“A Light Out of This World”: Awe, Anxiety, and Routinization in Early Nuclear Test Coverage, 1951–1953

By Glen M. Feighery

Above-ground atomic testing has long occupied an iconic place in twentieth-century history. The mushroom cloud was a symbol not only of the Cold War but also of promised advances in science and prosperity. An examination of 600 news articles and editorials from the early 1950s sheds light on how the tests were reported. Coverage of dozens of blasts at the Nevada Test Site reveals journalists struggling to make sense of a force that was simultaneously awe-inspiring, threatening, and routine. Accounts in national, state, and local newspapers convey a complex picture—some were enthusiastic boosters of nuclear testing, while others posed pointed questions about the health implications of radioactive fallout. The purpose of this research is to help understand reporting on atomic testing as a health and safety issue, not simply a political or military one. It complements earlier scholarship by suggesting that coverage was more influenced by news routines than by a reluctance to watchdog authority. It concludes that the forces that enable and constrain modern reporting on scientific, health, or environmental issues might trace their roots back to the early atomic age.

At 5:10 a.m. on March 24, 1953, a bright orange-white flash lit the sky north of Las Vegas, Nevada. Seven minutes later, a boom rumbled across the resort town. Throughout the region, residents saw and heard similar things. In Parowan, Utah, Mrs. Jed Orton reported that her house “started to rattle, and then there was a sort of thunderclap.” In tiny Panaca, Nevada, a man said that “windows rattled, dishes fell from cupboards, and the tremor was definitely noticeable.” Cedar City, Utah, resident Florence Cardon was frightened. “I thought someone was...
Our Founding Anonymity: Anonymous Speech During the Constitutional Debate

By Victoria Smith Ekstrand and Cassandra Imfeld Jeyaram

This article explores why American writers leading up to the ratification of the US Constitution may have used pseudonyms and how their usage shaped the constitutional debate. Analyzing anonymous newspaper essays and pamphlets written between September 22, 1787, and June 21, 1788, the authors identify six reasons for the use of anonymous speech by ratification writers. Though imperfectly drawn, these categories begin to offer a framework for thinking about motivations for anonymous speech during the ratification debate and perhaps for the current debates regarding anonymous speech online. The authors argue that anonymous speech and the nation’s founding are inextricably linked.

In May 1787, less than ten years after the adoption of the Articles of Confederation, congressional delegates met in Philadelphia to amend weaknesses in the government.1 After four months of deliberations, the delegates proposed an entirely new document to run the government—the US Constitution. Immediately following publication of the proposed government in the New York Independent Journal on September 22, 1787, a flurry of signed and unsigned support for and against the Constitution appeared in pamphlets and newspapers. During this constitutional debate, noms de plume such as Publius, Cato, Brutus, A Federal Farmer, Caesar, and Philadelphiensis were widely used in the publications. For example, Publius, the author of the Federalist Papers, wrote more than eighty anonymous essays, and Anti-Federalists Centinel and A Federal Farmer contributed more than forty letters combined to the ratification controversy.

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Shocking Atrocities in Colorado: Newspapers’ Responses to the Ludlow Massacre

By Elizabeth V. Burt

This article examines twelve newspapers’ coverage of the Colorado mine strike and Ludlow Massacre of April 1914. Rather than following the usual pattern of focusing solely on the conflict between the strikers and the mine operators, many newspapers developed two unique themes. One of these used the rhetorical argument of a paradoxical appeal to common belief by comparing the situation in Colorado to the ongoing revolution in Mexico. A second theme condemned the slaughter of the strikers and their families by the state militia and camp guards.

During much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States saw an increasing separation between laborers and their employers. As more and more laborers worked for fewer and fewer companies and as individual workers in the capitalist economic system lost the ability to negotiate directly with their employer, they began to organize in the hope that in numbers they might find a voice.¹

Mainstream general circulation American newspapers generally held no sympathy for the resulting trade unions, for at the same time as the labor movement began to gather momentum, newspapers were becoming commercial and profit-driven enterprises.² Editors, who during the years of the Revolution and the New Republic had published newspapers largely to promote political and partisan ideas and were sustained by like-minded intellectual and political elites, were becoming increasingly dependent on revenues from advertising and sales as they adopted the competitive, news-oriented, resource-hungry model of the penny press.³

In addition, after the 1850s few newspaper publishers had working-class origins.⁴ Those who did, if they became successful, soon came to identify themselves more with the wealthy

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Coloring America’s Pastime:  
*Sporting Life*’s Coverage of Race & the Emergence of Baseball’s Color Line, 1883–1889

By Lori Amber Roessner

This study explores how race was covered within *Sporting Life*, one of the nation’s first specialty sports publications, from the journal’s inception in March 1883 until an unwritten “color line” was drawn in mainstream professional baseball in December 1889. Drawing on historian Barbara J. Fields’s argument that race is a social construction, this study asks: How did *Sporting Life* construct race during the first decade of its existence? The researcher examined a census of *Sporting Life* issues between March 1883 and December 1889 for references to race. Overall, 169 articles from 348 issues of the weekly journal were identified and analyzed. Prior scholars have argued that *Sporting Life* was a progressive mouthpiece, encouraging the inclusion of African Americans in the National League and American Association, or an indifferent reflection of popular societal portrayals. This study uncovers a finer degree of nuance in its coverage of race. As a cultural forum, *Sporting Life* both perpetuated and contested dominant racial ideologies in its coverage of the emergence of baseball’s system of segregation.

In the 1880s, talented African American athletes including John “Bud” Fowler, Frank Grant, Moses Fleetwood Walker and his brother Welday (nicknamed “Weldy”), and George Stovey were granted access to mainstream professional baseball. But their time in the limelight was brief. Club owners insisted that players should be as white as the cover of a new baseball. Mirroring the national trend of de facto segregation, by autumn 1889, owners entered into a gentlemen’s agreement, drawing an unwritten “color line,” which prohibited black men from competing in all mainstream major

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