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ABSTRACT

This essay critiques the depictions of rank and file newsworkers of the 1920s and 1930s that are offered in traditional journalism histories and in cultural, social, and women's histories of the press. Following a tradition established in the first half of the 20th century, contemporary media historians continue to reify the use of other standard media texts as important sources in understanding the history of mass communication. The chronological structure, coupled with technology-driven periodization, reinforces a belief in the notion of history as progress. The style, vocabulary, and language used in media histories reflect a continued belief in the knowability of historical truth. The treatment of reporters during the interwar period in media history texts is extremely limited, consisting for the most part of decontextualized superficial discussions of exceptional individuals who stand apart; omitted from this treatment for the most part is any consideration of reporters as a group of working people. Discussions of women reporters during the interwar years focus on the strategies individual women use to triumph over adversity, and emphasize the progress made (albeit limited) of women in the media. In their coverage of the Great Depression, media histories fail to adequately address the human consequences. Discussion of women reporters during the Depression is also limited. Media historians who do not address newsworkers fail to realize that regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, reporters remain an underrepresented class of workers, whose influence and significance on American media history has not been fully explored. (Contains 41 references.) (RS)

NEWSWORKERS DURING THE INTERWAR ERA:

A CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

The role of newsworkers during the interwar period of 1919-1938 may be seen as central to understanding the political and economic development of the media. Technological changes encourage the dissemination of communication messages on a scale never previously available; millions of individuals have access to a daily urban newspaper, and telephones, radio, film, photography, and automobiles become available to vast numbers of people. Reporters emerge as significant members of news organizations who interact with the community, influence public opinion, and help to create the news. Yet, although journalists are pivotal to the development of contemporary American capitalist society, to date, the history of the rank and file has only been marginally addressed.

This essay critiques representations of American reporters, during the interwar era, that are presented in standard communication histories. It maintains that traditional media histories remain preoccupied with the collection and presentation of facts, often to the exclusion of any historical contextualization or deeper understanding. These facts are then arranged in a linear fashion and presented as "overwhelming evidence" to support the continued growth of newspapers, as well as a particular conception of freedom of the press, within the American capitalist system (Hardt 1989, 119-120). This paper suggests that an analysis of how media histories address the role of the reporter during the 1920s and 1930s may offer insights into the

ideological impact of the dominant liberal pluralist framework on historiography.

In an effort to historicize elements that seem natural and to understand the implications of a traditional "common-sense" approach to media historiography, this essay incorporates an ideological analysis that addresses the structure, content, style, language, and absences residing within cultural products. Stuart Hall suggests that the revealing of recurring patterns in placement, treatment, position, and tone are especially useful in "penetrating the latent meanings of a text." Yet, he finds that the most significant or meaningful item may actually be that which stands out as an exception from the specific pattern (Hall 1975, 15). Fredric Jameson explains that ultimately:

> The process of criticism is not so much an interpretation of content as it is a revealing of it, a laying bare, a restoration of the original message, the original experience, beneath the distortions of the various kinds of censorship that have been at work upon it; and this revelation takes the form of an explanation of why the content was so distorted and is thus inseparable from a description of the mechanisms of this censorship itself (Jameson 1971, 404).

This study addresses depictions of rank and file newsworkers of the 1920s and 1930s offered in traditional journalism histories including *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Bleyer 1927), *The Press an America: An Interpretative History of Journalism* (Emery & Smith 1954, Emery 1962, and Emery & Emery 1992), *Voices of a Nation: A History of the Media in the United States* (Folkerts & Teeter 1989), *The Communications Revolution: A History of Mass Media in the United States* (Gordon 1979), *Journalism in the United States* (Jones 1947), *American Journalism* (Mott 1941 and 1965), *The Media in America: A History* (Sloan, Stovall, & Startt

1989), *The Compact History of the American Newspaper* (Tebbel 1969), and *The Media in America* (Tebbel 1974). It also assesses the discussions of interwar era newsworkers found in cultural, social, and women's histories of the press such as *Brilliant Bylines* (Belford 1986), *Media and the America Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Czitrom 1982), *Media Voices: An Historical Perspective* (Folkerts 1992), *Up From the Footnotes* (Marzolf 1977), *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page* (Mills 1988), *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider* (Ross 1936), and *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (Schudson 1978).

Following a tradition established in the first half of the twentieth century, contemporary media historians continue to reify the use of other standard media texts as important sources in understanding the history of mass communication. Although media historians, as well as other communication researchers, may employ a variety of perspectives and approaches, they rarely challenge the basic assumptions inherent in these texts, often treat them, in one historian's words, as "definitive," "thorough," and "indispensable" (Tebbel 1969, 269), and tend to appropriate them uncritically in their own work. For example, one third of all references in Weaver and Wilhoit's historical overview of the journalist refer to media histories by Frank Luther Mott, Edwin and Michael Emery, and Michael Schudson (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986).

The contemporary histories of women in the media illustrate a trajectory that begins with Ishbel Ross's 1936 seminal study of women journalists, *Ladies of the Press*, and its reliance on Willard Bleyer for information relating to general media history. Marion Marzolf's 1977 text *Up From the Footnotes*, quotes Ross extensively in her investigation of early

twentieth century women reporters, while Barbara Belford, in 1987, relies on both Marzolf and Ross, as well as Emery and Emery as sources for *Brilliant Bylines*. Kay Mills's 1988 history, *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page*, draws on Marzolf, Belford and most importantly Ross, finding her now "dated" history of women in the newspaper business still the "best" (Mills 1988, 351). The acceptability of these histories as sources of information is certainly at question; perhaps more important, however, is the understanding that communication researchers continue to use these standard historical texts as primary source material. It is this realization that makes it even more important for researchers to critically assess the role of these texts as purveyors of knowledge.

STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS OF COMMUNICATION HISTORIES

Building on the lineage of Bleyer's 1927 *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism*, Mott's 1941 text, *American Journalism*, and Edwin Emery and Henry Ladd Smith's 1954 *The Press and America*, contemporary media historians continue to utilize the same chronological organizational scheme employed in these early texts. Period specific chapter divisions in Emery and Smith, such as "The Press and Revolution," "A Press for the Masses," "The New Journalism," and "The People's Champions" are still found in Emery and Emery's 1992 seventh edition. Other recent media histories include chapter designations such as "The Revolutionary Press, 1765-1783," "The Age of New Journalism, 1883-1900," and "The Media and Reform, 1900-1917" (Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989), as well as "From Revolution to Constitution," "Penny Papers in the Metropolis," and "The Press and Modernization" (Folkerts and Teeter 1989). These common chapter distinctions help to frame topical historical narratives that segment American

media history into a series of stories which reflect forward movement in the advancement of freedom and knowledge.

Media historians often combine a linear understanding of history, directed toward progress, with a belief in time-bounded and unchanging historical truth. For example, the treatment of the modern newspaper from 1914-1940, in Mott's first edition, is virtually identical to the discussion in his 1965 third edition. Both focus on technological advances, powerful newspaper publishers, and newspaper coverage of "big" stories of the period. Chapter headings as well as page numbers remain the same in both books; the third edition merely adds on a section for the period 1940 to 1965. Obviously, for Mott, historical understanding is not open to reinterpretation; once the facts are presented, they will stand the test of time.

The chronological structure, coupled with technology driven periodization, reinforces a belief in the notion history as progress. Media historians continue to devote chapters to the revolution of the penny press (Folkerts and Teeter 1989, Schudson 1978, Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989), the growth of broadcasting, as an agent of change (Czitrom 1982, Folkerts 1992, Folkerts and Teeter 1989, and Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989), the emergence of motion pictures (Czitrom 1982, Folkerts 1992, Folkerts and Teeter 1989), and finally the television revolution (Emery and Emery 1992, Folkerts 1992, Folkerts and Teeter 1989, Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989).

Structurally, each media history chapter includes a well defined beginning and end; within the boundaries of each chapter the narrative addresses challenges, concerns, and constraints relating to each topic, and then offers consequences, solutions, and results. In these texts, for example, discussion on the consolidation process of newspapers, during the beginning of the twentieth century, is generally considered a positive development, that

is directly linked to the growth of the Hearst and Scripps-Howard chains. Tebbel clearly represents the general position expressed in these histories, when he suggests, "Chain journalism and the trend to consolidation was clearly a major media phenomenon of the century, and one of its most significant developments" (Tebbel 1974, 328). Journalism histories note the emergence of consolidation, address the issues surrounding it, and resolve all potential problems within the confines of a single chapter. However, the opening and closing of the text, within each chapter, coupled with the orderly presentation and solution of problems, tends to limit discussion and inhibit individual meaning and interpretation. The reader is not only told the significance of each event, but how it contributed to the progress, growth, and development of the media in the United States.

Standard media texts, locked into the progressive interpretation of communication history, posit good vs. evil in terms of binary oppositions that help to illustrate fundamental assumptions regarding the role of freedom of the press in society and a continued belief in the merits of a "free" market system. Early twentieth century newspapers are represented as the "good" press, with other "newer" forms of media positioned as fundamentally "evil." Newspapers are shown to initially react against the intrusion of these new media and do not initially embrace their technological, social, or communicative potential. Communication historians discuss the emergence of tabloids and interpretative reporting as strategies of survival; they are strategies that represent "new product design and packaging, and product differentiation" that newspapers utilize to forestall challenges by national magazines, radio, and advertising, to their role as the dominant medium (Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989, 254).

Perhaps George Gordon captures this attitude best when he writes: "The lingering deaths of most of America's old newspapers are not encouraging or pleasant stories, particularly because so many of them are told against a background (except for the 1930s) of social and economic prosperity during which other media prospered" (Gordon 1979, 135). Assuming all newspapers require unfettered First Amendment protection, standard communication histories recast changes orchestrated by members of the newspaper industry, including chain ownership and consolidation, as positive attempts to preserve their constitutionally determined role as agents of democracy.

Although Edwin Emery suggests post-war journalism is hindered by its "big story" complex (Emery 1962, 633), a similar emphasis is also apparent in the content media histories discuss during this time. Top stories covered by the press in the 1920s include Charles Lindberg's flight from New York to Paris, the Versailles Conference, ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment, the Teapot Dome scandals, debate over American membership in the League of Nations, and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in the midst of the "Red Scare." In the 1930s newspapers concentrate on the wall street crash, F.D.R.'s presidential victory, the kidnapping and murder of the Lindberg baby, the California earthquake, the birth of the Dionne quintuplets, as well as an assortment of gangster killings and assassinations (Mott 1965, 696-703). Similarly, the "big stories" of media history, during the interwar period, that standard media histories address include the tabloid war of New York "gutter journalism" during the 1920s, the rise of chain ownership, the emergence of interpretative reporting and objectivity, and technological innovations that result in the development of public relations, advertising, radio, and motion pictures. The more contemporary histories also address the creation of the

Newspaper Guild, the professionalization of journalism, women in the press, and problems with the media coverage of the great depression.

These "big stories" are augmented with narrowly drawn biographical and institutional narratives of leading figures of journalism and their publications, such as William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., E. W. Scripps, Henry Luce, and the "prototypical" newspaper owner/entrepreneur turned "butcher," Frank Munsey. Communication histories which specifically address women journalists, are almost entirely biographical chronologies that focus primarily on the "stars" of the field. Many of the same women, including Anne O'Hare McCormick, Dorothy Thompson, and Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer (Dorothy Dix), first distinguished in Ross's book, continue to be addressed, in the same fashion, in each subsequent history. Ross, a notable newspaperperson in her own right, however, neglects to include her own story in *Ladies of the Press*. It is an omission Belford credits to Ross's own modesty (Belford 1986, 231) that Belford, Marzolf, and Mills rectify in their texts. While it is certainly important to include the stories of women pioneers in media histories, it is also necessary to understand that these chronologies only tell a part of the story. The discussions of these women are, for the most part, anecdotal, event oriented narratives, which lack historical context and critical understanding.

The style, vocabulary, and language utilized in media histories reflect a continued belief in the knowability of historical truth. They confront, address, and solve each challenge to the press, yet the social, political, or economic conditions that underlie specific events are rarely addressed. The texts, for the most part, maintain an authoritarian tone that tends to inhibit alternative views and interpretations. The authors present a myriad of facts as evidence of what "really" happened; when they discuss conflicting judgments, the

opinions are framed so that it is clear which position they favor as the "truth." For example, in their discussion of the tabloids, Folkerts and Teeter explain that the "standard view" of tabloids considers them to reflect "the declining moral values of the decade." They then, however, suggest that there is now "a newer" interpretation, in which the tabloids are shown to help people in urban areas "create order in their chaotic lives, and to understand and to cope with their own experience in relationship to a new and increasingly complex society" (Folkerts and Teeter 1989, 375). Although there is considerable literature reflecting a variety of opinion regarding the role of the tabloids, in this account the reader is clearly left to assume that the "newer" interpretation is the proper explanation.

In most of these texts the authors' stance can be inferred from the juxtaposition of material, the relative weight of an event, or the actual absence of discussion. One history, however, actually draws its judgments quite explicitly. In *The Communications Revolution: A History of Mass Media in the United States*, Gordon freely incorporates his own personal experience anecdotes into the narrative, and often lapses into first person when he wishes to make a salient point. Not impressed with early twentieth century American radio broadcasting, which he often refers to as "schlock," he admonishes readers, "Much rot has lately been written about the 'great days of American broadcasting,' mostly, I think, by people who were fortunate enough not to have lived through it -- or by amnesiacs" (Gordon 1979, 189). Believing "hindsight is usually twenty-twenty," Gordon, like the majority of media historians, incorporates a common sense view of history that is best "served by simple scrutiny of the ways that the past has become the present" (Gordon 1979, xii). While his language and tone may be more direct, his quasi-cultural approach to early twentieth century media history resonates

with progressive overtones and remains quite similar to the other standard communication histories.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE REPORTER

An important consideration in any ideological critique of a cultural product is the identification of its absences. As Pierre Macherey explains, what is important in a text, is what it does not, cannot say. Relating the notion of absence to Freud's concept of the unconscious, he maintains that "in order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said.*" An understanding of a work's absences, can illuminate that which is concealed, missing, or hidden; meaning, therefore emerges from an examination of the relationship between the explicit as well as that which is implicit (Macherey 1978/1989, 85). Finding absence crucial to any text's ideological structure, Mike Cormack cautions that what is at stake is not simply the avoidance of some issues, but how a text's ideological argument is worked out unproblematically (Cormack 1992, 32).

An understanding of what is missing from media histories, in their coverage of the American reporter during the interwar period, provides specific evidence of how a liberal pluralist framework impacts the writing of media history. It is possible to find many absences in an analysis of standard media histories, since, as Jean Folkerts explains, until recently, history was mainly written by affluent white men who "asked questions about how superior men in the past had conceived ideas and how they had structured nations and policies -- and the media -- around those ideas" (Folkerts 1992, xi). This essay, however, focuses primarily on the absence of reporters, as a class of workers; it is an omission which occurs in standard media texts,

contemporary social/cultural histories, and histories devoted entirely to women journalists alike.

Although one might assume the inclusion of the reporter in any standard media history, the same conclusion might be drawn from reading the introductory passages of many of these texts. Consider an except from Emery and Smith's 1954 forward along with a portion of the preface of Folkerts and Teeter's 1989 media history:

> Journalism history is the story of man's long struggle to communicate freely with his fellow men -- to dig out and interpret news, and to offer intelligent opinion in the market place of ideas. Part of the story has as its theme the continuing efforts by men and women to break down the barriers erected to prevent the flow of information and ideas...Just as important to our history are the heroes and villains, as well as the bit actors, who made the press (meaning all media of communication) what it is today (Emery and Smith 1954, vii).
>
> This book addresses the media as a complex societal and cultural institution -- a product of many voices. it views these voices within a social, political, and economic framework and considers the impact of owners, audiences, journalists, technology, and government (Folkerts and Teeter 1989, v).

Based on these statements one might reasonably conclude that in these two books reporters are addressed extensively, within the specific cultural and historical context of the period. However, a careful reading of these texts, as well as other media histories, finds the treatment of reporters extremely limited during the interwar period, consisting for the most part of decontextualized superficial discussions of exceptional individuals who stand apart rather than represent reporters as a group of working people. No chapters are specifically devoted to newsworkers; when reporters are mentioned, discussion is almost entirely restricted to entertaining anecdotes

about individual "star" reporters and columnists, such as Walter Lippmann, Dorothy Thompson, and Walter Winchell.

Reporters as a class of workers who confront specific bureaucratic restraints and restrictions are not addressed. Media historians do not explore hiring and firing practices, wages, hours, responsibilities, expectations, or newsroom politics. Nor do they link the plight of the newsworker to the larger cultural/historical context, or offer any explicit discussion of what it was like to work for a United States newspaper during the 1920s or 1930s. Instead, they focus on history as a "biography of power" (Hardt 1990, 349), that chronicles the most influential publications and their owners, publishers, and editors. They also address the impact of new technology on major media institutions. However, the extended discussions on the influence of technological change are almost entirely centered around effects on newspaper marketability, efficiency, productivity, and profitability. For example, Bleyer, one of the few media historians who refers to reporters explicitly in his work, does not address the implications of these changes for reporters. Maintaining that the telephone and the typewriter are responsible for changing the "whole character" of the modern newspaper, he finds that as a result of these "mechanical devices" reporters phoned in "facts" to rewrite "men" and became news gatherers rather than news writers. Yet, these reportorial changes are only noteworthy for Bleyer because although they saved time, they also increased the risk of inaccuracy (Bleyer 1927, 397).

Even though rank and file newsworkers merit only superficial attention in standard media histories, texts which specifically address the history of women in the media do offer some discussion of the working conditions of women reporters. Yet, because they chronicle the "exceptional" woman, it is often unclear if the experiences of one woman reporter may

reflect those of other women (or men) in the field. For former *New York Herald Tribune* vice-president Helen Rogers Reid, the representation of women in the media, at least through the 1930s, was tied to a perception of a woman's success as always being "individual, as an exception" to prevailing societal norms. In an introduction to Emma Bugbee's novel *Peggy Covers the News*, Reid suggests that Bugbee, for the first time, offers readers a "living picture" of the complex problems newspaper women face (Bugbee 1936/1940, viii-ix). Certainly, past *New York Herald Tribune* city editor Stanley Walker's forward to *Ladies of the Press* reinforces the perception of the capable female journalist as an exception. Praising Ross as the woman who best represents the male perception of a competent newspaper woman, he explains:

> A great many of the girls who have managed to get on newspaper payrolls have been slovenly, incompetent vixens, adept at office politics, showoffs of the worst sort, and inclined to take advantage of their male colleagues. They have protested that they wanted to do a man's work, to be treated as men, but sooner or later some situation would arise in which all these high-minded declarations of purpose were revealed as so much nonsense. These inferior members of an often admirable sex have done a great disservice to their sensible, straight-forward sisters -- the women who would be ornaments to journalism if they had only had a chance" (Ross 1936, xi-xii).

Although Walkers' comments may be offensive from a 1993 perspective, the histories of women in the media suggest that his forward accurately reflects the general perception of women journalists during the early part of the twentieth century.

In the histories of women journalists, women's experiences are not, for the most part, contrasted with those of men in the field. Yet, for example, the characterization of a female front-page reporter as an anonymous, "hard-working wretch" who, while working on a story, goes without food or sleep,

and often forgets her home and family (Ross 1936, 4-5), might also be made of her male counterpart. Because there is no discussion of the working conditions of men, readers are left to assume that the treatment of male newsworkers is unproblematic, that it was only women who were mistreated. Folkerts and Teeter's text offers a pointed example of this strategy. A section on reporters and editors appears in their chapter on the 1930s that addresses only two topics: women in the industry and the American Newspaper Guild. In this section there is no mention of male reporters during this period, nor is there any examination of reporters, as a class of workers (Folkerts and Teeter 1989, 406-409).

Discussions of women reporters during the interwar years focus on the strategies individual women utilize to triumph over adversity, and emphasize the progress made (albeit limited) of women in the media. While authors do not always agree as to what constitutes progress, or when the significant progress was made during this era, they do agree that progress was made. Although Marian Marzolf determines that the number of women reporters and editors doubled during the 1920s, and suggests that with voting rights and visions of equality, they represented the "new woman" (Marzolf 1977, 51-52), Kay Mills insists it was Eleanor Roosevelt's insistence that only women cover her press conferences during the 1930s, which marked "the first major turn in the fortunes of women reporters" (Mills 1988, 36). The representations of women in these media histories focus overwhelmingly on tales of achievement and success that overshadow any understanding of the actual problems women reporters as members of a class of workers, encountered in the newsroom.

JOURNALISTS AND THE DEPRESSION

The lack of discussion on the impact of the Great Depression on reporters significantly helps to enable the liberal pluralist ideological argument. Including specific discussion of the repressive treatment of reporters during the Depression is problematic because it would contradict the understanding of history as progress directed at the maintenance of a democratic society. In their coverage of the Depression, media histories fail to adequately address the human consequences; there is no sense of humanity, and absolutely no understanding of the sense of defeat and hopelessness that pervades much of American society during this period. Instead, these texts focus primarily on strategies newspapers use to remain solvent during the economic crisis. Suggesting that newspapers "suffered little" throughout the depression, Folkerts and Teeter explain that to remain stable newspapers cut wages and paid less for raw materials (Folkerts and Teeter 1989, 404-406). The implications of those cuts as they relate to newsworkers, however, are not addressed. While Emery and Emery suggest that by mid 1932, the average yearly salary for those who were still employed was $842 a year, and that one fourth of the population had no income at all, they do not consider how many of the unemployed were newsworkers, or what the average salary was for reporters who retained their jobs (Emery and Emery 1992, 302).

Standard media histories also address the actual press coverage of the great depression and the rise of objectivity during the period. Finding that the economic situation of the 1930s "forced" the interpretation of previously unquestioned "facts" (Mott 1941 & 1965, 688, Emery 1962, 637), Schudson suggests that the American government's inability to deal with the Depression, coupled with pessimistic thoughts regarding democracy and capitalism, encouraged journalists to substitute objectivity, legitimated rules

and procedures, for their previously "simple faith in facts" (Schudson 1978, 6-7). Some of the more contemporary histories suggest that newspapers failed to adequately inform the public about the economic situation in the late 1920s and did not assess the full impact of the Wallstreet crash at the beginning of the Depression (Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989, 292-94, and Folkerts and Teeter 1989, 404). Yet, in all these discussions the implicit conclusion is that reporters possess a considerable degree of power in their work environment; unfortunately readers of these texts fail to learn anything about the actual working conditions of reporters during the Depression.

Discussion of women reporters during the Depression is also limited, yet, it is generally agreed that when jobs are scarce, men are hired before women. However, each newspaper and wire service was forced to keep at least one woman on staff to cover news of the First Lady. Although widespread unemployment threatened all workers, Lauren Kessler suggests that women were a "special target;" considerable pressure was put on women not to compete with men for the limited jobs. She suggests that labor unions, government, and media alike spread the erroneous belief that while men worked to support their families, women merely worked for "pin money" (Kessler 1984, 80). While it seems clear that women reporters had a difficult time during the Depression, it is not clear, from these accounts, that they had a worse time than their male counterparts. Of course, what all of these accounts fail to mention is how minorities fared during this period. Significantly more African Americans (some of whom were reporters) lost their jobs during the Depression; their rate of unemployment was much greater than other workers. "In 1930, 15.7 percent of blacks were unemployed, against 9 percent of whites; in 1931, 35 percent of blacks were jobless, 24.1

percent of whites; in 1932, 56 percent of blacks, 39.7 percent of whites" (Meltzer 1969, 57).

In the most recent standard histories (Folkerts and Teeter 1989, Emery and Emery 1992, and Sloan, Stovall, and Startt 1989), a superficial discussion of reporters as a class of workers emerges from the portrayal of the Newspaper Guild's depression era efforts for standardized wages, shorter working hours, and better working conditions. Yet, although these histories explain that the Guild fought for a five-day, forty-hour work week, two weeks vacation, and a minimum wage of thirty to thirty-five dollars for workers with at least one year's experience, they fail to explain what these demands were posited against; they do not address the prevailing wages and working conditions for American reporters at that time. The lack of discussion seems additionally problematic given that these texts report Guild membership was concentrated on urban dailies and that most journalists did not actually join the Guild. These recent texts offer additional evidence to support Daniel Leab's 1970 indictment of journalism historians for their superficial and uncritical assessment of the formation of the American Newspaper Guild (Leab 1970, 3).

For the most part, media histories address the reporter unproblematically, as a part of the "team;" however, the limited and uncritical assessment of newsworkers tends to reinforce the notion that reporters (particularly men) were "honorably" treated by the "noble" institution that served as transmitters of information essential to the maintenance of a democratic society. Yet, although discussion of the reporter is marginal in media histories, it is important to note that it is not due to a lack of resource material; there is considerable evidence available in novels, autobiographies, memoirs, essays, and career books that addresses the role of newsworkers during the interwar era.

CONCLUSION

Even though it may seem surprising that media historians do not consider newsworkers a necessary component of early twentieth century communication history, other writers during the era envision the reporter as a "vital member of the social organism" with considerable influence over readers. Will Irwin suggests that to the an individual reader, the reporter appears as "the most important functionary in the newspaper organization" (Irwin 1937, 179). Bernard Weisberger, whose text *The American Newspaperman* comes closest to portraying a history of newsworkers, finds that "the pace and time of life in the United States were both reflected and molded by what the reporters said and wrote (Weisberger 1961, 158), while other critics insist that during the 1920s and 1930s the reporter was "the basis of the paper...the one indispensable person on every newspaper organization in the world" (Knapp 1932/1937, 81).

And, in his study of the working conditions which impact reporters from 1880-1900, Ted Smythe offers researchers clues as to issues a history of early twentieth century reporters might address. His essay directly addresses the specific employment conditions of newsworkers and suggests that during the late nineteenth century, many reporters were consumed with "fear and despair." Examining the employee-employer relationships between reporters and management as they were defined by pay, tenure, and status, Smythe finds:

> Pay was low, jobs were tenuous, hours were long and arduous. Reporters -- with notable exceptions -- knew they were not worth much to their publishers. Reporters, except for the truly talented, were treated as though they 'were machines or privates in an ill-paid army to be thrown in any breach' (Smythe 1992, 224).

In conclusion it seems relevant to speculate on reasons why newsworkers occupy a marginal role in conceptions of American media history during the 1920s and 1930s. Evidence of the exploitation of newsworkers during this period is certainly problematic to researchers who are locked into a progressive interpretation of communication history; the avoidance of any such discussion certainly helps to perpetuate their ideological belief in the "righteousness" of newspapers. Yet, perhaps traditional media historians who focus on narratives of power do not address reporters, because, as a class of workers, they had no power; exploited as cheap labor, newsworkers had no voice in determining the media policies of the era. And, maybe the contemporary social and cultural historians who attempt to do history from the bottom up and conceive of a pluralist society where power is thought to be diffused (at least among white men), do not focus on reporters, because they assume that since the majority of reporters were white and male, they could not be powerless. It is unfortunate that media historians who do not address newsworkers fail to realize that regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, reporters remain an underrepresented class of workers, whose influence and significance on American media history, has not been fully explored.

If the insignificant role newsworkers occupy in the conceptualization of American media history is due to event-oriented presentations that isolate historiography from its economic, political and cultural environments (Hardt 1990, 350), it is clear that such presentations reflect an individualistic liberal bias. However, if communication is no longer narrowly defined as message transmission and is reconceptualized, following Raymond Williams, instead, as community, an integral part of culture that describes, shares, modifies, and preserves experience (Williams 1958, 313), then early twentieth century

newsworkers may serve as the only actual connections to specific "real world" communities. Newsworkers, in their daily interactions with the public reflect a specific sense of culture, history, and time, all of which, for the most part, are missing in the standard decontextualized media histories. So that without an understanding of the chronicler of the community, actual knowledge about a knowable community may itself be inaccessible. If the role of the reporter is made central to communication history, then perhaps an actual sense of community might also be rediscovered. From this perspective, the encounters of newsworkers become central insights into the working conditions of labor as well as the historical and cultural specificities of an era, and the history of American journalists may be viewed as a crucial aspect of communication history that should be included in all examinations of the media.

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