

**Historical “Scoops”:** How reporters use the archive to avoid  
**ahistorical journalism (and why journalism students should care)**

*Moderator:* Denise Hill, Elon University

*Panelists:* Lorraine Ahearn, Elon University; John Archibald, metro columnist, Alabama Media Group;  
Tonyaa Weathersbee, former metro columnist, The Commercial Appeal, Florida Times-Union

Even as American journalism’s 24/7 news cycle tends to race past historical context and perspective, the flip side is that digitization, database reporting, and dogged, low-tech archival research has enabled reporters to break historical scoops—including from news organizations’ own morgues. Ahearn will discuss how journalists use archives to reveal history hidden by the mainstream, and why historical methods are fundamental to journalism education. The panelist from Alabama media group will explain how he used archival research, both from the Birmingham News archive and public records, to report the series “Unjustifiable,” which won the 2021 Edward R. Murrow Award for investigative journalism. Produced in the wake of George Floyd’s murder and amid the Black Lives Matter movement, the investigative series and podcast revisited not only the 1979 police killing of Bonita Carter, 20, an event that led to sweeping change in Birmingham; Archibald’s reporting also documented some 500 police killings in Birmingham and its surrounding county during the twentieth century.

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9) **President’s Panel - TK**

