

Stuart Shulman, "The Origin of the Federal Farm Loan Act: Agenda-Setting in the Progressive Era Print Press"

This dissertation examines and documents the origin of the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916 (FFLA). Two related hypotheses are explored. The first hypothesis (H1) concerns the proximate origin of the FFLA. H1 suggests that rural credit reform emerged in 1912 as a viable public policy issue only after the business and farm press favorably presented the idea of looking to European models of privately financed, cooperative rural credit. The second hypothesis (H2) concerns the rising importance of agenda-setting by the press as a defining characteristic of the survey period. H2 suggests that between 1907 and 1916 the print press became the preeminent tool for the cultivation of public opinion on matters of national public policy. The methodology blends the study of institutional change over time, a centerpiece of American political development (Political Science and History), with the study of press agenda change over time, which is central to agenda-setting (Journalism). This interdisciplinary approach yields a new methodology described in the dissertation as historical agenda-setting. A systematic approach to a key variable, the press, provides the basis for a new periodization. The data sources include primary and secondary historical texts, as well as three multiyear surveys of the business, farm, and farm-organization press during the period between 1907 and 1916.

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In Search of the Consensus Variable — A Cultural History
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ABSTRACTS

Dale Zacher, "Editorial Policy of the Scripps Newspapers During World War I"

By 1914 the Scripps newspaper organization (United Press, Newspaper Enterprise Association and twenty-one newspapers) — nicknamed internally the "Concern" — was arguably America's first national media organization, with E.W. Scripps boasting in 1915 that his news products could be read by a third of the U.S. population each day. This dissertation concentrates on the years 1914 to 1918, the years of World War I. This study, drawing heavily on original source documents, examines the Concern at this important time and its dealings with Woodrow Wilson, who seemed to share Scripps' beliefs in progressive governmental and societal reforms. The war led great growth in Scripps newspaper chain. Following Wilson's cue, the Concern remained

steadfastly neutral about the war until 1917. Technological and the need to save money to remain profitable influenced Scripps newspaper content as much as military censorship. The most significant consequence of the war for the Concern was the familial dispute over E.W.'s meddling that it sparked which led to a split in the Concern in the early 1920s. After the war, the chain's increased financial standing raised concerns among older editors and stockholders of the Concern who worried editorial policy would, in turn, grow conservative and favor the status quo.

Stephen Von Drehle Bird, "Politics, Economics, Technology and Religion: In Search of the Consensus Variable — A Cultural History of the Danville Virginia Press, 1840-1870"

This study documented the cultural history of Danville, Virginia newspapers between 1840 and 1870 as extensive and profound. This dissertation asserted that the Danville Register survived as the town's only newspaper because of the stability offered through its editor during this period, Abner Anderson. It also asserted that Anderson adopted new technology in his search for a consensus paradigm — one through which subscribers developed an appetite for news. This cultural history demonstrated that the news paradigm in Danville evolved as the town grew and as political parties dissolved. As a result, editors were forced to find other means for making their operations economically viable. In their search for alternative journalism paradigms, these editors, Anderson in particular, found that the more consensus they built in the population, the more newspapers they sold. They found the highest consensus-building element was cultivating in the local population an appetite for news. News, thus, became a commodity in Danville during the 1860s, just in time to report the Civil War.

Christopher Hansen, "A War Of Narratives: News Coverage of an Army Sexual Misconduct Case and the Image of Military Women In Post-Cold War America"

Using historical analysis and scholarly theory on narrative, this dissertation evaluates national news coverage of Sergeant Major of the Army Gene McKinney's 1997-98 sexual misconduct case. With both sides in this controversy struggling to create a powerful narrative in court and out, the media were challenged to provide insightful, detached, and coherent coverage. Was McKinney a sexual predator, as six military women alleged, or a victim of vengeful, lying accusers and an unfair system? The stakes were high: for court-martial defendant McKinney himself, who was facing a lengthy prison sentence if found guilty; for the Army and the Defense Department, both of which had been criticized for mishandling sexual misconduct cases since the 1991 Tailhook scandal; and for military women as a whole, whose struggle for equality in the 1990s had been covered primarily as a series of sexual scandals. The study argues that the media failed to alert audiences adequately to the dynamics of this narrative engagement. Coverage failed to draw sufficient attention to the advocates' strategies, including media manipulation and rhetorical ploys (for instance, tapping into such populist myths as the innocent man betrayed by false friends and malign institutions). On the whole, news outlets merely echoed the narrative of the side most effective at making its case on a given day. Ultimately, that was McKinney's defense team, which exploited classic negative stereotypes about women — "slut," "gold-digger," "unfit mother" — to create a narrative that discredited McKinney's accusers and helped win his acquittal on all sexual misconduct charges. The study highlights stereotypes as a key ingredient in narrative, especially in adversarial situations. While news accounts generally failed to contextualize stereotyping as a tool of the defense, reports also repeated and reinforced the stereotypes. In addition, the coverage itself advanced another stereotype: military woman as helpless victim. As none of these stereotypes is compatible with effective soldiering, the study suggests the coverage provided the public a distorted lens through which to view military women. Finally, the study outlines changes in journalistic practice to help avoid the distortions uncontextualized stereotypes can create in news coverage.