



# American Journalism Historians Association

*Advancing teaching and research in mass communication history since 1981*

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **REMEMBERING SYDNEY KOBRE**

As we prepare to honor Ford Risley, the 2020 winner of the Sidney Kobre Award for Lifetime Achievement in Journalism History, please take note of the career of this award's namesake, who died in 1995.

# Sidney Kobre, journalism historian, a CCB founder

By Fred Rasmussen *THE BALTIMORE SUN*, Jan. 8, 1995

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Dr. Sidney Kobre, a former newspaperman, professor, author and noted journalism historian who helped establish the Community College of Baltimore, died Thursday of cancer at his Pikesville residence. He was 87.

The author of 16 books, he was perhaps best known for his work, "The Development of American Journalism" and "The Development of the Colonial Newspaper," published in 1944. His last book, "A Gallery of Black Journalists," written with his wife, Reva, was published last year.

Maurine Beasley, a journalism professor at the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, College Park, said that Dr. Kobre "was a most eminent scholar and was a revered figure in the field of journalism history. A top-flight historian -- especially known for his work on colonial journalism -- made him an inspiration to many."

"He also created the phrase 'backgrounding the news,' in his master's thesis, which introduced the concept of going beyond the 'what' of news to describe the 'why,' " said his son, Kenneth L. Kobre, a photojournalism professor at San Francisco State University.

Until he donated them to the Baltimore Museum of Industry on Key Highway, he had two printing presses that required hand-set type and a 1910-era Mergenthaler Linotype machine in the basement of his home, where he enjoyed printing leaflets and broadsides.

"He had to tear a wall down to get them into the basement and then to get them out of the basement," the son said.

He earned his bachelor's degree from the Johns Hopkins University in 1927, a master's in journalism in 1932 and, in 1944, his Ph.D. in sociology, both from Columbia University. He was a reporter and editor at the Newark (N.J.) *Star-Eagle* and the Newark *Ledger*.

He returned to Baltimore in the 1930s and became managing editor of The Guide chain of newspapers, which advocated cross-town buses, affordable public health clinics and education.

However, it was his interest in education and his newspaper's crusade that triumphed over opposition from City Hall that proved to be pivotal in the creation of the Baltimore Junior College in 1947.

"There was no place for the child from a working-class home to go after high school," he said in a 1972 interview on the school's 25th anniversary. "They didn't have the money to go to Johns Hopkins or Goucher. And for the University of Maryland you had to go 40 miles."

The two-year, low-tuition institution is now the Community College of Baltimore, which started in several unused rooms at City College and has grown into a facility with campuses at Liberty Heights Avenue and the Inner Harbor.

He taught journalism at Florida State University and was director of the Bureau of Media Research from 1949 to 1964, then returned to CCB as a teacher and director of the school's news bureau. He retired in 1972 but worked part time at the college until 1977.

"He was always interested in writing and had been writing since he was a small boy," said his wife of 55 years, the former Reva Hoppenstein.

A voracious newspaper reader, he decried what he believed to be the loss in today's papers of the old-time crusading spirit that had inspired him.

He was born in Winston-Salem, N.C., grew up in Baltimore's Forest Park section and was a 1924 graduate of City College. He was an arbitrator for the National Labor Relations Board

from 1942 to 1946.

A memorial service was planned for 11 a.m. today at Sol Levinson & Bros., 6010 Reisterstown Road, Baltimore.

In addition to his wife and son, he is survived by a daughter, Ellen Kobre Katz of Baltimore; and two grandchildren.

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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