Of Tempests, Laughing Horses, and Sacred Cows: Controlling College Student Presses between the World Wars

By Timothy Reese Cain

This article examines the controversies involving college student publications in the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrating that restrictions on newspapers and magazines cut across institutional type and region in the era. It identifies three types of article content that frequently caused difficulty for student editors and writers (criticism of university officials, unpopular political stands, and alleged obscenity) and shows how they interacted with each other in specific campus contexts. In an era of in loco parentis, institutional administrators had almost limitless authority and little need to explain their actions in censoring papers and disciplining students. Still, two rationalizations for controlling the presses were evident: institutions viewed papers as student activities that should be managed and controlled like any other, or, as publishers of official papers and magazines, institutions claimed ultimate authority over editors and content. Though educational considerations were present in some of the situations, these cases demonstrate the desire of institutions to control their student presses in hopes of avoiding controversies that might offend legislators and potential donors. At the same time, the very act of censoring student papers could lead to the type of publicity that college presidents were hoping to avoid.

In 1931 English academic and activist Harold J. Laski famously asked of American colleges and society, “Why Don’t Your Young Men Care?” He juxtaposed knowledgeable but indifferent American undergraduates with their more politically active English counterparts, argu-
The “Dam Talk” of Butler, Tennessee: Tracing the Stability and Change of Historical Memory in Newspaper Coverage

By Christie M. Kleinmann

This analysis followed print newspaper coverage of Butler, Tennessee, to determine the stability and change of historical memory. Utilizing longitudinal analysis, it examines the historical narrative over time using local, regional, and national print coverage. The study determines that historical memory is modified over time in national, regional, and local print outlets, and that media play a pivotal role in the change process. The study concludes that media, particularly local media, often determine source perspective that leads to narrative modifications, thus “changing” memories of the past.

Today’s Butler residents know little, if anything, about the former town that shares their town’s name. They enjoy their vacation homes overlooking the blue-green waters of Watauga Lake in the Appalachian Mountains, and they might drive occasionally to the small country store that represents both the beginning and end of Butler city limits. Across the street from the store and up the lake waters, residents can almost see lake-marker “Point 5.” Few of Butler’s new residents know its significance, but marker Point 5 is where the town’s history resides—about 140 feet down. Old Butler, or Butler as it was known then, was the first and only incorporated town to be “drowned” by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

Butler was located in Northeast Tennessee near the Tennessee-North Carolina state line. At its height, Butler was one of the largest and
“As Though the Sixties Never Happened”: Newspaper Coverage of a First Amendment Battle Over Baltimore’s Last Blackface Act

By Stacy Spaulding

This case study examines the 1982 protest of a blackface performance by a white singer—a Baltimore police officer who fought and won a First Amendment battle with the police department over his right to perform Al Jolson tunes in black makeup. How did newspapers treat this episode of blackface performance, and how does this coverage illuminate the dynamics of class, race, and the media in Baltimore in the late twentieth century? This study examines the pages of the Baltimore Afro-American, the city’s primary black newspaper, and the Baltimore Sun, the city’s mainstream newspaper of record. Whereas the Afro more directly addressed the NAACP’s protest of racial representation, both newspapers refrained from commenting editorially on the case until the issue was resolved in the courts. Most notably, Sun coverage evolved from nostalgic profiles of the act before the protest to denouncements of blackface by columnists after the court cases were settled, evidence of the beginning of a broader shift in the representation of race spurred by protests against the newspaper itself. Additionally, this study considers the cultural functions of nostalgia and privilege in alleviating economic anxieties of the white working class during discrete time periods.

Introduction

Baltimore newspapers called Officer Bobby Berger the “singing cop.” In 1978, Berger began performing his Al Jolson Revue—in blackface—at his brother’s rowhouse bar, Old Shantytown. The act began with a set of popular

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Freedom of the Press under Attack during the 1938 Labor Uprisings in Jamaica: The Prosecution of the Publishers of the *Jamaica Labour Weekly*

By Roxanne S. Watson

In 1938, a new movement began in Jamaica that forced the British government to embrace universal suffrage and, ultimately, independence. Begun by workers agitating for better wages, it was co-opted by trade unionists and became part of a larger focus on self-government. As the movement evolved, the rhetoric became increasingly radical. The ideology of the movement found its way into written form in the *Jamaica Labour Weekly*, published by Hugh Buchanan and Stennett Kerr-Coombs. As part of a broad strategy to halt the movement, authorities prosecuted the Weekly publishers for seditious libel. This article traces their prosecution and six-month sentence and places it in the context of the 1938 uprisings.

One hundred years after the abolition of slavery, the laboring class in Jamaica—comprised mostly of the descendants of ex-slaves—continued to face poor social conditions and a combination of political, economic, and social factors that limited the opportunities for the majority of the population. Because of this, working-class Jamaicans took to the streets in May 1938 demanding better work conditions, jobs, and social amenities. This “labor movement” defied the existing status quo, which favored a minority privileged class interest to the detriment of the mass of the population.

It was in the context of the May 1938 labor riots that Stennett Kerr-