Does Journalism History Matter?

By John Nerone

Journalism historians worry that their work doesn’t matter. They lament that their work does not find a broader audience among historians. After all, historians of every nation, period, and specialization spend an awful lot of time thinking about the media these days. Because we were there first, we ought to have plenty to say to them. Oddly, though, journalism historians rarely worry that their work doesn’t matter to communication scholars. Perhaps they assume that, because most of them are located in schools of journalism and communication, their importance to that field is secure. But I think the relationship is more complicated and the opportunities richer than is usually recognized.

History is not about the past but about the relationship between the past and the present. For journalism historians, this bit of common sense suggests that their work should be about the relationship between past journalism and present journalism. And certainly there has been a lot of that: a lot of looking for the precursors of present journalism, and a lot of deploying the standards of modern journalism in judgment of the practices of the past. The presentist use of history is deeply embedded in the history of journalism history. There has been less of the sort of research that brings the past to bear on the problems of journalism in the present—what one would call a critical history of journalism.

But it is certainly not fair to say that journalism history hasn’t been critical. I argue that, in recent years, the critical mode has been the dominant one. This is especially true when the object of study is race or gender. The same cannot be said of critical histories of the news system, particularly if one measures those histories by their engagement with the scholarship of critical scholars of today’s news system. That is not the arena we have sought. The reasons why go back a few decades.

Journalism history has a built-in identity crisis. It is one of the
The Mediatization of War: A Comparison of the American and German Media Coverage of the Vietnam and Iraq Wars

By Gerd Horten

The last fifty years have seen the further expansion of the role of media during times of war. Although no longer dominated by large-scale propaganda agencies as during the two world wars, the media nevertheless have become ever more integral to the planning and conduct of wars. This article applies the concept of mediatization in an attempt to capture the ever-increasing role of the media during war times as part of an ongoing and accelerating historical process. It uses a comparative analysis to highlight the commonalities of this process as well as to emphasize national particularities. The article argues that the mediatization of war has significantly accelerated over the past fifty years and has established the media as the “fourth branch” of military operations, just as essential as the army, navy, and air force.

A new concept has emerged over the past decade in the discussion of the media’s impact on politics, society, and culture: mediatization. Mediatization research tries to analyze the dynamics of our increasingly media-saturated and media-driven societies, which are especially evident in high modern societies. Stig Hjarvard has defined mediatization as “the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become integrated into the operations of social institutions (family, work, politics, etc.) while at the same time acquiring the status of a social institution in their own right.”

Two objections, in particular, have been raised in connection with this new terminology and concept. The first is that this inquiry into the centrality of the media has been the focus of media research all along, which high-
Daughters of the New Revolutionary War: Representations of Confederate Women and Gun Culture in the Confederate Press, 1861–1864

By Mary M. Cronin

This research examines how Southern editors at twenty newspapers across the length of the Confederacy represented news stories of women soldiers and militia members. Although some editors cast a wary eye at women who cross-dressed and went off to battle, this article argues that the promotion of these women soldiers provided a unique opportunity for editors who sought to use their publications to promote Confederate nationalist beliefs. Women soldiers were held up as exemplars of those beliefs. Stories of women soldiers also served two other important purposes: Editors used such stories to boost morale, showing that even women would fight to help their husbands, brothers, and fathers build a new nation. Such stories also were used to shame men not in service to don uniforms and undertake their civic duty for the good of the South.

Laura Williams was not your typical scorned woman. Abandoned by her husband when he went north to join a Connecticut regiment near the start of the US Civil War, the Arkansas-born and based Williams responded by stepping out of the expected home sphere, adopting the name Henry Benford, disguising herself in a lieutenant’s uniform, and going to Texas, where she raised an independent company. She saw battle at Leesburg, Virginia, before her gender was discovered. Williams managed to re-enlist and fought at Shiloh, allegedly alongside her father, who supposedly did not recognize the young soldier as his daughter.

Williams’ bravery and heroism were recounted in a lengthy article that appeared mid-June 1863 in several newspapers across the Confederacy, including The Mississippian, of Jackson, the Savannah Republican, and the

Mary M. Cronin (Lamonica) is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at New Mexico State University, MSC 3J/P.O. Box 30001, Las Cruces, NM 88003. (575) 646–4638 mlamonic@nmsu.edu
This study examines the ways that news of African Americans was presented to white readers in the United States during the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. A content analysis of articles and photographs from 83 daily newspapers from 24 states found that whereas newspapers throughout the country exhibited a number of forms of racism, those in the Deep South were particularly aggressive in their anti-African American message. This was accomplished by minimizing and censoring news of Jesse Owens and other successful African American athletes, and by depicting African Americans as Coons, Mammies, and Bucks—minstrel character roles that had been used for decades to marginalize and humiliate blacks. Balanced or conflicting coverage was never offered to readers in the Deep South. Although the story of Jesse Owens remained temporarily unavailable to most readers there, African Americans made the news when they were associated with crime. Meanwhile, readers outside of the Deep South were able to see more of Jesse Owens, the iconic figure who “defeated whites at their own game” while remaining humble and dignified. As such, he was perhaps the first African American athletic figure who defied the traditional minstrel character stereotype.

[T]he Negro, who had won some recognition through the disputes of the white man, now [post-1890s] proceeded to lose out as the whites made up their differences. Up to the 1940s, the Negro largely accepted this fate with docility. Yet exciting Negro personalities began to be prominent in our headlines—Marian Anderson, Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, A. Philip Randolph. An awakening seemed to be taking place.1—George Hunt, Managing Editor of Life Magazine (1967)
The Selling of Sex, Sleaze, Scuttlebutt, and other Shocking Sensations: The Evolution of New Journalism in San Francisco, 1887–1900

By Mark Bernhardt

In 1887 William Randolph Hearst took over the San Francisco Examiner and made it a New Journalism paper, imitating the techniques of earlier New Journalism publishers in major British and US cities. Because of the competition they faced from Hearst, the other publishers of daily newspapers in San Francisco—Michael de Young and Claus Spreckles—implemented New Journalism techniques in their papers. By the end of the century, San Francisco had become the first US city of its size in which all of the daily newspapers practiced New Journalism. At that time, eight other US cities had populations similar in size to that of San Francisco, and in all of them there were at least two differing journalistic styles practiced by the daily newspapers. However, through the early decades of the twentieth century, four of those cities joined San Francisco in having all of their daily newspapers practice New Journalism.

In the 1870s, an engaging new style of journalism emerged out of several cities in the United States and England. Dubbed “New Journalism” by British poet Matthew Arnold, it proved highly marketable and spread throughout both countries. When William Randolph Hearst assumed control of the San Francisco Examiner in 1887, he implemented New Journalism in his quest to dominate the city’s newspaper market. As elsewhere, readers in San Francisco gravitated toward the style, making Hearst the most successful publisher on the West Coast.

The story of Hearst and the Examiner is a familiar one in the history of journalism, but it provides only a narrow view of the late-nineteenth-century San Francisco newspaper scene and rarely goes beyond what Hearst did with the Examiner.

Mark Bernhardt is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Jackson State University, 1400 Lynch Street, Jackson, MS 39217. (601) 979–2495 mark.a.bernhardt@jsums.edu

— Summer 2011 • 111