates: June 28-29, 2027
Abstracts: 15 July 15, 2026 (Early)
Nb. December 5, 2026 (Round One Abstract Submissions)
Website: https://amps-research.com/dublin-technology-media/
Conference organizers are University College Dublin and AMPS. Publishers are Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UCL Press, Intellect Books
TO SUBMIT AN ABSTRACT:
Contact Claire Short, Amany Maray, Rachel Isaac-Menard at info@amps-research.com

Now Live: African Journal of Media and Society

The editors are pleased to announce the launch of the African Journal of Media and Society (AJMS).

AJMS is a peer-reviewed, Africa-centered journal dedicated to advancing critical scholarship on media, culture, and society in Africa and its diaspora. The inaugural issue features contributions that engage pressing questions with intellectual rigor and cultural relevance.

We invite you to explore the journal here:

https://www.africanjournal.org/

We welcome engagement from researchers, practitioners, and theoreticians committed to Africa-centered approaches to media, culture, and society.

Histories of Publishing on Media, for History of Media Studies

History of Media Studies solicits proposals for a special section on the histories of publishing in the media, communication, and film studies fields. The focus of the special section is on the role of publishers—both commercial and nonprofit—in these fields' development. We are keen to highlight the contributions of publishing houses and publication initiatives from around the world, including those beyond the Anglophone North Atlantic.

Most existing histories of the media, communication, and film studies fields take the publication context of the works they survey for granted. The premise of the special section is that specific publishers—and the wider world of academic publishing—have made a difference in the development of local, national, and subfield traditions of scholarship. Very few works of dedicated history have attended to these publishing ventures. The special section will provide a forum for new accounts, in conversation with these fields' intellectual and institutional histories.

Proposals of around 1000 words, including references, should be sent to hms@mediastudies.press, with the subject line: Histories of Publishing. The deadline for submitting proposals is September 15, 2026. Please reach out if you have any questions or ideas.

Proposals may be submitted in English or Spanish, the two languages that History of Media Studies publishes.

We expect most contributions to be research articles (generally 14,000 words or fewer), but we will also consider other formats, including research notes, commentaries, interviews/oral histories, overlay re-publications, and contextualized archival materials; please see our Author Guidelines for more details: https://hms.mediastudies.press/author-guidelines

Suggested approaches include, but are not limited to:

- Case studies of media-related publishing houses
- Accounts of small and independent presses, as incubators of heterodox media scholarship
- Treatments of significant commercial publishers (e.g., Routledge)
- Studies of influential book series, including translation series
- Accounts of institutional publishing (e.g., UNESCO or CIESPAL)
- Histories of the publishing initiatives of scholarly associations, including association-affiliated journals
- Self-publishing and informal circulation in activist media scholarship
- The role of translation and translated editions
- Treatments of the relationship between books and journal portfolios within presses
- Historical accounts of the political economy of publishing and its effects on the field
- Reflections on the role of editors and editing as mostly invisible intellectual labor
- Accounts of publishing initiatives beyond the Anglophone world, including in Latin America
- Female-run initiatives, editors, and publishers

Please reach out to hms@mediastudies.press with any questions.

Third International History of Knowledge Conference: "Decentering the History of Knowledge" - Utrecht University (2027)

The third History of Knowledge Conference will take place in Utrecht on 25-27 August 2027. The conference follows the successful first international History of Knowledge Conference in Porto in 2023, and the second edition, hosted by the Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge in 2025. Utrecht University is home of the Descartes Centre for the History and Philosophy of Sciences and the Humanities, and the field's flagship Journal for the History of Knowledge.

In recent years, history of knowledge has developed into a vibrant field of interdisciplinary research and scholarship around the globe. The History of Knowledge Conference will gather scholars with a diversity of backgrounds to further develop the field and its impact on other disciplines and society. Fostering inclusivity, we welcome all scholars working on the history of knowledge in the broadest sense. The central theme of the conference will be: "Decentering the History of Knowledge."

What does it mean to decenter the history of knowledge? We understand it to mean:

- Decentering the geography of knowledge, adopting a global approach by comparing and connecting different geographical areas around the world.
- Including different forms of knowledge without privileging academic or written knowledge, while paying attention to shifting epistemic hierarchies.
- Dealing even-handedly with knowing and not-knowing, by shifting focus to ignorance, failure, and error as inherent to knowledge practices.
- Embracing epistemic diversity in different guises, by concentrating on the role of virtues and vices in shaping the identity of knowledge actors.
- Developing a more-than-human history of knowledge, including a variety of actors including non-human animals, plants, minerals or instruments.
- Adopting transdisciplinary approaches to develop the history of knowledge, historicizing formal and informal knowledge institutions such as universities and societies, households and families.

The conference is explicitly global in scope, and its time span is antiquity to the present. We encourage contributions moving beyond specific geographies and chronologies; we aim at a structure for the conference that is not a division in terms of geographies or chronologies.

A call for papers will be published in the Fall of 2026.

If you wish to be kept informed, register with: "hokconference27@uu.nl."

Upcoming Deadline: CFP for the Southern Gothic Area at PCAS/ACAS 2026

The Southern Gothic is not merely a regional offshoot of the Gothic tradition—it is a dynamic cultural mode shaped by the histories, violences, mythologies, and contradictions of the American South. Rooted in hauntings both literal and structural, the Southern Gothic interrogates race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ecology, labor, memory, and the ongoing afterlives of history. Its borders—like its landscapes and bodies—are unstable, porous, and contested.

Whether understood as genre, aesthetic, or rhetorical strategy, the Southern Gothic stages encounters with repression, grotesquerie, decay, excess, and revelation. It manifests in literature, film, television, music, digital culture, performance, and visual art. From canonical authors to contemporary Black, queer, and Indigenous creators; from prestige horror to folk aesthetics circulating on TikTok; from plantation tourism to eco-horror cinema—the Southern Gothic remains a vital framework for critically examining how the South is imagined, commodified, resisted, and reconfigured.

The Southern Gothic Area of the Popular Culture / American Culture Association in the South (PCAS/ACAS) invites proposals for individual papers, roundtables, or full panels

(3–4 papers) for the 2026 PCAS/ACAS Annual Conference, to be held October 15 – 17, 2026 in New Orleans, La.

Topics may include (but are by no means limited to):

- Contemporary Southern Gothic in film, television, streaming, and literature
- Black, Indigenous, and Latinx Southern Gothic traditions
- Queer and trans Southern Gothic
- Religion, evangelical spectacle, and faith practices
- Eco-Gothic Souths: climate crisis, landscape, extraction, environmental decay
- Southern noir and crime narratives
- True crime, documentary, and the commodification of Southern violence
- Carcerality, labor, poverty, and regional capitalism
- Vampires, monsters, ghosts, witches, cryptids, and body horror in the Southern imaginary
- Adaptation and transmedia reimaginings
- Southern Gothic in music and sound cultures
- Digital Southern Gothic (games, podcasts, social media, graphic narratives)
- Regional inflections: Appalachian, Delta, Gulf Coast, Borderlands Gothic, etc.
- Disability, madness, addiction, and mental health narratives in the South
- Camp, grotesque humor, and performance
- Pedagogical approaches to teaching the Southern Gothic
- Intersections with adjacent modes (folk horror, Afrofuturism, speculative fiction, Southern surrealism)

Submission Guidelines:

To propose a presentation (20 minutes or less) or roundtable for the Southern Gothic Area, please email your proposal to Area Chair Stephanie Graves at **Southern-GothicPCAS@gmail.com** by **June 15, 2026**, and include author's name(s), institutional affiliation and email address. Additionally, please include a statement of whether the submission is an individual paper, roundtable, or full panel and an abstract of 250 words or fewer. Also note whether you need A/V for your presentation.

Submission deadline is June 15, 2026; Notifications of acceptance will be sent by July 1, 2026.

NOTE: Please submit directly to the Area Chair rather than through the PCAS/ACAS website if your proposal is intended specifically for the Southern Gothic Area.

2027 Agricultural History Society & Rural Women's Studies Association

Joint Conference Call For Proposals

Theme: Identities, Landscape, Boundaries

For their joint 2027 conference, the Rural Women's Studies Association and the Agricultural History Society invite scholars and students, artists and scientists, and community practitioners to explore the theme **"Identities, Landscape, Boundaries."** Boundaries—whether physical, political, social, cultural, or ecological—shape how people define themselves and their communities. They mark divisions between places, professions, and identities, while also creating dynamic spaces of exchange, negotiation, and transformation. This theme invites participants to examine how boundaries are made and remade, crossed and contested, and how those processes affect rural lives, landscapes, and livelihoods across time and place.

We welcome papers and panels that engage with literal and figurative boundaries, including but not limited to topics such as transnational and regional borders; farm and town relationships; environmental and ecological change, the borders of race, gender, class, and sexuality; and the boundaries of ownership, belonging, and representation. By bringing together the insights of agricultural, environmental, and rural women's history, this conference aims to illuminate the shifting identities, power dynamics, and connections that emerge where people, ideas, and environments meet at the borders.

Possible theme-related proposals might include—but are not limited to—the following topics:

- Life on the border, i.e., transnational borders, state borders, community borders, reservation borders
- Life between borders, i.e., farm/town relationships
- Relationships between professions, i.e., sustainable vs. conventional farmers
- Explorations of "big" boundaries of race, religion, politics, gender, sexuality
- Contesting and negotiating borders
- Climate change and shifting ecological borders
- The boundaries of ownership -- exploring land use, ownership, and dispossession
- Queer ruralities and reimagined borderlands
- Agricultural practices, policies, and trade as boundary-making
- Digital borders and rural connectivity
- Land, water, and ecological boundaries
- Seasonal, temporary, and invisible borders of labor
- The borderlands of belonging
- Imagining and representing rural borders
- Boundaries of memory and storytelling

While both organizations urge scholars to submit papers, panels, and presentations that relate to the conference theme, submissions on other topics are also welcome.

AHS Statement:

The Agricultural History Society was founded in Washington, DC in 1919 "to promote the interest, study and research in the history of agriculture." Incorporated in 1924, the Society began publishing a journal, *Agricultural History*, in 1927. The term "agricultural history" has always been interpreted broadly, and the Society encourages research and publishes articles from all countries and in all periods of history. Initially affiliated with the American Historical Association, the Agricultural History Society is the third oldest, discipline-based professional organization in the United States. Currently the membership includes agricultural economists, anthropologists, economists, environmentalists, historians, historical geographers, rural sociologists, scientists, and a variety of independent scholars.

RWSA Statement:

Founded in 1997, RWSA is an international association for the advancement and promotion of research on rural women and gender in a historical perspective. RWSA welcomes academic scholars, public historians and archivists, graduate students, and representatives of rural organizations and communities to be association members and conference participants.

RWSA promotes and advances farm and rural women's/gender studies from a historical perspective by encouraging research, promoting scholarship, and establishing and maintaining links with organizations that share these goals. Worldwide, the association aims to encourage research, to promote existing and forthcoming scholarship, and to establish and maintain links with contemporary organizations around the interests of rural women, rural communities and the rural environment, including farming and the agricultural sector, from a gender perspective.

Both organizations welcome academic scholars from diverse fields, public historians and archivists, graduate students, practitioners, and representatives of rural/agricultural organizations and communities as conference participants and members of our organizations. We look forward to proposals for individual papers, full panel sessions, posters, roundtables, and what we are calling "novelty" sessions that could include films, performances, practitioner discussions, and more.

Submission Instructions:

Deadlines

- June 1, 2026 – Early submission deadline (recommended if you need additional time to arrange international travel visas)
- September 15, 2026 – Regular deadline

Presentation Formats

- Full panels
- Roundtables
- Novelty Sessions (i.e., film, performance, etc.)
- Individual papers (recommendation: please submit to and review the Collaboration Spreadsheet to identify similar papers and form a full panel)
- Posters
- Submission
- All submissions must be made using THIS FORM before September 15, 2026.
- Submissions received by June 15, 2026, will receive a response by August 15, 2026.
- We will notify all applicants of the status of their application by December 1, 2026.

For most submissions, you will need your paper title and abstract, and presenter name/position/affiliation/email address. These materials for all papers, plus the session title and abstract are needed for full panels and roundtables. To submit a panel or roundtable, you will need to identify one person to gather and submit the entire panel/roundtable. Most sessions will be 90 minutes. If you wish to deviate from the normative session length or style, please detail your preferred format in your proposal. Please include any audiovisual or other technological needs with your proposal.

This will be an in-person conference in Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA. By submitting a proposal, you are committing to participate in person at the date and time assigned should your proposal be accepted.

AHS and RWSA are able to provide a limited amount of Jensen-Neth grants that will cover conference registration and housing in the university dorms. The Jensen-Neth grant application is available HERE. Deadline to request a grant is September 15, 2026.

Program Committee:

- Elyssa Ford, Northwest Missouri State University (chair)
- Joe Anderson, Mount Royal University (AHS)
- Karen Scholthof, Texas A&M University (AHS)
- John Seitz, Tennessee Wesleyan University (AHS)
- Mary Curtin, University of Limerick (RWSA)
- Corrina Neal, Arkansas State University (RWSA)
- Jodey Nurse, McGill University (RWSA)

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