John Brown was not the only individual making headlines in the late fall of 1859. Several women, notably the abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, captured the attention of newspaper editors. Another woman, Christine Foulke, earned a Boston editor’s praise as the “Heroine of Harper’s Ferry.” Undertaking great personal risk, a third woman, Rebecca Spring, traveled from New Jersey to Charlestown to visit Brown twice. Two others, Mary Day Brown and Mahala Doyle, had more tragic connections to Brown. As this research uncovers stories about these women, it determines, too, whether a discourse called “the cult of true womanhood” emerges in the news coverage. Such a discourse, prevalent in the nineteenth century, stresses the four “cardinal” virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity and emphasizes a woman’s proper place in the home (or private sphere) while celebrating her position as homemaker and mother. Further, the article reveals editorial reaction when these women either violated or supported notions of “true womanhood.” Finally, some findings suggest that editors used ideas about womanhood to launch cultural attacks against their opponents.

When the New Jersey abolitionist Rebecca Spring first received news of John Brown’s raid in northern Virginia, she turned to her husband and said, “I must go and help them.” From the moment of John Brown’s October capture at Harper’s Ferry through his December hanging in nearby
By most any standard, the monumental heat wave of July and August 1936 represents the most severe protracted weather event in North America’s recorded history. To better understand the social and historical impact of this significant weather phenomenon, this critical-historical analysis examines the manner in which select major newspapers framed the heat wave in terms of an integral relationship between news values and news stories. The analysis reveals that despite the event’s epic dimensions, reportage generally treated the heat wave as a transient event without long-term significance. In general, stories overemphasized agricultural concerns and ongoing drought conditions, while coverage failed to adequately address germane urban issues related to the heat. Further, stories focused excessively on New Deal solutions to Dust Bowl era social problems at the expense of addressing key emergent private-sector technologies such as air conditioning.

Understanding An Epic Heat Wave

Beginning in early July 1936, a strong upper-atmosphere high-pressure system became locked over North America’s already drought-stricken Great Plains states, and over the next several weeks it intensified to levels never experienced before or since. During the ensuing forty-five days, fourteen states, stretching from North Dakota to Texas to Pennsylvania, experienced absolute extreme temperature records that have continued to stand for seventy years.¹ All but two of America’s forty-eight states experienced protracted temperatures in excess of 100 degrees Fahr

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This content analysis of World War II movies and Office of War Information documents was conducted to ascertain the influence of the U.S. government on the depictions of the Japanese and German enemy by American filmmakers during the war. Film content was selected for this study as television was in its infancy during the war, and the U.S. government routinely used film in conjunction with radio and other mass media.

Findings show that selected government-defined themes depicting the enemy during the war are systematically found in these popular movies. This study reveals the results of the extensive coordination of public messages about the two enemies between mass media and the U.S. government. The study is useful in understanding the continuing influence of government on filmmaking and other mass media in an attempt to influence and shape public opinion during times of war.

In 1942 Elmer Davis, director of the Office of War Information (OWI), said “the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize they are being propaganda.” A year later one of Davis’s deputy directors, Joseph Barnes, wrote “Today, when the speed of modern communications means that events themselves and their impact on public opinion are almost simultaneous, a fighting nation must have fast communications if it is to play a part in the war of ideas which is...
Historically, racial minorities have not been gatekeepers in America’s newsrooms. Critics have long argued that this limits or even distorts media coverage. This study examines how two newspapers covered a series of racially motivated bombings that took place in Dallas, Texas, in 1950 to determine how race and culture affected news framing, the process by which media gatekeepers define and construct issues or events. Both The Dallas Morning News, the city’s prosperous daily, and the Dallas Express, a black weekly, covered the events. But each told a different story. The two papers employed divergent frames that represented the distinct cultural values and needs of each medium’s core audience. The frames were also affected by each medium’s unique professional and institutional influences. The Dallas Express, for example, embraced advocacy in the interests of promoting community causes. The Dallas Morning News, on the other hand, hued to the professional norm of objectivity.

Two Tales of One City

Historically, racial and ethnic minorities have not been “gatekeepers,” the decision-makers who determine which information becomes news in America’s newsrooms. Critics have long argued that this contributes to media representations of minorities that are at best limited and often outright distorted. In 1947, the Hutchins Commission exhorted the press to project a more representative picture of the constituent groups in society. And in its 1967 report, which blasted the news media for failing to report adequately on the causes of...
In the early twentieth century, the founding of the Montana School of Journalism indicated that Montana was following national trends in the professionalization of journalism. However, the multi-national Anaconda Copper Mining Company began to dominate economic and political life in the state and, as a strategy to silence dissent, purchased most of the state’s daily newspapers. From the 1920s until 1959, journalists working at the newspapers could write nothing that clashed with the company’s business enterprises. Journalists were thus not all owed to develop and exercise their professional skills through their news judgment—lawyers and accountants made news judgments, not journalists—and were frozen for decades in this pre-professional model. This changed in 1959 with the purchase of the Anaconda papers by Lee Enterprises, a Midwestern newspaper group. Following its own traditions, Lee allowed the journalists to exercise their own editorial judgments. Don Anderson, a Montana native and Lee executive, led the way in this transformation of the state’s journalists to professional status. Newspapers soon found themselves engaged in clashes with Anaconda over important issues and even taking more active roles in civic reform efforts. Lee has managed the papers over the years since with praise for their editorial independence but criticism of their financial frugality.

When Lee Enterprises announced its purchase of the Anaconda Company newspapers in Montana on June 1, 1959, a wave of excitement swept through the state. From the plains of eastern Montana to the mountains in the west, subscribers in Anaconda, Billings, Butte, Helena, Livingston, and...