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Randall S. Sumpter. *Before Journalism Schools: How Gilded Age Reporters Learned the Rules.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2018. xv + 175 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-2159-9.

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It is a relatively unknown fact that formal journalism schools or degree programs at the college level did not really exist prior to the first half of the twentieth century. Before that time, nascent journalists had to literally learn on the job the ins and outs of an often cutthroat business that was still in the process of developing a loosely assembled collective idea of the sorts of practices and values that should guide their work. It is precisely this process of defining the rules of the trade that associate professor of communication at Texas A&M University Randall S. Sumpter examines in *Before Journalism Schools: How Gilded Age Reporters Learned the Rules*. Sumpter's work is not merely a narrative account of the development of modern journalism and its practice in the late nineteenth century, however. He digs much deeper, using a sociological framework to buttress his theories relating to the patterns this process took and the ways that journalists interpreted, internalized, and manifested a set of practices that laid the foundation for the profession of journalism as it is known today.

Sumpter begins with a brief exposition of the modernization of journalism that was a part of the larger process of mass industrialization and the development of large, vertically and horizontally integrated corporate structures that rapidly and drastically altered the world of commerce in the nineteenth century. Journalism was not immune to the effects of these processes. The technological boom in mechanization that transformed so many other industries also made its presence known in newspaper offices and printing shops across the United States. The massive and expensive new presses that were required to remain competitive in a rapidly expand-

ing news market necessitated large capital expenditures and investments. As with most other industries, the increase in capital investment led owners and managers to cut corners in the most obvious of places to business leaders—labor. The demand for labor increased with circulation, but business-savvy owners more often than not chose ill-trained workers they could hire cheaply and who could rapidly produce hundreds, if not thousands, of words per day to meet the expanding space requirements of growing publications. The demand for labor also coincided with a glut in the labor market, as journalism became something of a fashionable endeavor and thousands of young men, and occasionally women, offered their services at almost any price to gain a toehold in the industry.

This perfect storm of supply and demand created crowded, boisterous newsrooms that operated in a mostly ad hoc fashion as journalists scrambled to fill quotas with little to no training and no firmly established set of practices and norms from which they could draw knowledge to assist their navigation of the numerous roadblocks that inevitably emerged. What was clear from almost the very beginning, however, was that some sort of standard practices were necessary to facilitate the collection, writing, and distribution of the news. The turnaround time was too quick to allow for indecision and experiment with format. Failure to meet deadlines could not only be a death blow to a reporter's career, but a substantial hit to the bottom line of the newspaper itself.

Sumpter proposes a very interesting theory to ex-

plain the journalism industry's response to its growing need for order in response to the chaotic nature of newswork in the second half of the nineteenth century. He bases his ideas first in the work of French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, who proposed that the dispersal of innovation in the nineteenth century operated on a model of "invention, imitation, and opposition," which were diffused through "interpersonal communication" (p. 24). In the world of journalism, "inventions" were new ideas on methods to collect and write the news. Sociologist Everett M. Rogers expanded on Tarde's theories with his concept of "diffusion of innovation." New ideas cycle through an organization through a process of "awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption" that can occur at different rates and "may repeat over time at different organizational levels" (p. 25).

In the 1990s, these concepts were carried even further by researchers at the Institute for Research on Learning in Palo Alto, California, with their Communities of Practice (CoP) model. CoPs are described as "containers to store work and life competencies." Contributors to "these containers share three common attributes: Mutual engagement (the level of communication and interaction among members), joint enterprise (a common set of tasks that group members perform and can influence), and a shared repertoire for completing these tasks." The progenitors of this model postulate that CoPs "emerge spontaneously to cope with a new problem encountered by an occupation." Each organization creates its own CoP which is then connected into larger "'constellations' of interrelated CoPs" through "knowledge brokers" that act as intermediaries between CoPs (p. 27).

After establishing the scholarly foundation for his ideas, Sumpter spends the rest of the work identifying and illustrating through an exhaustive examination of primary sources—both the newspapers themselves and the plethora of writings, fiction and nonfiction, produced by male and female journalists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—precisely how the concept of CoPs manifested in nineteenth-century newsrooms. Through trial and error, American journalists gradually developed a loose collection of practices and norms. These were then diffused and refined through a vast network of experienced practitioners who shared their amassed knowledge both directly, through interpersonal communication and interaction, and indirectly, through various writings on the subject that both introduced and guided novices in the exploration of the field.

Sumpter explains how interaction and diffusion of

knowledge occurred across the vast field of nineteenth-century newsrooms in various ways and at multiple levels. Direct interaction was probably the most effective method of knowledge diffusion. Experienced journalists exchanged knowledge with novices inside the newsroom itself, the locus of the individual CoP, which was constantly open to new knowledge brokers through the revolving door of hiring and firing that was typical of the day. This exposed inexperienced journalists to a wide variety of models to mimic and examples to follow. Novices often shadowed senior staff and star reporters, who frequently reciprocated and took fledgling reporters under their wing. Outside of that bubble, journalists interacted out in the field as they collected stories among the competition, who were often willing to cooperate and pool resources and knowledge for mutual benefit. Outside of the singular newsroom, the abundance of available freelance work exposed journalists to editors and practices in a multiplicity of locations. The emerging journalistic culture also developed its own social networks and groups, which further facilitated the diffusion of knowledge through the spiderweb of journalistic CoPs that existed by the turn of the twentieth century.

Indirect diffusion of journalistic knowledge took place in the form of the multitude of writings, outside of the newspapers, published by experienced journalists during the period. Many journalists entered the field either to supplement or to launch a literary career, and their writings, both fiction and nonfiction, often explored journalistic themes. Many published in trade journals that served as knowledge brokers for amateurs and professionals alike. Some, like E. L. Shuman, Robert Luce, and Martha L. Rayne, wrote "how-to-do-it" books that served as entry-level guidebooks for many young reporters, male and female, during the era. Sumpter sees such significance in "newspaper fiction"—short stories and novels with journalistic or "newspaper-related" themes—that he devotes an entire chapter to the topic (p. 79). Most authors of such works had experience as journalists themselves, so their works were informed by first-hand experience. Plots often involved the inner workings of the journalistic method, which served as another mode of knowledge diffusion as would-be reporters formed a view of the job based on their perceptions of the characters and scenarios they read about. Although realistic, these works were of course often idealized renderings of the risks and rewards of the job, which frequently led to unrealistic expectations in readers who aspired to emulate their fictionalized heroes.

In the aggregate, the networks of knowledge brokers

and CoPs identified and explicated by Sumpter slowly established a recognizable set of practices and norms that created the nucleus of the later curriculum of the schools of journalism that developed in the twentieth century. By that time, the era of wild experimentation and proliferation of a variety of different styles across the American journalistic spectrum that was a feature of the early years of newspaper expansion was over, and the growing profession of journalism settled, at least in theory, on a collectively negotiated set of practices and code of conduct. Sumpter does not merely look at the processes of knowledge formation and diffusion, however. He also spends some time on the practices and norms themselves. He devotes an entire chapter to those practices that formed around the art of securing and interviewing sources, which he identifies as the central aspect of the journalists' craft. Sumpter also explores the seedier side of the formation of a journalistic ethos, focusing his final chapter on "rule breakers" and the way the establishment of ethical rules often involved the same sort of trial and error, and an instinctual sense of when to break the rules and when to adhere to them, associated with the formation of other journalistic practices.

Sumpter's work overall is well written and expertly researched. An experienced media scholar and experienced journalism historian, he utilizes primary sources with a historian's keen eye, and the bulk of the work is gleaned from such materials. His willingness to venture outside of the standard historian's toolbox and utilize the work of other disciplines to underpin historical

work in modern social science makes Sumpter's work not just good, but exceptional. To make that very interdisciplinary work the core of his thesis and theoretical paradigm is a welcome breath of fresh air in the discipline. Such interdisciplinary work is becoming more in vogue in historical circles, but thus far most historians have only skirted the edges of social sciences and few, if any, have been so bold as to make ideas and principles gleaned from other disciplines central to their thesis and conclusions. Sumpter's expert use of the sociological theory of communities of practice illustrates perfectly the nature of knowledge generation and practice formation among nineteenth-century journalists and shines a light on the ways this theory can be applied to the numerous other burgeoning industries of the Industrial Age by future scholars. All that is required is to identify the knowledge brokers and the CoPs among which they operated, and solid evidence can be discerned to show the ways that knowledge was dispersed in any industry or organization that operated in the ephemeral zone between its establishment and the acceptance and codification of practices and norms diffused through formalized academic structures. These same ideas can even be used to explore even older organizational practices, such as the various guilds and trade organizations of the medieval period. More historians should think further outside the box, take some intellectual and academic risks, and listen to the things other disciplines are trying to tell them. As Sumpter ably shows with *Before Journalism Schools: How Gilded Age Reporters Learned the Rules*, the results can be remarkably stimulating.

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