

The material traces of forgotten journalists: the importance of places and objects in telling the stories of the rank-and-file (Will Mari)

Abstract

For most of media history, the focus has been on the lives and times of powerful figures such as publishers, editors and famous journalists (columnists, correspondents, et al). But in the past several decades, there has been an overdue shift to a more grounded, “ground-up” media history, one centered more on rank-and-file news workers whose experiences may be less well known.

As part of that move to examine the important lives of everyday news workers, there has been a corresponding move to look at the *physical* spaces and *prosaic* tools of these people, as they can tell historians and laypeople alike a messier, more complex story and help to explain how, for example, many of us came to “work from home” during the pandemic, or receive our news on our phones.

Even as newsrooms and news work become more mobile and distributed, these kinds of rank-and-file, material media histories are needed now more than ever.

In my talk, I will thus highlight several examples of how extended examination of regular people and their ordinary workplaces and news-production tools not only enhance media history as a field, but also enliven our appreciation for how our forebears not only navigated massive changes in their information environments, but learned to adopt to new, challenging or at least uncertain times—much like our own.

Bio

Will Mari is associate professor of media history and media law at the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University. He is the author of a book on the history of the computer in the American newsroom from 1960 through 1990, *A Short History of Disruptive Journalism Technologies*, and a book covering the social-cultural history of the American newsroom during the interwar years and early Cold War, *The American Newsroom: A History, 1920-1960*. His third book, *Newsrooms and the Disruption of the Internet: A Short History of Disruptive Technologies, 1990–2010*, came out in 2022.