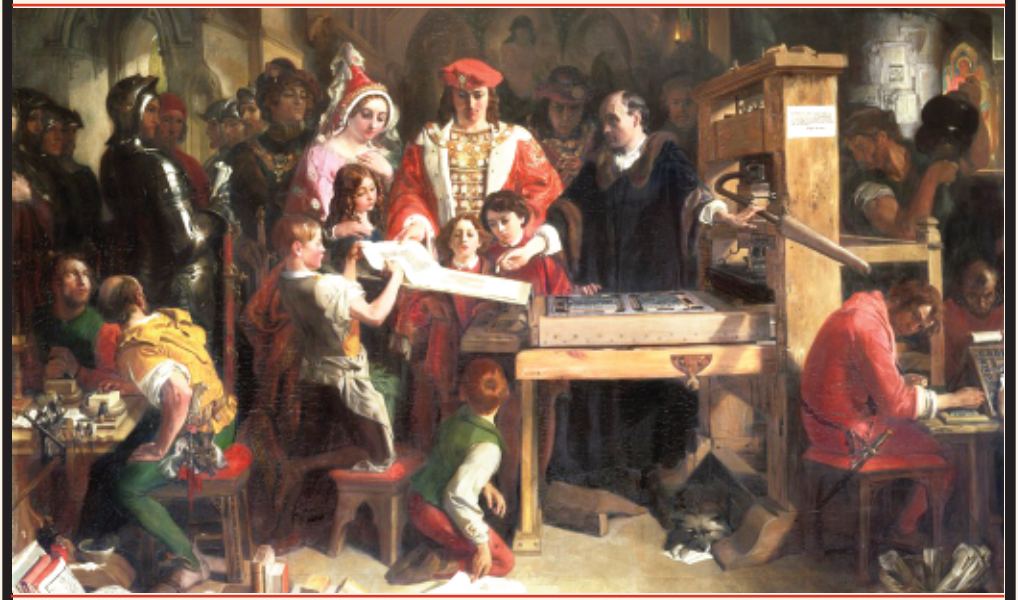
Historiography

in Mass Communication



Volume 4 (2018). Number 1

Historiography in Mass Communication

Editorial Purpose

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

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Essays

This journal invites historians to submit essays. They may be original ones written specifically for this journal, or they may be from material that the authors already have (such as classroom lectures, AJHA presidential addresses, etc.).

Essay length may vary from 500 to 5,000 words.

To submit an essay for consideration, email a Word file to the editor at wmdsloan@gmail.com

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

If you have an essay accepted for publication, you will be required to affirm that you are the owner of it and that it violates no law.

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Historiography
in Mass Communication

Volume 4 (2018). Number 1

Contents

After you download the pdf of this issue, you can go directly to an article by clicking on its title.

New Year's Resolutions

By Wm. David Sloan ©

Sloan

My father said people shouldn't have to make New Year's resolutions. His idea was that we must live in a way that we have no need to make major changes in behavior from year to year. "If you have to make a New Year's resolution," he told us, "you're not doing what you should the rest of the year."

Of course, his view might seem peculiar to most people. But, of course, he didn't think that most people kept most of the resolutions they made anyway. Some resolutions, though, are easier to keep than others. Here's a sampling:

"Write out everything I did last night and then add the word 'stop.'"

"My resolution is to work on my low self-esteem, but I don't think I can do it."

"My new year's resolution is that donuts have no calories."

"Stop exercising, because it's such a waste of time."

"Use more deodorant and do less laundry."

No matter what my father or people with high hopes say on

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

January 1, every JMC historian needs to ask whether he or she needs to make a New Year's resolution to contribute more.

So here, at the beginning of 2018, is a challenge: If you would like to see the study of JMC history improve, what will you resolve to do this year to make it better? What will you do to improve its vitality? To raise its status in the JMC curriculum?

Are you content with the view of JMC history among your department colleagues? Or are you concerned? What will you do about it?

Are you already doing so well in your own work and in promoting JMC history that you don't need to do anything else? Or is there something you can do better?

Historiography begins this new year resolved to continue to try to do our part. We plan to publish articles of exceptional quality written by some of the best historians in our field.

We think we are off to a good start with this first issue of 2018. We begin with an essay by Jim Startt addressing the issue of the extent to which history and the social sciences are compatible. For our roundtable, Bruce Evensen has organized a discussion among prominent historians on the idea of "American exceptionalism." For our Q&A with a winner of the Kobre Award for lifetime achievement, we interviewed Kitty Endres, the most recent (2017) recipient. Finally, for our Q&A with a book-award winner, we interviewed Tom Hrach. His book *The Riot Report and the News* received the American Journalism Historians Association's 2017 award for the year's outstanding book.

Like you, we want to see JMC history practiced with the highest standards. Even though we agree with what my father told his children, we think everyone should try every year to do better than in the previous year.

CLICK HERE TO RETURN TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

History and the Social Sciences

By James D. Startt ©

Startt

In the study of history, scholars often raise the question of whether there is a compatible relationship between history and the social sciences and, more recently, the behavioral sciences. In mass communication, where the social and behavioral sciences play such a large role, the question seems to be ever present.

History and the social sciences certainly share a number of common interests. Both historians and social scientists study the past — or, more precisely, they study things in the past. They both deal with analysis, explanation, and generalization. Both employ method in their work, aim for precision, and are concerned with the verification of conclusions reached. However, they tend to go about these tasks in different ways, and the tasks themselves do not necessarily mean the same thing to one group as they do to the other. By methodology, for instance, an historian usually has something quite different in mind than a social scientist. Consequently, distinctions between them can be blurred.

To make matters more confusing, some historians think of themselves as social scientists, particularly, but by no means exclusively,

James D. Startt, a Senior Research Professor in history at the Valparaiso University, has written a number of books about President Woodrow Wilson and is a recipient of the AJHA's Kobre Award for lifetime achievement.

those interested in social history. On the other hand, many social scientists think of themselves as behavioralists. Social scientists do not compose a monolithic group. Some of their scholarly interests are more traditional than they are behavioralist. The various disciplines of the social sciences continue to define and redefine themselves. So does history.

What then are the differences?

In answering that question we must keep in mind the variety of interests found among social scientists and the diversity of the definitions of their individual disciplines. It is, consequently, only fair to speak of tendencies in much of their work and how they differ from those found among historians — who are by no means of one mind regarding the nature of their discipline. Some social scientists, for instance, tend to think of themselves as scientists. The tendency is most pronounced among behavioralists.

Do historians think of history as a science? The question is, of course, an old one that takes us back to nineteenth-century debates about the nature of history.

It is correct enough to think of history as a science if science is loosely construed to mean a rational investigation in which generalizations will be advanced based on evidence and if it is thought of as a study that is concerned with establishing truth. Scientists, however, can experiment in a laboratory and subject experiments to a type of verification impossible for historians to use. The scientist seeks laws. Historians hope to generalize, and their generalizations are usually qualified.

Scientists can measure, but measurement is not always within the province of historians. Can historians measure the impact that a war, a revolution, or an idea made upon the mind of someone or some group of people who lived in times past? The scientist deals with prediction, but history is not predictive in nature. Historians do not claim that their study of the past allows them to predict the future. They study what

people have done, thus helping one to understand what people can do, but they do not predict what people will do.

A scientist can observe data objectively. Historians are objective, too, but they are also frequently subjective. They become involved in the past as they endeavor to understand the mood of a time or the nature of someone's personality or many other intangible matters.

The material of history concerns matters — such as cultural forces, social contexts, and human hopes and fears — that are simply different from those of the scientist. It yields a different type of understanding than that which scientist seek. So historians differ from scientists — and also from social scientists to the degree that the latter tend to think of themselves as scientists.

In fact, differences between social scientists and historians are numerous. Consider the following statement made in explanation of the study of political behavior by the political scientist David Easton. "There are," he contended, "discoverable uniformities in political behavior. These can be expressed in generalizations or theories with explanatory and predictive value."[1] Such a study of political behavior, indeed, would be scientific, but it would have little to do with an historical inquiry. Easton, of course, did not speak for all political scientists, nor does the present writer express the opinion of all historians. But the thrust of Easton's comment does underscore a definite difference that exists.

In addition and in contrast to historians, social scientists tend to be more interested in constructing models, in quantification, in factor analysis, in establishing regularities they perceive present in their data, in linking together theory and research, and in using the past to substantiate theories offered in explanation of social concepts. Historians, on the other hand, study particular things in the past. More than social scientists, they place great stress on original sources and on narrative in their studies; and unlike social scientists, they accept intuitive insight

as a viable element in their inquiry. More than social scientists, they try to position themselves at some point in the past and to grasp how something or someone appeared from that perspective.

Perhaps most of all, the understanding they seek differs from that which social scientists seek. As the historian John Lukacs points out, history is about human understanding and that "is a matter of quality, not quantity.... The purpose of [human] understanding differs from the scientific purpose of certainty, and of accuracy.... Human understanding of other human beings is always, and necessarily, imperfect."[2] Yet, acquisition of knowledge about real people who once lived and engaged life lies at the core of the purpose of history.

Any consideration of how history relates to the humanities and social sciences and where it should be positioned is useful. It helps to sharpen one's understanding of the nature of history and helps to define what history can and cannot do. The novice tackling a serious historical investigation for the first time would be well advised to read a few of the better known statements on the subject by historians.[3]

History is sometimes perceived as one of the humanities and sometimes as one of the social sciences since it contains elements of both art and science. But is such a hybrid definition correct? Both science and art were known when Herodotus and Thucydides wrote. Yet they thought of their investigations as unique studies. As we have previously seen, history has a number of distinguishing characteristics. They are all clues to its separate identity. The renowned English historian R. G. Collingwood once observed that the "prime duty of the historian" is found in "a willingness to bestow infinite pains on discovering what actually happened."[4]

The object of that discovery is some particular subject of the past. History, it should be remembered, is the study of human deeds. It is about real human beings who lived in the past, their lives and sayings, successes and accomplishments, and their sufferings and failures. It is

also about particular events and movements and the change that occurs within them.

Since no other study of the human experience has these hallmarks, one can conclude that history can be distinguished from other types of investigations. It can be understood as an autonomous and unique approach to the past.

NOTES

[1] David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), 7.

[2] John Lukacs, *At the End of an Age* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 55.

[3] Among the better books on the subject are the following: Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); G. Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967); G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967); Eric Hobsbawn, *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997); H. Stuart Hughes, *History As Art and As Science* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964); and Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London: Macmillan and Co., LTD., 1970).

[4] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Clarendon Press, 1946; reprinted, London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 55.

CLICK HERE TO RETURN TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Historical Roundtable: Historians and American Exceptionalism

By Bruce Evensen, Dave Nord, Jeff Smith, and Steve Vaughn ©

Evensen

This roundtable examines the role of the journalism historian in chronicling the idea of "American exceptionalism." American exceptionalism holds that Americans aren't anything special but that the nation's founding documents testify to an exceptional ideal, based on individual rights that aim at personal empowerment. Barely seven years ago, four in five Americans told Gallup pollsters that U. S. history and its Constitution gave the United States a "unique character" and made it "the greatest country in the world." Three years later, Pew researchers found that two in three Americans over 65 believed America was "exceptional" but only one in three under 34 did. Hilde Eliassen Restad, author of *American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made America and Remade the World* (2017), wonders whether we are coming to "the end of American Exceptionalism."

This roundtable brings together scholars who happen to be associated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Jeff Smith and Dave Nord received their doctoral degrees from the university's mass communica-

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Historiography* published an essay by Bruce Evensen about American exceptionalism in September 2017 (Volume 3, No. 5). You can find it at this link: http://history-jmc.com/Home.html

tion program just before I did, and Steve Vaughn has been a leading journalism historian at Madison for a number of years.

Evensen: What would you say has been and should be the role of journalism historians in the creation and maintenance of a civil society? By "civil society" I mean America as a community of citizens linked by a commonly understood collective past and common interests that unite us moving forward. Franklin Roosevelt thought this common past made America a nation of "second chances." Its bedrock were Four Freedoms which he hoped one day all the world might know — freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

Nord

Smith

Vaughn

Bruce Evensen is a professor of communication at DePaul University. He has written a number of books, including Truman, Palestine and the Press: Shaping Conventional Wisdom at the Beginning of the Cold War *and* When Dempsey Fought Tunney: Heroes, Hokum and Storytelling in the Jazz Age.

Dave Nord is professor emeritus of journalism at Indiana University. He is the author of Communities of Journalism: a History of American Newspapers and Their Readers *(2001)* and Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America, 1790-1860 *(2004). He is also co-editor of* The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America *(2009).*

Jeff Smith is emeritus professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and has written Printers and Press Freedom: the Ideology of Early American Journalism *(1988),* Franklin and Bache: Imagining the Enlightened Republic *(1990), and* War & Press Freedom: the Problem of Prerogative Power *(1999).*

Steve Vaughn is the author of Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism and the Committee on Public Information *(1980) and* Ronald Reagan in Hollywood: Movies and Politics *(2004). He also edited* The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History *(1985) and* Encyclopedia of American Journalism *(2008)*

Recent polling indicates Americans know little of our common history and even less about the role journalism plays in preserving, protecting, and defending what George Washington called "the destiny of the Republican model of Government."

Nord: I disagree with George Washington. Washington was right about many things, but he was wrong about "destiny." He and other founders talked about destiny because they wanted their story to be true, and they sought to make it true by declaring it true. They called their novel claims about government self-evident truths. They spoke of their own interests as common interests. They linked their Enlightenment philosophy to nature and nature's God. This was political work. The standard version of American history, taught in schools and vivified in the public sphere, is this 200-year-old story of American destiny, shared values, and common interests. It is a history the founders would approve because they wrote it and bequeathed it to us, their descendents. But our job is not to ratify the histories that have come down to us from the past; it is to treat those histories as we would treat any historical documents, as human creations.

So, does it make sense to speak of America's "common interests"? I'm skeptical. In my view, common interests are those interests that have been declared common by interests that have the power to do so. The United States has been too diverse — in geography, politics, class, race, gender, religion, and many other cultural fundamentals — for the idea of "common interests" to have much meaning beyond politics. If a history is "commonly understood," it's because it has been made so by people who hold political and cultural power.

What about "shared values," such as Roosevelt's Four Freedoms — or the concept of freedom in general? Are there commonly shared American values? Perhaps. But Americans have always understood — and experienced — American values quite differently. For example, in

his recent book *The Common Cause*, Robert Parkinson explores the journalism of the Revolutionary War era in a novel and compelling way. The American colonials were hopelessly divided in their economic and political interests, but they could be united in their shared fears of alien machinations fomented by the British. So patriot newspapers regaled their readers with news of conspiracy and treason. Significantly, the perpetrators were always alien others. "It was a perfect convergence," Parkinson writes. "Stories of slave 'insurrections,' Indian 'massacres,' and Hessian 'atrocities' became as much a part of the news of the Revolutionary War as the battles of Saratoga and Yorktown." This kind of storytelling, which appears also in the Declaration of Independence's denunciation of "domestic insurrectionists" and "merciless savages," persisted long after the war ended. It became a "founding narrative." Indeed, it became the basis for uniting the country as a white man's republic.

Does Parkinson's history suggest shared American values? Yes. But these are values rooted in fear, outrage, and racial tribalism. Obviously, this is not the history revered in public memory or taught in school civics classes. Yet the elements of it are found in America's historic newspapers, everywhere and in profusion. I believe it is the job of journalism historians to recover these elements and to shape them into useful histories for our time.

Smith: Journalism historians can discuss how early Americans thought that the press and education could help to prevent the kind of declines and falls other nations had experienced. The founders turned to journalists, as Jefferson did, or wrote for the press themselves, like Madison and Hamilton. They expected the contending interests described in Madison's "The Federalist No. 10" and worried that political parties would act selfishly and hinder independent judgment, but hoped that America's democracy could be self-repairing enough for survival and

progress.

Scholarship on the concept of civil society, as shown by the collection of essays edited by Michael Edwards, points out that core values are contested in nations like ours that have norm diversity and competing visions, but that people can come together in common cause to address a crisis. Otherwise, various conditions can limit civic participation in democratic negotiation, consensus building, and cooperative action. News organizations may or may not be useful in helping citizens to connect and address what they think is in the public interest.

Democracy allows ideas and activities that may or may not be just or practical. Research with some sophistication about media processes and freedoms can add to understandings of how our system has performed in the past. The press has played a part in how civil society has handled deeply divisive issues such as independence, slavery, suffrage, prohibition, civil rights, and war. Journalism historians are in a good position to discuss how concerns and possible solutions are made known and how connections exist between communication and the forces at work in the nation, forces that can produce diverse outlooks and divisive results.

Today we do not necessarily accept the *E Pluribus Unum* part of our civil religion. Political parties are locked in partisan conflict and many citizens are angry, discouraged, or ignorant. The latest American Psychological Association survey on stress says that the state of the nation is our biggest worry. The past tells us that frictions and follies can be expected in free nations where rights are used and abused. Martin Luther King Jr. and others have told us, though, that we can bend history toward more peace and justice if we support our ideals.

Vaughn: Historians play an important role in helping us to understand our collective past as well as in helping us to appreciate the important contributions that journalism makes to our way of life. Helping stu-

dents and the public learn about their history is a perennial problem. Today, the historian's job is especially important. It is a paradox of our age that we live in a time when we have access to more good histories and more historical documentation than ever before. We have unprecedented ability to record our generation's history as well as the events of our own personal lives. Yet we often hear it said that we live in a culture of "historical amnesia."

Our modern media and entertainment industries have made it possible to construct in print, film, TV, and the Internet many different competing versions of the past. The vast majority of the histories presented in modern media are not of good quality. Many are little more than fictitious recreations of history that contribute to creating what the literary scholar Andreas Huyssen calls "imagined memories." In our modern media environment, where we are inundated with false, or misleading, historical images and stories, it should not be surprising that so many of our citizens seem to have a poor understanding of our real past, nor should it be surprising that there is so much disagreement over the question of whether or not we have a shared, common past.

The emphasis on speed, combined with the devotion to finding unique and interesting stories, Canadian scholar Harold A. Innis told his students, has created an "obsession with present-mindedness" and a predisposition in Western societies to celebrate "the life of the moment." That attitude had also strongly influenced the direction of scholarly research, he said. Even historians, lamented Oron James Hale during World War II, had turned their attention to very recent history and neglected the deeper past. This way of thinking was damaging to society, the literary scholar Eric A. Havelock believed, because "we live in a mood of the here and now." A growing number of scholars have pointed to the influence of television and how it involved us in what Marshall McLuhan called "an all-inclusive *nowness*." Television, as well

as film and other new media, shaped and legitimized our ideas about history, wrote the art historian Brandon Taylor in 1987, and present the past as "an endless reserve of equal events," often shown with little or no context. Historian and media theorist James Carey concluded that the fragmented information found in modern media had replaced logical narrative, isolating readers from the past and impoverishing their sense of history.

We know even less about the influence of computers, the Internet, and the many new social media that have emerged since the 1980s. Computer time, according to one study, rejects the limitations imposed by historical consciousness and treats the past as "formless, timeless data, taking on new meaning every time" it is incorporated into a new program. Recent studies argue that the Internet and new social media may actually weaken our long-term memories and engulf us in a sea of trivial information. The good historian can help us see the larger picture and discern what is important from what might be ephemeral. It is the well-informed historian who can help place our daily news into the larger sweep of truly significant historical events and to separate sound history from that which is spurious.

Evensen: In *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States*, Pulitzer Prize winning historian Gordon Wood maintains America's "belief in liberty, equality, constitutionalism, and the well being of ordinary people came out of the revolutionary era. So too," he adds, "did our idea that we Americans are a special people with a special destiny to lead the world toward liberty and democracy." Other historians deprecate this "folk theory of American democracy." Donald Pease describes it as a "fantasy." David Noble has suggested scrapping studies of what makes America distinctive in exchange for "post-nationalist American studies."

What do your work and the work of other journalism historians

contribute to our understanding of America's central story?

Nord: In an earlier book, Gordon Wood linked those lines about Americans being "a special people with a special destiny" to Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, when he was desperately trying to boost northerners' flagging commitment to the union. Later in *The Idea of America*, Wood does associate those lines with "our culture." These beliefs, he writes, are "our highest aspirations and noblest values." I agree. But in politics and public memory, America's aspirations and values are often mistaken for an actual, providential history of American exceptionalism. Wood does not make this mistake himself. He knows, as all historians do, that aspirations and values, like destiny, are not history.

However, if the adjective "special" (separated from "destiny") is taken to mean simply "what makes America distinctive," then I see a role for serious historians doing real history, including journalism history. In recent years, many historians have grown wary of the narrow provincialism of national histories. Some of the best current scholarship focuses on supranational themes such as Atlantic history or Pacific history or the history of capitalism. But, of course, nations do have histories, and those histories are distinctive in particular ways. In other words, all nations are special, in the sense that we tell our children, all our children, that they are special.

Certain species of journalism in the past were ignored as insignificant eddies in the flow of history. They were not part of the "central story." That has changed. Historians today are much more interested in institutions and practitioners of journalism outside the mainstream: women, African Americans, Indians, religious groups, not-for-profit organizations, fringe political movements, etc. All of these former cul-de-sacs have been rerouted into the "central story" of journalism history, as they have been in all of American history.

Smith: A theme of my book *Franklin and Bache: Envisioning the Enlightened Republic* is that early American leaders and journalists thought that democracy has to depend on individual virtue and public spirit rather than rely on rulers or rigid ideologies for human progress. The idea was that people would have to work for themselves and the community to make self-government successful. Opponents of monarchy and political misdirection said that patriotism would need to be refreshed from time to time by going back to the moralized language of what Thomas Paine called "first principles."

Journalism historians can note that the revolutionary generation could prefer free expression over fair expression. Benjamin Franklin used propaganda and phony news to make arguments. His grandson Benjamin Franklin Bache edited a newspaper that attacked the fitness and character of the first two presidents. Individuals could then, as now, sue for false statements damaging to their personal reputations, but the government was prohibited from making any law abridging freedom of the press.

My *War and Press Freedom: the Problem of Prerogative Power* book points out that suppression can be unjust, unconstitutional, and unwise. When the Federalists responded to supposed foreign threats by passing the Sedition Act of 1798 and jailed journalists for their opinions, their party went into a death spiral. The First Amendment protects the clash of ideas, including awful ones, rather than power structures or personal feelings. Recent Supreme Court cases usually get that right. We now often lack common beliefs and much commitment to the common good, but we should be able to agree that human rights have to be protected.

Evensen: Late in life Benjamin Franklin asserted he hoped America's experiment in democracy would be extended to every country. "God grant that not only the love of liberty," the old man wrote, "but a thor-

ough knowledge of the rights of man may pervade all the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say, 'This is my country!'"

Other historians have not shared Franklin's enthusiasm in exporting America's noble experiment. Godfrey Hodgson has argued, "A largely imagined exceptional America" is a dangerous form of self-praise "that seems to justify, even demand, domination." Andrew Bacevich goes further, arguing the use of American power "as an instrument to reshape the global order" has inevitably led to "the end of American exceptionalism."

What has your work and the work of other journalism historians contributed to our understanding of the global implications of "American exceptionalism"?

Nord: Two words in this question suggest two dramatically different avenues for the internationalization of American values. Godfrey Hodgson and Andrew Bacevich speak of "power"; Ben Franklin speaks of "knowledge."

In the early nineteenth century, the most important values exported by the United States through the exercise of state *power* — either diplomacy or military force — were the rights to private property and free trade. These values guided American foreign policy, including territorial expansion and the assertion of American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. Significantly, both were thoroughly entwined with human slavery. Next to land, slaves were the most valuable form of private property and were crucial to U.S. foreign trade. After the terror of the French Revolution and the success of the slave rebellion in Haiti, white Americans were less eager than Benjamin Franklin had been in 1789 to export notions of liberty, equality, and the rights of man if those rights strayed beyond private property and commerce. So property rights and freedom of commerce remained the primary values

projected by American diplomacy and power over the next two centuries.

Of course, this constricted understanding of American values was not what Franklin had in mind. Like Franklin, many Americans in every era after the Revolution believed that "a thorough knowledge of the rights of man" meant much more than freedom of the seas or the right to own property in slaves. Always there was profound disagreement. The expansion of slavery through the dispossession of lands held by eastern Indians, the annexation of Texas, and the Mexican-American War pleased many Americans but outraged others. Journalism history is an excellent venue for assessing the values that Americans deemed worthy or unworthy of export via state-sanctioned power. That's because newspapers in this country have always been organs of politics, and while different political interests in America spoke the same words, they meant utterly different things. So, too, newspapers. For every newspaper that held up the concept of "liberty" as an obvious indictment of slavery, many more understood "liberty" to be the bulwark of property rights, including the right to property in slaves.

On the other hand, how American values have been circulated as "knowledge," rather than as a projection of power, is a different story. When Americans have simply published their values, leaving their foreign readers to interpret them in their own way, they have generated much more enthusiasm than saber-rattling and gunboat diplomacy have produced. Years ago when I worked on the *Journal of American History*, we published a special issue with more than a dozen articles by foreign scholars of U.S. history on the translation and reception of the Declaration of Independence abroad. My memory of this project is similar to Ben Franklin's in 1789: Many people around the world have read the words of the American founding, in translations understandable to them, and said, "This is my country."

Smith: Early Americans were conscious of being able to promote liberty with publications that reached across time and space. One reason many Americans were willing to try what they regarded as an experiment in freedom was that they had suffered violations of revered Anglo-American rights. Their Declaration of Independence, a printed statement to the world, briefly refers to basic principles of happiness and safety before providing a long list of complaints about British repression. The Constitution provided an influential model of making the people the ultimate authority and saying that they have to be left alone unless officials have adequate reasons and processes. My book *Printers and Press Freedom: the Ideology of Early American Journalism* argues that Enlightenment outlooks on individual liberty and limited government were taken seriously. If the people are the sovereigns, then the notion that they can be punished for criticizing government does not hold up.

The successes of the American experiment have provided some inspiration for other countries. Franklin, a journalist, inventor, and statesman who was perceived as a prime example of what a free and enlightened person could accomplish, became a popular culture celebrity in prerevolutionary France. A century later the French built a 450,000-pound, copper-clad statue for America named "Liberty Enlightening the World." Of course, we also have the story of stingy Americans not providing a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty until Joseph Pulitzer's newspaper campaigned to raise the money.

Politicians of both major parties still call America an exceptional and indispensible nation. By the measures of prosperity, a willingness to sacrifice for important principles at crucial times, and developments in knowledge of all kinds, the country has performed remarkably well. Historians should acknowledge the roles that the media have played in all that has happened. If respect for the United States has been waning around the world, we could ask ourselves what could be going wrong.

George Washington's Farewell Address, written for newspaper publication in 1796 and ceremonially read every year in Congress, warns about the "baneful effects of the spirit of party" that include animosities, false alarms, and opportunities for "foreign influence and corruption" and for "cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men." The address also cautions against "overgrown military establishments." Today, with an American military presence in more than 170 nations, we spend enormous sums on defense while cutting other programs.

Vaughn: The questions about Americans being "a special people with a special destiny" and American exceptionalism both deal with aspects of American nationalism. Americans are not unique in believing that they have a special destiny. It is well to remember that nationalism was an underlying cause of both the First and Second World Wars.

During World War I, the journalist George Creel led the American propaganda effort and brought into his Committee on Public Information (CPI) other journalists as well as academics, filmmakers, artists, and advertisers. Many of these people saw the war as an opportunity to expand Americanism globally or, to "make the world safe for democracy." For Creel and others, democracy, patriotism, and Americanism were synonymous and constituted a secular religion. Despite their intentions, their work had unintended consequences. Truth was a casualty. The journalist Arthur Bullard, who helped create the CPI, announced that "Truth and Falsehood" were "arbitrary terms" and there was "nothing in experience to tell us one is always preferable to the other. The force of an idea," he said, lay "in its inspirational value" and not whether it was true or false. The CPI's advertising professionals encouraged the idea that people were irrational and easily manipulated, not the thoughtful citizens that democracy required. The CPI's zealous promotion of the war and its intolerance of the war's critics contributed to an atmosphere of anti-democratic cynicism after the Armistice.

During World War II and the early Cold War, Ronald Reagan's experience with Warner Bros. and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) was an underestimated formative period for the future U.S. president. The Warners, who were Jews from Eastern Europe and who were alarmed by rampant anti-Semitism, turned their films (including several involving Reagan) toward promoting American preparedness well before the war began. They discovered that patriotic movies were both popular and profitable. With the Warners, and more generally with Hollywood, patriotism was often combined with opportunism. After the war, in an era of political blacklisting, Reagan became president of SAG, and Eric Johnston, who was the president of the Motion Picture Association of America, became influential in Reagan's world. He advocated using American movies to promote free enterprise during the Cold War and Reagan came to share his views as he turned more conservative politically and began to hone his skills as an orator. One of Reagan's favorite speeches was "America the Beautiful." Reagan's later efforts as U. S. President to bring about a patriotic revival, build up America's military, and lead a resurgence of capitalism against Soviet communism were consistent with his early years in Hollywood. In these endeavors, the ideas of American exceptionalism and America's destiny became intertwined with entertainment and advertising in new and compelling ways.

These two wars offer lessons about national destiny and exceptionalism. One is to realize that the tenor and tone of our patriotism is important. Many veterans of World War II, including my father, found FDR's Four Freedoms to be inspiring. His patriotism was resolute but respectful of others, and he believed, as I do, that exploiting patriotism merely for profit or political gain is dangerous and reprehensible. Another lesson is that our actions, whatever our intentions, are likely to have unforeseen consequences. During World War I, people from progressive backgrounds genuinely believed that their efforts would im-

prove the lives of millions worldwide. However, others saw the war as a laboratory in which to experiment on how best to manipulate opinion by appealing to fear and other primal instincts. Future propagandists and leaders in the fields of persuasion carried forward this research. Finally, history can show us how our own time, while similar to the past, may also be different. Many began World War I still grounded intellectually in the nineteenth century and failed to recognize how the Industrial Revolution had transformed modern warfare. World War II began on the other side of a scientific revolution that would transform warfare yet again. With the advent of nuclear weapons in 1945, a new era opened that assured that another world war would be exponentially more damaging to civilization than anything in the past.

Evensen: On November 4, 2008. President-elect Barack Obama told his supporters in Chicago's Grant Park and millions more watching on television or over the internet that "if there's anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our fathers is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

What has been the role of journalism historians in telling this story of individual empowerment based on inalienable rights embedded in the story and struggle of America's role in human history?

Nord: President Barack Obama walked a fine line whenever he spoke of American exceptionalism. His soaring rhetoric about America as "a place where all things are possible" often seemed too sanguine. His supporters sometimes urged him to speak more forcefully about racism, for example. But when he criticized America or America's historical record, he was often denounced as un-American. Obama may have walked the fine line best in his 2015 speech in Selma, Alabama, commemorating the "Bloody Sunday" civil rights march of 1965. In that

speech he affirmed the classic narrative of America's highest aspirations and noblest values. He quoted the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; he spoke of self-evident truths and inalienable rights. But unlike George Washington, Obama evoked "destiny" only to deny it. The language of American exceptionalism, he said, is "a living thing, a call to action, a roadmap for citizenship and an insistence on the capacity of free men and women to shape our own destiny." The marchers in 1965 were beaten and denounced as un-American and unpatriotic. But they persisted. "What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this," Obama asked, "what greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals? ... We know America is what we make of it."

History, too, is what we make of it. And journalism offers especially good materials for fashioning an American history in all its complexity, all its grandeur and squalor, all its quotidian contingency. It's all there in the newspapers. In the end, the historian's task is to show how everything we believe, value, or think we know about the past is a human creation — first imagined by a human mind in the past and now reimagined by us. Neither histories nor futures are predestined. Rights are not inalienable. Truths are not self-evident. These things are made so by human choice, effort, and sometimes accident. Obama believed — and, on sunny days, historians usually do, too — that the relativity, the malleability of history, should not frighten us into nihilism but should inspire us to democratic action.

Smith: The United States has become a very rich and powerful nation with its principles and its freedoms, but can have perplexing social, eco-

nomic, and political divisions. A highly individualistic culture that emphasizes the pursuit of happiness is likely to have media portrayals with a striking mix of triumphs and troubles. Americans have a long list of significant accomplishments, but if our rates of poverty and gun homicide are any indication, we can be our own worst enemies. Journalism history demonstrates that the press can perform difficult and sometimes dangerous tasks that may help energize movements for progress on basic human needs and rights.

James Madison liked the idea of newspapers printing competing perspectives. However, the institutional press, as Silas Bent and Willard G. Bleyer said during the inter-war years, can settle comfortably into turning out standardized content. The best journalists are smart, civil, morally engaged, and able to put us in touch with unfamiliar people and places. Our knowledge of the world can be deepened by listening better and by trying to understand how others feel and reason. Better choices may be made when educators and journalists do their jobs well.

Vaughn: A commitment to inalienable rights is important whether we believe them to be handed down by God or are merely "useful fictions" that we, as humans, have created. The term, of course, brings to mind the words of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Government, which derives its authority from the consent of the governed, is established to protect those rights. It is important that we have a sound, clear-eyed understanding of how these ideas and the government created after the American revolution came about. In this regard, civic education, intelligently conceived, is important. If we abandon our commitment to these rights, then what defense does the individual have against those who wield unbridled wealth and power?

We know, thanks to historians, that at the outset these inalienable rights were essentially for white males who owned property. Women, African Americans, Native Americans, and others were excluded. In our national histories, the pasts of these people were also excluded. During the past half century, historians have brought these neglected stories into the mainstream, and in so doing they have helped to expand the number of people who can now share in what should be the basic rights of every American.

History suggests that such rights are fragile. Authoritarianism, racism, sexism, and income disparity are a few of the persistent threats. My interest in the history of new technologies suggests another danger. A growing body of scholarship argues that we may be on the threshold of changing what it means to be human through the application of a combination of artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, prosthetics, and pharmaceuticals. The Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari has recently argued that these developments may bring revolutionary changes in our cognitive abilities, and that a "new elite of upgraded superhumans" may appear. The chasm between this new caste and the rest of humanity might be larger than the gulf that now exists between *Homo Sapiens* and our Neanderthal ancestors. This new elite, Harari speculates, might treat those of us who are left behind the way we now treat our pets. In this world, inalienable rights and individual dignity would have little meaning.

Whether or not this new world soon comes about, changes in computing, genetics, and other areas of scientific endeavor have already created a crisis in the humanities. Good historians and journalists are needed now more than ever to help us understand what is taking place.

CLICK HERE TO RETURN TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Kobre Award Interview: Kitty Endres

Name

Kathleen "Kitty" Endres received the American Journalism Historians Association's Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2017. She holds the position of Distinguished Professor in the School of Communication at the University of Akron, where she has taught since 1987. She is the author or editor of six books and has published more than 100 journal articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries. She also has written and produced several historical documentaries, for which she has won a number of awards. She received her Ph.D. in history from Kent State University.

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

Endres: I was born in Toledo, Ohio, and lived in the most northern part of the city — Point Place, which is nestled on the peninsula where the Maumee and Ottawa rivers flow into Maumee Bay. Point Place is known for many things — almost causing the "Toledo War" between Ohio and Michigan in 1835, the 1919 heavyweight title bout between Jess Willard and Jack Dempsey (Dempsey won), and the Palm Sunday 1965 tornado. It has *never* been known as a cultural or educational center.

Until I married, I lived with my family in a small converted summer cottage on the main drag through the Point. The house was right next door to the Toledo *Blade* distribution center. I always wanted to be a newspaper carrier. My hopes were dashed, however, when the distribution manager told my dad to keep me home because no girl would

ever be a carrier for the *Blade*.

My parents weren't well educated. Dad didn't have a high school degree; Mom, a war bride from Ireland, never had a chance at higher education. But they did value education. I still remember my Dad bringing home a $25 savings bond every month and telling me he was saving to send me to Vassar.

Dad was a pressman for a small paper box company in Toledo. Printing has always been a dangerous profession. When I was 8, Dad was injured at work and Mom got a job at the library downtown to support the family. About a year later, Dad was back at work. Later Mom, who attended night school to learn shorthand and typing, found a better paying job as a secretary at the Jeep factory.

By the time I was 10, I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I was going to be a journalist. I have no idea where I got the idea. No one in my family had ever been a journalist or knew a journalist (and I was still banned from the *Blade* distribution center). But the entire family did read the newspaper. However, Mom and Dad never appreciated the *Blade*'s pro-management editorials. Ours was a strong union family. Mom was a member of the UAW, and Dad was the shop steward for the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants Union. My parents often criticized the *Blade*'s coverage of labor disputes. Thus, I doubt my parents thought much of my career aspirations.

I had just turned 15 when my dad was injured at work again. This time his arm was crushed in the printing press and a massive stroke followed. Dad never worked again. Mom's job at the Jeep plant saved our family from financial ruin.

I always went to Catholic schools. My mother insisted on it. I went to Central Catholic High School. Not many of the Point Place kids went there, in part because it was so far away — about an hour by the city bus. Central had a strong academic program, which prepared me well for the University of Toledo.

During my sophomore year in college, I met a young, handsome journalism prof and we got married. I had just turned 20. He was offered a job in Washington D.C. I finished my English degree at the University of Maryland. I was the first person in my family to get a college degree. I got a Master's in journalism from the University of Maryland and, after returning to Ohio, got my Ph.D. in history from Kent State University.

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

Endres: My first job out of college was as a reporter in Washington, D.C., for a small news service that covered business. I remember the offices were right across the street from Ford's Theatre and about two doors down from where Lincoln died. There I learned about business, reporting, the "Hill" and writing on deadline.

Two years later, I was working for *Datamation*, a national magazine that covered the business of computers. Its Washington bureau was small — just my editor and me. We spent most of our time on the "Hill," primarily covering proposed legislation that could affect the computer industry or government innovations in computer usage. My editor sent me to the Supreme Court whenever there was a case that might impact the computer industry. My editor was quite the wordsmith; and my bare-bones news-service writing style didn't suit him. So I learned magazine writing on the fly. To this day, I thank Phil Hirsch for being such a demanding editor — I'm a better writer because of him and my time at *Datamation*.

Two years later, my husband was offered a teaching job at Kent State and we returned to Ohio. I continued to string for *Datamation*, although I have to admit that northeast Ohio was not the center of computer innovation then or now. I also did public relations, was managing editor of a business magazine and did freelance writing as I started my

Ph.D. work in history and had my beautiful daughter Stephanie.

Q: *Where and what classes have you taught?*

Endres: I taught one year at Kent State, one year at Hiram College, two years at Bowling Green and, seemingly, an eternity at the University of Akron.

I've taught writing (news, feature, magazine, online and documentary), production (electronic publishing and magazine editing) and history (journalism and documentary). I have also involved students in my creative activities, including documentaries, websites and special events. I teach on the undergraduate and graduate level.

Q: *Tell us your background in history. When did you first get interested in historical research? How did your education prepare you to be a historian?*

Endres: I cannot remember a time in my life without history.

As a young child, Mom told me tales of Irish history and the Irish war for independence. As soon as I was old enough, I got a library card and took the bus to the neighborhood library to borrow books on history. I don't recall the Point Place library or the library at the Catholic high school I attended having journalism history books.

As an English major, I discovered journalists left their mark on American literature but didn't do any research on it. In my Master's work at the University of Maryland, I dabbled a bit in journalism history, doing research on women reporters and editors. But it was during my Ph.D. program in history at Kent State that I made the commitment. I wrote every paper in every seminar on some topic related to journalism history. My dissertation, however, was not in journalism history, which made my adviser very happy.

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

Endres: There are many historians who influence my work, and the names change depending on the project.

But I'd like to credit a small group of historians who had a lasting impact on me as an historian and as a person.

When I started, Kent State's Ph.D. program had no women's history expert. Luckily, I had an opportunity to study at Sarah Lawrence College one summer with the great historians Gerda Lerner and Alice Kessler-Harris, who taught me much about researching and writing women's history — and the importance of social activism.

In the 1980s, Kent State's history department had a nationally recognized graduate program. That meant that when I applied for the Ph.D. program, the graduate coordinator greeted my Master's degree in journalism from University of Maryland with, well, skepticism. I would have to prove myself — with none other than university professor Lawrence Kaplan, who specialized in diplomatic and colonial history. Kaplan was influential to my career as an historian in two ways. First in his colloquium in diplomatic history, he encouraged me to study Benjamin Franklin's role in American diplomacy. The stack of books he assigned came from many different disciplines. In the process, Kaplan demonstrated the importance of interdisciplinary work in historical research, something I've embraced throughout my career. Second, Kaplan became my champion before the Ph.D. committee. Kaplan insisted that I be accepted into the Ph.D. program. I think I may have been the first Ph.D. student in Kent State's history program without a Master's degree in history.

I was then handed over to Robert Swierenga, the program's quantitative researcher who specialized in economic and immigration history. No one was going to leave his classes without learning historical

research methods in general and quantitative methods in particular. Beyond those important lessons that I use every day in my research, Swierenga also demonstrated that a historian need not specialize in one narrow field. Swierenga came to be known for his immigrant, economic, agricultural and behavioral research. Now retired, Swierenga — the only historian I've ever known who has been knighted by a queen — just branched out into urban history.

Early in my Ph.D. work, I took a class in the history of the city from sociologist/historian Elliot Rudwick, best known for his work with August Meier, who also taught at Kent State. Rudwick was an extraordinary teacher who wove sociology and history together in his classes on the city and Civil Rights. Rudwick and I became microfilm buddies. We'd spend hours before those big, clunky machines. Sometimes I showed him some great discovery. He seemed delighted. Other times he'd talk to me — a graduate student early in her program — about how he was approaching his research. (I know of no other graduate student ever offered such an opportunity.) And then Rudwick wasn't there. I thought he must be writing. So I dropped by his office and realized something was wrong. He insisted on writing a letter of recommendation for me. I said I was still three years away from finishing and then he could write something wonderful about me. A month later, Rudwick committed suicide. I learned an enormous amount from Rudwick, in the classroom and over the microfilm machines, but he also showed me that research and teaching can't be enough in anyone's life.

Finally, I need to acknowledge my adviser, Frank Byrne, who specialized in 19th-century American history. Not as well known as Lerner, Kaplan, Swierenga or Rudwick, Byrne was a qualitative researcher, a graceful writer, a master teacher and a kind person. I learned an enormous amount on research, historiography, academic writing and teaching from him. I am grateful that Byrne was willing to mentor that strange Ph.D. student who aspired to become a journalism historian.

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

Endres: When I was in graduate school, the great historian/Civil Rights activist August Meier asked what my specialization would be. Without a moment's hesitation, I responded I was going to be a journalism historian.

Meier just rolled his eyes.

Notwithstanding Meier's response, I proudly identify myself as a journalism historian. I've done research on newspapers and magazines, editorial cartoons and photography, advertising and public relations, broadcasting and blimps, and 19th, 20th and 21st century media. I've written about reporters, editors, and literary, cultural and business trends. Throughout my research, I have attempted to weave an interdisciplinary thread through my work. I've also always tried to place journalism into its broader social context.

I also do research on topics, ideas and institutions that are a part of my community. The project I'm currently working on — a documentary entitled "Taking the Cure: The Story of the TB Sanatorium at Springfield Lake" — is a case in point. Although journalism played an important role in this institution's growth, the documentary itself deals with people suffering from a disease that had no cure.

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

Endres: I've published seven books and monographs (two of them with Therese Lueck, one of my colleagues from UA), about 75 chapters (in journalism, history, sociology and geography books), and more than two dozen scholarly articles (in communication, history, business and popular culture journals) and written roughly 80 convention papers.

Lately I've been working on documentaries. I credit one of my undergraduate students, Jennie Castle, for my involvement in documentaries. She suggested the documentary as an outlet for my historical research. So far, I've produced five documentaries: "Akron Women: Another Look at History"; "The Rise and Fall of the YWCA of Summit County" (a Telly award winner); "Final Edition: Journalism according to Jack and Jim Knight" (an Emmy and SPJ winner); "Rebels on Lake Erie: A Pirate, A Prison, A Plot" (featuring the voices of a number of AJHA members and distributed nationally by American Public Television); and the just released "BLIMP! Sports, Broadcasting and the Goodyear Airship." I'm currently working on two documentaries, one on the TB sanatorium in Akron and the other on the "Squadron of Death," about female aviation daredevils in the 1920s and 1930s.

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

Endres: Whenever students ask this question, I always respond that my books are like my children. How can I pick one over another? Each has its own personality and strengths. Each posed different challenges. I truly believe that.

Q: *We realize that is difficult to judge one's own work — and that the most accomplished people are often the most modest — but if you had to summarize your most important contributions to the field of JMC history, what would they be?*

Endres: That's difficult to answer because who really knows what work will have a lasting impact on the field? I like to think my work on women might have some lasting importance. Lately, there's been a renewed interest in the history of business journalism. Perhaps my

work in that area will have some importance.

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

Endres: Perhaps, I should have been more productive. After all, I do have a drawer full of unpublished convention papers. On a personal level, I would have been kinder to people.

Q: *Tell us about your "philosophy of history" (of historical study in general or of JMC history in particular) or what you think are the most important principles for studying history.*

Endres: This is an interesting question because throughout my time in Kent State's graduate program, I don't recall ever discussing the "philosophy of history." Isn't that odd? Perhaps we just phrased the idea differently.

My historical research has been shaped by two things — curiosity (a characteristic nurtured in my journalism career) and research principles I learned in graduate school. I begin with an idea that I find personally interesting. How can you spend hours studying a subject unless you are interested in it?

I always start with secondary research from many different disciplines. Sometimes that narrows my focus; other times it makes me rethink my idea. Then I go into the primary sources. These may be sources no other scholar has ever touched. (And how exciting is that?) I spend hours, weeks, months, sometimes a year or more with these primary sources. I also question my work as I do research, as I write, as I rewrite. Is presentism making its way into my work? Does the evidence support my conclusions? Why/how is all this happening? It's a complex, intense, exciting, frustrating experience.

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

Endres: I am so excited about the quality of the work being done in JMC history today. These young historians are so bright. They are doing such great work. Many are linking historical subjects to broader theoretical frameworks in communication. They are using new searchable online resources, which allow historians to explore topics never before possible. I do have one concern. Too often I see JMC history locked into the communication silo; I would like to see more work done from an interdisciplinary perspective. It can only benefit our field and our research.

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

Endres: This is a difficult time in higher education. In my institution, we're facing cutbacks. Every college, every department, every area is competing for enrollment and limited resources. The sexy new areas, like social media, gain enrollment and get new faculty. Lots of students, and even some faculty and administrators, ask if journalism history has any relevance today.

I think it does, but it's a tough sell to make. That's why we really need to get our story out — in every one of our classes, to the general public, to anyone who will listen.

I don't see many journalism historians reaching out to the broader discipline of history. We just seem so comfortable preparing our articles for JMC journals and presenting our papers at JMC conventions. When we collaborate, it's almost always with scholars from our field. We need to break out of our silos and start working with scholars from

other disciplines, including history. That would certainly be one step toward improving the status of JMC history.

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

Endres: There will be many challenges to JMC history in the future. But I'd like to talk about two. One is based on new methods of communication, and the other deals with old technology.

We communicate in so many different ways today — Email, Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat. We humans send out millions/billions of messages every day. These will represent challenges for historians of tomorrow. Archivists today are trying to figure how and what to save of these communication streams. The Library of Congress archives all public tweets but that database is not available to researchers. The National Archives offers the searchable Obama White House Social Media Archive. ProPublica is archiving President Trump's Tweets. Documenting the Now, a collaboration of the University of California — Riverside, University of Maryland and Washington University — St. Louis, is working on an open source Web application to allow researchers and archivists to collect, analyze and preserve Twitter messages and the Web resources they reference, according to the group's website. The group is also a forum for discussing the ethical use of social media content. What a resource for any scholar interested in studying social media now and in the future.

Second, technology changes — fast. Those of us who have been around for a while know this. I still have 5-1/2 in. and 3-1/4 in. floppies. I wonder what are on them? Did I back up those disks before I changed computers? The other day I found the complete set of *Star Trek the Next Generation* — on VHS. I cannot even remember the last time I had a VCR. I was at an estate sale recently and bought some U-matic tapes. I'm fairly certain they aren't blank, but I just don't want to buy a U-matic

tape player for $800 on ebay to satisfy my curiosity. Changing technology represents real challenges for archivists and historians today. We, as historians, cannot just throw out tapes, film, wire recordings just because we do not have that piece of equipment to play them. Otherwise, we could be throwing out history.

Somewhere in our basements, there may be tapes, films, audio recorders that could be a key to the past. There may be a big clunky wire recorder or a U-matic video player. Why not donate all of it to an archive that is committed to preserving these artifacts. Why not help an historian of today or the future.

CLICK HERE TO RETURN TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Book Award Interview: Thomas Hrach ©

Hrach

Tom Hrach won the American Journalism Historians Association's award for the year's outstanding book in 2017 for *The Riot Report and the News, How the Kerner Commission Changed Media Coverage of Black America*. He teaches journalism at the University of Memphis.

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

Hrach: The book is about the 1968 Kerner Commission, an 11-member panel appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to study rioting in American cities in the summers of 1965, 1966 and 1967. The book focuses specifically on the media criticism contained in the report, which was one of the two most influential areas of the report. The book examines how the commission did its work to investigate the news media. It offers some ideas on why the media criticism was so influential.

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

Hrach: The issue of rioting in America's cities in the 1960s had always been an interest of mine ever since my youth as a boy growing up in

Cleveland, Ohio. The riots in the 1960s were major turning points in history for many American cities. I was always interested in their origins and their impact. My first career was as a newspaper reporter in Ohio. Then I returned to school to pursue a doctorate degree. When searching for a research topic while at Ohio University, I stumbled across the 1968 Kerner Report. The report is well-written, and it is still a good read 50 years later. After reading the report, I researched its impact on the media and determined there needed to be some good research into how and why the Kerner Commission members decided to investigate the news media.

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

Hrach: I enjoy doing interviews. One of the first things I did was to see how many former Kerner Commission members and staff I could find that were still around and able to talk. I was most fortunate to be able to find four people who worked for the commission and one former commission member to interview. I did that all by phone. After that, I found out that the original documentation for the Kerner Commission was stored at the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. I took two trips to Austin to examine and take photos of the commission records. I also did a research trip to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Massachusetts, where the original papers of former Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner are stored. The final trip was to the Library of Congress to see some papers from Roy Wilkins, former executive director of the NAACP and commission member. I also did a lot of research in newspaper archives for The New York Times, Washington Post and Chicago Tribune. Interviews and other research were conducted over a four-year period.

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

Hrach: As I was researching and writing, I kept noticing and hearing things about the Kerner Commission. Each time, I think I might have missed something so that kept me adding to my research collection. In fact, I know more now than I did when I wrote the book because I keep getting new research. I would have liked to do more investigation into the backgrounds of each of the Kerner Commission members because each of them very likely has documentation about their time on the commission. I am certain there are people who knew the commission members who could be interviewed as well. The 11 commission members were all interesting historical figures who very likely had something to say about how the media criticism was put together and written.

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

Hrach: There is no substitute for talking to people who lived or experienced something in history. Those people are extremely valuable in helping someone do research. I would advise anyone to see if there are people still living who could talk about the event or the issue. While memories are sometimes cloudy, they still are extremely valuable. In the history business, we are losing sources to old age all the time. The faster a researcher gets to the people who were there, the better it is. Many insights into the past are being lost because important people often never record their experiences. It is not just the important people either. It is often the people who are behind the scenes who know the most and have the best insights. I advise interviewing people as soon as possible and make sure those interviews are recorded and transcribed.

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

Hrach: Anyone doing historical research must keep asking himself or herself about why this is important. History is meaningless if it does not tell the public something about the present or give the public some guidance for the future. The greatest challenge for me was to constantly figure out why this research would be relevant to people in the current time period. While I think that studying history just for the sake of it is valuable, the public wants to know why it is important. I wanted to show the current generation of journalists that social responsible journalism can have a positive impact on society. The Kerner Report's criticism of the news media was just what the country needed at the time, and it had a positive impact on the future.

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

Hrach: While I had no issue with being too close to the subject, I did think a lot about bias when researching this issue. I am a journalist. I love journalism. I believe journalism is a profession that is of paramount importance to a free, democratic society. I hurts me to see how the profession of journalism has declined. I am most troubled by how influential and powerful people in American society attack the profession. I wanted the book to show that good journalism matters and has a positive impact on society. The Kerner Commission's report crystalized the importance of journalism and the social responsibility theory of the press. I hope that my biases about the importance of journalism did not color how I researched the book. Ultimately, the book is about how journalism can have a positive impact on society.

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

Hrach: The new insight that I hope readers recognize is that the commission's chairman Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner deserves some reconsideration in history. While Kerner was not a journalist, he had an impact on the future of the profession thanks to the report. Kerner deserves a little more love in history than he has gotten. He was a tragic figure. After the commission report he was appointed as a federal judge, but his past as Illinois governor came back to haunt him. He was tried and convicted for his actions in racetrack stock scandal while governor. He was let out of federal prison early only because he had cancer. He died a few months later in 1976. The way his career ended colors the way he is viewed in history, but I make the case that Kerner was an important figure in journalism history.

Q: *What findings most surprised you?*

Hrach: The finding that most surprised me was the connection between the Kerner Report, the Warren Commission Report and then even later the 9/11 Report. The writers of the Kerner Report in 1967 recognized that the Warren Commission did a poor job. The Warren Commission was investigating the Kennedy assassination, and it made some errors. The Warren Commission failed to keep the public informed as it investigated and then dumped the massive report to the news media and the public all at once. It was also not all that interesting a read. Kerner was sharp in that he recognized that keeping the news media, and the public, informed on what it was doing was crucial. He recognized that if the public were going to read and accept its findings that the report had to be readable. A lot of effort went into making it a compelling document that offered praise as well as criticism. Decades later, the writers of the 9/11 report heeded that advice as well, and that

is why that report will be so well regarded in history. If the writers of the Warren Commission report had done a better job, perhaps we would not be to this day still debating whether there were a conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination.

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

Hrach: I would think about how the topic relates to the current climate in media or how it might relate to the media of the future. Lots of lessons can be learned from the past. If a piece of history can relate to the present, that is where a researcher wants to be. There are so many things that can offer new insights for people. Another piece of advice is to recognize how the decisions made by people in the past affect the present and future. These people are often not presidents or important figures, but rather ordinary people who find themselves thrust into historic times.

Q: *Where do you want to go in the future for your research?*

Hrach: I want to stick to things I love — history, journalism and the newspaper business. I am seeking new topics that relate to the 1960s and 1970s because that is a time period that is well enough in the past but still has many people around to interview. I most enjoy talking to people who have memories of something important in history. I get a lot out of it, but I think the interviewees get a lot out of it as well. People want to tell their stories. They are waiting for someone to ask. History, just like journalism, is all about telling peoples' stories.

CLICK HERE TO RETURN TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS