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The AJHA Margaret A. Blanchard Doctoral Dissertation Prize, established in 1997 and named in 2003, is awarded annually for the best doctoral dissertation on media history. Named in honor of the late Professor Margaret A. Blanchard of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – superb scholar and the source of guidance and inspiration for generations of doctoral students of journalism history – the prize is accompanied by an honorarium of five hundred dollars. A two-hundred-dollar honorarium is awarded to each honorable mention.

2008 AJHA ANNUAL CONVENTION
OCTOBER 2-4, 2008 • SEATTLE, WA
lished their own stations, using the nascent medium to stimulate a demand for receivers and to stimulate a demand for receivers and to promote their overall business. Drawing from the prior literature on the early broadcast industry and the history of department stores, original archival research, and informed by the theories of the social construction of technology and the diffusion of innovations, this dissertation explores department store radio stations of the 1920s and early 1930s. This group of stations has never been documented or studied in any systematic fashion, though many department stores facilitated the growth of broadcasting through the stations they operated, shows they sponsored on other, and promotional activities that actively encouraged this new form of communication. The educational efforts of the department stores, including set-building contests, window displays, and classes, also reveal that the commercialization of a new media technology is not necessarily a later stage occurrence in the overall pattern of technological diffusion but may affect the initial stages of innovation itself.


This study developed a new concept of Black Feminist thought and employs it to examine the intersection of press and communication practices among women involved in Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964. The study draws on oral histories of women participants in this project as a way to contribute these omitted “voices” to the canon of journalism, civil rights, and women’s history. In analyzing these stories, this study discovered generational differences among the women in terms of Freedom Summer’s influence on their worldviews and subsequent vocations. Although all the study’s participants performed journalistic tasks, the older women of this group continued their lives as social activists, and the younger women became professional communicators. The rationale for this phenomena helps explain, in part, the omission of women from the historical “image” of African-American civil rights leaders.


This dissertation examines the career of Sylvia Porter (1913-1991), a syndicated newspaper columnist who developed the genre of personal finance journalism. The author uses primary sources to trace Porter’s evolution from a media curiosity to a nationally recognized expert amid changes in women’s social and economic status. The author argues that Porter carved a niche for herself within the male-dominated field of financial journalism by using seven professional strategies: (1) She accepted a job in a non-prestigious field of journalism, (2) she allied herself with her readers rather than her peers, (3) she formed alliances with men who could help her career, (4) she used preconceptions about gender to her advantage, (5) she mythologized herself in interviews with other journalists, (6) she used multiple media platforms to reach different audiences, and (7) she appropriated the labor of other writers. The author also argues that although gender was an important facet of Porter’s public persona, her development of personal finance journalism was driven more by market forces and her eventual use of ghostwriters than by prevailing gender norms. Nevertheless, the author argues, Porter opened a door for women in financial journalism and left a complicated legacy.

Roger Mellen, “A Culture of Dissidence: The Emergence of Liberty of the Press in Pre-Revolutionary Virginia”

This historical research broadens our understanding of the origins of the First Amendment right of freedom of the press. Focusing on the popular prints of eighteenth-century Virginia and Maryland before 1776, this study reveals that press liberty was valued as a bulwark against political abuses, consistent with English “radical whig” ideology. Examination of newspapers, almanacs, political pamphlets, and related primary sources reveals an evolution from radical English politics, the local struggles between printer and governor, and the larger political rift between British policies and the American colonists’ assertion of rights. This emerged from important changes that evolved from spreading print culture, education, and literacy. Utilizing media ecology theories, this work demonstrates how changes in the dominant medium of communication were an enabler of the cultural development that allowed for the growth of political dissidence. Virginia’s traditional culture of deference was gradually replaced by a “culture of dissidence,” and from that emerged the first constitutional right for press freedom in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. From a waning of deference emerged a resistance to the legal concept of sedition libel, a finding in contrast to generally accepted theories as to what free press meant to the founders.