



American Journalism Historians Association

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FORD RISLEY EARNS KOBRE AWARD FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

The American Journalism Historians Association Awards Committee honors Ford Risley of Pennsylvania State University as the 2020 recipient of the Sidney Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Journalism History.

Risley is the associate dean for undergraduate and graduate education, distinguished professor, and head of the Department of Journalism at the Bellisario College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University.

Tom Mascaro of Bowling Green State University, chair of the AJHA Awards Committee, announced the award: “Ford uplifts us all. He is the scholar’s gold standard.” David Sloan of the University of Alabama said that between his service, teaching and research as a historian, “you have what seems to me to be a perfect recipient for the Kobre Award.”

Risley served as editor of *American Journalism* from 2014 to 2020. He is a renowned Civil War-era journalism scholar, the author of six book chapters and more than two dozen academic papers, which have appeared in *American Journalism*, *Journalism History*, *Civil War History*, and the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*. He has produced four books on Civil War-era journalism, published in 2004, 2008, 2012, and his latest in 2018, *Dear Courier: The Civil War Correspondence of Melvin Dwinell* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press).

Mick Mulcrone of the University of Portland praised the selections offered in *The Civil War: Primary Documents on Events from 1860 to 1865* (Greenwood Press, 2004) as “a rich documentary record of the thoughts and feelings—the structure of consciousness—that led men to war and kept them at it for five bloody years.” Susan Thompson of the University of Montevallo concluded her review of *Abolition and the Press*, which won AJHA’s book award in 2009, by calling it “a must-have for scholars interested in the antebellum and Civil War eras, the abolitionist movement and the black press.” David Copeland of Elon University explains: “His work paved the way for others looking at how the press reported on the war, something you will discover when you talk to others who do research on that time period.”

Regarding Risley’s contributions as editor of *American Journalism*, Michael Sweeney of Ohio University wrote: “It requires skill to parse the value of manuscripts and find the right reviewers for them; it takes even more, plus a dash of tact, to negotiate the hazards of revision and resubmission with authors who don’t always see eye to eye with reviewers. Ford was the ideal editor. . . . As president of AJHA, (Ford) set in motion the process that led to the creation of an award for excellence in teaching. This relates to the scholarship foundation of the Kobre, because our research as historians vanishes like smoke on a windy day if we do not find ways to share it with audiences.”

Previous *American Journalism* editor Karla Gower of the University of Alabama said Risley was always one of her go-to reviewers. “I could count on him to provide constructive feedback to the author that strengthened the manuscript and added value to our knowledge of

journalism history,” she noted. Pat Washburn of Ohio University added, “Since he has become editor of *American Journalism*, I have admired the consistent high quality of the journal, which clearly is due to his diligence as editor.”

Risley started his journalism career as a reporter for the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, *Florida Times-Union*, and *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. He was editor of the *Deerwood/Southpoint Messenger* and freelance writer for the *Dallas Morning News* and the *New York Times*, among others.

He has previously been recognized by top honors in the field: the Henry W. Grady Award (for Best Paper on Southern History), by the AEJMC Southeast Colloquium; Top History Paper and Top Faculty Research Paper (History Division), both from AEJMC conferences, the Penn State College of Communications Alumni Society Excellence in Teaching Award, the Hazel Dicken-Garcia Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Journalism History, the AJHA Book of the Year Award (2009), and the Distinguished Alumni Scholar Award, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.

As a teacher, Risley has served on more than a dozen doctoral committees, a dozen master’s theses, and multiple undergraduate honors committees. Leonard Teel of Georgia State University wrote, “Through 25 years of teaching at the college level, Dr. Risley has established a continuous record of dedication to the profession through academic excellence.”

Echoing the sentiment of Jim Martin of the University of North Alabama that Risley’s award was “well-deserving in every way,” other colleagues explained the breadth and depth of his contributions. Former AJHA president Ross Collins noted, “Beyond his mentoring to me, Dr. Risley has had a far-reaching influence on AJHA and on the discipline of journalism history.”

“Beyond his scholarly record one would be remiss if failing to mention the personal contribution,” added Jim Startt of Valparaiso University. “He has always accepted responsibility and often the additional work it requires, despite his administrative and teaching obligations at Pennsylvania State University. Every organization needs such people and the talent they share. I have always found Ford to be helpful when help is needed. He is one of most valuable colleagues and also one of our most amiable members.”

Dianne Bragg of the University of Alabama said: “Ford is genuinely courteous and diplomatic in all of his interactions. Whether it be committee meetings or scholarly discussions, Ford is one of the few who is always eager to hear what others have to say.”

Founded in 1981, the American Journalism Historians Association seeks to advance education and research in mass communication history. Members work to raise historical standards and ensure that all scholars and students recognize the vast importance of media history and apply this knowledge to the advancement of society.

For more information on AJHA, visit <http://www.ajhaonline.org>.

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