Harvey O’Higgins and “The Daily German Lie”

By Michael S. Sweeney

Journalist Harvey O’Higgins, associate chairman of the Committee on Public Information during World War I, wrote and distributed “The Daily German Lie,” a series of press releases, from August to November 1918. This article provides the first scholarly examination of the content and impact of O’Higgins’s column. “The Daily German Lie” provided newspapers and magazines with wartime rumors that the federal government deemed anti-American or pro-German, along with responses from military and government authorities. Attempting to kill destructive rumors and shape public opinion, the column supported key themes in the CPI’s propaganda campaigns. The column demonstrated O’Higgins’s skills as a propagandist as well as his pragmatic, low-key relationship with the American press in contrast with CPI Chairman George Creel’s aggressive and antagonistic approach. Significantly, “The Daily German Lie” sought to silence questions about the authenticity of the so-called Bryce Report, which alleged widespread German atrocities in Belgium, and which most historians later repudiated. Thus “The Daily German Lie” helped undermine confidence in government-supplied war propaganda, and atrocity stories in particular. That proved significant when stories of real atrocities surfaced two decades later in Nazi Germany.

“The Germans have invented two amazing new weapons in this war. One is the official frightfulness on the field of battle. The other is organized lying in the field of propaganda.”

So began the first issue of “The Daily German Lie,” a series of mimeographed press releases produced by Harvey O’Higgins, associate chairman of the Committee on Public Information during World War I, and mailed to American newspapers and magazines. The column, examined apparently for the first time in this article (the only published mention of “The Daily German Lie” appears to be on one page of Stephen
This research attempts to partially rectify the void in 1920s black press scholarship by examining the editorial vision of one of the South’s most prominent, eloquent, and activist publishers, Clifton F. Richardson of the Houston Informer. What set Richardson apart from many African American publishers of the time and makes him particularly worthy of study is the fact that he did not view the three leading strains of black thought of the period—Garvey’s black pride rhetoric, the Du Boisian activist vision of civil rights, or Washington’s promotion of uplift—as being incompatible or in opposition. Although he rarely mentioned the men by name in the Informer, Richardson’s personal values and the social conditions in which he lived led him to weave aspects of these three social visions together to create an editorial agenda coupled with civic action in an effort to bring tangible change to Houston’s black population.

When Clifton F. Richardson died unexpectedly of kidney failure in August of 1939, the middle-aged editor’s funeral procession was one of the largest in Houston’s history. His eulogy appropriately summed up his life—a gifted writer and a charismatic, dynamic speaker, Richardson was one of the South’s most militant voices—a constant crusader for civil rights.¹

In the forty-eight years he lived, Richardson’s journalistic activism resulted in several key civil rights victories for Houston’s black citizens, including improvements in teachers’ pay, school buildings, roads, and parks. He also lobbied for the development of the

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These Working Wives: Representation of the “Two-Job” Woman Between the World Wars

By Jane Marcellus

Between 1920 and 1930, the number of married women who held paying jobs increased about 25 percent. While all employed women were controversial, married women were particularly so. The controversy intensified during the 1930s, when policies such as Section 213 of the 1932 Federal Economy Act forced many married women out of work.

This paper looks at magazine coverage of the “two-job” wife, as married female workers were known. Examining popular magazines such as Ladies’ Home Journal, Harper’s, Forbes, and The American, as well as an alternative publication for employed women, it argues that the domestic role was reinforced, often by framing articles in terms of cultural change itself, which was seen by some as benefitting women and by others as victimizing them. Moreover, the paper supports Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s argument that the “feminine mystique” was rooted in the interwar years, not the 1950s.

Women may be lovely and feminine and successful in a career. They may marry and have children—and still work.

—Doris E. Fleischman, Ladies’ Home Journal, January 1930

Your business is to be a woman. Your career is to make a good marriage. . . .

—Rose Wilder Lane, Ladies’ Home Journal, October 1936

“A B.,” a college-educated mother of four, contributed a column to The American Magazine in 1928 saying that she had become “a different woman” since she had bobbed her hair, hired a housekeeper, “sallied forth into the world of business, and found an office position with a good salary attached.”

“I had been a square peg in a round hole, dissipating all my God-given energy in doing poorly the work which, under the new regime,

The author would like to thank the Center for the Study of Women in Society at the University of Oregon and the Faculty Research and Creative Projects Committee at MTSU, which provided partial funding for this project.

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In Their Own Backyard: Local Press Coverage of the Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner Murders

By Laura Richardson Walton

The disappearance of three civil rights workers on the eve of Mississippi’s Freedom Summer captivated the world. Hordes of reporters rushed into the rural community of Philadelphia, Mississippi, to cover the search for James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael “Mickey” Schwerner. As reporters poured in, the community closed ranks and eventually came to see itself as the victim in the situation.

This article explores how the local papers, the weekly Neshoba Democrat and the daily Meridian Star, covered the search for the missing men and finally, the gruesome discovery of their bodies. Throughout the 44-day search for the men, these newspapers supported the supposition that their disappearance was part of a hoax staged by civil rights organizations to gain publicity for the movement. By using loaded wording in articles and headlines, omitting and failing to acknowledge available information, reporting the demagoguery of state’s politicians, and simply ignoring their own intuition, these papers and their reporters helped elevate the notion of a hoax among their readers. Ultimately, these newspapers failed in their social obligation to report a fair and balanced account of the story and exacerbated the situation causing further violence.

This may have been the most severe test of my own journalistic integrity since World War II. We were all on the same side then, and most of us newsmen abandoned any thought of impartiality as we reported on the heroism of our boys and the bestiality of the hated Nazis. The civil rights struggle that was tearing at our nation was of a vastly different order, an order of much greater magnitude in terms of the demands for neutrality in our reporting.

— Walter Cronkite

On the morning of 21 June 1964 three Council of Racial Equality (CORE) workers set out from Meridian, Mississippi, to investigate the June 18 bombing of the Mount Zion Church in Longdale, a rural community.