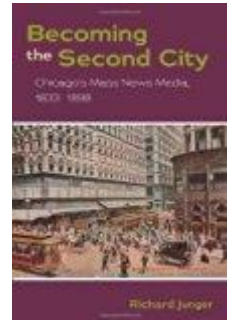


Richard Junger. *Becoming the Second City: Chicago's Mass News Media, 1833-1898.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xiv + 235 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-07785-2.



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Shaping Chicago's Sense of Self: Chicago Journalism in the Nineteenth Century

In this book, Richard Junger explores the development of the Chicago press in the nineteenth century (from 1833, when the city's first newspaper appeared, until 1898), looking at several key moments to understand the press's role in shaping the city's development and its sense of itself. The jacket copy calls attention to Junger's discussion of the 1871 fire, the Haymarket Square incident, the Pullman Strike, and the World's Columbian Exposition—all from the final two decades of the study—but this material occupies less than half the book, and is not its most significant contribution. Junger's key focus is the path that led Chicago to become America's second city—a campaign of civic boosterism that obviously aimed significantly higher, but nonetheless played a central role in elevating a small frontier town into a leading city over the course of several decades. Junger asserts that this newspaper crusade “creat[ed] a unifying force among Chicago's disparate population and classes” (p. x), though I have seen little evidence

for this in the labor and immigrant press, or in the seemingly parochial sensibilities that often dominated local politics. This is a particularly valuable study because it leads Junger to focus on a period that has received relatively little attention, particularly from journalism historians, and once again reminds us that the practice of journalism by no means uniformly followed the progressive narrative that still too often shapes our approaches.

My major criticism of this very useful work is the extent to which it persists in treating Chicago journalism as a singular entity, and one distinct from other centers of social power. Junger's subtitle refers to “Chicago's Mass News Media,” perhaps in recognition of the fact that his focus on English-language daily newspapers excludes the vast majority of titles published in the city. References to “mass news media” pepper the opening pages, but I looked in vain for a definition. Junger gives his most extensive discussion to the *Chicago Daily News* (1876-1878), *Chicago Democrat*

(1833-61), *Chicago Evening Journal* (1840-1929), *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (1865-1914), and especially the *Chicago Times* (1854-95) and *Chicago Tribune* (1844?-present). While he does discuss the *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung* (1874-1924) and the *Illinois Staats-Zeitung* (1848-1921), the *New York Times* receives more extensive attention, judging from the length of the index entries.

Junger has read widely, often using databases to facilitate the work, consulting the files of the leading Chicago dailies but also online archives of African American periodicals and other newspapers from across the country that mentioned Chicago (some hardly the leading papers of their day). His bibliography lists fifteen Chicago newspapers, though some have evidently been consulted much less thoroughly (there are only a handful of references to the two German-language dailies in his list), and eleven out-of-town papers, heavily weighted to the New York City press. Junger also consulted surviving archival records, particularly for the *Daily News* and *Tribune* (although there are archival records for the *Democrat* and other early papers that might also have proved useful).

While frontier Chicago was a predominantly Anglophone community, by the 1870s the city had developed a substantial German-speaking community and press, and other foreign-language communities and newspapers played a prominent role by the 1890s. Indeed, the *Chicago Daily News*, the city's new journalism pioneer which is cited extensively in the study, was founded in a corner of the *Skandinaven* (1866-1941) newspaper offices. This vibrant foreign-language press is perhaps less relevant to Junger's larger discussion of how the press shaped Chicago's image nationally, but it certainly played a major role in shaping the city's own understandings of itself.

This narrowed focus is unfortunate, as Junger in many ways offers a useful corrective to our field's tendency to tell media history in isolation, and through a quasi-biographical approach. *Be-*

coming the Second City is a serious attempt at cultural history, and one that draws on an impressive array of sources. Junger clearly recognizes that the press was not monolithic, even if his book could benefit from more engagement with the ways particular newspapers spoke to and on behalf of particular classes and cultural formations. It is a far more nuanced and comprehensive approach to nineteenth-century Chicago journalism than anything we have seen previously. (I leave to the side David Nord's body of work, which also suffers from too exclusive a focus on the English-language press but better appreciates the varied nature of the journalistic ideologies operating in the Chicago newspaper scene and the niches different papers served; while Nord's work begins with the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it continues well into the twentieth, and so he is fundamentally dealing with a later period, when Chicago was well established as a major urban center.)

Junger's blinkered approach is perhaps most jarring when he discussed the Haymarket incident, which he sees almost entirely through the eyes of the hysterical English-language press. Chicago's anarchist movement was not an entirely marginal affair in the 1880s—it published a daily newspaper, weeklies in two other languages, dominated the city's predominantly German-speaking Central Labor Union, and regularly organized marches and picnics with thousands of participants. And it has been reasonably well documented by historians, several of whom Junger cites in his notes. However, Junger treats this movement with disdain, referring to its press “coming ... under the editorial control of August Spies” (p. 111; Spies was an upholsterer and labor activist who became editor of the daily *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung* in 1880 and hanged by the state of Illinois in 1887 on the basis of articles published in the paper), a formulation that ignores the significant fact that the editors and managers of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and its sister papers were elected to six-month terms by the community institutions that owned the papers. Similarly, Junger refers to

“a lack of success in the local political arena” (p. 111) radicalizing Spies, when the record is clear that many German workers turned to anarchism after Chicago officials refused to respect the results of elections in which labor candidates won the vote in some districts but were not seated.

While it is but an offhand remark, Junger refers to the working-class Lehr und Wehr Verein militia as among “the same type of organizations that would aid the growth of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Party during the 1920s” (p. 111, no footnote is provided for this claim). There is not the slightest basis for such a characterization. The Verein (the subject of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that workers did not have Second Amendment rights after Illinois outlawed the group) was organized to provide security at movement events, to provide training and recreational opportunities to its members, and to serve as a counterweight to the organized violence being visited against Chicago’s labor movement on a daily basis. There is not a single documented instance of Verein members attacking opponents or firing their weapons outside of organized presentations and target practice. The rest of Junger’s discussion of Haymarket is more even-handed, noting the regular incitements to violence in the mainstream press and the lynch mob atmosphere it helped sustain, even if (like Paul Avrich’s *The Haymarket Tragedy* [1984] before him; Avrich offers a different candidate in Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont’s *Haymarket Scrapbook* [1986] he gives rather more attention to theories about who threw the bomb than either the evidence or the issue merits).

The central fact at issue in the Haymarket incident (which occupies eleven pages of the book, as part of a longer chapter ostensibly about Chicago radicalism but actually about the broader labor movement that came to prominence in the post-Civil War era) is that Chicago’s English-language press actively whipped up xenophobic hysteria, urged the most ruthless suppression of democratic rights for working-class radicals, and were part of

an elite-wide conspiracy to commit a legal lynching against people they saw as a menace to their continued power.

While Junger sometimes writes as if the press was an independent actor in all of this, the leading English dailies were in fact part and parcel of the ruling order. In the decades leading up to Chicago’s emergence as an industrial and transportation powerhouse, the press was not merely boosterish, as Junger establishes in his opening chapters. Like most journalism historians, Junger tends to treat newspapers as independent actors, shaping more than shaped by the society they serve. Like John Nerone (who first raised this argument in his *The Culture of the Press in the Early Republic: Cincinnati, 1793-1848* [1989]), I believe the media are best understood ecologically, embedded in a network of relationships, and in the context of those relationships. Take Long John Wentworth, for example. He was indeed a pioneer when he took charge of the weekly *Democrat* in 1836 and built it up into a political powerhouse and the city’s first successful daily, even if his *Democrat* was redolent of a bygone era of personal political organs just twenty-five years later (when he sold it to the *Tribune*). But Wentworth was simultaneously an editor, a politician (serving six terms in Congress and two as mayor), and a real estate speculator. None of these can be understood in isolation from one another, or in isolation from the political machine he built and which continued to exercise significant influence years after Wentworth’s *Democrat* no longer published. No doubt Wentworth fiercely believed in the internal improvements he championed in Congress and in the pages of his newspaper--infrastructure projects that did much to cement Chicago’s prosperity. But he also profited personally as a result, both financially and politically. His three roles were inextricably intertwined. For Wentworth, internal improvements were of central importance, but not so central that he ever contemplated joining the Whigs, who were more sympathetic to such measures (and who maintained their own newspapers

to challenge Wentworth—one of which, the *Evening Journal*, eventually morphed into the *Chicago Sun-Times*). But while Wentworth actively shaped public debate and developments in this area, he sought to avoid the contentious issue of slavery—throwing his lot in with the new Republican Party only when developments forced his hand. He was never fully comfortable with the Republicans, nor they with him, but his political machine provided the margin of victory in many elections and he was a force to be reckoned with until the end. Nor was Wentworth alone. While the *Daily News*'s Victor Lawson was not himself a politician, his father was a real estate speculator elected to the Chicago city council in 1864. The *Tribune*'s Joseph Medill served a not very successful term as mayor, and *Tribune* managers were always in the thick of Chicago and statewide politics. The *Times* was, in its final period, the house organ of the Carter Harrison wing of the Democratic Party. The city's leading publishers were actively engaged in Chicago politics and business affairs throughout this period, and for decades to come—thoroughly enmeshed in commercial and political governing circles in a way I suspect was much more typical across the country than is generally recognized.

Given this, it is hardly surprising that, as Junger demonstrates, the Chicago press was a booster press, touting the city's commercial (and social) prospects and successes and denigrating its rivals (though I suspect one could find many examples of this up to the present day). The book ends with streetcar magnate Charles Yerkes' unsuccessful effort (he failed by one vote) to secure a fifty-year franchise renewal; a fight in which most publishers lined up with good government forces and the Harrison machine while Yerkes and the *Inter-Ocean*, which he bought as his daily mouthpiece, waged a bitter campaign against the "trust press" and its proprietors' ambition to control city government. Junger terms this a "bizarre reversal" (p. 186), but it had some resonance in a city where competing newspaper publishers collaborated to promote their own political tickets, signed sweet-

heart deals to build their plants on public school land, were engaged in a wide array of anticompetitive practices, and relied on politicians hardly known as models of probity to promote what they saw as the greater good—a greater good that served the interests of Chicago as they saw them, to be sure, but one which made them wealthy and powerful while giving short shrift to the immigrant workers in the city's burgeoning industries or the communities that reaped the results of the decision to reverse the flow of the Chicago River to carry sewage away from the city's water supply.

It is easier to understand why Yerkes thought he could prevail against the combined voices of the newspaper establishment, or why a succession of new publishers positioned themselves as voices for the underdog if one confronts the extent to which Chicago's publishers were at least as much a part of the power structure as a check upon it. *Becoming the Second City* is a valuable and interesting book, but more emphasis on the ecological context in which these papers were published could help reinterpret the stories Chicago's newspaper publishers told about (and to) themselves.

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