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ABSTRACT

Based on an examination of 90 books and journal articles, this paper provides an analysis of the interpretations historians have used in explaining American journalism during the national crises of 1917-1945 (World War I, the Depression, and World War II). The paper concludes that, in general, the historians defined three divergent approaches to evaluating the press during that period: (1) the Progressive/Liberal approach, which enbodied a conflict approach to history, and which saw differences among sections of American society as the underlying causes of change in history; (2) the Consensus approach, which played down the differences among Americans and emphasized the ideas and beliefs shared by them, and which favored journalism philosophies and activities that were nationalistic in outlook; and (3) the Developmental approach, which assumed that the proper stance of the press should be neither liberal nor conservative, but apolitical, and which viewed the history of journalism not as the story of how the press stood on issues, but of how it performed its professional role as an informer of the public, supporter of press freedom, and watchdog over government. The paper analyzes each of these three approaches and summarizes representative works from each school. (FL)

JOURNALISTS IN TRYING TIMES, 1917-1945:

PROPAGANDISTS, PATRIOTS, OR PROFESSIONALS?

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Presented to the History Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, National Convention, Gainesville, Florida, August 1984.

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In the 20th Century, the United States moved into one of the most extended critical times in its history. A global war was followed by a decade of economic depression, followed by a second world war. In such crucial and devastating events, the American press naturally was caught up. In addition to covering the nation's involvement in World War I, journalists had to decide what their reaction to America's participation should be. As the debilitating depression of the 1930s set in, journalists found themselves facing another national crisis and had to decide how they stood on major social, economic, and political issues. How were they to view sweeping changes in government's role in social and economic programs? What should be their own role in regard to racial injustice? How were they to stand on the question of the position organized labor should have in American industry and

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politics? Should the press support the causes of labor and minorities, or should it accept the beneficient influence of business in both American society as a whole and journalism in particular? Similar questions confronted journalists during the second world war. Should the press support American military participation in wars? Should it accept censorship of information that comes with wartime? Should the press oppose war on the grounds of the damage it does to liberal reform and libertarian ideals? Or should the press simply not get involved in any such questions and remain instead professionally detached?

These same questions confronted historians of American journalism in the critical period of 1917-1945. The answers they gave depended to a large extent on the conceptions of the nature of journalism and American society which they brought to the study of journalism history. The following study provides an analysis of the interpretations historians have used in explaining American journalism during the national crises of the 20th Century. It is based on an examination of ninety books and journal articles and is part of a larger study of interpretations of American journalism since 1690.

In general, historians' conceptions defined three divergent approaches to explaining and evaluating the press during times of national crises. The first approach was characterized by a Progressive or liberal viewpoint and embodied a conflict approach to history. Progressive historians believed differences among sections of American society were the underlying causes of change in history. They usually supported the rights of labor and of unionized journalists, opposed the malignant influence that big-business media owners had on journalistic practices, opposed or only reluctantly supported American involvement in war because they believed war halted liberal reform and killed responsible reporting, and supported libertarian views of freedom of expression and liberal views on social justice. In a contrasting approach, Consensus

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historians played down the differences among Americans and emphasized the ideas and beliefs shared in common by them. These historians generally were nationalistic in outlook and favored journalistic philosophies and activities which they believed worked for the good of the nation as a whole. Most argued that the nation's good was served by its participation in both World Wars and that the press served well by supporting the nation during wartime, accepted the need for limited wartime censorship, argued that the press did an adequate job of informing the public during times of major crises, and argued that radicalism among journalists was not effective. The third school of historians employed a Developmental approach to journalism history and assumed that the proper stance of the press should be neither liberal nor conservative, that instead the press should be apolitical. The history of journalism in the 20th Century, they believed, was not primarily the story of how the press stood on issues, but of how it performed its professional role as an informer of the public, supporter of press freedom, and watchdog over government. These historians, therefore, attempted to analyze the press of 1917-1945 in terms of how it advanced in its performance of strictly journalistic practices.

Historical evaluation of the press in these trying times depended on historians' views on the role the press should play in society in general and during crises in particular. Progressive historians believed the press should help bring about greater social and political equality among segments of society, while Consensus historians believed the press should attempt to unify the various groups in America. Developmental historians reasoned that the role of the press was a professional one which should be unrelated to ideological arguments. The most aggressive historians in arguing their point of view were those who comprised the Progressive school. Approaching history with an outlook that favored liberal reform and their particular brand of humanitarianism, they opposed American participation in

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World War I because they believed that it did little to improve conditions at home, that America got involved in the war primarily because of British and chauvinistic propaganda, and that war resulted in dangerous censorship and irresponsible, jingoistic journalism. While they were not as hostile about U. S. involvement in World War II, they still were concerned about nativism and jingoism in the press and about the war's effect on journalism. On the issue of the press' role during the Great Depression and the government's attempts to alleviate many of the problems it caused, Progressive historians generally were extremely critical of the purely financial motivations of media owners and their failure to support President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies. At the same time, historians were complimentary of journalists who worked for social reform and of specialized publications such as labor newspapers which supported workers and the underprivileged.

The view to be taken by Progressive historians was argued forcefully by press critics of the 1930s, who believed that press owners had sold their souls to capitalism and the wealthy class. Typical of the criticism was the presidential address Kenneth E. Olson delivered to the 1935 national meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Journalism. Entitling his speech "The Newspaper in Times of Social Change," Olson argued that media owners should be using their profits to help the less fortunate members of society, that the press should be "a champion of their rights." Approaching the social role of the press with a Progressive, pro-New Deal point of view, Olsen criticized newspapers for becoming "the voice of an institution representing stockholders interested in profits." Increasingly, he declared, "as it has demonstrated its effectiveness as an advertising medium, the newspaper has become the aide of business until today it is one of the foremost agencies in our American scheme of distribution....I cannot avoid realizing the social significance of this development. As the newspaper has become more dependent

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upon advertising it has become less dependent upon its readers and less concerned with their welfare."[1]

The most fully elaborated and one of the most trenchant Progressive attacks on the conservative press came from another New Deal supporter, Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior under Roosevelt and director of the Public Works Administration. In the 1939 book America's House of Lords, a caustic criticism of newspaper publishers who opposed the New Deal, Ickes argued that the shortcomings of the press were the result of modern publishers being businessmen who were more interested in running their newspapers as business enterprises than journals of news. Publishers, he said, imparted to their newspapers an "upper stratum interest and outlook" and an attitude in which newspapers primarily were considered to be private profit-seeking businesses rather than public-spirited agencies concerned about social good. As a result, the emphasis on business endangered the free press required by a democracy and led to a lack of fairness in newspaper pages, unreliability, suppression of information, and fabrication of news. Other critics echoed these charges, claiming that the emphasis on obtaining advertising dollars and making more and more profits finally distorted the concept of "freedom of the press" into "freedom of the press to make money."[2]

Such arguments against the conservative, money-oriented press typified numerous studies by Progressive historians. Among the worthier critical histories of the press during the Depression years were Oliver Pilat's Pegler: Angry Man of the Press (1963), a biography of Westbrook Pegler which painted the syndicated columnist as an irascible and savage reactionary of the Far Right; John A. Gothberg's "Press Reaction to Japanese Land Ownership in California,"[3] (1970), which argued that newspapers were anti-Oriental; John E. Nichols' "Publishers and Drug Advertising: 1933-1938"[4] (1972), which argued that newspapers sometimes had used inaccurate and distorted news reporting in an

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attempt to court advertisers; James S. O'Rourke's "The San Francisco Chronicle and the Air Mail Emergency of 1934"[5] (1979), which argued that selfish motives on the part of publishers determined newspapers' editorial and news treatment of a major public issue; and Rodney P. Carlisle's Hearst and the New Deal: The Progressive as Reactionary (1979), which claimed that Hearst opposed Roosevelt's policies because the 1935 federal Revenue Act raised Hearst's income tax.

On the issue of the press' role and performance during the two global wars, most Progressive historians argued that war was either unnecessary or damaging to the nation's ideals and that it had a detrimental effect on the press and journalistic standards. These historians were concerned especially about how the press fostered aggressive and discriminatory attitudes, the increase in censorship brought on by war, the deleterious effect and misuse of propaganda, and the tendency for the press' reporting of war to be biased and inaccurate. The beginning of World War II served as a catalyst for historical work on the first world war, as historians showed a growing concern about the effect war has on the press and about how the press performs during wartime. In general, Progressive historians pointed out problems and failures of the press in World War I in the hope that such shortcomings would not be repeated with World War II. In a study of the influence of propaganda in bringing about America's entry into World War I, published just two years before the nation entered the second war, H. C. Peterson decried the gullibility and the deplorable performance of journalists in serving as mouthpieces for British propaganda efforts. Such propaganda, he argued, was a major factor in getting America to enter the war. Peterson's book, Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American Neutrality 1914-1917 (1939), which was written from a non-interventionist or isolationist viewpoint, was based on the argument that Americans went to war against Germany because they

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were gulled by British propaganda, that America's journalists were all too willing to promote the propaganda, and that the American press was permeated by British influence.

In the event America should enter World War II, Progressive historians attempted to find lessons from history to prevent the nation from repeating mistakes from earlier wars. One lesson was to be found in the history of censorship employed during World War I. Published only a few months before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, James R. Mock's Censorship, 1917 typified liberal concern and provided the most prominent arguments against censorship written by the Progressive school of historians. Mock's intent was to examine America's experience with censorship in World War I and to draw from it some guidance for World War II. Although Mock found that the censorship on 1917 occasionally was marked by absurdities, such instances were few, and rarely was censorship used to protect dishonest or incompetent officials. However, while reasoning that censorship during the first war had served a useful purpose, he believed that the real danger from wartime censorship lay in the threat to democratic government that resulted from carrying over into peacetime an oppressive attitude that war engendered. Thus, Mock argued, the system of censorship during World War I led perniciously into peacetime repression after the war had ended. The censorship that followed the war—such as state and municipal ordinances limiting freedom of speech, and state and federal criminal syndicalism laws—was aimed primarily at preventing unpopular ideas from being expressed rather than at suppressing truly subversive action.

Of similar concern to later historians was the detrimental effect war had on press news coverage and journalists' tendencies to become advocates of their nations' actions rather than seekers and reporters of truth. The most pointed critique of the performance of the press during war was made by

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Philip Knightly in The First Casualty (1975), a study of news coverage of conflicts from the Crimean War of 1853-1856 to the Vietnam War. The "first casualty" during war was truth, Knightly declared, for the war correspondent consistently trampled on truth and served more often as "hero, propagandist and mythmaker" than as journalist. Rather than placing the blame on government and difficult wartime conditions, as some historians had done, Knightly concluded that the fault for bad reporting lay squarely on reporters. In wartime, correspondents forgot they were journalists and became instead part liar, part hero, part soldier, and part diplomat. Most were less concerned with truth than with scoops and glory, Knightly claimed, and acted as irresponsible adventurers, always ready to believe their own country's censors and propagandists. Because reporters were influenced by patriotism and ideology and had a team attitude with their fellow countrymen, they forsook truth, giving only warped accounts of reality. The end result was that they greatly damaged people's understanding. In World War I, for example, the Allied press led people to believe simplistically that the war was one between two forces —one of pure good and the other of evil—and thus, in its devotion to nationalism rather than truth, had helped lead the world into war. For such failures, correspondents' misguided attitudes about their role as patriots and propagandists rather than as journalists have been more culpable than the conditions—such as censorship, transportation difficulties, and hazardous situations—under which they operated. Rather than trying to be glamorous adventurers and heroes for their countries, Knightly argued, war correspondents, like other good reporters, should attempt to find and tell the truth no matter what the consequences. In time of war, journalists' main allegiance should be to truth, he said; and journalism itself should be independent, critical, and analytical of the political, social, and economic causes and effects of war, rather than loyal to its nation. If the press had reported truthfully,

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Knightly claimed, the course of history would have been different, for the press for generations had been very influential in determining whether wars were to begin.

While many liberal historians such as Knightly were critical of the mainstream of journalism, some found much to praise among particular journalists and incidents. Finding favor with these historians were Progressive journalists, labor-oriented newspapers, freedom of expression, anti-imperialism, and similar topics. One of the most favored journalists was the New York Evening Post's liberal publisher, Oswald Garrison Villard. Grandson of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and son of Henry Villard, the liberal owner of both the Evening Post and The Nation in the late 1800s, Oswald Villard was considered the epitome of the media mogul who used his journal for the proper and grandest journalistic cause, support of liberal reform and ideals. The liberal reputation of Villard was advocated most fully in D. Joy Humes' biography Oswald Garrison Villard: Liberal of the 1920s (1960). Reacting to the Consensus interpretation of American history which attempted to downplay sharp ideological differences in the nation's past, Humes argued that even in the conservative 1920s there were many liberal causes and that Villard was a true liberal and leader of many of the causes. Along with being a pacifist, he battled for human rights and dignity and for the extension of democracy to more groups of Americans. Because his philosophy was a modern liberalism, he always was willing to listen to ideas and experiment with new methods that might protect the underprivileged. On the deepest level, Humes wrote, he was concerned with a "free flow of ideas." Liberty, Villard said, "means above all else tolerance," even of "bad taste and folly in public utterances." The role of the government therefore was not to attempt to repress expression but to protect the right to freedom of expression even in times of war. Villard also believed strongly in a "kind of noblesse oblige—an effort on the part

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of the privileged class to have their privileges extended to others." This required support for such groups as immigrants and American blacks. On the other hand, he opposed business' domination of politics and society and the favoritism shown business by government in such matters as a protective tariff. Villard faced his greatest dilemma, however, with the two world wars. A pacifist, he could not favor war; but, according to Humes, neither was he an extremist who would hinder his nation in its quest for victory. Still, although he had no desire for the enemy to win, ultimately he believed that war never solved international problems and that there must be a better solution.

Notable additions to the Progressive interpretation were made by such works as Michael Wreszin's Oswald Garrison Villard: Pacifist at War (1965), which more fully elaborated the publisher's views on war; Jerome Edward's The Foreign Policy of Col. McCormick's Tribune, 1929-1941 (1971), an anti-isolationist interpretation which accused Robert McCormick of the Chicago Tribune of being reactionary, distorting foreign reporting, and blindly arguing that Roosevelt wanted America to join the Allied cause in World War II so that the President could achieve his dream of complete dictatorship; Elmer A. Beck's "Autopsy of a Labor Daily: The Milwaukee Leader"[6] (1970), which argued that the labor newspaper succeeded in bringing news to the American public which other papers would not print; Mervin D. Zoak's "How U.S. Magazines Covered Objectors in World War II"[7] (1971), which praised magazines which supported the right of expression by people who objected to serving in the military; and John A. Britton's "In Defense of Revolution: American Journalists in Mexico, 1920-1929"[8] (1978), which praised the efforts of three leftist American journalists who exposed America's imperialistic intentions.

While the Progressive interpretation of history had a lengthy tradition, the fact itself that from 1917-1945 America faced major crises encouraged a diametrically opposing interpretation. With the nation confronting external

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threats and domestic problems, a large number of historians sought to present a picture of America and its press that was characterized by basic agreement and unity. These Consensus historians reasoned that America's past was marked more by general agreement than by conflict and that Americans, rather than being sundered by class differences, tended to be more united than divided. While Americans from time to time might disagree on certain issues, their disagr ements took place within a larger framework—such as a belief in democracy, human freedom, and constitutional government—that overshadowed their differences. Generally, Consensus historians claimed that American history was not marked by extreme differences among groups; and in their hands the Progressives' villains such as industrialists, businessmen, and big media owners were molded into less evil people who made constructive contributions to America, while Progressives' heroes such as reformers and the labor press were painted as less idealistic and more egocentered. Forsaking the critical attitude which had characterized much Progressive writing, Consensus historians tended to emphasize the achievements of America and its press, with the intent of showing a national unity among Americans. The Consensus outlook on history had a major impact on the interpretation of numerous aspects of journalism. The press' role in America's entry into the two world wars was explained in terms of the general agreement among Americans that involvement was necessary. The press' performance during the wars was viewed positively, with historians crediting the press and government information agencies for providing adequate information, while the censorship that was practiced was accepted as necessary and fairly administered. Press treatment of social issues and problems during the 1920s and 1930s was viewed positively, while extremism in labor and radical publications was criticized for its narrow perspective and ineffectiveness. In general, Consensus historians approached journalism history of 1917-1945 from the viewpoint that the press should work with the public and government

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to solve problems rather than create divisions by emphasizing problems and conflicts.

The Consensus viewpoint tended to be especially strong at those times during which the United States faced grave dangers. A large number of studies of the press during World War I, for example, appeared in the years surrounding World War II. The Consensus attitude indeed reflected that of many observers during the crises themselves. In a 1933 essay entitled "Newspaper Leadership in Times of Depression,"[9] Thomas F. Barnhart argued that as newspapers and society faced severe economic problems, "the editor has been faced with new demands which have forced the newspaper to occupy a position of leadership, a position it may not have taken in times of well-being and prosperity." Presenting case studies of how specific newspapers had served as community leaders during the Great Depression years of 1930-1932, Barnhart pointed out that the economic situation had "turned the editorial office into a headquarters to mobilize relief, welfare, and socializing enterprises." Similarly, in an essay in 1942 entitled "Editorial Pages in Wartime—Their Techniques and Ideology," William Wesley Waymack, Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial editor of the Des Moines (Iowa) Register and Tribune, relied on the Consensus argument. The job of the newspaper editorial page, Waymack reasoned, is more than simply to reflect or react to what is occurring on a day-to-day basis. With the world confronted by military threats, he said, the press' purpose is instead to encourage democratic progress in both the world and the nation by making "more of our citizens better informed about grave issues of great complexity and better qualified therefore to influence the making of profoundly wise decisions through workable democratic processes."[10]

Such concern for the press' aiding in defeating the threats and solving the problems facing the nation was shared by Consensus historians. To them, journalism's past revealed that the press had performed best when it

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had contributed to national unity. They believed that the press' attitude toward America's entry into both World War I and World War II was responsible and reflected the consensus of the American people, that the proper role of the press during the wars was to support the aims of the nation, that freedom of the press during wartime must conform to the overriding needs of the nation, and that government information efforts during the wars were exercised acceptably. Against the Progressive argument that propagandists, profiteers and reactionary publishers misled the public and led America into the wars, Consensus historians declared that the position of the press mirrored the opinions of the majority of the American public and that press support of the war effort was fully justified by the enormity of the threat from America's and democracy's enemies. As Axis powers engulfed the world in war in the 1930s, Edwin Costrell examined American and press attitudes toward the United States' entry into World War I. In "Newspaper Attitudes Toward War in Maine 1914-17" (1939), he examined the views of six Maine newspapers in an attempt to answer the Progressive question of whether American leaders plunged the nation into World War I contrary to popular desires. Costrell concluded that newspaper content indicated that the press and the public had favored America's entry. By 1917, he wrote, "gone was all opposition to jingoism, all desire for neutrality, all talk of isolation. Although then, as many writers contend, public opinion may not have been the primary cause of America's involvement in the World War and its citizens may not even have desired to engage in hostilities, the people of Maine may safely be said to have definitely committed themselves in favor of a belligerent course. War headline after war headline over a period of more than two years at last had infected Yankee blood, aided by Germany's renewed disregard for the rights of American nationals; and a restless belligerency which had been held in abeyance by stronger peace forces broke all bonds. War sentiment had grown slowly; it had not come to full flower

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during the crisis, nor during the crises which shortly followed; but by February of 1917 it had undoubtedly come into its own, not reversing itself once in the two months which intervened before war actually was declared. Whatever the rest of the nation may have thought, Maine advanced to battle when it most fervently desired to go."[11] In a similar study intended to determine whether the pro-war attitude of Maine newspapers was shared by journalists elsewhere, Andrew C. Cogswell concluded that Montana newspapers were pro-Ally by July 1914. "[T]hrough the pre-war Montana newspapers of 1913 and 1914," Cogswell wrote, "ran discernible threads of traditional American concepts of right and wrong. Upon these concepts Montana newspapers judged the Central Powers. It is hard to believe that these concepts were those of newspapers alone."[12]

In other studies, Consensus historians came to similar conclusions. Lamar Bridges (1969) found that newspapers in the Southwest United States viewed a German proposal in 1917 to help Mexico reconquer land in the Southwest as an act of war;[13] Carl Ryant (1971) argued that between the years 1939 and 1942, the Saturday Evening Post forsook its isolationism in favor of wholehearted support of United States war efforts because the magazine mirrored the views of America's professional middle class;[14] Carol Reuss (1972) argued that whereas most discussions of the government-press relationship center on the watchdog role of the press, the activities of the Ladies' Home Journal during World War I should remind the press that it can serve the public by working with the government in distributing information;[15] and Lee Finkle (1975) argued that black editors during World War II believed that black Americans should support the American war effort because such support would result in equal treatment of blacks after the war and that a world crisis was no time to demand a complete change in discriminatory racial practices.[16]

Consensus historians also broke sharply with the views of Progressive

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historians on the issue of the concept of freedom of the press and government control over information. Whereas Progressive historians generally argued that freedom of the press should be absolute and that cooperation of the conservative press with government posed the danger of compromising honest, liberal journalism, Consensus historians believed absolute freedom and independence of the press could result in a journalism that was irresponsible and that ultimately could endanger the nation and the democratic system that made press freedom possible. To merit freedom, Consensus historians argued, the press must perform responsibly in relation to the rest of society, with the welfare of the nation as a whole rather than of the press alone of primary importance. This view led Consensus historians to the natural conclusion that restrictions on press freedom during wartime may be acceptable and that such restrictions—because of the circumstances under which they are implemented—do not abandon the concept of freedom in a democratic philosophy. As the United States faced wartime conditions in the 1930s and 1940s, Consensus historians attempted to look to press operations during World War I to provide guidance in World War II and generally concluded that limited censorship and government information agencies had served the nation well with minimal damage to the press.

One of the foremost journalism historians on World War I, Reginald Coggeshall, argued against the view of some journalists of the 1930s that American officials had practiced impermissible censorship at the Paris peace conference following World War I. A journalist himself, Coggeshall had been a member of the staff of the Paris edition of the New York Herald. In a 1939 article, "Was There Censorship at the Paris Peace Conference,"[17] he assumed implicitly that censorship during wartime is acceptable and concluded that American military officers at the peace conference considered the conference to be part of a continuing war, thus justifying control of information. Any

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censorship of news that did occur was usually unintentional and therefore justifiable. In the fullest study of censorship during World War II, Theodore F. Koop reached a conclusion similar to Coggeshall's. Koop's Weapon of Silence (1946) analyzed the job performed by the United States' civilian censhorship organization, the Office of Censorship under Byron Price, and concluded that even though at times censorship exceeded what was necessary, all in all it served a very useful purpose and prohibited little innocuous material from being distributed. Price acted responsibly in establishing policies and carrying them out, Koop reasoned, and exhibited a true concern about both informing the public and working for the national welfare.

Along with censoring information during the wars, the American government also carried on operations to provide information to the American public and present the Allied point of view. Consensus historians generally argued that such efforts were performed in a reasonable manner and were necessary as part of the larger effort to win military victory. In "Mysterious Silence, Lyrical Scream: Government Information in World War II"[18] (1971), Robert L. Bishop and LaMar S. Mackay outlined what they considered the "main problems in setting up U. S. information agencies" and in protecting "the historic right of the people to know about the politics and programs of their government while maintaining the security of the nation." Detailing the history of the Office of War Information, they concluded that because of the complexity of the American government and the immensity of national propaganda operations, a government information agent no longer can be the leader in forming policy —as the OWI did—but must work with both government and the mass media and in effect serve as an auxiliary weapon for the nation. In a larger study of the CWI, The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information (1978), Allan M. Winkler also accepted the legitimacy of government information programs and concluded that the OWI performed an important role in America's efforts to

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win the war. In chronicling the struggles within the OWI itself to determine what procedures it should use, Winkler found that some libertarians such as Archibald MacLeish and Robert Sherwood preferred a straightforward approach in propaganda rather than scare tactics, basing their decision on their belief in the fundamental rationality of Americans and citizens of other countries. Elmer Davis, more pragmatic and less idealistic, was not as confident of the desire of the people for rational truth; and, as OWI director, he redirected the agency toward military-oriented propaganda rather than propaganda primarily promoting democracy, as liberals had hoped. The liberals' ideas, however, Winkler concluded, were either inappropriate or unworkable in the wartime conditions, and the OWI's primary purpose of winning the war was the most proper one, as even the liberals themselves eventually came to realize.

As with wartime issues involving the press, Consensus historians believed that the press during difficult domestic times should contribute to the solution of social problems, and they tended to argue that the most workable and equitable solutions could be found in mainstream institutions and ideas. They therefore were critical of radical journalists and press movements—which they concluded frequently performed poorly—and argued that journalists who advocated causes could be most effective by working within the established system. The labor press, for example, fared poorly with these historians. Earl W. Simmons, in "The Labor Dailies" (1928), a study of various labor newspapers from 1886 to 1924, pointed out that most such papers had short lives and concluded that "the American labor movement has not made much progress in the field of daily journalism" and that the labor press had no national influence. The causes of its problems lay with both its editors and the newspaper audience. "With few exceptions," Simmons wrote, "the American editors have been first-rate fighters, but they have lacked the cultural breadth necessary for a clear perspective on national and international

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problems." Furthermore, the laboring reader was more interested in sensationalism and entertainment in his newspaper than in labor issues. "The average American working man," Simmons reasoned, "is not class conscious enough to support a labor press. The New York Daily News and the Chicago Herald-Examiner contain what he likes to read."[19]

In a study focused more narrowly on the newspapers published by the Non-partisan League, an agrarian political movement, from 1915 to 1920, Joseph H. Mader (1937) argued that even though the League had some success using propaganda, its newspapers failed because of factional fighting and incompetent management. The League experienced rapid growth because of its leaders' "mastery of propaganda techniques," and it had early success with its attempts at journalism, but ultimately its newspapers were marred by careless financial management and by political bickering among League leaders, resulting in their demise after only a short publishing period.[20] Consensus historians viewed the minority press in a similar fashion. In No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the Messenger, 1917-1928 (1975) Theodore Kornweibel Jr. argued that the magazine became a successful advocate of the cause of black Americans only after it gave up its early radical stance and moved toward the center of national politics. In the 1920s, blacks received no help from government, the political right or left, industry, or labor. A. Phillip Randolph helped found the Messenger as a forthright Socialist magazine and tied its fate for the first five years to the American Socialist Party. Once Randolph realized, however, that the party offered no real hope for blacks, he gradually changed the magazine's stance toward a pro-business one. Randolph's pragmatism—contrasted with an idealism which Progressive historians admired in American reformers but which Consensus historians argued was ineffectual in bringing about change—provided one of the prime factors in the magazine's surviving as long as it did. By the time the Messenger died in 1928, Randolph had

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moved it into the mainstream of American politics, where it sought accommodation with the Republican and Democratic parties and even with the mainline labor groups hated by Socialists.

The third major approach to the press of 1917-1945 was provided by Developmental historians. Unlike the ideological viewpoints of the Progressive and Consensus historians, the interpretation of Developmental historians normally displayed little concern for partisanship. Most Developmental historians attempted to explain the performance of the press in terms of professional journalistic practices rather than ideology. Thus, in examining journalism in regard to the two world wars and the Great Depression, they placed primary emphasis on how the press operated according to journalistic standards with little regard for ideological conflict. While a number of Developmental historians did believe the press should be an advocate of truth, a crusader for justice, a protector of the underprivileged, a guardian of fairness, or a performer of some other such role, they did not consider these roles to be ideological in nature. Instead, they thought of them simply as professional aspects of journalism. A typical Developmental study of the press in such terms was Daniel W. Pfaff's "The Press and Scottsboro Rape Cases, 1931-32" (1974). The cases were brought against several black males in the South, providing "an interesting challenge to the press to exercise its functions as interpreter in the struggle between truth and falsehood and as watchdog in the interests of fair and equal justice. They served to demonstrate the viscissitudes of dealing evenhandedly in print with a story that involved both inflammatory racial attitudes and international ideological controversy."[71] The press failed to perform according to proper journalistic standards during the cases, Pfaff concluded, for it was prejudiced, and the information and editorial opinion it carried failed to provide the public with a fair or accurate story. With a similar concern for journalistic practices, Developmental

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historians conducted a number of studies of press performance and advances, including among others relations between the U. S. Presidents and the press, presidential press conferences, presidential press secretaries, press access to information, journalistic non-partisanship, the press' "watchdog" role over government, press freedom during wartime, interpretive and investigative reporting, newspapers' emphasis on news, the rise of female journalists, editorial integrity and independence, the growth of the American Newspaper Guild, advertising, and magazine journalism.

The subject of most interest to Developmental historians, however, was war reporting. With the period 1917-1945 witnessing two wars of great magnitude during which reporting seemed to improve, it was only natural that the subject of war reporting should attract a large number of historians. They published numerous biographies of war correspondents and histories of war reporting, including such works as George Schreiner's Cables and Wireless (1924), Douglas Gilbert's Floyd Gibbons, Knight of the Air (1930), Samuel Hopkins Adams' Alexander Wollcott: His Life and His World (1945), Lee G. Miller's The Story of Ernie Pyle (1950), Joseph J. Mathews' Reporting the Wars (1957) and George W. Smalley: Forty Years a Foreign Correspondent (1973), Emmet Crozier's American Reporters on the Western Front, 1914-1918 (1959), John Hohenberg's Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times (1964), and M. L. Stein's Under Fire: The Story of American War Correspondence (1968). These historians believed that truly professional war reporting developed in the 20th Century and that war reporters were fully committed to the job of providing accurate and complete information to their readers. War correspondents faced great hazards, and Developmental historians gave considerable attention to their derring-do and heroic adventures. Whereas reporters of the 19th Century often had been pictured as mere adventurers and famous journalistic stars, the modern correspondents were described by Developmental historians

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as more serious about their task and role. They were concerned about their preparation, their qualifications, and their performance as competent journalists. The most successful war correspondents, Developmental historians believed, were those who were most determined to do their job despite obstacles—both military and political—and who were concerned with gaining access to information, with accuracy, and with speed in transmitting news. All in all, historians concluded, while reporting often was colored and incomplete, the primary motivation of journalists was the desire to provide immediate and valuable information to the public, and war correspondents as a whole performed admirably.

How, in the final analysis, is the press during the national crises of 1917-1945 to be judged: as an advocate of social reform and liberalism, as an irresponsible and jingoistic propaganda tool, as a servant of entrenched conservative interests, or as a practitioner of high journalistic standards? The final conclusion is linked inevitably to the interpretive perspectives of historians. While the three historical schools discussed in this study present pictures which clearly are at odds, each nevertheless provides a perspective that helps paint a fuller and deeper picture of how American journalists have performed during critical and trying times. In the end, each contributes to a better understanding of American journalism.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Kenneth E. Olson, "The Newspaper in Times of Social Change," Journalism Quarterly, 12 (1935), 9-19.

[2]For a summary of press criticisms during the period, see Margaret A. Blanchard,"Press Criticism and National Reform Movements: The Progressive Era and the New Deal," Journalism History, 5 (1978), 33-37, 54-55.

[3]John A. Gothberg, "Press Reaction to Japanese Land Ownership in California," Journalism Quarterly, 47 (1970), 667-672, 724.

[4]John E. Nichols, "Publishers and Drug Advertising: 1933-1938," Journalism Quarterly, 49 (1972), 144-147.

[5]James S. O'Rourke, "The San Francisco Chronicle and the Air Mail Emergency of 1934," Journalism History, 6 (1979), 8-13.

[6]Elmer A. Beck, "Autopsy of a Labor Daily: The Milwaukee Leader," Journalism Monographs, 16 (August 1970).

[7]Mervin D. Zoak, "How U. S. Magazines Covered Objectors in World War II," Journalism Quarterly, 48 (1971), 550-554.

[8]John A. Britton, "In Defense of Revolution: American Journalists in Mexico, 1920-1929," Journalism History, 5 (1978), 124-130.

[9]Thomas F. Barnhart, "Newspaper Leadership in Times of Depression," Journalism Quarterly, 10 (1933), 1-13.

[10]William Wesley Waymack, "Editorial Pages in Wartime--Their Techniques and Ideology," Journalism Quarterly, 19 (1942), 34-39.

[11]Edwin Costrell, "Newspaper Attitudes Toward War in Maine 1914-17," Journalism Quarterly, 16 (1939), 334-344.

[12]Andrew C. Cogswell, "The Montana Press and War: 1914 to 1917," Journalism Quarterly, 21 (1944), 137-147.

[13]Lamar W. Bridges, "Zimmerman Telegram: Reaction of Southern, Southwestern Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 46 (1969), 81-86.

[14]Carl G. Ryant, "From Isolation to Intervention: The Saturday Evening Post 1939-42," Journalism Quarterly, 48 (1971), 679-687.

[15]Carol Reuss, "The Ladies' Home Journal and Hoover's Food Program," Journalism Quarterly, 49 (1972), 740-742.

[16]Lee Finkle, Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II (Cranbury, N. J., 1975).

[17]Reginald Coggeshall, "Was There Censorship at the Paris Peace Conference?" Journalism Quarterly, 16 (1939), 125-135.

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[18]Robert L. Bishop and LaMar S. Mackay, "Mysterious Silence, Lyrical Scream: Goverament Information in World War II," Journalism Monographs, 19 (May 1971).

[19]Earl W. Simmons, "The Labor Dailies," American Mercury, 15 (September 1928), 85-93.

[20]Joseph H. Mader, "The North Dakota Press and the Non-partisan League," Journalism Quarterly, 14 (1937), 321-322.

[21]Daniel W. Pfaff, "The Press and the Scottsboro Rape Cases, 1931-32," Journalism History, 1(1974), 72-76.

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