

HAZEL BRANNON SMITH: A PORTRAIT OF THE JOURNALIST
AS A YOUNG WOMAN

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This historical study spans the years 1932–1935 when Hazel Brannon Smith, the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing, attended The University of Alabama. Here she studied journalism, a first step toward realizing her goal of owning her own newspaper. In order to gain a better understanding of how a very provincial and traditional southern young woman was transformed into a trail-blazing history-maker, her influences will be examined and her college journalism sifted for patterns, evidence of shapes and of shaping, signs of influence and confluence related to her time on UA’s college newspaper, *The Crimson-White*. I sought to locate Brannon Smith amidst the trajectory of American journalism and in order to do this I first had to sketch the cultures of place, journalism, and journalism education. Primary sources and documents comprised the bulk of my research. They included newspapers, course catalogs, yearbooks, memoirs, documentaries, government files, court case transcripts, personal interviews, and personal correspondence and papers. Videotaped interviews along with face-to-face encounters, and telephone conversations also contributed. I was able to examine the original editions of the *Crimson-White* from 1932 to 1935, numerous original copies of the *Durant News*, and the *Lexington Advertiser*. The *Etowah Observer*, the *Etowah Daily*, and the *Northside Reporter* did not exist in full and/or were only available on microfilm. I also tracked down archived and personal collections, magazines, an unfinished autobiography, diaries, journals, cards and letters, photographs, photocopies, FBI files, and additional newspapers in the research

stage. Not only does this research add to the current knowledge base, it ensures that Brannon Smith and her accomplishments will not be forgotten.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The year was 1941. War was imminent. The Great Depression had left its mark. According to FBI file number 100–683: Hazel Brannon of Durant, Mississippi, stated to a traveling member of the U.S. Navy concerning President Roosevelt: “He is an egotistical, conceited moron and is leading the country and people into ruin just to make a name for himself.” The recruiter, whose identity has since been redacted, also reported that in a visit to her home he was offered “numerous drinks of whiskey and subsequently asked an inordinate number of questions in regard to the U S. Navy, its submarines, destroyers, and operations, etc.”¹ In addition, he noted seeing mail from New York firms with German names. The FBI file describes Brannon as follows:

Name	Hazel Brannon
Height	5'6”–5'7”
Weight	130
Race	White
Eyes	Blue
Hair	Brown
Complexion	Fair
Face	Round
Occupation	Newspaper publisher and editor
Residence	Durant, Mississippi
General appearance	Attractive ²

¹ *FBI File Number 100–683 Subject: Hazel Smith (other referenced FBI File Numbers 44–36715 and 100–142096)*, Federal Bureau of Investigation Freedom of Information, Privacy Acts Section, Washington D.C., Jackson, MS: U.S. Government Printing Office, (FBI September 17, 1942), 14–16.

² Ibid.

Twenty years later, Hazel Brannon Smith (her married name) appeared in Washington, D.C., wanting to see FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in person. She was referred to C.D. DeLoach's office. According to a memo dated May 12, 1961, at 11:15 a.m., Hazel “was a guest of the Department of Justice and in town for a highly confidential meeting.”³ Although not at liberty to disclose names, she had been briefed by Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall. However, the memo notes that this was not her reason for calling the Bureau. She relayed a “long story” about how she was struggling to keep her newspaper afloat as she fought the White Citizens Council of Mississippi and asked for information that would implicate someone as a “Nazi.” After being told the files of the Bureau were not available for dissemination, she went into detail about the dire straits she and her husband, Walter (Smitty) Smith were in, explaining that the White Citizens Council had brought “every pressure to bear upon them to try and force them out of business.” Her husband had been fired as administrator of the local hospital. Her advertisers were told to cancel their advertisements in her newspapers. The financial results were devastating, and they were losing money every year. She reported that the paper was presently in debt up to \$55,000 (in excess of \$400,000 in 2010 dollars).⁴

The memo also observes, “Mrs. Smith describes herself as conservative yet stated that she was a believer in the rights of the individual and that she felt the Negro people had rights and were to be respected. “Mrs. Smith is a very talkative individual . . . tends to ramble on at great length . . . and it is obvious that she is an ardent crusader.”⁵

Three years later, during the summer of 1964, as President Lyndon B. Johnson accepted

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Currency Conversions, Historical*. May 23, 2010, <http://futureboy.homeip.net/fsp/dollar.fsp> (accessed May 23, 2010).

⁵ *FBI File Number 100-683 Subject: Hazel Smith (other referenced FBI File Numbers 44-36715 and 100-142096)*, Federal Bureau of Investigation Freedom of Information, Privacy Acts Section, Washington D.C., Jackson, MS: U.S. Government Printing Office, (FBI September 17, 1942), 14-16.

the nomination at the Democratic National Convention, *The Northside Reporter* that Smith owned and published in Jackson, Mississippi, was bombed.⁶ The following month at a White Knights state executive meeting, the grand giant reported that Jackson Klansmen had asked him for “permission to eliminate Mrs. Smith.” The FBI alerted Mr. Smith and local law enforcement, but informed Mr. Smith “that the FBI could not offer protection to Mrs. Smith and that any protection desired would have to be obtained through local officials.”⁷

It had been a “local official” in Holmes County, Mississippi, who initiated the debt by filing libel charges against her. Since then, other officials had followed suit. The FBI's suggestion wasn't exactly comforting. But comfort wasn't a local theme of Freedom Summer,⁸ with Medgar Evers, Emmett Till, and the insidious violence. Mississippi was not the only state experiencing great conflict at this time. It was, for the entire country, one of the most difficult periods in United States history—the 60s. “On an entire generation rested the burdens of the twentieth century: two world wars, industrialization, urbanization, wide spread immigration, roiling class and racial strife and the depression.”⁹ Fellow Pulitzer Prize recipient for Nonfiction, Richard Hofstadter, contemplated what anti-intellectualism might mean to American life saying, “It is possible, of course, that under modern conditions the avenues of choice are being closed, and the culture of the future will be dominated by single-minded men of one persuasion or another.”

Power struggles could be seen in most facets of society, but especially in the South. The media was carving up American consciousness, making it impossible to now ignore the

⁶ Arthur J. Kaul, “Hazel Brannon Smith and the Lexington Advertiser,” in *The Press and Race—Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, edited by David R. Davies (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 233–262.

⁷ *FBI File Number 100–683 Subject: Hazel Smith (other referenced FBI File Numbers 44–36715 and 100–142096)*, Federal Bureau of Investigation Freedom of Information, Privacy Acts Section, Washington D.C., Jackson, MS: U.S. Government Printing Office, (FBI September 17, 1942), 14–16.

⁸ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 17.

⁹ Margaret B. Maree, *Through Hazel Eyes, 1959–1964, A Newspaper Mirrors the Community it Serves* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, Masters of Arts in Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, 1999), 4.

fragmentation that had existed since the Civil War. “It would be difficult to understate how foreign settling with the past was (and still is) in the South.”¹⁰ This settlement lies at the heart of my dissertation and sums up much about the historical context for my observations. Brannon Smith came of age in the middle of the settling, and in this dissertation I will examine the influences that shaped her personally and professionally while considering how the impact of her college journalism was pivotal. Her navigation between the Old and New South, her past and future, offers not only a personal story of the young journalist but also reflects much about a culture attempting to do the same.

This historical study spans the years Brannon Smith attended The University of Alabama, 1932–1935, to gain a better understanding of how a provincial and traditional woman turned into a trail-blazing history-maker. The Pulitzer Prize committee cited Brannon Smith’s “steadfast adherence to her editorial duty in the face of great pressure and opposition” when naming her the first woman to receive the award for editorial writing. But her then unquestionable and indelible mark on history is growing faint. According to Judy Kelley, family friend and life-long resident of Lexington, Mississippi, Lexington would have named a day in Brannon Smith's honor if she'd won for anything not connected to civil rights. The city, to date, does not celebrate Hazel Brannon Smith day. Some residents have never even heard of their famous, fellow citizen. In fact, it seems her historical mark is in danger of disappearing altogether.

¹⁰ Ibid, 4.

Significance of the Study

After a half-century's worth of publishing and editing weekly newspapers, winning numerous journalism and humanitarian awards for taking a stand against injustice, and blazing trails through a patriarchal society and male-dominated profession, relatively little information about Hazel Brannon Smith exists in the public record. In fact, it is difficult to find her in journalism and media textbooks, on historical timelines, or in classroom syllabi. More often than not, she is left out. Even the cyber-exhibit from the National Women's History Museum featuring the history of women as printers, publishers, and journalists omits her.¹¹ By noting her obscurity within this dissertation, I hope to elevate her to her proper place. Why, after all, is she missing? Was she deemed unworthy? Culled? Overlooked? Forgotten? Why this absence? One possible answer is that she is a woman; and, although this dissertation does not focus on feminist theory, it leads us to another important goal of this dissertation: to contextualize how gender affected the timeline we call history. Being a woman often meant getting overlooked or not taken seriously.

Some scholars have said that we live within a culturally propagated historic conscious that has omitted women. "One of the ways that our culture militates against historical consciousness in women is the omission of history from women's culture," states Naomi Wolf in "The Future is Ours to Lose."¹² Could this be what is happening with Brannon Smith? Considering the time period, it's a definite possibility. I am not suggesting that we judge "then"

¹¹ Stephanie Edwartoski and Tamar Rabinowitz, 2007, <http://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/womenwithdeadlines/wwd2.html>.

¹² Naomi Wolf, "The Future is Ours to Lose" "Timeline Special: Women in the United States", *The New York Times Magazine*, Copyright 1999, the New York Times on the Web, <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/magazine/millennium/m2/wolf-timeline.html>.

by current standards. That never betters the historical record. Instead, it is essential to include the biographical and cultural information that will offer the proper context for her college journalism. She had, after all, been born at a time when a woman could have been “Put In Jail For Street Speaking.”¹³ During that same time period, a state medical society president had said that “hardy study killed sexual desire in women and took away their beauty and brought on hysteria, neurasthenia, dyspepsia, astigmatism and dysmenorrhea.”¹⁴ Therefore, her choice to major in journalism could be considered surprising, perhaps even courageous.

Brannon Smith’s trajectory throughout her eighty years amidst a culture wrestling with an economic depression, the KKK, industrialism and progressivism, provides the context that illustrates the interplay between her professional and personal life. This look at her life sheds some light on why women are often “absent from the timeline.” “The Everyday World as Problematic” notes that women are usually “situated outside textually mediated discourses.”¹⁵ The newspaper at that time had few women in its employ who considered journalism their career and focus. Even Brannon Smith said if she'd had children she would not have been able to keep working and do what she did, suggesting that although she spoke out against the dictates of society she was still governed by them.

This society omits her from a timeline of twentieth century women’s history and a BBC timeline for the decade of the 1960s. She is also left out of *Women Writers in the United States: A Timeline of Literary, Cultural, and Social History*, by Cynthia J. Davis and Kathryn West. The omission of such an important historical figure in the roll call of American female pioneers is worth noting. Brannon Smith is included at The Freedom Forum’s Newseum, yet the ratio of

¹³ *Rebels in the Pulpit: Early Alabama Women Clergy*, broadcast on Alabama Public TV (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama's Center for Public TV & Radio, 2001).

¹⁴ Paimi Johnson, quoting R. W. Van Dyke (1905) “Women in Medicine: Viewpoints from the Other Sex,” Presentation at University of Iceland, 2008.

¹⁵ Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*, (Boston : Northeastern University Press, 1987), 62.

women to men journalists honored reveal an historical imbalance: 33 out of 150 are women.¹⁶ Although such examples of inequality exist within the profession and provide context for the journalism profession, I do not seek to rewrite history. I seek instead to continue and broaden the conversation surrounding women in journalism by fortifying the record of Hazel Brannon Smith. In 1988, the supposed benchmark of journalistic accuracy—*The New York Times*—published an article on Southern newspapers that had two errors about Brannon Smith. Maybe there were no corrections because no one noticed. Maybe no one noticed because they didn't know otherwise. Again, I seek to add to the body of knowledge about Brannon Smith in an effort to have a more accurate historical record. Exploring the architecture that existed in her college work means a clearer portrait of this pioneering newswoman can then emerge.

Exploring her college work in this study is key for a number of reasons. First, it is an area of her history that has gained little or no attention. Existing scholarship has neglected to examine the affect Brannon Smith's college journalism had on her professional work. This is a mistake. No time after college was she ever influenced by fellow staff members who were not on her payroll. So this offers another key reason to focus on her college work. It was a time that she was part of a staff concerned first and foremost with good journalism, and its ethics is significant. Most published articles in academic periodicals such as *Journalism History* or non-fiction books such as *The Race Beat*, however, have examined Brannon Smith's later journalism, especially amidst the civil rights movement and her editorial stand against injustice. Mentions are made of her mentor, UA's founding journalism department director, Clarence Cason. But an examination of the evolution of journalism programs up to that point, along with Cason's influence as a shaping force for the young journalist-in-training, have yet to be undertaken.

¹⁶ Maurine Beasley, "Recent Directions for the Study of Women's History in American Journalism" in *Journalism Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, (Routledge, 2001), 209.

Some research offers biographical data from her formative years as a child, but as simply a starting point for her puzzling shift. Historian Arthur Kaul writes of Brannon Smith, “Dixiecrat segregationist undergoes a life-changing conversion that transforms her into a crusading civil rights advocate, and eventually, liberal martyr to the cause of press freedom.”¹⁷ Kaul considered the conversion gradual, and located her “editorial values and voice in the roots of Progressivism and the craft culture of Twentieth Century American journalism,” but took only one sentence to discuss the program where she studied American journalism and her evolution began. “She entered the University of Alabama in 1932, joined Delta Zeta sorority, became managing editor of the student newspaper and graduated with a B.A. Degree in journalism in 1935.”¹⁸ The Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* said it was nearly overnight. Brannon Smith herself credited her Christian parents and her strict upbringing and paid tribute to her mother on Mother’s Day:

You have given me your priceless heritage of a sound mind and body with a vision of what can be accomplished if I but try, and courage to do my best. Your life has been a picture of loving, unselfish service to others . . . an inspiration to those who know you . . . an ideal to be lived up to.¹⁹

But no one has examined how her time as a college journalist bridged the extremes, nor has research examined her college journalism for hints of the revered newspaperwoman to come. As it was the last time she operated under the tutelage of different editors and/or publishers, it means her time on staff at The University of Alabama's student newspaper, The *Crimson-White*, was singular in its formal and practical training. I therefore suggest that this time was not only significant, but also pivotal.

¹⁷ Arthur J. Kaul, “Hazel Brannon Smith and the Lexington Advertiser,” in *The Press and Race—Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, edited by David R. Davies (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 23.

Literature Review

The single, book-length examination of Hazel Brannon Smith, *Maverick Among the Magnolias*, is a biography by John A. Whalen, who was a professional journalist for sixty years. Therefore, he does not practice the type of documentation that journalism historians may take for granted, such as footnotes. Whalen did note sources on occasion, though sporadically and inconsistently. One example is when he referenced *Life Magazine* without identifying the issue or date. The year could be deduced only from textual clues. Another example re-occurs throughout the book: the origins of specific, biographical details. In one anecdote, Whalen introduced her lifelong love of hats by telling a story:

On Easter the Brannon children, clad in the new clothes they always received for the occasion, attended the services at Dwight. Then back at home, they changed into everyday garb for the Easter egg hunt that preceded the huge dinner that Mother Brannon prepared. One Easter that stood out in Hazel's memory was when she was about twelve and her mother bought her a beautiful horsehair braid hat that she had wanted very much. But Hazel made the mistake of leaving the hat on the front porch swing and one of Dock's dogs got hold of it—and that was the end of the prized hat. Hazel was sure her mother was going to punish her in some way but all that Georgia said was, “Now young lady, that's the last hat that I ever intend to buy for you.”

And sure enough it was,” Hazel said. “Every hat I owned afterward, because I love hats, I bought with money I had earned.”²⁰

Another example tells the story of Brannon Smith's brothers playing outside with neighborhood children, including a “mulatto” girl: “Mrs. Brannon heard one of the visiting white children call the girl a “flop-eared hound.” She immediately called her sons inside and told them

²⁰ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, (2000), 21.

to inform the neighborhood children that they would not be allowed to play in the Brannon yard in the future if they used such offensive language again.”²¹

Presumably, Whalen treated the biography as he would a newspaper article: He did his research without citing or revealing each source. He exited the bounds of “objectivity” by hypothesizing that “The metamorphosis of Hazel Brannon, from the ultra-conservative darling of the white citizens of Holmes County in darkest Mississippi, to Hazel Brannon Smith, civil rights activist who came to sanction inter-racial marriage, is a fascinating, inspiring, heroic and ultimately tragic story that began on February 3, 1914, in Alabama City, Alabama.”²² Whalen continued, “The elder Brannons imbued in their children a respect for other religions and races. The passion for justice that Hazel was to display later in life had its foundation in the example set by her parents.”²³ Clearly, Whalen used anecdotes to support his position. Citing the origins of the anecdotes would have strengthened it altogether. Also, if this time period had been as critical in Brannon Smith's development as Whalen suggests, dedicating only eight pages seems contradictory.

In *Maverick Among the Magnolias*, Whalen did not argue or propose a certain theory relating to Brannon Smith. Overall, his tone tends toward worship, not critical study or historical method. The biography is also weighted heavily toward the civil rights era, though it made up only a fraction of her eighty years. While it was central to the drama that surrounded her newspapers, having the majority of the 329 pages deal with the topic in some form or fashion seems unbalanced for a life history.

Maverick Among the Magnolias is not without merit, however. I found it especially helpful as a starting point for locating primary sources. Also, it served as a springboard for

²¹ Ibid, 22.

²² Ibid, 18.

²³ Ibid, 21–22.

journalistic and cultural context. During a telephone interview, Whalen confirmed his reverence and revealed his bias. “Despite all she’d done,” he said, “no one had written a book about her. I thought that was just plain wrong. So when I retired, I traveled south to chronicle her amazing life.”²⁴

In his article, “Hazel Brannon Smith: Pursuing Truth at Her Peril,” Matthew Bosisio spoke of Brannon Smith as “an old-time journalist” who clung to her notion that “serving humanity through our small efforts²⁵ . . . was the principal task of any journalist, regardless of the consequences—even if those consequences meant economic ruin.”²⁶ By locating her in the tradition of “old-time” journalist, he suggested that she purported to find and tell the truth, to “call it as she saw it, plain and unvarnished.”²⁷ Bosisio went on to agree with former publisher, editor, and journalist Bill Minor in saying that Hazel deserved to be “cast in the history of journalism as one of the courageous figures in Southern journalism.”²⁸ And the claim that her “courageous stand against bigotry and violence is one of the untold stories of Southern journalism”²⁹ corroborates my findings of scantily available material and scholarship. While no longer “untold,” Brannon Smith’s story remains largely unknown.

In his article, Bosisio did mention her tenure on the staff at the *Crimson-White*, unlike Whalen who cited her birthday as the beginning of the story. “The story begins with a young woman from Gadsden, Alabama, who went to the University of Alabama to major in journalism.”³⁰ He went on to say that she was a serious student who quickly found her way into a role as managing editor. But Bosisio stopped there; he did not discuss her work at the *Crimson-*

²⁴ John A. Whalen, telephone interview, Iowa, 2005.

²⁵ Matthew J. Bosisio, “Hazel Brannon Smith: Pursuing Truth at Her Peril,” in *American Journalism: A Journal of Media History*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 69–83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

White He did not examine the available primary resources of that time—her writing. Instead, he quoted *Look* magazine's senior editor, who called Brannon Smith “one of those well-brought-up Southerners who—helped by warmly remembered master-servant friendship—later could adapt to the genuine courtesies of equality.”³¹ While her upbringing and memories, paternalistic and progressive as they may have been, undoubtedly influenced Brannon Smith, this study posits that it was the University’s journalism program that contributed to her journalistic operating system.

In “Hazel Brannon Smith and *The Lexington Advertiser*” Arthur Kaul also mentioned her time at The University of Alabama: “She entered the University of Alabama in 1932, joined Delta Zeta sorority, became managing editor of the student newspaper and graduated with a B.A degree in journalism in 1935.”³² Her upbringing, and later her career, Kaul proposed, reflects the philosophy attributed to progressivism,³³ or “the Progressive ethos” as Columbia professor and Pulitzer Prize winning cultural historian Richard Hofstadter dubbed it in *The Age of Reform* (1955). According to Hofstadter, muckraking journalists embodied three major Progressive themes: (1) a vision of reality that saw “evildoing among the most respectable people, (2) the mischief typically interpreted simply as “widespread breaking of the law,” and (3) exhortatory appeals to “universal personal responsibility” inherited from the “moral traditions of rural evangelical Protestantism.”³⁴ Kaul, however, neglected to explore how Brannon Smith’s time on campus might have influenced her progressive ethos, or to note that the University under President Denny employed many informal evangelists of progressivism. President Denny even called for women to play larger roles in society. Her family, however, was not progressive. They

³¹ Ibid, 70.

³² Arthur J. Kaul, “Hazel Brannon Smith and the Lexington Advertiser,” in *The Press and Race—Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, edited by David R. Davies (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 235.

³³ Ibid, 234.

³⁴ Ibid, 234.

balked at her attending the University when she graduated high school, saying she was too young.³⁵ Between the two—the University and her family—it seems obvious which would demand she take risky steps to stand on progressive ground.

Although many accounts of Brannon Smith construct a “salvation narrative,” Kaul, who also considered her something of a civil rights legend, suggested that her editorials belie that narrative. Even so, he credited her editorial legacy to “the old-time religion of conservative Protestant moral fundamentalism that informed so much of American Progressivism.” This, instead of any “conversion to a new-found faith in the liberal agenda of the civil rights revolution,” he said, catalyzed her shift. Kaul traced her old-time religion to her upbringing and paraphrased one of her editorial columns where she wrote that God and her parents gave her “the example and the strength I have to do what I must.”³⁶ Some of her editorials do reflect a strong religious influence, but it is the “old-time journalism” posited by Bosisio that sets the tone and imbues all of her journalism.

Bernard L. Stein, also a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial writer, posited that Brannon Smith’s evolution from segregationist to active ally of the civil rights movement was gradual until she agreed to print the *Mississippi Free Press*, an activist newspaper founded to vocalize the campaign.³⁷ Though “evolution” implies a beginning that Stein defined as segregationist, he did not consider her genesis at all. In fact, it is as if she were always a publisher in Mississippi. Stein did weave a narrative that included many of the pivotal moments in her professional career and posited that her trajectory was a “gradual evolution.” Yet, he did not mention much about her

³⁵ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 21.

³⁶ Arthur J. Kaul, “Hazel Brannon Smith and the Lexington Advertiser,” in *The Press and Race—Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, edited by David R. Davies (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 235.

³⁷ Bernard L. Stein, “This Female Crusading Scalawag” in *Media Studies Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2000).

influences or early life. He was, however, pretty clear in his opinion of her, as one article's title suggested: "This Female Crusading Scalawag."³⁸

Mark Newman in "The Making of a Pulitzer Prize Winner" posited that "[h]er career provided an opportunity to explore why some white southern journalists"³⁹ who had been conservative segregationists moved toward integration and why others did not. He discussed her upbringing and touched on the religious, familial, and cultural categories of the South that shaped Brannon Smith using her own words from her "Through Hazel Eyes" column for support. But Newman did not explore where the shift began. Nor did he examine the period between her upbringing and career: the college years. I suggest that the study and practice of journalism at The University of Alabama was central to "the making" of Brannon Smith by thrusting her into a realm where her ideas were encouraged and her abilities sharpened.

In "Journalist Under Siege," Newman discussed the climate of conflict that Hazel endured, connoting the battle metaphor that Hodding Carter Jr. used when describing her in "Woman Editor's War on Bigots" and "The Little Lady Who Won't Stop Fighting." Once again, the focus is on the fight, not the training of the fighter.

Jan Whitt noted that Hazel was not a willing participant in the fight for civil rights.⁴⁰ She "had clay feet" and in spite of her achievements, Whitt said, it's "important not to deify the hard-working woman of conviction." For Whitt, there was little doubt that Smith was conflicted about issues of race in the South. She argued for segregation but supported equality before the law; she could not understand how the two beliefs could be contradictory—a paradox indeed. Whitt suggested it was the familiar social, political, and religious supports that shifted beneath Brannon

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mark Newman, "Hazel Brannon Smith and Holmes County, Mississippi, 1936–1964: The Making of a Pulitzer Prize Winner," *Journal of Mississippi History* 54 (February 1992), 59–87

⁴⁰ Jan Whitt, "Burning Crosses and Activist Journalism: The Unlikely Heroism of Two Mississippi Journalists", AEJMC Presentation, Boulder, CO, 2001.

Smith rather than an internal shift. I agree with Whitt's assessment that Hazel continued to believe in herself during the shift and tried to live up to the tenets of her profession in a difficult and dangerous time. But from where did these tenets originate and develop?

Brannon Smith as "journalistic paragon of courage" appears in various tributes after her death, including the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors publication *Grassroots*. But few consider "what made Hazel the way she was."⁴¹ Or more specifically, what made her the type of journalist she would become?

Susan Weill compared Hazel to "Hacksaw Mary" Cain in a study of Freedom Summer coverage by the women of the Mississippi Press. Once again, the difficulties Hazel faced are outlined, but Weill contextualized as she compared the women journalists in Mississippi during a time of violent, civil unrest. Her method is content analysis, and her purpose is clearly delineated. She concluded that Hazel was repeatedly the lone female voice that took exception to the reports of fellow journalists that season. Weill did not mention any sort of journalistic apprenticeship in the article nor suggest it for further research.

Judy Teresa Smith sketched a biography of Hazel along with five other "Magnolia Matriarchs" in her dissertation.⁴² But a sketch is not a fully drawn picture, nor does it provide a clearer, fuller image. It also doesn't attempt to delve deeply into any area of Brannon Smith's life, much less her work. While patterns related to women and journalism can be detected, the work is not specific enough to connect patterns that may have emerged during her college years.

"Through Hazel Eyes, 1959–1964: A Newspaper Mirrors the Community It Serves"⁴³

⁴¹ Max Brannon, videotape interview, Cave Spring, GA, June 2006.

⁴² Judy Teresa Smith, "Magnolia Matriarchs: Six Women's Contributions to the Community Press in Mississippi," (Hattiesburg, MS: University of Southern Mississippi, Doctor of Philosophy in Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, 2001).

⁴³ Margaret B. Maree, *Through Hazel Eyes, 1959–1964, A Newspaper Mirrors the Community it Serves* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, Masters of Arts in Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, 1999), 3.

used a chronological approach to contextualize information about Hazel and her second purchase of a newspaper weekly, the *Lexington Advertiser*. Maree explored each of the five years leading up to the Pulitzer, including the events and responses of the community and the weeklies. She began by introducing the long-argued debate about newspapers as mirror or creator of reality. She argued they are mirrors of reality, specifically for the communities they serve. She also suggested that journalists are messengers or harbingers who bring the news. As harbingers, Maree said that journalists must sometimes bring unpleasant messages to society. She added, “Capitulation by the messengers seems expedient, particularly to all others, even in advanced democracies.”⁴⁴ In other words, rabble-rousing, muckraking messengers might stir trouble up, unless they shut up. Maree chose one of the most violent lenses—the civil rights journalism lens—through which to understand Brannon Smith and her community. She did not examine Hazel’s early journalism at all, even though she did note that an important aspect of newspapers is their function as a bridge between the past and the future. I suggest that Hazel’s college journalism served as a transition that also bridged the past and future, the paradox of “southern belle” and newspaperwoman.

Other researchers have compared Hazel Brannon with fellow female journalists, fellow Pulitzer Prize winners, and fellow independent voices. Yet, a study of her college journalism for evidence of a social awakening, editorial leanings, impending advocacy, or “new journalism” convert does not exist. Was she as spunky when she left The University of Alabama as when she arrived? Was she perhaps even spunkier? Were there signs of success already showing up in her work? Were there large or small revelations of the young woman who would be called—during her First Amendment/civil rights fights—“the little Alabama girl kickin’ butt?”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁵ Hodding Carter, III, videotape interview, April 2007.

Still, other research on Brannon Smith tends to highlight her editorial verve, using quotes from her columns. She did challenge the status quo of her community with her writing. She called for sheriffs to resign, naming them “egg-sucking dogs.”⁴⁶ She faced down the power brokers who disagreed with desegregation, and civil and human rights on the written page as well as in person despite violent threats. “If she’d been a man, she’d have been lynched,” journalist Bill Minor said.⁴⁷

The “David and Goliath” aspect was real and, since “little appeals more to the American sensibility than a tale about overcoming insurmountable odds in the interest of a higher goal,” television producers dramatized it. Screenwriter Rama Laurie Stagner was sent more than 500 pages in a packet of materials. “After reading it, I spent about six months dramatizing the narrative for the TV script,” Stagner shared.⁴⁸ The script was produced as a made-for-TV movie, *A Passion for Justice*. It starred Jane Seymour as Brannon Smith and was more Hollywood than history. Such movies have mass appeal, but they do not pass the “the art of narration” test according to historian James Startt, simply because a narrative has been based “loosely on some facts.” “In constructing narrative,” Startt said, “we know that history must argue from evidence, but we know, too, that such evidence must be, to our best knowledge, truthful.” While the movie introduced Brannon Smith to a mass audience, since mass appeal trumps historiography in entertainment, what people “learned” was not factually accurate. Such fabrication does propagate the mythic elements of her story, but it does little to elucidate or provide historical clarity. One Lexington resident when asked if he knew Brannon Smith said, “No, but I watched the movie.”

The movie did not include her early life with her family, nor her college years. It began when Brannon Smith was 36, after she had married and become successful enough to own two

⁴⁶ *Lexington Advertiser*, July 24, 1954.

⁴⁷ Bill Minor, telephone interview, Jackson, Mississippi, April 2007.

⁴⁸ Rama Laurie Stagner, telephone interview, Hollywood, CA, April 2007.

newspapers in Holmes County. Therefore, like many scholarly accounts, it ignored the formative years, the period(s) that enabled Brannon Smith to blaze her historical trail. In this dissertation I will focus on this time period and in particular, her time as a young journalist on staff at The University of Alabama's student newspaper.

Methodology

“Historians stand between past and present and must engage both with imagination, integrity, and a sense of responsibility. The creation of that delicate balance represents one of the greatest challenges in historical scholarship.⁴⁹ With that challenge in mind, along with the position that “History is, after all, a reconstruction by an individual of things past,”⁵⁰ a few key terms and phrases related to this dissertation’s methodology merit noting. “Historiography is the study of various steps and procedures that historians use in their research.”⁵¹ And one key element in the various steps is constructing an accurate and illuminating context in which to include new information. With the help of biographical and cultural information, it will be possible to contextualize her college journalism and explore its influence. After all, according to Richard O. Mason, James L. McKenney, and Duncan G. Copeland in their article, “An Historical Method for MIS Research: Steps and Assumptions,” “The principle product of historical research is context—an understanding of the organization, individual, social, political and economic circumstances.”⁵²

To complicate matters methodologically, there’s a profusion of historical design methods. “History has no single methodology. Its practitioners hold many different persuasions about the discipline.”⁵³ It also doesn’t help that “few writers agree on a precise procedure.”⁵⁴ History itself

⁴⁹ William David Sloan and James D. Startt, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989), 56.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 53.

⁵¹ Gall, Meredith, Joyce Gall, and Walter Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 518.

⁵² Richard O. Mason, James L. McKenney, and Duncan G. Copeland, “An Historical Method for MIS Research: Steps and Assumptions” in vol. 21, no. 3, (September, 1997), 309.

⁵³ Ibid, 48.

dodges precision: “Differing perspective among historians result in pictures and explanations that are multi-dimensional rather than flat, multi-colored rather than monotone.”⁵⁵ With such blurred and uneven bounds, this study availed itself of the statement from the journal *MIS*: “The key to good research lies not in choosing the right method, but rather in asking the right question.”⁵⁶ According to historians David Sloan and James Startt, questions should relate to “causation, generalization, interpretation, and the establishing of significance.” Historians have two primary jobs. One is to describe the essential nature of the past. The other is to explain why that essential nature was as it was,⁵⁷ or “to grasp the reasons that explain the changing nature of their subject.”⁵⁸ Brannon Smith’s college journalism during her years at The University of Alabama, 1932–1935, connected her provincial past with her Pulitzer-winning future.

⁵⁴ John W. Cresswell, *Research Design Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994) 143.

⁵⁵ William David Sloan and James D. Startt, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* (NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989), 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

Plan of Study

The goal of this project is to examine Brannon Smith's newspaper experience during the formative period when she studied journalism as a student at The University of Alabama from 1932 to 1935, a time when the journalism program itself was just forming. I seek to locate Brannon Smith in this era of social change, while examining her college journalism for signs of the "steadfast adherence" that the Pulitzer Committee would cite when they chose her for the Pulitzer Prize in 1964. I explore her editorial experiences for hints of social advocacy, as well as other journalistic elements that might suggest an impending metamorphosis. I organize the cultural influences that shaped Hazel as a young journalist by the following chapters: The Culture of Place and Her Roots, The Culture of Journalism, The Culture of Journalism Education, The Culture of The University of Alabama and Its Journalism Program, and The Influence of the Student Newspaper, the *Crimson-White*.

I agree with the previous assertion from the *MIS* journal that good research "lies not in choosing the right method, but rather in asking the right question." Therefore, my plan of study organizes Brannon Smith's cultural context by questions. The following five questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. How did Brannon Smith's upbringing in Alabama City, Alabama, shape her values and belief system before she left for college?
2. What was the state of journalism at this time?
3. How had journalism programs evolved nationally?
4. What impact did UA and its journalism program under Clarence Cason have on Brannon Smith?
5. How was she shaped by working on the *CW* staff?

Primary and Secondary Resources

Primary documents comprised the bulk of my research. They include newspapers, course catalogs, yearbooks, memoirs, documentaries, government files, court case transcripts, personal interviews, and personal correspondence and papers. The interviews consist of videotapes, face-to-face encounters, and telephone conversations. The bulk of the primary documents came from archives and special collections housed at The University of Alabama, Mississippi State University, Auburn University, the Mississippi State Archives in Jackson, and the Alabama State Archives in Montgomery. I was able to examine the original editions of the *Crimson-White* from 1932 to 1935, the *Durant News*, and the *Lexington Advertiser*. The *Etowah Observer*, the *Etowah Daily*, and the *Northside Reporter* did not exist in full and/or were only available on microfilm. Hoole Special Collections at The University of Alabama allowed access to original editions of the *CW*, as the *Crimson-White* is affectionately called, as well as relevant course catalogs and style books. MSU allowed access to many original editions of the *Durant News* and the *Lexington Advertiser* as well as the Mississippi Press Association and Hazel Brannon Smith collections. Auburn University possessed a few, rare editions of the *Etowah Observer* on microfilm. I also consulted various other primary documents: archived and personal collections, on- and off-camera interviews, magazines, an autobiography, diaries, journals, cards and letters, photographs, photocopies, FBI files, and additional newspapers.

Obtaining the sources sometimes required out-of-state travel, face-to-face persuasion, sleuthing, long hours of sorting and reading newspapers, and further persuasion. I now possess more than a hundred hours of on-camera interviews, b-roll, and videotaped documents and

pictures of material on Brannon Smith. This ensures that I have one of the largest holdings of existing information pertaining to Brannon Smith.

This dissertation also benefits from a variety of traditional and non-traditional sources that were used for the production of an historical documentary about Brannon Smith, *The Hazel Brannon Smith Story*. The documentary, geared toward a public TV audience, tells the life story of Brannon Smith without focusing on a specific era. As a result, the wealth of primary resources spanned her lifetime, offering a glimpse of how the influences played out. Much of this material will be taped and then archived in the Winter Reading Room at The University of Alabama's College of Communication and Information Sciences. Another primary source will be her own writing, and an important secondary source will be the written interpretation of her writing by others. It is here that context becomes extremely critical.

To examine an editorial outside of its time and place creates even more ambiguity. I suggest that Brannon Smith's work, especially her editorials, only provide pertinent information when examined within historical context. Bearing in mind that the "language of historical documents is never transparent, and historians have always been aware that they cannot simply gaze through to the historical reality behind these primary sources for a single, unalterably true meaning."⁵⁹ Instead they have been sifted for patterns, evidence of shapes and of shaping, signs of influence and confluence.

In the following chapter, I will scrutinize the culture of place to locate Brannon Smith not only geographically but also contextually among her blood and community relations.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 91.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE OF PLACE

Hazel Brannon Smith did not arrive in 1932 at The University of Alabama a blank slate. In order to gain insight into the influences that had shaped her up to this point, it will be important to locate her geographically and contextually among her blood and community relations. “Context,” according to Anind Dey at Georgia Institute of Technology, “while undisputed in its importance is not always well-defined. Previous definitions of context are done by enumeration of examples or by choosing synonyms for context.”⁶⁰ Although the definition that Dey went on to develop is suited to context applications for virtual interchanges, it notes the difficult and comprehensive nature of context for all disciplines: “Context is any information that can be used to characterize the situation of an entity. An entity is a person, place, or object that is considered relevant to the interaction.” Therefore, the contextual importance of place includes Brannon Smith’s upbringing, her lineage, and her cultural heredity and community. All shed light on her development during the first 18 years of her life in the small, mill-town of Alabama City, Alabama.

Brannon Smith’s region was indeed influential. She had, after all, not only lived in the same “place” since birth, she had lived in the very same house. It was literally all she knew. Her parents and grandparents had not been raised in Alabama City but they heralded from within this

⁶⁰ Anind K. Dey and Gregory D Abowd, “Towards a Better Understanding of Context and Context-Awareness.” *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, vol. 5, no. 1 (February 2001), 4–7.

same geographic region. Her provincial roots, therefore, ran deep and—although not necessarily detectable—they were nevertheless present. Therefore, an in-depth look through “Culture of Place” will provide for a fuller understanding of how contextual elements positioned her to be the way she was when she entered The University of Alabama.

An editorial paper presentation at the 1917 National Education Association, “Ideals of the Profession,” provided insight into developmental forces that were considered important for the time: “Education is a process of self-culture under influences in the home, the school, and the church, all three more or less simultaneously. Ideals are formed in the home, the school, and the church; they are put to test in the world.”⁶¹ Brannon Smith was not quite three and a half when the assertion was delivered. Thirteen years later when she graduated high school early—at 16 years old—her parents thought she was too young to go off to college. They reflected the notion that the “world” was risky and might challenge her inculcated values. They wanted to keep her safe, at home. “Some of the teaching of early life,” the paper “Ideals of the Profession” asserted, “may not stand the test of experience and may have to be discarded.” Up to that point, Brannon Smith’s “teachings” had a singular emanation. All “three agencies through which knowledge is acquired”—home, school, and church—were in the same location: Alabama City, Alabama.

Writers and cultural critics such as Flannery O’Connor, William Faulkner, and William Cash have always known that place matters, but the Deep South’s influence has been considered unique for bequeathing us with the likes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, grits, cotton, and slavery. O’Connor’s infamous line, “The devil we know is better than the devil we don’t,” summed up the justification for keeping “the other” distant, an outsider. Within Brannon Smith’s culture, fundamental convictions governed the operating system like watchdogs, wary and aggressive.

⁶¹ “Ideals of the Profession,” Paper Presented for the Modern Language Association, 1917.

And while trying to carve out a living, a shape known as Southern emerged. Existing as both an adjective and an adverb, “Southern” managed to become an enduring distinction that was somehow distinguishable from the other regions of the country. Something either was or wasn’t Southern; somebody either was or wasn’t Southern. It went down to the bones. Tim Jacobson sums this up in *Heritage of the South*:

More than any other part of America, the South stands apart. . . . For this is still a place where you must have either been born or have ‘people’ there, to feel it is your native ground. It is a loyalty to a place where habits are strong and memories are long. If those memories could speak, they would tell stories of a region powerfully shaped by its history and determined to pass it on to future generations.⁶²

For Brannon Smith, the culture of place may be understood as emanating from the land itself with layers of impact that affected a community’s interactions. This chapter will discuss the area’s natural history and natural boundaries. It will also consider what part cultural heredity might have played. For Brannon Smith, it was not nature vs. nurture; both had a hand in shaping the Pulitzer Prize winner. Her cousin Mack Brannon said, “I don’t know what made Hazel the way she was.”⁶³ This chapter includes elements that reveal and suggest that she was much “the way she was” because of the confluence of factors derived from place.

⁶² Tim Jacobson, *Heritage of the South* (Avenel, NJ: Crescent Books, 1992).

⁶³ Max Brannon, videotape interview, Cave Spring, GA, June 2006.

Natural History: The Land Maps

To better understand Brannon Smith's past, it is first helpful to know something about the geographical area where she was raised, its natural history, and its relationship to the economy. The interplay between these factors is well-known, courtesy of the Civil War. Cotton was king in the South, but not in every southern region. As the English settlers migrated southeast they encountered different terrain from their familiar Southern Seaboard. The area where Brannon Smith's ancestors settled, unlike the fertile Black Belt region, was not plantation friendly. Northeast Alabama was hilly and rocky in places, often inconsistent. Alabama's geologic history includes episodes of continental collision and building that have resulted in the folded and faulted sedimentary rocks of the Appalachian Valley and Ridge. Lookout Mountain stretches from the Georgia state border in DeKalb County to Gadsden, in Etowah County. It continues through northwest Georgia to Chattanooga, Tennessee. And as if symbolizing the double bind that would characterize Brannon Smith throughout her evolution as a newspaperwoman—being caught between the old ways of home and the progressive ideals of the New South that would include civil rights—the plateau tilts toward both the southwest and the southeast, as if pulled from both sides. Along most of its length, the interior of the plateau sags.⁶⁴

Geologically speaking, the Appalachians covered a region rich in coal and other natural resources used to fuel industry. Some profited from the discoveries but only a few got rich. Mills opened, and people got jobs making steel and socks, among other things. Factory work, though,

⁶⁴ Mike Neilson, "Cumberland Plateau Physiographic Section" in *Encyclopedia of Alabama* (University of Alabama at Birmingham, August 22, 2007, updated May 10, 2010), <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1301>.

did not make wealth. The region remained one of the most impoverished in the country. The mill town distinction impacted more than the economy. The agrarian way of life, defended in *I'll Take My Stand*, a collection of essays by writers associated with Vanderbilt and known as The Fugitives, became a southern manifesto against the commercialism of industry propagated in mill towns.⁶⁵ In it, Robert Penn Warren and his fellow writers “advanced traditional southern values as an antidote to the destructive onslaught of capitalism and materialism.”⁶⁶ They defined “traditional” as “focused on the prevalence of independent yeoman households that cradled within themselves time-honored classical virtues of liberty, moderation, and a well-tempered individualism.”⁶⁷ These writers feared that industry would introduce destructive elements and exploit the region they loved.

Brannon Smith’s home was three blocks from the steel mill where her father worked. There, time cards were punched and shifts changed around the clock to keep things going. Men kept the fires stoked and aflame so that the burden would smelt continuously. The billowing smoke stacks and clouds filled the air of her neighborhood so that abstract concepts related to industry—such as capitalism, greed, ambition, and success—rose overhead in a concrete fashion and filled the air. The proximity was so close it was breathable. Inside the plant, despite industrial progress, the old labor hierarchy had changed little since the Civil War. Black men were on bottom, and white men were on top. The only mobility that was possible existed in between, where the working class and middle class jockeyed for position. Brannon Smith’s father punched a clock at the plant, but he took his ambitions home where he operated an electrical contracting business from the backyard. That meant Brannon Smith had a front row

⁶⁵ Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, January 1978).

⁶⁶ Sarah E. Gardner, “Every Man Has Got the Right to Get Killed? The Civil War Narratives of Mary Johnston and Caroline Gordon,” *Southern Cultures*, 5 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, Winter 1999), 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

seat as she watched her father simultaneously work for someone else and himself. Her thoughts on this are not recorded, but when she graduated The University of Alabama, she said she did not want to take dictation; she wanted to give it.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000).

Legacy and Blood

Cultural heredity consists of group-shared ideas and behavior often brought from elsewhere.⁶⁹ When these intersect with the environment, a region's personality is established. After the Civil War, the South still possessed a distinct, if "New," personality. W.J. Cash argued in *The Mind of the South* that the South was utterly different from the rest of the country.⁷⁰ He explains that no region of the United States has a more stereotyped identity than the South. Rednecks, hillbillies, and cotton-picking pickaninnies all suggest a relationship of Southerners to the land—both as terrain and as the basis for an agrarian way of life.⁷¹ In his book *Born Fighting*, Jim Webb traced the Ulster Scots of what is now Northern Ireland and followed them to the Appalachians where the Scots-Irish temperament was transplanted among the hills and mountains.

Hazel's parents were both born in the foothills of the Appalachians, where the soil was part clay and unpredictable. Unlike the Black Belt region with its dark and fertile earth that supported large farms and plantations, the hilly landscape of Southern Appalachia "broke farm plots into corn patches"⁷² in which the yields were meant for survival, not sale. Cotton wasn't king here. Corn was king. Cornbread, hominy, grits, and corn syrup were kitchen regulars, but corn liquor, or moonshine, provided the area with its most infamous income. The Scots-Irish are

⁶⁹ John Burrison, "Transported Traditions: Transatlantic Foundations of Southern Folk Culture," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Atlanta: Georgia State University (September 2003), 2.

⁷⁰ Harry L. Watson and John Shelton Reed, eds., *Southern Cultures*, 5 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, Winter 1999), 1.

⁷¹ John Burrison, "Transported Traditions: Transatlantic Foundations of Southern Folk Culture," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Atlanta: Georgia State University (September 2003).

⁷² Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 3.

credited with the “most mythologized” gift to southern folk culture: illicit corn whiskey.⁷³

“Whether they considered themselves above the law, or as some thought merely “lawless,” this group often regarded outsiders with suspicion and wore its contrarian nature proudly like a badge.

⁷³ John Burrison, “Transported Traditions: Transatlantic Foundations of Southern Folk Culture,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Atlanta: Georgia State University (September 2003).

Conflict and the Southern Code

The contrarian nature materialized in the KKK, the White Citizens' Council and other clannish groups anxious to keep the outsider at bay. Having been accustomed to difficult conditions and poverty, the people of the Appalachian Mountains were not unlike their homeland, where many Scots-Irish had been herders for centuries—a way of life that fostered territorialism and settled conflicts with violence. In their article in the *Journal of Crime and Delinquency*, researchers Nisbett and Cohen (1996) advanced a provocative thesis whereby a “culture” or “code” of honor has evolved over time in the U.S. South that supports the use of violence in certain situations.⁷⁴ They argued that Southerners, especially southern white men, adhere to the code and as a result support the use of violence for countering insults and self-protection. The violence stems from the Scots Irish herding economy mentality. They'd had to respond to insults in violent and public ways, projecting a tough reputation to deter would-be livestock thieves. Exhibiting public acts of violence was considered a rational strategy for dealing with the inherently risky nature of herding economies. Nisbett and Cohen also predicted that the code of honor, once established, is capable of enduring long after a population has abandoned herding. In other words, Brannon Smith's people and her place were do-or-die tough. They believed in defending their territory, too, even if it resulted in bloodshed.

In her unfinished autobiography, Brannon Smith noted that her “parents were of Scotch-Irish ancestry.” The *Atlanta Journal Constitution's* Ralph McGill also acknowledged the

⁷⁴ “The Heritage of Herding and Southern Homicide: Examining the Ecological Foundations of the Code of Honor Thesis” Robert D. Baller et al., *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* (May 27, 2009).

importance of his Scots Irish heritage after the 1948 Democratic convention: “My immediate Confederate ancestors . . . and my Welsh ancestry are so much a part of me.”⁷⁵ To have an ancestry that included Scotch (or Scots) Irish meant something. And that something harkened back to the days of Celtic clans:

They were poetic and warlike. They followed strong leaders, even to their deaths. They brought their women and children to the battlefield and put them behind their ranks so they would be sure not to retreat. And they did not retreat. But they refused to recognize leadership beyond their local tribes and thus would not become a nation. And they had a permeating discontent that caused the more determined of them to keep pushing, every generation, a little bit farther into the wild unknown. They were the wildest most contentious people on all the earth, trapped in a sea-bound bottleneck, their emotions spattering out into poetry and music and brawls, calling each other Irish and Scottish, or Catholic and protestant, anything that might make another reason for a good, hard fight.⁷⁶

These were the forefathers of the Southern redneck, the working class, the defining fabric of the South. To be sure, the Southern aristocracy—the planter elite—existed and, though they stood to gain the most from a Confederate victory, F. N. Boney of the University of Georgia in a discussion of Southern aristocrats asserted, “The rebel elite had fought well enough, but the real backbone of the Confederacy had been its redneck infantry . . . who slugged it out with a numerically superior enemy who were also farmers.”⁷⁷ The plantation aristocrats, on a percentage basis, were probably the most efficient draft dodgers in the Confederacy through the use of the famous “20-nigger law” that granted exemptions to planters whose slaves numbered a score or more. Their ancestors were largely English, not Scots Irish.

⁷⁵ Gene Roberts and Hank Kilbanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, And The Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, December 2007), 41.

⁷⁶ James H. Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*, (Portland, OR: Broadway Books, October 2004) 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

As a group, the Scots Irish were known for their tempers and clannishness, their tendency toward pints and stories, and their familiarity with lack. Hiram Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, wrote, “We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter of culture, intellectual support and trained leadership. We are demanding and we expect to win . . . everyday, not highly cultured, not overly intellectualized, but entirely unspoiled and not de-Americanized, average citizen of the old stock.”⁷⁸

Evans considered the class anti-intellectualism a weakness and admitted that the charges of being “rubes” and “hicks” and “drivers of second-hand Fords” were true: “All action comes from emotion, rather than from ratiocination. Our emotions and the instincts on which they are based have been bred into us for thousands of years; far longer than reason has had a place in the human brain. . . . They are the foundations of our American civilization, even more than our great historic documents.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “The Klan’s Fight for Americanism,” *North American Review*, vol. ccxxii (Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, March-April-May 1926) 38.

⁷⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 124–125.

The Brannons

Brannon Smith's mother, Georgia Freeman, was born May 14, 1892, at Missionary Ridge, Tennessee. The hub of transportation was nearby Chattanooga with its trains that had to navigate the local mountains, which to this day are called Signal and Lookout. She was the third of Daniel and Ida Freeman's eleven children. When Daniel found work at Dwight Cotton Mill in Alabama City, Alabama, the family relocated. It was not a bow to the industrial revolution, but as Clarence Cason reported in the *New York Times*, "It was not surprising that the tenant farmers and poverty stricken people of the hills should have beaten a wide track to the southern cotton mills at their first opportunity. Wages of \$10 a week meant unaccustomed luxury to folk whose former income had been no more than \$15 a month in actual money."⁸⁰ It was a promise of a steady paycheck. Even so, more than twenty years after the Freemans moved to Alabama City, Cason wrote that the South remained the last frontier of the industrial revolution, "suspended halfway between industry and agriculture. These people are ready at a moment's notice to swing in either direction. On the frontier it awaits a turn of circumstance."

Though he was employed *by* the industry, Daniel Freeman's job was not *in* the industry. He was a night watchman. Security, rather than machines, was his concern. And if Hazel Brannon Smith's reputation as a watchdog journalist is any reflection, then it is likely her grandfather took his role as guardian (or defender) very seriously.

Hazel's father, Dock Boad Brannon, was named after the doctor who attended his birth

⁸⁰ Clarence Cason, *New York Times*, August 28, 1932.

on February 28, 1890, at Cave Springs, Georgia. D.B., as he was also known, was one of Mack and Mary Ann Brannon's five boys. The "boys will be boys" attitude prevailed among the Brannons as did working with their hands. Four of the five would exemplify the puritan work ethic; the other son migrated to the darker side of the Irish affinity for pints. The Brannon boys cleaned up nicely, respected their mama, said grace at Sunday dinner, and often helped their neighbor—unless their neighbor had raised their ire. Being a Baptist did not preclude being a fighter.⁸¹

One brother became a barber, and another built houses. D.B. moved 45 miles to do electrical wiring for Republic Steel in Alabama City, Alabama. There he met Georgia Freeman. They were married on February 5, 1913, and before they could move into their small, white house that D.B. had designed himself, it had to be officially blessed by a preacher. "That was probably my grandmother's idea," granddaughter Mary, who lived there during her teenage years, said. "She was very strict, especially about her religion. I had to sneak out when I wanted to visit the Church of God."⁸² On the outside of the house was a small front porch flanked by two round columns. On the inside, in addition to the usual plumbing for a kitchen, D.B. had stubbed for something futuristic—he'd plumbed for an eventual indoor bathroom. Apparently Brannon Smith's father was not only smart, he was also something of a visionary. "They had a little more than most but were generous," it was agreed at the family reunion. So generous in fact that her father donated an organ to a church that he did not even attend.⁸³

⁸¹ Brannon Family Reunion, oral interviews, June 2006.

⁸² Mary Betancourt, oral interview, Cleveland, TN, September 2007.

⁸³ Max Brannon, videotape interview, Cave Spring, GA, June 2006.

Religious Roots

The religious influence on Brannon Smith's culture cannot be overstated. As both heavenly and just down the street—where she attended Dwight Baptist Church—religion could be useful as well as powerful. Historians have long believed that textile and coal company officials encouraged Baptist and Methodist churches in mill towns because those denominations preached a gospel of work, along with an otherworldly obsession with being born again and obtaining heavenly rewards instead of social justice in this world. Companies often contributed both to church maintenance and preachers' salaries. The companies even used a check-off system, withdrawing from salaries whatever contributions workers wanted to make to the churches. Although some workers praised such philanthropy, others considered it manipulative and self-serving.⁸⁴

Often times, religion was unpredictable, and sometimes illogical, but it almost always provided interesting characters and stories. In Historian Wayne Flynt's book *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*, Flynt includes colorful, historical characters such as a white Alabama coal miner and bootlegger who served prison time due to his wife's "crazy religion." She became a "holy roller kind" and turned him in to the Talladega County sheriff; she then left to build a new life for herself and their children by working in a cotton mill. In the northern part of the state on Lookout Mountain, a coal miner who had lost his home, his job, a son, and a son-in-law to violence told a different story. He lived by the Ten Commandments and

⁸⁴ Wayne Flynt, "Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites, and the Great Depression" *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 71, no. 1 (Houston, TX: The Southern Historical Association, February 2005).

a simple code of right and wrong. Though he had joined a Church of God and had repented his bootlegging, he still believed federal laws against making whiskey infringed upon his personal liberty. Nevertheless, he proclaimed to an interviewer, “The church has done for him through love and sympathy what the state could not do through force and fear of prison.”⁸⁵

In Appalachia, sectarians even defined gender relationships. Historian Robert S. Weise emphasized the “household localism” that located familial authority in the male head of the family. He argued that Old Regular churches reinforced such authority, which limited leadership and preaching to men.⁸⁶ But Deborah Vansau McCauley’s study of traditional Appalachian churches (Old Regular, Separate, and Missionary Baptist congregations as well as Pentecostal and holiness sects) highlighted a different aspect of their practice: the widespread selection of “eldresses” and “deaconesses” represent women leaders who achieved “relative equality” and sometimes-considerable respect and distinction.⁸⁷ Though women were never accorded the status that men were, some had more power than others, even sometimes within the same denomination. Religion could be confusing business in Brannon Smith’s hometown and wildly inconsistent to the point of unbelievable.

Other aspects of traditional Appalachian churches include the value they placed on ordinary believers as opposed to hierarchical elites; the egalitarian conversion experience (being “born again”) as the entry point for membership into a sacred community; the emergence of revival preachers as persons of significant social status; “the chanted, spontaneously composed sermon[s];” the emotional and/or ecstatic services; the oral transmission of culture; the church as a gathering of equals; and the prevalence of democratic rituals such as baptism, foot-washing, the

⁸⁵ Ibid, 17–18.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 26.

Lord's Supper, laying on of hands, the kiss of charity (the so-called holy kiss), and extending the right hand of fellowship. Although McCauley rejects Erskine Caldwell's assumption that these churches were part of "a subculture of poverty and the product of powerlessness and alienation," her individual portraits of leaders and sects offered much support for that conclusion. She was so anxious to emphasize the agency and respectability of the people she described that she did not follow the logic of her narrative. These churches were a mixture of the very poor and people moving into the lower-middle class. But their theological emphasis upon equality, ultimate vindication, and the value of ordinary people as opposed to wealthy, educated elites represented classic poor-white religious themes that go all the way back to colonial times.⁸⁸ This complex morality and desire for personal success would clash on the front page of Brannon Smith's newspapers in her editorial column, "Through Hazel Eyes."

Although Pentecostalism moved beyond Appalachia, the region was a fertile "seedbed" for it. Characterized by "otherworldly hope," "antagonistic" relationships to the secular world, occasional "aberrant social behavior," and emotional zeal, sects formed as the result of a vast religious "coming out." David Edwin Harrell Jr., senior scholar of the movement, described this phenomenon in class terms: "The most tangible single explanation for the southern sectarian revival . . . was poverty—the grinding, pervasive, unrelenting poverty of millions of white Southerners between the Civil War and World War II. Deprivation has always been the breeding ground for religious zealots."⁸⁹ Otherworldly hope was less about escapism about ultimate vindication and hope for a miracle that would "bypass the repressive machinery of society."⁹⁰

D.B. and Georgia Brannon and their four children exemplified the new middle class in

⁸⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 29.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 30.

their white columned home on Sansom Avenue. As D.B.'s responsibilities at the steel mill increased, so did his income. Also, an electrical contracting side business he ran from his backyard provided even more insulation as the Great Depression rolled in. When Brannon Smith's parents said she had to wait until she turned 18 to start at The University of Alabama, Brannon Smith started searching for a job. She was hired by the local weekly paper and paid by the inch. This meant she got her first official taste of journalism at age 16.

While journalism would inspire her to learn, something else stood as inspiration a few miles from her house: a white statue of the East Alabama, teenage girl Emma Sansom, one of the South's most unlikely Civil War heroes. When Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest needed guidance crossing the Coosa River, Sansom ignored her mother's protests and the dictates of society and, quelling whatever anxiety she felt, climbed on Forrest's horse and galloped off toward the river. This was 1864. Unattended females, especially young ones, did not accompany men anywhere. In Sansom's case, she was venturing off into the unknown with a stranger. The unknown might present the enemy. Though the approaching Union troops had yet to arrive in the area, renegades and lookouts were always a possibility. Most likely, the unknown would position her to encounter more strangers—an entire Confederate troop. Apparently none of these possibilities deterred Sansom from aiding General Forrest.

History is not privileged with very many specifics of Sansom's legendary adventure. As for General Nathan Bedford Forrest, he crossed the river safely, thanks to Sansom, and went on to become a hero. He also became the first grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.⁹¹ What impact either figure had on Brannon Smith is unknown. Throughout her life, the statue was simply there, as it had always been, another given in a complicated landscape.

⁹¹ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, And The Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, December 2007), 205.

Summarily, the influence of “place” involves the confluence of various factors. Particularly in Brannon Smith’s case, these factors must be examined through the Southern filter considered elemental by many. This landscape sustained an agrarian society in part due to its resistant nature. This nature emerged from a Scots Irish heritage, which often believed in settling problems with violence or using “fighting words” to protect their property, flock, and clan. The people strongly identified with their Southern culture and were sometimes proud of their heritage in a stubborn and exclusive way. The religious influence molded gender expectations firmly into a hierarchy that privileged patriarchal headship. Men were the head of the house, the church, and the country. But this was complicated for Brannon Smith by certain exceptions to the “rules” or traditions. Emma Sansom exemplified female empowerment by showing Confederate General Forrest where his troop could safely cross the river; she was a young teenage girl at the time who saved the day and became an honored hero and legend. Given this complex culture of place is it any wonder that Brannon Smith grew into one of the most paradoxical journalists of all times? She was a quintessential Southern Belle in many ways and considered a looker who loved flashy cars and clothes, but not the kind of belle linked to a plantation. And although she was compared by her cousins to Scarlett O’Hara and would later build a home similar to Tara, there was nothing coy about Brannon Smith’s ambition. She had never been afraid to work hard and fast, which is a good thing since newspaper deadlines do not suffer procrastination well. Brannon Smith was indeed a product of place, through and through. “To her credit, Smith never looked away after evolving to understand the enormity of human suffering,” wrote Margaret Maree after researching her for several years. “She began to be of her time but not of her place.”⁹²

This study’s first research question asked how Brannon Smith’s Alabama City, Alabama,

⁹² Margaret B. Maree, *Through Hazel Eyes, 1959–1964, A Newspaper Mirrors the Community it Serves* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, Masters of Arts in Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, 1999), 73.

pre-college upbringing shaped her values and belief system. My findings reveal that her culture privileged work ethic, fighting nature, and Sunday school values, all of which combined to form what Professor of Public Policy, journalist, and former Assistant Press Secretary to President Jimmy Carter, Hodding Carter, III, described as a walking paradox. She would face down the corrupt powerbrokers and pay the price during the 1960's—losing her hard-earned popularity and comfortable income that she had so dearly enjoyed. Carter said, “She stood for everything that journalism should be about but usually isn't.” This idea that conceptualized the ethics of journalism developed over time and emerged from the Progressive Era. It is another important contextual element that illuminates the importance of Brannon Smith's college journalism. The next chapter will discuss what journalism is, how it has evolved, and its professional status and appeal as a career. It will also explore the “culture of journalism” that existed when Brannon Smith chose to become a newspaperwoman with the goal of contextualizing just how life-changing that choice would be.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURE OF JOURNALISM

As it was important in the previous chapter to contextually locate the “Culture of Place” for a better understanding of Brannon Smith’s provincial development and stomping grounds, so also is it beneficial to review the “Culture of Journalism” that was in existence when she embarked on her journey to become a newspaper woman. The province of journalism would, especially as it contrasted with her regional traditions, challenge her existing operating system and, as the two belief systems clashed, even remodel her cultural origins to accommodate the notions of justice and equality that were evolving in the nation during the 1950s and 1960s. Navigating between two such different realms would be neither smooth nor consistent, a trajectory not unlike the history of journalism itself. A brief examination of American journalism’s history will not only offer opportunities to show some of these parallels, it will also sketch an outline of the foundation of American journalism—important to Brannon Smith because it would become her new home “base” upon which she would stand. “A newspaper editor who tries to stand for the right,” she said in the December 4, 1958, edition of the *Lexington Advertiser*, “always makes enemies—and your editor has been around a long time—22 years.” This brief history will also show how journalism came to be considered such an influential institution.

Brannon Smith wasn’t joining ranks with a new occupation, but for her it was new territory. And though in 1932 the domain itself was certainly not new, it had only recently been

elevated from trade to profession. The exact moment of transformation, according to Victor Rosewater in a 1934 *New York Times* letter to the editor, was in 1866 “when the first known program aimed at cultivating newspapermen was offered by Washington College.”⁹³ Decades later, journalism historian Kevin Lerner countered that what Washington College accomplished was not the first offering of any specific program or course. Rather, after Robert E. Lee became the college’s president and supported fellowships for printers, the college introduced the debate over “the proper way to train journalists.”⁹⁴

According to Lerner’s research, the printers who were brought to Washington College in 1866 were there “not to learn ‘journalism’ per se, but to be educated in more general matters.” Lerner posited that “journalism was just then emerging.”⁹⁵ However, journalism historian Susan Thomson claims in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* that the age of modern-day journalism began, in many ways, “with the penny press.”⁹⁶ Analogously, Brannon Smith’s first journalistic moment is also arguable and inexact.

As we saw in chapter two, the “Culture of Place” was more than Brannon Smith’s stomping grounds. Likewise, the “Culture of Journalism” is more than a career history. It is an evolutionary account that considers how society’s needs affected the iterations of journalism and the roles of newspapers as they became part of the American democratic fabric. In his discussion of journalism’s current professional standing, Elliot King classified the culture of journalism as that ideal vision “that serves as the starting point—albeit sometimes inchoate starting point—of

⁹³ Victor Rosewater, *New York Times*, 1934.

⁹⁴ Kevin Lerner, “The Origins of Journalism Education and its Failure to Emerge as a Professional School, 1869–1912” (paper presented on the Panel for Research Addressing the State of Graduate Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, AEJMC 2008), 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Susan Thompson, *The Penny Press* (Northport, AL; Vision Press, 2004), 6.

most press critiques.”⁹⁷ He also said, “A core knowledge of the history of journalism is central to that task.”⁹⁸ While a comprehensive history of journalism is not within the scope of this dissertation, again, it is important to understand the trajectory of the American newspaper amidst the Progressive Era in order to locate the “dawn of professionalization” that suffused journalism’s culture at that time. It was, after all, this contextual convergence that Brannon Smith navigated as she left the security of home to attend The University of Alabama. To better understand what this meant for her path, I will begin the first leg with brief histories of both American and Southern newspapers before concluding with the *Etowah Observer*, where, according to her cousin Max Brannon, she got “the ink on her hands that wouldn’t come off.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Elliot King, “The Role of Journalism History and the Academy in the Development of Core Knowledge in Journalism Education,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, Summer 2008, 168.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Max Brannon, videotape interview, 2006.

The American Newspaper

The evolution of the American newspaper began in Europe with its precursors: gazettes, broadsides, pamphlets, and corantos. The Old World was expanding during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and people wanted news of the New World. Banks and businesses started paying correspondents in distant locations to send newsletters back along commercial routes, and as their bottom lines improved, news value increased. The Venetian practice of collecting a penny or so to have one of these “gazetas” read aloud contributed “gazette” to the newspaper vocabulary.¹⁰⁰ Another form, the “broadside” or “printed ballad,” contained content similar to ours: news, entertainment, and editorials in the form of sermons. It was a single news sheet with two columns of text printed on one side and folded in half.¹⁰¹ The pamphlet became popular in the late sixteenth century. It had four pages and focused on a single news event. By the seventeenth century, the actual prototype to the American newspaper was born in Holland. The first published English-language “coranto,” meaning current news, was dated December 2, 1620. The coranto spread throughout Europe, and the following year the first was published in England by Thomas Archer, who was jailed for publishing it without permission from the government.¹⁰² Wrangling between publishers and the law was not a thing of the past as evidenced by Brannon Smith. Over her five-decade career, she faced charges of contempt, libel and slander, having said, “It is not only a ‘right’ we have to keep the people fully informed. It is our sacred duty.”¹⁰³

Before the existence of an American newspaper, colonists read European newspapers to

¹⁰⁰ William David Sloan, ed. *The Media in America, A History*, 6th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2005), 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁰³ *Lexington Advertiser*, November 10, 1955.

keep themselves informed—despite the distance. Thus, the printed word held authority because it came from the Mother country. In a primitive land, it invoked civilization and linked newspapers—and journalism—with the concepts of truth, honesty, clarity, and trust even before they had taken hold.¹⁰⁴ In its one and only issue, the first American newspaper (1690) announced that it was printed to prevent false reports.¹⁰⁵ And so our American newspaper was born, conjoined with morality. This legacy was very much alive in Brannon Smith’s newspapers, and she took the role of local watchdog seriously among the roles of community crier and reporter.

The second newspaper, the *Boston News-Letter* (1704), was a weekly publication that survived for seventy-two years. Its intentions were commercial. Indeed, advertising became a primary motive of the colonial press.¹⁰⁶ Though they took hold slowly with only a dozen newspapers by 1750, that number had quadrupled to 48 by 1775.¹⁰⁷ The colonial press—although used as tools for public debate, sermons, scandal, and advertising—set the stage for the Revolution and demonstrated just how powerful the printed word could be. Pamphlets that advocated liberty were distributed, and the notion of the press’s power flourished.

Politics, as the young and independent nation navigated self-government, took the forefront. If the first newspaper had interwoven morality with newspapers, the First Amendment sought to release certain fetters, especially those of the government. And although the election process corroborated the press’s powerful agency, America’s founding fathers disagreed over the rules and parameters of the press. Effectively as the press emerged from the party press phase, it escaped “from the clutches of the political creed and party affiliation” and transformed the editor from “the physical realm of printer to the cerebral realm of gatekeeper and knowledgeable

¹⁰⁴ William David Sloan, ed. *The Media in America, A History*, 6th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2005), 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 49.

voice.” Brannon Smith thrived so much in these roles that early in her career she created her own platform and pulpit, a signed editorial column called “Through Hazel Eyes,” and published it alongside the most important news on the front page.

In the decades prior to the Civil War, the penny press added its own form of democratization by making newspapers affordable to everyone.¹⁰⁸ “Reading the newspaper each day became a cultural norm in burgeoning cities throughout the United States, as tens of thousands came to rely upon their daily newspapers for information, instruction, and entertainment. Tens of thousands of rural subscribers also enjoyed the weekly versions of the penny dailies.” These weeklies, not the dailies, were the real precursors of Brannon Smith’s newspapers. For only a short time did she ever work at a daily newspaper, and it had been a weekly when she started. The weekly paper the *Etowah Observer* became the daily *Etowah Times* just a few months before Brannon Smith left to begin her formal study of journalism at The University of Alabama.

Before the penny press’s emergence in 1833 with the launch of Benjamin Day’s *New York Sun*, there really was no such thing as a reporter. Most newspapers were run almost entirely by their owners, who served as editors and publishers. These men were considered printers and tradesmen, not journalists. They were literate of course, but held no specific educational or professional certification or degrees. They just owned printing presses and did what they wanted with them.¹⁰⁹ After Day’s *New York Sun*, the publishers’ content decisions were “based on their intense concern for profits.”¹¹⁰ Advertisements could take up half the paper and appear on the

¹⁰⁸ Susan A. Thompson, “Jennings Bryant: The ‘Compleat’ Scholar,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 50, no. 1 (March 2006), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Kevin Lerner, “The Origins of Journalism Education and its Failure to Emerge as a Professional School, 1869–1912” (paper presented on the Panel for Research Addressing the State of Graduate Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, AEJMC 2008), 5.

¹¹⁰ Susan A. Thompson, “Jennings Bryant: The ‘Compleat’ Scholar,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 50, no. 1 (March 2006), 3.

front page.¹¹¹ And the women's pages existed as much or more for capitalism as for journalism.¹¹² But the newspapers sold more than fashion and Bundt pans. Religion was also a commodity of sorts. Interwoven among news reports were sermons and lectures that espoused religious views, promoted religious thought, and prescribed religious living.

The student newspaper that Brannon Smith would join as a freshman at Alabama also espoused religious principles. In 1933, staff member Carroll Kilgore wrote an editorial for his fellow students:

Above everything else religion offers an opportunity for the individual to correct from within his own small and petty practices and attitudes. It offers the motives and the driving force which we find so lacking in our social order at the present time. It must interest itself in guiding not forcing the individual in an understanding of the right attitude and of a correction from within which will be a guiding influence in his whole thinking and acting both toward his professional and private relationships.¹¹³

Faith for many then was an anchor in the uncertain waters of progress. It kept people from losing their personal and professional moorings as the industrial age ushered in changes at unparalleled speeds. Brannon Smith's *Lexington Advertiser* and the *Durant News* also included regular denominational reports that included attendance and events. Her own column, "Through Hazel Eyes" espoused Christian virtues, especially at Christmas and Easter.

To meet the instant and intense demand of the penny presses, new business practices and technology were embraced. The telegraph was adopted in the 1840s, and new content was introduced in the newspaper. Sports writing, society and religious news, stock market tracking, and lecture reports appeared. The role of watchdog developed with the coverage of social ills and institutions, including the government. Progressivism had arrived.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 203.

¹¹² Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, "Grit Your Teeth, Then Learn to Swear: Women in Journalistic Careers, 1850–1926," *American Journalism*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 55.

¹¹³ Carroll Kilgore, *Crimson-White*, September 6, 1933.

Progressivism

Journalism giant and social commentator Joseph Pulitzer was a product of the Progressive Era. He analyzed the impact of progressivism in the essay “The March of Progress”: “We are embarked, whether we like it or not, upon a revolution in thought and life. Progress is sweeping forward with accelerating force, outstripping in decades the advance of former centuries and millenniums.” Pulitzer supported his claim by noting the increase in circulation of New York morning papers from 18,000 copies at their births 70 years earlier, to over a million copies in 1904, when he published “The March of Progress” in the *North American Review*. “In other words, for every New York newspaper sold in 1833, 140 are sold now to fourteen times as many people,” he wrote. “Where there used to be nearly three families to every newspaper, there are now over three newspaper[s] to every family.” Newspapers were becoming so common place that they were no longer limited to the larger, cosmopolitan areas. “Of course,” Brannon Smith wrote in chapter two of her unpublished memoir, “the daily and weekly newspapers were always in the home.”¹¹⁴

To show how far progress had carried the country, Pulitzer included other details from 1833 for dramatic contrast: the farmer reaped his grain with a scythe and cradle, and threshed it with a flail or under the feet of horses. Blacksmiths made whale-oil lamps and nails. A calico gown was a luxury, and not a single real university existed, nor any great libraries. The best presses required hand-feeding paper, and all the presses at that time would not have been able to print a single edition of a leading New York newspaper of 1904. It was unfathomable that news

¹¹⁴ Personal Papers Bill Minor, Jackson, MS, April 2006.

could be flashed from Tokyo to New York and “printed before it happened,” or that one “could take breakfast in New York and dine in London a week later.” Wireless telegraphy was in its infancy, and “radium is hinting at things unsuspected.” Although the impact of progressivism could not yet be calculated, Pulitzer included newspapers as crucial elements of the equation. He even used an epigram to introduce his essay on progressivism that intimated of a newspaper’s most important job—informing the public: I know but two ways by which society can be governed: the one is by Public Opinion, the other by the Sword.—Macaulay.¹¹⁵

The Bromley Lecture at Yale University in 1908 discussed how the ability to navigate unprecedented change in so short a time period required an “ability to apprehend the correct viewpoint concerning a vital subject . . . the eye of the mind, whose object is truth.” This “correct viewpoint” reflected the notion that “public service” was journalism’s most important objective. Because journalism had been around much longer than “public service,” this objective can be attributed to the Progressive Era and its focus on social service. Throughout Brannon Smith’s professional career, articles, columns, and notes highlighted society and encouraged social service. “Improving the community was foremost in all of Smith’s work,” concluded Judy Teresa Smith in “Magnolia Matriarchs: Six Women’s Contributions to the Community Press in Mississippi.”¹¹⁶ Sometimes her columns did more than *preach* progress. Sometimes they *revealed* progress—her personal progress. When she first began her column, she praised Confederate President Jefferson Davis as an example worthy of praise. Within two decades, she was taking blame—as a Southerner—for President Kennedy’s assassination.

Progressivism was born in the decades following the Civil War, and arose from citizens’

¹¹⁵ Joseph Pulitzer, “The College of Journalism,” *North American Review*, vol. 179, no. 570 (Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, May 1904), 650.

¹¹⁶ Judy Teresa Smith, “Magnolia Matriarchs: Six Women’s Contributions to the Community Press in Mississippi,” (Hattiesburg, MS: University of Southern Mississippi, Doctor of Philosophy in Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, 2001) 206.

dissatisfaction with the late-nineteenth-century big business consolidation of economic and political power.¹¹⁷ It was the period in which the United States moved from isolated, agrarian “islands” to the interconnected, industrial, urban, and transcontinental nation that it would be in the twentieth century.¹¹⁸ Poverty was no longer the rule of the land, and the American Dream was no longer restricted to visions. It was the “end of the first generation in which there were reporters who were employed to seek out news and write about it, and the period just after the sensationalism of the yellow press.”¹¹⁹ Coming to terms with the speed of change required a moral grounding that could stand against the unpredictable tides of materialism, in addition to better, and possibly even higher, education. During this period, Brannon Smith’s family mirrored these changes. Her grandparents relocated from the more rural areas of the Georgia and Tennessee state lines to Alabama City to be closer to the new industrial jobs that were becoming common in similar towns around the country.

In response to concerns over a lack of moral turpitude that could withstand the dizzying impact of progress, many progressives recognized the power of the written word as an “opportunity for reform and empowerment” and sought to develop an advanced curriculum that would train students to be more active readers and writers, to develop skills that would help them to effect change in the world.¹²⁰ One of the movements’ key figures, Wisconsin politician Robert La Follette, who had served as a senator, governor, and also a journalist, recognized the “crucial role of writing experts in the creation of a new society.”¹²¹ Although the link between writing and civic responsibility was not new, the elevation of newspaper writing to responsible citizenship set

¹¹⁷ Ellen Gardiner, “Progressive Politics and the Training of America’s Persuaders,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 93.

¹¹⁸ Kevin Lerner, “The Origins of Journalism Education and its Failure to Emerge as a Professional School, 1869–1912” (paper presented on the Panel for Research Addressing the State of Graduate Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, AEJMC 2008).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁰ Gardiner, 93.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

apart the writing of newspaper articles from the business of newspapers. Staying in business obviously mattered across the board, but the goals of journalism became clearly different from those of advertising. The editor of the *North American Review* suggested the true position of the American press was “foremost among God’s agencies for the uplifting of the American people.”¹²²

The American people in fact, according to the component of the Progressive Era that combined humanism and Protestantism—“the Social gospel”—had a duty to their fellow Americans, who might be lesser privileged. Jacob Dorn characterized an economic theory of the Social gospel: “Labor, starting from an unequal position, was prone to sink steadily downward, thus extending inequality.”¹²³ In the periodical, *Sunday Afternoon: A Magazine for the Household*, launched in 1878, Dorn argued, “the magazine brought the traditional moralism, paternalism, and fear of class polarization of genteel, middle-class American Protestants to its frank treatment of contemporary problems.”¹²⁴ It was the social gospel according to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Bernard Stein that compelled Brannon Smith to write editorials in the face of opposition and bankruptcy, and “defined her as much or more than did her journalistic ethics.”

“Unfortunately no definition of journalism has yet found general acceptance, and none probably could be made that would stand the test of critical analysis,” suggested the *North American Review* in 1908. “To Franklin, the printer, it was a trade; to Bryant, the poet, it was literature; to Greeley, the apostle, it was evangelism; to Raymond, the disputant, it was polemics; to Bennet, the cynic, it was manufacture; to Dana, the satirist, it was an art; to Godkin, the

¹²² “Journalism, Politics, and the University,” *North American Review* vol. 187, no. 6f29 (substance of the Bromley Lecture delivered at Yale University on March 12, 1908), 609.

¹²³ Jacob H. Dorn, “Sunday Afternoon: The Early Social Gospel in Journalism,” *The New England Quarterly* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1971), 250.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

caviler, it was hyper-criticism.”¹²⁵ To many, progressivism’s trend toward education, professionalization and specialization, the “age of specialism had somehow missed journalism, regardless of its definition.”¹²⁶ For Brannon Smith, her five decades as a newspaper woman in Mississippi literally provide volumes of her thoughts on the duties of journalism, but not once does she offer a succinct definition. At the height of the boycott against her newspapers, in a July 4 issue she included Declaration of Independence trivia to support the freedom of the press theme that she hoped would remind readers of the necessity of what she was doing even if they didn’t like what she wrote.

Joseph Pulitzer wrote that the “journalist alone has the privilege of molding the opinion, touching the hearts and appealing to the reason of hundreds of thousands every day. Here is the most fascinating of all professions.”¹²⁷ Yet in 1904, the question of professional status was not completely resolved. Pulitzer, in fact, was hoping if not to settle the debate over journalism as a trade or a professional, to tip the scales toward professionalization with his endowment at Columbia. He did not dispute the practical elements of journalism, having himself been a practitioner for decades, but desired a “sense of professional honor” not unlike membership at West Point that was even as far away from He did not dispute the practical elements of journalism, having himself been a practitioner for decades, but desired a “sense of professional honor” not unlike membership at West Point that was even as far away from the counting room as possible. The *New York Times* responded to Pulitzer's essay: “Doubtless, when journalism is considered as a profession, the intrusion into the teaching of it as journalism as a business . . .

¹²⁵ “Journalism, Politics, and the University,” *North American Review* vol. 187, no. 6f29 (substance of the Bromley Lecture delivered at Yale University on March 12, 1908), (Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, April 1908). 598.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Joseph Pulitzer, “The College of Journalism,” *North American Review*, vol. 179, no. 570 (Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, May 1904), 650.

would be as irrelevant as a like kind of mixture into the case of law, of medicine or divinity.”¹²⁸ By 1913, Dr. Talcott Williams, director of the Columbia school of journalism reported that the school’s first year had a high degree of success. “These students are in the highest sense professional.” Brannon Smith would be born the following year and win the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing fifty years later. Yet almost a century after Williams’s words, Lerner suggested that “unlike medical and law schools with their prescribed course of study and body of common knowledge needed to enter the profession or architects and teachers who require certification, journalism stands apart.”¹²⁹ “Anyone can become a journalist and because a degree is not required, but may confer an added status, an added respectability, it may have the effect similar to the unnecessary but respected MBA.”¹³⁰ The author continued:

Perhaps the idea that journalists should have a specifically required education never really caught on in the way that medical, legal, pedagogical, engineering, architectural, nursing or any number of other professional schools that took during the Progressive Era did, even though there were certainly movements both in the profession and in the academy to make the connection. It almost seems appropriate to think of journalism schools as a kind of failed professional school, since the links between profession and curriculum did not become codified in this fertile period of the development of professional schools.

In many places, the category of profession, occupation, or career didn’t matter. Bills needed paying and where one “got on”—whether the steel or textile mill, the sock or shirt factory, or the daily or weekly paper—didn’t matter as long as it was a job. A regular payday trumped most titles, especially during and after the Great Depression.

In Etowah County, Brannon Smith’s mill town community epitomized America’s

¹²⁸ *New York Times*, May 3, 1904.

¹²⁹ Kevin Lerner, “The Origins of Journalism Education and its Failure to Emerge as a Professional School, 1869–1912” (paper presented on the Panel for Research Addressing the State of Graduate Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, AEJMC 2008).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

industrialization. Her family's middle class status, Southern Baptist standing, and openness to education illustrate the local nature of progressivism. It must be noted that progress for a small town still standing in the shadows of the Civil War and Reconstruction had a Southern component that clung to traditional ways, glorifying the past. Forward progress was not a unanimous goal. Historian Wayne Flynt said it was fear over change destroying the existent hierarchical structure that paralyzed much of the South.¹³¹ Historian Stan Ingersoll compared the hierarchy to dominoes: Once anyone fell out of his or her proper place, the entire set would come tumbling down. Even the layout of mill towns illustrated this. Certain quarters housed certain workers and the lines were drawn according to color as well as class and labor, creating an almost layer-like community. That is except for the owners who weren't a part of the community. They, more often than not, lived in a different state.

For Brannon Smith, to be raised in such a community would have meant the inculcation of similar expectations. Without having had any other "operating system" counter her way of life, she would have entered The University of Alabama with a very provincial perception of community that would have collided with a very academic understanding of society. Having to bridge the resultant schism is one explanation of her paradoxical nature. How else to explain that she could staunchly defend segregation yet become appreciated as a civil rights martyr? This, perhaps, is the single most perplexing question that has been asked about Brannon Smith. Journalist Bernard Stein called her a "crusading scalawag."¹³² Her cousin Max Brannon called her bullheaded.¹³³ And former Presidential Assistant Press Secretary, Hodding Carter, III, said

¹³¹ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1998).

¹³² Bernard L. Stein, "This Female Crusading Scalawag" in *Media Studies Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2000).

¹³³ Max Brannon, Videotaped Interview, June 2006.

she just didn't like to see people treated unfairly.¹³⁴ Perhaps by examining the sub-history of newspapers in the South a more definitive understanding of this paradox will be possible.

¹³⁴ Hodding Carter III, Videotaped Interview, Jackson, MS, April 2006.

Southern Newspapers and Reconstruction

The infamous shot heard around the world fired at Lexington and Concord not only started the Revolutionary War, it set forth a spirit of independence that would spread to the south and flourish in the fertile soil. This independence was a systemic spirit that took root amidst plantations, scrub farmers, and squatters alike through several decades, sprouting a foreboding bloom of state sovereignty. And within a few generations this independent spirit also started another schism—the one that separated, among other things, northern and southern newspapers.

Resources were not equal between the two regions, and because much of the war was fought in the South, chronic shortages of paper, ink, and type meant that some southern editors—out of desperation—resorted to using shoe blacking for ink and printing on the backside of wallpaper. Alone, New York's *Herald* sent more than sixty reporters. All total, southern newspapers and wire services only sent about 100 people to cover the war. The reporters faced impossible tasks and sometimes made up stories if they could not cover them.¹³⁵ The use of pictures created an appetite for more, and immediacy mattered as never before. Writing styles changed, and though technological advances and desperation advanced the newspaper in many ways, the war took an immeasurable toll. Though costly for both sides, the southern press lost half its papers by the war's end. Over five years, the number of southern dailies dropped from 105 to 58 and the number of weeklies decreased from 466 to 266.¹³⁶

The fallout from defeat was not uniform. The loss of family members, the loss of war,

¹³⁵ William David Sloan, ed. *The Media in America, A History*, 6th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2005), 163.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 163.

and the loss of a way of life left many Southerners bitter. Some, however, were ready for something new while others remained righteously entrenched in the past. In Brannon Smith's hometown, there had been nothing civil about the war. If anything, the regular undercurrent of animosity toward outsiders surfaced and seemed to increase—directed almost exponentially at Yankees and carpetbaggers. But something else had flourished within newspapers. Since the same big news came across the wire, the promotion of specialized or “small news” offered the competitive edge. Departmentalization of this news included foreign, city, financial and commercial, books, religion, sports, women, and both housekeeping and humor columns. The gathering of this news required many reporters, but the number of experienced reporters plus the apprentices found through the old back-shop route were not enough.¹³⁷ More would be needed, but from where would they come?

For Robert E. Lee, it seems the answer was reconstruction through education.¹³⁸ Lee took office as president of Washington College in October of 1865 and quickly undertook the business of reshaping the college by attempting to inaugurate an agriculture school under the Morrill Act, a school of Civil and Mining Engineering, a business school, and a program to school young men in printing, or journalism, as their profession.¹³⁹ According to Lerner, although it is notable that Lee was the first to propose education for journalists, his conception of the profession itself was about 35 years behind the times.¹⁴⁰ Though contemporary journalists disdained Lee's attempts, Lerner and others considered them a part of the much larger trend of professionalization.¹⁴¹ Lerner also deemed it odd that Lee, “a cosmopolitan man who had trained

¹³⁷ Ibid, 215.

¹³⁸ Kevin Lerner, “The Origins of Journalism Education and its Failure to Emerge as a Professional School, 1869–1912” (paper presented on the Panel for Research Addressing the State of Graduate Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, AEJMC 2008), 4.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 5.

at West Point” and also served as a superintendent there, was aware that newspapers in the country’s urban centers were changing, yet devised a program that was not future oriented. Some would argue this lack of forward thought kept the South behind and hindered the construction of a New South.

The system Lee devised for Washington College was directed toward his region’s existing newspapers—the small, independent printer-run paper. It was a small, independent newspaper that hired Brannon Smith at 16: the *Etowah Observer*. This, her community’s local weekly, offered Brannon Smith’s first exposure to the business of news and her first taste of success, neither which required formal training. Yet after only a short tenure with the paper, her articles were landing on the front page, and she was making enough in sales to be taken off commission and put on salary. The main credential that a weekly required was willingness to work. And this was not only true in her community; it was also true in any community.

Weeklies

A weekly newspaper, in the simplest terms, is published once a week. Because breaking news was not an option, weeklies included a variety of information that was timely but did not depend on immediacy. Although not always country or rural, the weekly typically focused on a smaller and/or local demographic—a community—with shorter paragraphs aimed at a broader, less educated audience. With 51 percent of the U.S. population still classified as rural before World War I, small newspapers played vital roles in their communities by serving as boosters and bulletin boards as well as giving a political voice.¹⁴² Communities could be counties and towns, or groups with commonalities such as labor organizations, political or religious affiliation, or even specific hobbies.¹⁴³

In her thesis, Margaret Maree described the small town newspaper as a beacon illuminating local government, suggesting the idea that newspapers shaped public opinion. However, she titled her thesis *A Newspaper Mirrors Its Community*, an apt parallel to the transformation that occurred after the Civil War—newspapers reflected their societies, mirrored their communities and became voices for, not just to, the communities.

Willey and Weinfeld, in what they claim as the first analysis of trends and numbers for community journalism, considered the country weekly an important social institution within local communities. They charted, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, a gradual decline that from 1915 to 1930 exceeded 20 percent. Over the thirty-year period,

¹⁴² William David Sloan, ed. *The Media in America, A History*, 6th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2005), 291.

¹⁴³ Thompson, *The Penny Press*, 2; Susan Holly, “Women in Management of Weeklies,” *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter 1979), 810; William David Sloan, ed. *The Media in America, A History*, 6th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2005), 284.

weeklies dropped in number from 167 to 126 in Alabama and from 11,310 to 9,532 across the country. Willey and Weinfeld's number differs from Sloan's 1910 estimation¹⁴⁴ of weeklies being 14,000, because they included only papers in populations of 15,000 or less. During this time period, weeklies were not alone in decline. Dailies also declined, Willey and Weinfeld suggested, due to a cultural trend from multiple to "one-paper places," but one form of competition.¹⁴⁵ Numbers, however, were never the strength of weeklies.

Something else propelled the community paper to the importance as seen in its spread. The weekly newspaper was the first form of journalism to adapt to an expanding democratic society. The flatbed press, not much changed since Gutenberg's time, was ideal for the frontier. Loaded onto a wagon or boat, set up in a tent or under a tree, the press became one of the earliest marks of community, both purveying news and boosting the town. Cincinnati got its first newspaper in 1793 when it had fewer than 500 citizens. The first newspaper west of the Mississippi came to St. Louis in 1808 when the population was less than 1,500. Leavenworth, Kansas, had a newspaper in 1854 when the town consisted of four tents.¹⁴⁶

The overall circulation of daily newspapers was steadily growing and so strong that the average household received more than one paper. But the overall number of newspapers had been diminishing from the prewar years. In 1947 there were 1,769 dailies, down from 1,983 a decade earlier. The men who were ascending to the level of publisher were links in corporate chains, with few ties to the community. They had little or no journalism background.¹⁴⁷

Therefore their journalistic ethics were not shaped by universities or progressive creeds. But that

¹⁴⁴ William David Sloan, ed. *The Media in America, A History*, 6th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2005), 284.

¹⁴⁵ William Weinfeld and Malcolm M. Willey, "The Country Weekly: Trends in Numbers and Distribution, 1900–1930," *Social Forces*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, October 1934–May, 1935), 51–56.

¹⁴⁶ Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, "Magazines and Newspapers," *Reader's Companion to American History* (Publication Date: Dec. 1, 1991, Orlando, FL: Houghton Mifflin, December 1, 1991).

¹⁴⁷ Hank Klibanoff and Gene Roberts, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, And The Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, December 2007), 31.

did not mean that all weeklies were interested in only the bottom line. The financial aspects mattered otherwise they wouldn't stay in business, but some, like the Etowah Observer, touted their motto along with their banner: "FOR ALABAMA FIRST, ETOWAH COUNTY NEXT, THEN THE STATE, THEN THE NATION."

The Etowah Observer

Since Brannon Smith was only 16 when she graduated Gadsden High, her parents said she was too young to go off to college. Being the eldest and female, it was expected that she would continue to help her mother with domestic duties that included caring for her younger stair-step siblings. College was also expensive and mysterious. None of her family had gone. So while she waited to turn 18, she worked at a local weekly newspaper, the *Etowah Observer*. According to issues from 1929, the paper was published by A.B. Cargile and Beulah Jay Cargile. The masthead lists A.B. as “Editor and Manager” and Beulah Jay as “Sec. and Treas.” It also included the \$1.50 yearly subscription rate; the March 3, 1879 ACT that allowed it to be mailed sans postage as second-class matter; that it was published “every Thursday at 200 Sixth Street, Alabama City, Ala. by the Observer Publishing Company;” and the telephone number: 1473-W. Biographer John Whalen offered this account of Brannon Smith’s job at the weekly:

She went job hunting and landed a spot on the staff of the weekly *Etowah Observer* there in Alabama City. For the first three weeks Brannon Smith wrote personals, society and other news items at \$1 a column. Then, she was promoted to the front-page material. Some time later, the banker who backed the paper told the editor that Brannon Smith was being wasted on news—that she should be selling advertising. “Anyone can write,” he philosophized. Brannon Smith was so successful as an ad salesperson, receiving a 10 percent commission, that she was put on a regular weekly salary, partly as an economy measure. She was also given the task of keeping the company’s books.¹⁴⁸

The sixteen-year-old Brannon Smith entered the working world during the Depression to discover that she could make lots of money at a time so many had none.

¹⁴⁸ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 24.

She also discovered the utility of a single editorial column beneath the masthead. Like most editorials, the April 17 issue's editorial column did not have a byline and represented the paper's opinion, but it adopted a personal tone that was different from its regular articles. Though Brannon Smith would pen her editorial column beneath her banner, she would use a personal tone to express her opinions in the column. The April 17 issue of the *Etowah Observer* column asked to be excused for not coming out "in our usual positive way on one side" of the Commissioner v. Board of Revenue question. The column further indicated that the reason no side was taken was that not enough information existed. Because the column ends with a quote from an "An ancient philosopher": "Give the people light, and they will find their way home," the apology indicates the paper felt it had fallen short in its duty to inform the public. Just below the ancient philosopher's quote occurred a dose of scolding and the command to pay poll taxes, "this little price for the privilege of the electorate—that cost the blood and lives of our forefathers—well—we just don't understand it."¹⁴⁹ The publisher's passion regarding the cost of democracy and voting would not have been missed by Brannon Smith. Even though small and a weekly, the *Etowah Observer* stated its mission to inform, scold, and uphold democratic principles. It also typified a weekly newspaper in many ways: it was a small, family business, community focused, and less prestigious than a daily newspaper.

While not all historians agree, Bowman suggested that many weekly newspaper jobs were left to women because men did not consider them "worthy of their efforts."¹⁵⁰ But other scholars take the position that not all weeklies were considered unworthy. Brannon Smith bought her first two weeklies from men. But it was also suggested that she made the first purchase because it was the only thing she could afford, and because she would not have to compete or

¹⁴⁹ *Etowah Observer*, April 17, 1932.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Holly, "Women in Management of Weeklies," *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter 1979), 810.

take orders from others as she would have had to if she'd gone to work for a metropolitan paper, especially a daily. Perhaps if Brannon Smith had worked at a larger newspaper first or at a daily, she would not have bought small weeklies. But her first experience had been at the *Etowah Observer* and she had seen first hand that a small rural paper could be the critical provider of news and information for an area.

The *Etowah Observer's* 1932 issue also offers insight into the content choices and provides a little community flavor. It focused largely on local news and included obituaries among economic and community information and commentary on the Eighteenth Amendment: "Plans hurried for homes in Goodyear Village; News Notes Caught as we go to press; Banks of Gadsden District Make a Remarkable Showing; Community Sing at Boaz Sunday; People's views on remedy for violation: Opinions on the Eighteenth Amendment; Mrs. Annie Dunn Dead; Alabama City Boy on High Honor Roll; State Treasury Shows Balance." Additional local flavor is found in the reported results and in comments gathered from a prohibition enforcement prize. "There are at least 147 Americans who believe a person should be executed for violating the eighteenth amendment," the article noted. It also listed additional ways to enforce prohibition: "make violation treason, banish poverty, Christianize the nation, use the army and navy, and make home brewing a crime."¹⁵¹

It's been widely noted that Brannon Smith started writing for newspapers at the *Etowah Observer*, but it has not yet been noted that she became a section editor or ended her hometown journalism under a different banner: the *Daily Observer*. When she left for college in 1932 to begin studying journalism at The University of Alabama, gone were the two Cargiles who ran the paper's earlier incarnation as a weekly. In their place were now R.E. Cunningham, Publisher; A. Moore, General Manager; Gordon H. Gauss, Editor; and Walter H. Goan, Superintendent. The

¹⁵¹ *Etowah Observer*, April 1932.

new masthead read: “An Independent Newspaper Published Every Day Except Sunday, at 405 Kyle Avenue, Alabama City, Alabama.” The motto proclaimed: “Serving the Tri-City Industrial District of Gadsden, Alabama City and Attala.” To the right was the price: “3 CENTS Per Copy; By Carrier 10¢ PER WEEK.”

In addition to gaining experience in sales and reporting, Brannon Smith had become an editor by the age of 18. Weeklies may have been considered second class and thus the territory of women, but they did at least have men in the ranks. Some areas of newspapers, such as society pages, did not. They were the express provinces of women; no self-respecting man would want his byline there. And the section created to appease the appetites of women readers—the woman’s section—gave women their own space, kind of a theoretical separate-but-equal section that propagated the masculine/feminine axis on which society turned.

According to the April 17, 1932 *Daily Observer* issue, Brannon Smith had become—at the age of 18—Society Editor for the weekly. Nowhere was this related in any of the research. Assuming her first paid editorship as a teenager is not only noteworthy, this fact also suggests something about Brannon Smith’s youthful ambition and the depth, or lack thereof, of the research related to her to date. She was only 18, yet responsible for an entire section of a daily newspaper in a growing town. This fact must not go unnoticed.¹⁵²

“Society Editor” is listed under two separate sections on the same page: “Alabama City Social News” and “Gadsden Social News.” Following the title of Society Editor is Brannon Smith’s name, preceded by another title of sorts: “Miss.” The staff at her newspapers later called her “Miss Hazel.”

Journalistic orthodoxy still demanded that the newspapers unfailingly refer to white women as “Miss” or “Mrs.” but drop the title when referring to Negro women, no matter what

¹⁵² *Daily Observer*, April 17, 1932, microfilm (Auburn, AL: Auburn University Libraries).

their station in life. The practice, which had its origins in slavery and had changed little in the years since the Civil War was not limited to newspapers, which reflected and perpetuated the custom. The practice of sourcing in newspaper history sheds further light on the historical role of men vs. women and even more about the role of white citizen vs. black citizen. In the Pulitzer Prize winning account of the South, the press, and civil rights, “The Race Beat: The Press, the civil Rights struggle and the Awakening of a Nation,” the authors write:

A Mississippi rookie reporter asked if a crime victim was a Miss or Mrs. “It ain’t either one, the detective blurted out. “Its a damn nigger.” On second reference, a negro woman would traditionally be referred to by her last name as in “the Jones woman.” There was ongoing debate among some newspapers in the late 40’s and early 50’s over whether they should print the word “Negro” with an uppercase, a convention that Negro newspapers at the instigation of the *The Crisis Magazine*, had been advocating since WWI.”¹⁵³

Regardless of the significance of Brannon Smith’s title, her first editorial position held significance of another kind. As society editor she was not responsible for or concerned with the hard news. Her focus included parties: “Eastern Star Ladies To Have Party; Misses Nears Entertain Happy Go-Lucky Club; Methodist Class enjoys Party,” church: “East Gadsden Baptist Give Program Sunday,” school: “Etowah P.T.A. Meets Wednesday,” and arts: “One-Act Play Given Thursday.”¹⁵⁴ Kept separate, this section highlighted service features and echoed the Victorian idea that women belonged at home. Although lucrative because it was an advertiser’s haven, it undercut journalistic integrity. Brannon Smith even reported when she and a male went to visit his parents in Tennessee. Also, tucked within the brief mentions are two that hint of her interest outside the expected, boundaries of what society considered respectable: “Business women Meet” and “Fortune Teller Killed.” Dr. Lola Taylor, state president of the Business and

¹⁵³ Hank Kilbanoff and Gene Roberts, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, And The Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, December 2007), 55.

¹⁵⁴ From *Women In Journalism* “Women’s Pages: Special sections designed to appeal to women’s interests” page 702.

Professional Women's Club presided over the Gadsden meeting. This meant that Brannon Smith had been exposed to professional women with career goals. The other headline shows that she worked within the journalistic orthodoxy of the time by noting race: "David Wonder, 35, negro fortune teller was run over and killed by an automobile behind the steel Plant Saturday night. The car did not stop."¹⁵⁵

If omens exist, or wonder could speak, this last story might do more than inform. Here, tucked away in Brannon Smith's Society Section in a mere two sentences, this murder eerily foreshadows the events of the fateful Saturday night to come that would turn the tides against Brannon Smith and eventually lead to her bankruptcy. As in the *Etowah Observer's* story there would be violence. There would also be a black man who suffered. And there would be Brannon Smith, pen in hand, a reporter charged with writing the story.

Thirty years later, in 1953, her decision to write the controversial story would be considered a fateful choice, the defining moment of her career.¹⁵⁶ I suggest, however fateful it was, it was less a choice than it was a habit. After all, it was not her first time to report something of this nature. Such stories had always been around, and she had been writing them—even if in the society section—for more than three decades.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Hazel Brannon, "Negro Man Shot In Leg Saturday Night In Tchula: Witness Reports He Was Told To "Get Goin,'" by Holmes County Sheriff, *Lexington Advertiser*, July 7, 1953.

A Fine Breeding Ground for Paradox

Consonant with this habit were perhaps an uncommon dose of guts and stubbornness—characteristics attributed to the South’s backward ways as well as survival—characteristics supposedly inherent in Brannon Smith. Though the “Culture of Place” and “Culture of Journalism” clashed along various points, there were perhaps shared attributes that defied logic to create paradox. Perhaps it also bequeathed courage to face uneven odds. In his article, “Who has guts?” journalist James Boylan defines journalism as “resisting legal and physical threats on one’s native ground,” telling “disquieting news to the world of the comfortable,” and offering “audiences what they do not necessarily want to hear” to the point of becoming a dissident.¹⁵⁷ Though Boylan's terms are androgynous, gender, according to journalist Barbara Cochran, may have played a part in Brannon Smith’s courage. “Maybe a woman could say some things then that a man couldn’t.”¹⁵⁸

Few women after the Civil War were saying much of anything in newspapers, according to the Census Report in 1870. In that year, a category for women who made their living as journalists was established. The first year it contained only thirty-five persons, 0.6 percent of all working journalists. Twenty years later the percentage had increased to four percent, a gain of enough significance that the trade magazine *The Journalist* devoted an issue to profiles of fifty important women journalists.¹⁵⁹ By 1900, the U.S. Census reported that women journalists

¹⁵⁷ James Boylan, “Who has guts?” *Courage Media Studies Journals*, (Spring/Summer, 2000), <http://www.freedomforum.org/publications/msj/courage.summer2000/contents.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara Cochran, videotaped interview, .

¹⁵⁹ Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, “Grit Your Teeth, Then Learn to Swear: Women in Journalistic Careers, 1850–1926,” *American Journalism*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 54.

numbered 2,193. “By the early twentieth century, enough women were employed as journalists in the United States to see themselves as a category—albeit a minority group in a profession still widely acknowledged as male.”¹⁶⁰ When Genevieve Jackson Boughner's book *Women in Journalism: A Guide to the Opportunities and a Manual of the Technique of Women's Work for Newspapers and Magazines* came out in 1926, it codified women's position in the profession.

The second research question inquired about the state of journalism during Brannon Smith's time. Journalism's culture in the new century sported two indissoluble elements: a “newly-won professionalism” and women. Both elements were integral aspects of The University of Alabama's new journalism program when Brannon Smith enrolled in 1932. Just as the culture of journalism in general offered contextual understanding of her career path, a look at the culture of journalism education will provide a more specific look at the realm surrounding her student journalism and suggest ways it impacted her work.

¹⁶⁰ Linda Steiner, “Gender at Work: Early Accounts by Women Journalists” *Journalism History* vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 4–5.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURE OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION

By the time Brannon Smith enrolled at The University of Alabama in 1932, the debate over the “professionalization” of journalism had quieted, but in its wake was a new question: “What would be the best, new route for would-be journalists?” Now that journalism was more than a trade, the traditional apprenticeship-path no longer sufficed. But it was unclear what would take its place, what the new course should look like, and to what degree—amidst an ever-increasing intellectual focus—the vestiges of craft and technique should remain. Even without any kind of final consensus, however, the culture of journalism had already begun to take shape, led by three journalism schools: Missouri, Wisconsin, and Columbia.¹⁶¹ Collectively the imprimatur of each was melding into a national discipline of journalism education that would, in turn, serve as the basis for the course of study for journalism majors at The University of Alabama. Therefore, Brannon Smith was one of the earliest products of this journalism education culture.

Evidence of the proliferation of journalism education could also be seen as various conferences, gatherings, and workshops were designed to advance the profession outside of the formal setting of a university. By the end of the nineteenth century, National and State Press Associations also became popular. For Brannon Smith, these groups were significant not just for what she learned, but also for what she contributed. A letter from Floyd Taylor, director of the

¹⁶¹ Schools of Journalism,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1934.

American Press Institute, April 23, 1948, asked her “advice” on holding a seminar for editors of weeklies. He explained that the Institute was founded by thirty-eight publishers, among them Joseph Pulitzer, Marshall Field, Arthur Sulzberger, W. E. Scripps, and Guy P. Gannett. “Our seminars for men from dailies have had excellent results and it might be that a seminar for editors from weeklies would be equally valuable,” he said. Taylor also listed his expectations:

That editors of weeklies would want to discuss the special problems of their field with men who have been successful in meeting such problems, that they would want to hear men with provocative ideas about weeklies, that they would desire discussions and demonstrations of new methods of engraving and printing, that they would be especially interested in costs, methods of clear writing, readership surveys, typography and make-up and organization of the week's work. They might want discussions of advertising, circulation and bookkeeping. It is possible that they would want information sessions to give background for editorial writing.¹⁶²

The seminar, a forerunner to the Neiman Fellowships at Harvard, would start in September and be either two or three weeks long. But because the living arrangements were based on “the theory that all the seminar members would be men, and a good many women are editors of publishers of weeklies,” Taylor said, “we might be able to make new plans to provide for them by persuading the manager of the women’s residence halls to let us have a few rooms.” Taylor closed, “I would be most obliged if you would indicate on the enclosed blank whether your paper would be interested . . . please give me your suggestions on the program, including its length.”¹⁶³ Although there is no documentation, it seems likely she would have responded that women were worth the “new planning” based on a later press release from the National Federation of Press Women that quoted her as saying:

¹⁶² Letter to Hazel Brannon Smith, April 23, 1948.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

The Declaration of Independence didn't specifically include slaves or women . . . and women still aren't free. . . . More opportunities are available through the work of NFPW members. We must make certain that more opportunities are open to the young women coming out of high school and college, providing they have the desire the ability, and dedication to do the work. The world needs all the talent, dedication and education it can get.¹⁶⁴

Brannon Smith's actions, not just her words, showed her sincerity. One example occurred when she and fellow female journalist Mary Cain desired to associate with journalists like themselves, but there was not an organization that reflected who they were. The Mississippi Press Association was predominantly male. So they had to stake out their own press association territory by co-founding the Mississippi Women's Press Association Women. In many ways, their action paralleled the way women had staked out territory within newspapers themselves: the creation and maintenance of "women's pages." Because the Jim Crow mentality of "separate but equal" was interwoven so tightly within a culture that also expected separate spheres for men and women, claiming territory—not equality—was progress. This was also a form of learning: learning-by-doing.

The impact of The University of Alabama's journalism program, as Brannon Smith's sole formal educational experience, is inestimable. However, gauging its influence is possible. By tracing the influences on the national development of the journalism education culture that emerged during the Progressive Era, a better understanding of how Brannon Smith was shaped as a journalist becomes possible.

The Progressive Era's influence incorporated "muckraking"—coined by President Roosevelt in reference to nosy journalists who sought to dig and stir stuff up—as not only morally important but also democratic. This era also re-emphasized the role of universities. The

¹⁶⁴ NFPW Press Room, Biloxi, Mississippi, June 2, 1977.

far-distant days when universities aimed at exclusively training ministers had been replaced with more democratic times that valued education for individual betterment as well as for occupational placement. “Progressive educators such as John Dewey, Newman Scott, and Sterling Leonard all wished to change the passive curriculum of drill and memorization to one that would create informed citizens who could read the latest research, study candidates, and interact locally to insure progress.”¹⁶⁵ Even so, Brian Thornton suggested in his examination of “Perceptions of professionalism between muckraking journalists and their readers” that it “can be argued that by the time of the muckraking era (1902) journalists were starting to have professional values of their own, values distinctly different from non-journalists.” According to Thornton, this gap could be linked with this new sense of professionalism and a “perceived province in the formation and voicing of public opinion.” He offered another possibility: growing divergence of their backgrounds. In 1902, according to federal census figures 6.3 percent of the general population graduated from high school. More than half of the 400 leading muckraking journalists had college degrees and engaged in some graduate work, and the rest had at least two years of college training. Peter Neil Barry undertook a similar study of the background of the same journalists of the time and found that half the reporters with a college education attended Yale, Harvard, or Princeton.¹⁶⁶ Journalism was, for some, very ivy league.

A college degree, however, was not necessarily a journalism degree. The first attempt at a journalistic curriculum had failed.¹⁶⁷ And though sixty-three years would pass before Brannon Smith would enter The University of Alabama, the program had only been in existence for three

¹⁶⁵ Katherine Adams, *Progressive Politics and the Training of America's Persuaders*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 1999.

¹⁶⁶ Brian Thornton, “Muckraking Journalists and their readers: Perceptions of professionalism.” *Journalism History*, vol. 21, no.1 (Spring 1995), 29.

¹⁶⁷ Joseph A Mirando, “The First College Journalism Students: Answering Robert E. Lee's Offer Of A Higher Education, Paper presented at the national convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, History Division, Washington, D.C. 9–12 August 1995.

years. Journalism historian Robert Sobel may have written that by the late 1800s, the editor “took his place alongside the clergyman and doctor as a leading citizen and respected figure,” which signified an arrival of sorts, but agreement over the best path was not collective.

University of Chicago president Robert M. Hutchins said to the Inland Daily Press Association, “The shadiest educational ventures under respectable auspices are the schools of journalism.”¹⁶⁸

Shady or not, The University of Alabama’s president Denny had inaugurated the first journalism program; and when Brannon Smith graduated with a major in journalism, she was part of the third entering-class to do so.

¹⁶⁸ Robert M. Hutchins, *The Modern Language Journal* (USA: John Wiley and Sons, 1938) 640.

Leading the Way: Missouri, Wisconsin, and Columbia

Considered to house the first lasting school of journalism, the University of Missouri is also credited with housing the Journalist's Creed, the profession's belief statement written by founding dean, Walter Williams, in 1914. One century later, his declaration is still considered to be one of the clearest statements of the principles, values, and standards of journalists throughout the world.¹⁶⁹ The progressive language is illustrated in this excerpt:

Journalist's Creed

I believe in the profession of journalism.

I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

I believe that clear thinking and clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism.

I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true.

I believe that suppression of the news, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, is indefensible.

I believe that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman; that bribery by one's own pocketbook is as much to be avoided as bribery by the pocketbook of another; that individual responsibility may not be escaped by pleading another's instructions or another's dividends.

I believe that advertising, news and editorial columns should alike serve the best interests of readers; that a single standard of helpful truth and cleanness should prevail for all; that the supreme test of good journalism is the measure of its public service.

I believe that the journalism which succeeds best—and best deserves success—fears God and honors Man; is stoutly independent, unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power, constructive, tolerant but never careless, self-controlled, patient,

¹⁶⁹ "Journalist's Creed," Missouri School of Journalism, <http://journalism.missouri.edu/about/creed.html>.

always respectful of its readers but always unafraid, is quickly indignant at injustice; is unswayed by the appeal of privilege or the clamor of the mob; seeks to give every man a chance and, as far as law and honest wage and recognition of human brotherhood can make it so, an equal chance; is profoundly patriotic while sincerely promoting international good will and cementing world-comradeship; is a journalism of humanity, of and for today's world.¹⁷⁰

The University of Missouri may have been the first lasting school of journalism, but the University of Wisconsin was first to promote journalism education. Willard Bleyer, the first director of its journalism education program, agreed with the tenets of the creed, especially the first one that deemed journalism a profession, but he thought something else important. The journalism instructors ought to be professionals in their own right. Being a good journalist did not one make one a good journalism teacher. In one of the few articles of the time that addressed this topic, "Training for Journalism Teachers," Earl Vance wrote, "the practical newspaper man has some serious limitations as a teacher."¹⁷¹ Vance continued by saying, "My own idea of what this training should be at the present time is a course in a liberal arts college with emphasis mainly upon its broadening aspects, the aim being to familiarize the student with the theories, terminology, and methods of as many fields as possible."¹⁷²

It was the very same concept that Willard Bleyer employed as he inaugurated Wisconsin's program. From 1904 when Bleyer taught a non-credit course on Law and the Press to 1912 when it became a department, to 1927 when it became a school, Bleyer's influence remained constant.¹⁷³ Under his leadership, journalism education would introduce the student to important fields of knowledge while still providing sufficient practical training so that students

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Earl L. Vance, "Training for Journalism Teachers," *The English Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9 (November 1930), 740.

¹⁷² Ibid, 742.

¹⁷³ Taken from the School of Journalism & Mass Communication, s.v. "History" (University of Wisconsin-Madison) <http://www.journalism.wisc.edu/pages/history>.

could apply what they had learned.¹⁷⁴ He also emphasized the need “to protect society and government against immature, half-educated, unscrupulous journalists”¹⁷⁵ and to condemn “news and editorial policies designed merely to advance the personal, political, or class interests of publishers.”¹⁷⁶ Williams concurred but emphasized the practical side. Missouri established a daily newspaper to provide students with the opportunity to actually practice what they were learning in the classroom.¹⁷⁷

Over the next few years, leading educators returned repeatedly to this theme of the practical combined with the theoretical, urging colleagues to experiment with new methods and concepts for teaching. Bleyer also supported educators who stressed the importance of informative reporting in a democracy and who advocated social science and humanities approaches for journalism professors and students.¹⁷⁸

A shift was already underway at some schools to ground journalism study in the social sciences. Dean Eric W. Allen at the University of Oregon, for example, warned that journalism schools would fail unless they went beyond technical training to inculcate broader concepts. The goal should be to produce a graduate who had “the habit of keeping up with the authentic progress of the best current thought and actually applying the most enlightened conception of social science to his work as a reporter and as an editor.”¹⁷⁹ Bleyer also promoted socially

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey A. Smith, “Fredrick Siebert’s Absolute, Adjustable First Amendment,” *Communication Law and Policy*, (Autumn 2002), 386.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁷⁷ See also: Aaron Nathans, “UW Journalism School Turns 100; Profession’s Best to Lecture [All Edition].” *Madison Capital Times*, April 29, 2005, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed October 19, 2009). Jeffrey A. Smith, “Fredrick Siebert’s Absolute, Adjustable First Amendment,” *Communication Law and Policy*, (Autumn 2002), 22.

¹⁷⁸ Jeffrey A. Smith, “Fredrick Siebert’s Absolute, Adjustable First Amendment,” *Communication Law and Policy*, (Autumn 2002), 390.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 394.

responsible press behavior and hoped to bring more respectability to the study of journalism.¹⁸⁰

He criticized monopolistic media and called for organizations that would establish high professional standards.¹⁸¹

It was criticism that led Joseph Pulitzer to respond in the *North American Review* in May of 1904 with an essay: “The College of Journalism: A Review of criticisms and objections—reflections upon the power, the progress and the prejudices of the Press—Why Specialized Concentration and Education at College Would Improve the Character and Work of Journalists and so Promote the Welfare of the Republic.” He had just founded and endowed Columbia University’s College of Journalism.¹⁸² And few journalists embraced journalism schools wholeheartedly. Horace White in the January issue of NAR had said that he “could see no need of a School of Journalism” and “that the university has nothing to teach journalists in the special sense that it has to teach lawyers, physicians, architects and engineers. It can teach the technique of those professions. It cannot teach the technique of journalism, except by publishing a newspaper.”¹⁸³ This hands-on element was echoed three decades later when the *Modern Language Journal* published an excerpt from Robert Hutchins’ speech: “The best preparation for journalism is a good education. Journalism itself can be learned, if at all, only by being a journalist.”¹⁸⁴

White, to support his claim, posited that there were differences of scent “between trained newspaper men as marked as between different breeds of dogs, and the demand for journalists who are both highly gifted and highly trained in this particular is great and increasing; but such

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 391.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 390.

¹⁸² Horace White, “The School of Journalism,” *North American Review*, vol. 178, no. 1 (January 1904), 25.

¹⁸³ Joseph Pulitzer, “The College of Journalism,” *North American Review*, vol. 179, no. 570 (Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, May 1904).

¹⁸⁴ Robert Hutchins, *Modern Language Journal*, (USA: John Wiley and Sons), 1938, 640.

men have never been made at college, and never will.”¹⁸⁵ White opined that what journalists needed was already being taught at every university: the fundamentals to make “Mr. So-and-So a gentleman and a scholar.”¹⁸⁶ He concluded by saying, “To make good journalists is not difficult. The raw material abounds and the tools are not deficient. But to do noble work of preparation they must see a field of labor worthy of noble minds. Show them an arena where the highest merit will win the highest prize, as in law, medicine and engineering, and the arena will soon be vocal with *gaudium certaminis*.”¹⁸⁷

Joseph Pulitzer, when invited to respond to critics of his new journalism school, elaborated why journalism education was important. On the second page with regard to natural aptitude—or the idea that a newspaper man must be “born not made”—Pulitzer replied that the only position “which a man in our Republic can successfully fill by the simple fact of birth is that of an idiot.” He allowed that the course of study remained uncertain¹⁸⁸ but not the study itself. He’d first mentioned the idea to Columbia University President Low twelve years earlier and had wanted to implement it¹⁸⁹ in hopes that the College would raise the standard of the editorial profession.¹⁹⁰

All three schools—Missouri, Wisconsin, and Columbia—were committed to improving newspapers and journalism; their implementations, however, differed. Missouri privileged the practical, hands-on element seen in its newspaper. Wisconsin favored a more cerebral approach and Columbia fell between. But it wasn’t just colleges that were grappling with journalism education. This thing called journalism education was infecting schools earlier and earlier. In

¹⁸⁵ Horace White, “The School of Journalism,” *North American Review*, vol. 178, no. 1 (January 1904), 26.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph Pulitzer, “The College of Journalism,” *North American Review*, vol. 179, no. 570 (Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, May 1904), 656.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 642.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 656.

1928 it had infected more than a thousand high schools, according to Grant Hyde in “The High School Teacher of Journalism,” 1928.¹⁹¹ But Hyde did not consider the beginning stages actual journalism and disagreed with classifying it as such. He said quite simply that it “should not be called ‘journalism.’” According to Hyde, the word signified the “kind of professional training now being developed in the universities,”¹⁹² and such training was impossible to accomplish within a high school environment. “Any high-school course that encourages a boy to enter newspaper work without further education is not fair to the boy; it is pitching him into a blind alley.” Hyde went on to discuss the instability and chaos of high school journalism, pointing out that it sprang up almost overnight and that it “had only half a dozen textbooks of its own and is borrowing books that are entirely unsuitable.”¹⁹³

This debate would continue; and a half century later in 1976, University of Arkansas's Clifton O. Lawhorne would assert that journalism education was still lacking, especially in the opinion of community editors and publishers. “Many editors of small dailies and weeklies seeking talented young men and women in journalism schools and departments are expressing dismay at what they find. More frequently than perhaps is realized they are questioning journalism education.”¹⁹⁴ Yet during the first two decades of the twentieth century, journalism curricula were being introduced to American universities.¹⁹⁵ Journalism’s professional identity was blossoming.¹⁹⁶ Seemingly, such a burgeoning field would attract a flood of textbooks; however, without the slew of traditional academics, a shortfall existed instead. Most journalists were busy meeting deadlines and not focused on academic publications. “The practical man,”

¹⁹¹ “The High School Teacher of Journalism,” *The English Journal*, vol. 17 (November 1928), 714–715.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 715–716.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 718.

¹⁹⁴ *Journalism Educator* (April 1976), 3.

¹⁹⁵ Randall Sumpter, “Core Knowledge: Early Reporting Textbooks and the Formation of Professional Identity,” *Journalism History*, 35:1 (Spring 2009), 42.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

according to Earl Vance in “Training for Journalism Teachers,” 1930, “has some serious limitations as a teacher. In the first place, he is likely to be mediocre. If he is genuinely successful as a newspaper man the consequent promotions will keep him in that field.”¹⁹⁷

In popular college journalism textbooks published from 1903 to 1917, authors grappled with how best to instruct students, how to combine the art of writing with the physics of printing, and the business of reporting with the math of profitability—all without a single scientific formula. Despite the challenges, an analysis of six popular textbooks by Sumpter found that “dogmatic rules and direction” were useless and that the point of greatest difficulty in handling a story “lies in the choice of a proper and effectively worded lead” that would draw the attention of a busy reader.¹⁹⁸ All six texts had a chapter on how to structure a news story, but only Bleyer’s textbook included a chapter on what would become the crux of UA’s journalism program—the press’s function in a democracy, and only two devoted chapters to the category in which Hazel would win the Pulitzer Prize—editorial writing.

A study based on the interpretive analysis of 309 news reporting and writing textbooks published between 1867 and 1997 examined ethics education in journalism programs. The study started with the year 1867 because a book “published that year could have been considered up-to-date and readily available” to students enrolled in America’s first-ever college course in journalism, offered in 1869 at Washington College, known today as Washington and Lee University. The study found that most journalism educators “believe it is pedagogically more sound to treat ethical issues as they arise in the classroom. . . . They insist that students should

¹⁹⁷ Earl Vance, “Training for Journalism Teachers” *English Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9 (November 1930), 740.

¹⁹⁸ Randall Sumpter, “Core Knowledge: Early Reporting Textbooks and the Formation of Professional Identity,” *Journalism History*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 44.

encounter such issues throughout the curriculum during the entire semester”¹⁹⁹ in a survey based on 274 institutions, showed that most schools were without a separate ethics course, but not one school doubted the need for ethics instruction, and most treated ethical issues as they arose.

The number treating or attempting to treat such issues was increasing. In twenty years, from 1910–1930, the number of journalism teachers jumped from less than a dozen to 690. It represents a growth in the history of American education that was unparalleled then as well now,²⁰⁰ and also “coincided with the late nineteenth-century development of the modern American university. This change in university education reflected a ‘culture of professionalism’ that swept the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”²⁰¹ Vance cited Professor Clarence E. Cason’s thesis that journalism should cease being regarded as a professional course for newspaper workers, except in the four or five larger schools of journalism. In others, Cason believed, the work should be of a broad, cultural nature.”²⁰²

University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Finance and Commerce gave a comprehensive answer to the question of the college man’s standing in journalism. Perhaps the most important fact brought out in the research was that 52 percent of the men comprising editorial staffs of American city newspaper in 1927 were college and university graduates.²⁰³ “Twenty-five years ago college men in journalism numbered but nine percent. There must be reasons for such a condition,” the survey stated, and it sought to find them. The study also wanted to determine whether the college man was given preference over others in the newspaper field, the quality of the work he was doing, the opportunities he was given, and whether in the

¹⁹⁹ Christians, Clifford G. and Edmund B. Lambeth, “The status of ethics instruction in communication departments. *Communication Education*” vol. 45, no. 3 (1996), 236–243.

²⁰⁰ Earl L. Vance, “Training for Journalism Teachers,” *The English Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9 (November 1930), 738.

²⁰¹ Randall Sumpter, “Core Knowledge: Early Reporting Textbooks and the Formation of Professional Identity,” *Journalism History*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 43.

²⁰² Earl L. Vance, “Training for Journalism Teachers,” *The English Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9 (November 1930), 744.

²⁰³ *Miami News*, June 19, 1927.

final analysis if his college training served as an asset or a liability for working in the newspaper industry.

Seventy newspapers from thirty-one states with a total circulation of 5,645,974 were canvassed in the survey. Of 340 men employed in executive capacities, 218 were college men. Among managing editors, the proportion of college men was 68 percent; chief editorial writers, 77 percent; city editorial writers, 77 percent; city editors, 70 percent; news editors, 51 percent; and copy desk heads 51 percent. The college man predominates. That might not necessarily mean that the college man shows special aptitude for journalism or is especially favored. It is but logical that the proportion of college men in journalism should increase as it undoubtedly has in other fields of endeavor (with trend that every youth who has the opportunity goes to college).

The consensus was that the “college man is a better writer than he is a news-getter.”²⁰⁴ While 70 percent of editors found the college man superior to others in the writing of news, 74 percent found that the “non-college man is just as good. Or better. When it comes to news-getting. One would expect the college man to be the better writer. He is in daily contact with scholarship of a high order. If he is taking a journalistic course of study, his energies are directed in the proper usage of language. He is possessed of a writer's training that the non-college man lacks. On the other hand, it is difficult matter to teach any one the theory of what constitutes news. That is a subject best studied in actual practice. The man who begins as cub reporter, and advances by successive stages, has an experience which no classroom is able to afford.”²⁰⁵

Not infrequently, the survey disclosed that the college man who entered journalism nursed an ambition to become a writer and not an investigator. He was inclined to overrate his worth to a newspaper during his first few years out of college. He wanted to jump immediately in

²⁰⁴ *Miami News*, June 19, 1927.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

the cream of the work, without passing through the period of apprenticeship, which the non-college man is subjected. The lure of a columnist's job or that of a managing editor attracts him more than the practical experience such a job necessitates. If he were willing to start at the bottom and utilize his university training to gain quick advancement, employment would be easier. The conclusion was that college men have the advantage.²⁰⁶ This is particularly true when they have specialized in journalism. They have at least the basic knowledge of their chosen field. How to apply it best should be their next concern; there is the danger, as many editors point out, that the college man may think he knows too much to go through the same school of newspaper experience that the non-college man is forced to attend. If that tendency is overcome, his way undoubtedly will be smoother. Education rightly applied is never a disadvantage. That holds good in journalism as in any other profession.²⁰⁷

While the third research question concerned the evolution of our country's journalism programs and this chapter offers a brief overview, the dissertation's focus remains on Brannon Smith's journalistic development. And Brannon Smith, like the successful student that she had always been, wanted to take full advantage of her educational opportunities. The culture of journalism education mirrored her desire to progress, to move forward because it too was dynamic. As she took the next step along her career path toward becoming a newspaper woman, she was breaking new ground.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CULTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA'S JOURNALISM PROGRAM AND THE *CRIMSON-WHITE*

The previous chapters located Brannon Smith across a broad spectrum of influences in anticipation of narrowing to the specific culture that impacted and shaped her journalism while she attended The University of Alabama: the culture of the *Crimson-White*. Additionally, these chapters provided contextual breadth so that her own development could be seen as a parallel to her profession's evolution amidst a region in flux and a society undergoing transformation. This study will culminate by examining the local and campus values at the time, including the implications of the college newspaper and its cultural climate. It will also look at the journalism department as it was just beginning, concurrent to the Great Depression. Here, because of her actual college newswriting experience, her editorial voice of conscience took root. It would strengthen and grow, reaching new heights as she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

By exploring what UA journalism courses were offered by the department it may be possible to gauge departmental philosophy and extrapolate how this was influential for Brannon Smith. That she, the eventual product, differed from what one might expect of a woman from her place and time personifies how progress and change may look. Perhaps even more directly we can see patterns of influence and confluence by digging and sifting through the archival work of the staff of the college newspaper, the *Crimson-White*. As a link between the emerging

newspaperwoman and the future award-winning journalist, the “*C-W*” (as it was often affectionately called) provides Brannon Smith’s only available work during that period. As a newspaper, it reflected the times. As a lab, it allowed students to experiment. As evidence of the First Amendment, it instilled foundational values designed to last beyond individual lifetimes. The *C-W* members, as a unit, did not privilege any one individual. Instead, the staff sought to uphold the democratic principles of journalism through objective reporting and deliberative commentary. Values and principles were also an integral part of The University of Alabama’s educational mission.

Alabama's Back-Story

Thirteen years after its inception in 1818, inaugural ceremonies opened the doors of The University of Alabama. At that time, there were four professors plus the president (who was required to teach classes) and three-dozen students. However, within that first year, the student body swelled to over ninety.²⁰⁸ It would be another seventy-five years—1893—before the University would admit the first females,²⁰⁹ and the absence of women's dorm facilities practically limited female enrollment to Tuscaloosa residents or boarders. However, by 1914, the physical composition of the campus was also amended with the construction of the first building specifically to house women. Coincidentally, it was the same year Brannon Smith was born.

Attendance wasn't just a matter of shelter, though. State legislators had legally limited University admission to women who were "able to pass the necessary examinations to enter the sophomore or any higher class."²¹⁰ Coeducation *was* change, something the South, in general, was staunchly against.²¹¹ In some places the fight against progressivism was unanimous. For example, in 1903 the entire student body at the University of Charleston approved a petition opposing coeducation. Admitting women, the petition explained, "Would inevitably tend to alter the spirit and robust manliness of the student body which we believe to be of even greater importance than scholarship."²¹²

²⁰⁸ David M. Battles, *The Story Behind "Yea, Alabama" and Other University of Alabama Songs: 1839–1926*, (2007, <http://bryant.ua.edu/includes/band/behindyeaalabama.pdf>), 1.

²⁰⁹ Amy Thompson McCandless, *The Past in the Present: Women's Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century America South* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 99.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 99.

²¹¹ Howell Raines, "Getting to the Heart of Dixie," *New York Times*, September 17, 1989, Sunday.

²¹² Amy Thompson McCandless, *The Past in the Present: Women's Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century America South* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 85.

A hundred years after The University of Alabama opened its doors, the Depression would wreak havoc on the economy. A headline in the *C-W* read: “Alabama hit harder by depression than nation as a whole.” A study by H. H. Chapman, director of the bureau of business research, reported that Alabama suffered more during The Great Depression than did the country as a whole.²¹³ To augment dwindling finances and cover tuition, students at Alabama took, among other jobs, “Sign painting and hair setting.”²¹⁴ Despite the economy the year before Brannon Smith started at Alabama, enrollment had reached 4,639, and the students had managed to celebrate the university’s centennial anyway. The centennial celebration suggested both reflection *and* vision, a looking back and ahead—as if it were possible to gaze in two directions at once. This paradoxical element shows but one of the contradictions that permeated the University’s culture during the 30s, when Brannon Smith attended.

By 1932, the depression was in full swing. Movements like The Better Speech Movement, introduced in 1917 with the goal of improving the way Alabamians spoke and sounded,²¹⁵ no longer held a high priority in the face of unemployment, hunger, illness, and other dire consequences of the South’s abject poverty. The Brannon family was not spared. In order to finance her dream of owning a newspaper, Brannon Smith’s father had borrowed against an insurance policy to supplement her savings from her work at the *Etowah Observer*. That same year, “Alabama’s State government simply collapsed. Only 16 of Alabama’s 116 school districts were able to pay their teachers a full salary. As 1932 drew to a close, officials in Montgomery were warning that as many as half the schools in the state would not open in January.”²¹⁶ Then in

²¹³ *Crimson-White*, December 7, 1934.

²¹⁴ Jane Campbell, *Crimson-White*, Oct. 28, 1932.

²¹⁵ Claudia Crumpton, “The Better Speech Movement in Alabama,” *The Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, vol. iii, no. 4, (Routledge, October 1917), 291.

²¹⁶ Harvey H. Jackson III, *Inside Alabama: A Personal History of my State* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2004).

the spring, a rash of tornadoes ripped through the state leaving destruction in its wake and setting records that still stand today in 2010. It was a year for monumental change.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The University under President George Denny

September 9, 1932, was dry on campus at The University of Alabama, clear with a high of 83 degrees.²¹⁷ The first *C-W* of the year went out with the headline “Freshman Days Planned for Girls.” Time rang out quarterly, thanks to the new chimes constructed under, and named for, President George Denny,²¹⁸ a graduate from Washington and Lee.²¹⁹ As the place where General Robert E. Lee attempted to rebuild the South through the nation’s first journalism education program, it was a complicated alma mater. After all, a defeated-general-turned-university president who desired to strengthen a region—not a country—through progress might not have had the purist of motives.

At The University of Alabama, President Denny’s motives often signified forward progress. Although he specified young “men” when quoted in the *C-W* that there was an “even greater need for trained men than there has been under the passing dispensation,” he went on to say, “the future is in the hands of the rank and file of undergraduate young women.”²²⁰ His leanings toward social progressivism were not cloaked:

The individual will count for more in the coming social regime which will put a larger emphasis on efficiency and character and service. We summon you to the council chambers of the high enterprise of equipping yourselves for the right kind of living in the new time. This is a sober challenge. It is a high and sacred responsibility.²²¹

²¹⁷ “The Alabama Weather Page,” The Alabama Office of the State Climatologist (Huntsville, AL: The University of Alabama in Huntsville), http://nsstc.uah.edu/alclimate/climate/daily_climate.php.

²¹⁸ *Crimson-White*, September 16, 1932.

²¹⁹ David M. Battles, *The Story Behind “Yea, Alabama” and Other University of Alabama Songs: 1839–1926*, (2007, <http://bryant.ua.edu/includes/band/behindyeaalabama.pdf>), 3.

²²⁰ *Crimson-White*, September 6, 1933.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

The interweave of progressivism on campus is preached even more clearly in the Social Gospel-sounding editorial that the *C-W* managing editor Carroll Kilpatrick wrote in October 1934. The article “The Individual in a Democracy” explained the philosophy he and the *C-W* held:

It seems the most powerful institutions for good in America today are the churches and the schools. Both of these, however, must undergo operations and assume new responsibilities before they can qualify for a place of leadership in modern life. Above everything else religion offers an opportunity for the individual to correct from within his own small and petty practices and attitudes. It offers the motives and the driving forces which we find so lacking in our social order at the present time. It must interest itself in guiding not forcing the individual in an understanding of the right attitude and of a correction from within which will be a guiding influence in his whole thinking and acting both toward his professional and private relationships.²²²

As the editorial in the *C-W* continues, it sounds as though Walter Williams could have written it alongside his “Journalist’s Creed.”

The article continued on, “It must forever aid in the seeking of truth which in the end will make us a free people and a free nation.”²²³ The progressive movement on campus during Denny’s rein cultivated a strong foundation for learning journalism because the two were so strongly connected. This connection was noted by Pulitzer Prize author and cultural critic Richard Hofstadter when he said, “The Progressive mind was characteristically a journalistic mind.”²²⁴ Advocates of social progressivism believed deeply in the “empowerment and equality of the less privileged in society, the primacy of democracy in American life, and the notion that government should safeguard the common good from unchecked individual and commercial

²²² *Crimson-White*, October 19, 1934

²²³ *Crimson-White*, October 19, 1934.

²²⁴ Arthur J. Kaul, “Hazel Brannon Smith and the Lexington Advertiser” in *Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement: The Press and the Race*, edited by David R. Davies (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001) 234.

greed.” They challenged government to eliminate its own legal injustices and also harnessed the force of government as a vital tool for advancing human freedom and establishing the “more perfect union” envisioned by the Founding Fathers.²²⁵

Though the Southern fathers traditionally railed against government force and freedoms that required cultural shifts of society’s separate spheres, the *Crimson-White* headline claimed that Dr. Denny “Points Way To Women: Future Open to Them.” In the article, Denny addressed women saying, “A rich heritage and a great opportunity is yours. Coeducation is now acclaimed as a priceless possession of the institution.”²²⁶ It was not just lip service, either. The year before Brannon Smith arrived, a *C-W* headline read: “Co-Eds will be given the opportunity to edit paper: Members of Fair Sex will have complete charge of *Crimson-White* for One Issue.”²²⁷ With the number of women graduates exceeding 200 for the first time in a single year,²²⁸ Denny’s claim that the future was open to women seemed plausible. However, the present was not free from the past yet. Exemplifying this struggle, at the start of Brannon Smith’s sophomore year the *C-W* published a list of rules for women that warned, “dancing not allowed unless University of Alabama authority in charge, special permission required to go on a picnic, and talking out of windows is forbidden.”²²⁹ Ironically it was OK to hail special University guest Amelia Earhart,²³⁰ even though she was outspoken against rules that constrained women.

The *C-W* also published an article during this time that claimed, “The university woman of today is a real student” who has allowed “social activities to be put in the background by a true and sincere interest in her studies and the career she expects to follow upon graduation.”

²²⁵ *Social Movements and Progressives, Three of the Progressive Tradition Series*, John Halpin and Marta Cook (Center for American Progress, April 2010, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/04/progressive_traditions3.html), 1.

²²⁶ “Points Way to Women: Future Open to Them,” *Crimson-White*, September 6, 1933.

²²⁷ *Crimson-White*, December 1, 1931.

²²⁸ *Crimson-White*, September 6, 1933.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Crimson-White*, February 2, 1934.

And while the newspaper's focus was on its campus audience, its objectives were not thusly limited. It published pieces that suggested what might be possible tomorrow, and beyond, through its observations of current events: "the Roosevelt administration cast a direct reflection upon the education of women by giving them recognition in permanent national and international affairs."²³¹ And by noting the simple fact that "Frances Perkins became the first woman to hold a position in the president's cabinet as Secretary of Labor"²³² it showed how things were progressing—previous "possibilities" were becoming today's "realities."

Back on campus Dr. Denny greeted the students in the September 12, 1934 *C-W*:

You are coming to a campus where the democratic spirit traditionally prevails . . . hard work and clean, fine living on your part will make the year a notable one in your career. Never have men witnessed such social and economic changes as are taking place. Never was there more need for knowledge and intelligent leadership.²³³

Change was becoming a national possibility and, although at times it seemed ironic—or even schizophrenic—it was encouraged on campus through the voice of the student newspaper. As a journalism major, Brannon Smith would not only be learning about the newspaper business, but because of the *C-W*'s existence she would have a place to practice what she learned. It also meant that she would be exposed to new and progressive ideas.

²³¹ *Crimson-White*, September 15, 1933.

²³² *Crimson-White*, October 6, 1933.

²³³ *Crimson-White*, September 12, 1934.

The Journalism Department

In 1927, the concept of college journalism was still new enough to be considered experimental by some. “There ain't no such animal here,” was one professor’s reply at the University of the South to a survey conducted that year by John E. Drewry from the University of Georgia. Among his conclusions, Drewry found that eight programs in the South kept pace with national developments, students were increasingly interested in journalism courses, and students exhibited an increased “appreciation of journalistic instruction.”²³⁴ Journalism itself was in transition and the “principal direction of American journalism during the first half of the twentieth century was toward establishing itself as a profession. It was also an era that saw a proliferation of professional schools.”²³⁵ The American Society of Newspaper Editors was demanding that journalism become a profession on par with those maintained at the best schools of law or medicine.²³⁶

At the time of Drewry’s survey, The University of Alabama offered only one journalism course, which was taught by a *Birmingham News* reporter who commuted to the campus.²³⁷ However, in the spring of 1928 the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Charles Barnwell, announced that there would be a new department in the fall: journalism.²³⁸ The department’s budget, however, enthusiastic though the college might have been, was small. It covered an

²³⁴ John E. Drewry, “Journalistic Instruction in the South,” *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4 (January 1928).

²³⁵ John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, and William W. Bowman, “The Professional Values of American Newsmen,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1972).

²³⁶ Albert A. Sutton, *Education for Journalism in the United States from Its Beginning to 1940*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1945), 25.

²³⁷ H. Bailey. Thompson, “Clarence Cason: Journalist in Academe,” *The Alabama Review: A quarterly journal of Alabama history*, vol. 53, no. 31 (July 2000), 184.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

instructor and two readers.²³⁹ The next question for the University of Alabama was one that had been posed two years earlier by progressive journalism advocate Earl Vance, who claimed that the next question facing college authorities with reference to journalism was “Who should teach it?”²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Earl L. Vance, “Training for Journalism Teachers,” *English Journal*, vol. 19, no. 9 (November 1930), 738.

Clarence Cason, Journalist, Teacher, Thinker

The University of Alabama's answer was Clarence Cason. It was a fateful decision. In 1928 when Cason accepted the call to head Alabama's inaugural journalism department, he brought with him from the University of Minnesota a mix of the practical and academic beliefs that characterized the state of journalism education at that time. It was a position, but it was also a homecoming. He had learned journalism by working on student publications at the University of Alabama and was homegrown, having been raised in Talladega before coming to Tuscaloosa.²⁴¹ After graduating high school in 1917, he had gone on to work at various papers across the country. First, he took a reporting job with the *Birmingham News*, but the following May he had enlisted in the army, where he became an expert in the use of the Vickers machine gun and spent six months in France teaching at an aerial gunnery school.²⁴² After his discharge in February 1919, Cason worked for a string of newspapers, including the *Louisville Courier Journal*. While in Louisville, he attended seminary and taught high school, but his discontent motivated him to apply to the University of Wisconsin's graduate program in English literature. In 1925, he accepted a position as assistant professor of journalism at the University of Minnesota. Thus, his academic career had begun.²⁴³ Three years later he returned home to Alabama, and the role of native son expanded to include the role of mentor for Brannon Smith.

²⁴¹ Thompson, H. Bailey. "Clarence Cason: Journalist in Academe," *The Alabama Review: A quarterly journal of Alabama history*, vol. 53, no. 31 (July 2000), 184.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 185.

²⁴³ See Beidler, Philip. "Yankee Interloper and Native Son: Carl Carmer and Clarence Cason: Unlikely Twins of Alabama Exposé." *Southern Cultures* 9.1 (2003): 18-35; Matthews, John M. "Clarence Cason among the Southern Liberals." *Alabama Review* 38.1 (1985): 3-18; Thomson, Bailey. "Clarence Cason's Shade: A Look at Alabama Then and Now." *Alabama Heritage* 60 (2001): 20-27.

Clarence Cason's Direction

Under Clarence Cason's direction The University of Alabama's journalism program flourished, partly because he advocated that journalism was a legitimate academic discipline, and partly because his focus was on a broad understanding of the press and society. Students from all disciplines registered for journalism classes, not just those majoring in journalism.²⁴⁴ Cason's approach was so successful that fewer than 10 percent of the students taking journalism courses expected to pursue careers in the field. In this respect, journalism instruction fit comfortably within the general liberal arts curriculum.²⁴⁵ According to biographer Bailey Thompson, Cason's contribution was significant for two reasons. First, he founded a department that became the major institution for educating Alabama's journalists, particularly those editors and writers who worked for the state's newspapers. Second, his insistence that journalism education develop within the liberal arts as an intellectual pursuit in its own right placed him among a group of influential educators nationwide who sought to elevate journalism from craft to profession.

According to Cason, a major function of journalism was "to supply really significant scholarship instead of the old instruction in technical details of the news room. It's an effort to establish journalism as one of the liberal arts and to supply through much of the training in social science that now comes from the historian, the psychologist and the sociologist. This idea in journalism teaching is precedential in American Universities." Cason, according to biographer H. Bailey Thomson, paralleled the departments of Journalism and English, explaining that only a

²⁴⁴ H. Bailey Thompson, "Clarence Cason: Journalist in Academe," *The Alabama Review: A quarterly journal of Alabama history*, vol. 53, no. 31 (July 2000), 184.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 185.

small percentage expects to become professional writers. “The same is true of students in journalism here,” he claimed, estimating the number to get newspaper jobs at about 25% of the enrollment of the journalism department. “The numbers who actually succeed in getting permanent employment with a newspaper is about 10%” he guessed, with permanent meaning jobs lasting more than two to three years. Journalism programs should seek to provide training in social forces that will fit the student to meet intelligently the movements and conditions of the day,” said Cason in the article.²⁴⁶ In the same issue another article’s headline added Columbia University’s philosophy: “Journalism Dean Urges Continued Press Freedom.” The Columbia University dean is quoted as saying, “If the newspapers of the world were free to report and interpret affairs in their respective countries, there would be less cause for concern over recent developments in the U.S.”²⁴⁷ The article also said that editorial courage was needed along with knowledge and understanding. Also imperative was “responsibility for the public effect of the printed word” but the crucial element, the article said, was “above all—courage.”²⁴⁸

And according to his students, Cason taught them to think critically. He used the Socratic method to elicit thinking and was always encouraging students to learn more, to find out more, to not make conclusions until all the facts were known.²⁴⁹ By 1935, the year Hazel graduated, Cason had nurtured a group of formidable talent. Along with Hazel, who went on to win a Pulitzer Prize, Carroll Kilpatrick became a political reporter for the *Washington Post* and Melvin Israel, later known as Mel Allen, became the voice of the New York Yankees.²⁵⁰ Yet of these three, only Hazel followed Cason’s directive “not to leave the South in the lurch.” He said, “You may make more money elsewhere but in your homeland you will have a chance to be of more

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ *Crimson-White*, October 13, 1933

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 190.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 191.

service to more people and have a part in the growth and development of one of the greatest undeveloped regions in America.”²⁵¹ “Over the years, she was to turn down a few very good opportunities to leave the region—some of them after the brouhaha of the Sixties, the time, according to *Look* editor T. George Harris, when the South “flipped its wig.”²⁵²

Cason’s main concern seemed not to be economics; he wanted to educate future journalists who had a liberal arts foundation.²⁵³ And so Brannon Smith, whose experience had taught her that working on a local paper could be extremely profitable, found herself under the tutelage of a man with strong opinions about journalism that did not privilege profit. Rather, Cason thought journalism’s greatest strength was its ability to interest students in contemporary issues. In turn, their awakened intellectual curiosity might lead them to explore other disciplines. For example, a student who read recent journalistic books or articles about the Soviet Union might want to learn more about Russian history. In this manner a professor of journalism, beginning with the familiar, could work back to the past for explanations, reversing the typical order of learning in the classroom, in which the present was rarely examined at all.²⁵⁴ Cason’s educational approach remains in favor today. According to the Poynter Institute’s Lillian Dunlap, this principle of examining the present,²⁵⁵ of questioning what is current and accepted in society, of reporting what “is” still constitutes basic journalism in today’s programs.

²⁵¹ T. George Harris, “The 11-Year Siege of Mississippi’s Lady Editor,” *Look* (November 16, 1965), 122.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 122.

²⁵³ Clarence Cason, “Journalism in Liberal Education,” *The English Journal*, 144–47.

²⁵⁴ Clarence Cason, “Journalism as Social Science,” *The English Journal*, 374–75.

²⁵⁵ Lillian Dunlap, videotape interview, Tuscaloosa, AL.

The Impact of Cason's Writing Style

Biographer Bailey Thomson says Cason's writings and essays reveal his combined desire to explain the world with a poetic but journalistic sensitivity.²⁵⁶ Though Cason may be remembered most often for the swirl of controversy that surrounded his infamous *90° in the Shade* and resulted in the taking of his own life, his writings covered a variety of topics, and not all controversial. In "Literary Bushwhackers," published in the *Nation*, Cason wrote: I have 319 books for sale. They are not much good, and I shall expect only a little money for them. I have paid freight on these books twice. They have occupied ninety of the 1,800 cubic feet in my study for a period of six years. Simple calculations demonstrate that the space thus occupied has cost me \$144, not including the expense of dusting, which has been enormous."²⁵⁷

In writing personal essays, Cason combined his literary abilities with his bent for social criticism and showed that he was not limited to the sober tones for which he is most often remembered.²⁵⁸ His tones were reflective of a style coined "muckraking" by Theodore Roosevelt, who, as President, keenly felt but disdained the sharpness of journalists' intent to expose corruption, greed, and harmful elements of society. This intent had emerged along with journalism's evolution into a profession and academic discipline.²⁵⁹ In the 1920's South, this philosophy was not only progressive and ironic, it was also dangerous. Cason became so uneasy that just before his upcoming collection of essays—*Ninety° in the Shade*—was to be published he

²⁵⁶ H. Bailey. Thompson, "Clarence Cason: Journalist in Academe," *The Alabama Review: A quarterly journal of Alabama history* vol. 53, no. 31 (July 2000), 184.

²⁵⁷ Clarence E. Cason, "Literary Bushwhackers," *Nation* (October 10, 1928).

²⁵⁸ H. Bailey. Thompson, "Clarence Cason: Journalist in Academe," *The Alabama Review: A quarterly journal of Alabama history*, vol. 53, no. 31 (July 2000), 185.

²⁵⁹ Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, "Magazines and Newspapers," *Reader's Companion to American History* (Orlando, FL: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 680.

took his own life in his office. He had come under fire for writing about the South in what he considered a truthful manner and had even been threatened. The extent of the threats was not recorded nor is it clear who made them. Whatever caused Cason to commit suicide must have been unbearable, since he did so while classes were still in session.²⁶⁰ Brannon Smith finished her classes and finished her degree the following term. Cason had, by writing with a personal tone, modeled the inclusion of the individual voice within an article. And this would become the most memorable element of Brannon Smith's journalism: her own editorial voice.

Cason's influence on all writers continues today in inestimable ways, among them the annual Clarence Cason Award for an Alabama writer of non-fiction, whose work has affected change. And Cason's influence on Brannon Smith was even recognized by a future Cason award-winner. When the 2008 Cason Award recipient, Hank Klibanoff, who had just received the Pulitzer for *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, And The Awakening of a Nation*, accepted his award, he spoke of Brannon Smith, "She kept writing, kept reporting, kept putting out the newspaper. She did what she was taught to do."²⁶¹ Cason taught, perhaps even preached, that journalism meant something. It was not a job but a way of thinking. A way to think. Critically.

²⁶⁰ W. Kirk Wood, "Clarence Cason," <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2456>.

²⁶¹ Hank Klibanoff, Acceptance Speech for The University of Alabama's Cason Award, Tuscaloosa, AL, Spring 2008.

Journalism Classes

Before Cason took the helm of the journalism department in 1928, there had been one journalism class. When Brannon Smith began college four years later, in 1932, the course catalog had a list of classes to satisfy the journalism major. Many of these classes used texts Cason had become familiar with at Wisconsin. There was also a required text that Cason himself had compiled: *A Composite Style Book for Journalists*. Published while still at Minnesota, he explained in the introduction:

This handbook represents an effort to select those points of style and usage upon which most of the best newspapers are agreed, and to bring them together in convenient form for the use of journalists at work in schools, colleges, and offices. Realizing that journalistic style, being close to the spoken language, is even more subject to change, and more directed by taste, than literary style, the compiler has in no sense attempted a rule book. Without those questionable assumptions implicit in critical judgments, theories, and preachments, he has tried to present a composite picture of journalistic style at the moment.²⁶²

A composite illustrating Cason's progressive liberal arts intent may be noted in the course catalog. In 1932, under the Department of Journalism the year Brannon Smith enrolled, Cason is listed as Professor Cason, followed by Assistant Blasingame with Miss Provost and Mr. Taylor as Readers. It begins:

The department of journalism extends the cultural and practical advantages reside in knowledge of journalistic subject-matter and methods. Training for newspaper work is an important but secondary aim. The department seeks primarily to direct the study of contemporary affairs as they are reported and interpreted by magazines, books, and newspapers, Courses are designed to utilize

²⁶² Clarence E. Cason, *A Composite Style Book for Journalists* (Scholastic Editor, 1927), 1.

the heightened interest stimulated by current events and situations which graphically illustrate principles of the social sciences, and the arts and provide problems which such principles are involved. Adequate practical training for journalistic work can be obtained by pursuing courses in this department in combination with a number of basic subjects offered by other divisions of the University.

Summaries of the eleven course headings that comprised the journalism program from the 1932 Course Catalog are as follows:

Current Affairs. "Contemporary national and foreign affairs, in the light of magazine and newspaper reporting and interpretation . . . three hours credit with two sections . . . open . . . intended to be of general value as well as of interest to prospective students of journalism . . . aims are informational and broadly cultural . . . Questions of the day impartially examined . . . Lectures and recitations based upon current journalistic books and a news magazine."

Journalistic Writing: "Study and practice in the gathering and writing of news, with some treatment of special feature material . . . Lecture, recitation, and written exercises . . . Not open to freshman."

American Magazines. "Particularized consideration of the nature and content of twelve important periodicals, including several of the leading general magazines and a few with specialized fields. Lectures, recitations, and written exercises. Not open to freshmen. Three hours."

American Newspapers. "Systematic analysis of the various types of newspapers in the United states at the present time, with emphasis upon their meaning and function in society. The newspaper is studied as both an influence and a reflection bearing upon such phenomena as public opinion and the tastes, morals and interest of the public. Textbook, representative newspapers, lectures, and recitations. Not open to freshmen. Two hours.

Community Newspapers. "Study of the management and social functions of the smaller newspapers, particularly those in rural communities, from the points of view of both the editor-publisher and the public. Text-book, newspapers, lectures, and recitation. Not open to freshmen. Two hours.

History of Journalism. "Rise of the press in England and America

in the eighteenth century and the subsequent development of newspapers in the United States. Text-book, lectures, and recitations. Not open to freshmen. Two hours.

Newspaper Technique. “Condensed treatment of copy-reading, problems of editing, law of the press, typography, and related subjects, with a brief preliminary review of news writing. Text-book, lectures, and practice. Not open to freshmen. Two hours.”

Recent Books. “Guided reading and discussion of important current books which treat aspects of modern life and public affairs from the layman's point of view, and which constitute journalism in spirit and content.”

Modern Trends. “Representative of four departments (economics, political science, sociology, and journalism) combine their special points of view in a topical treatment of selected aspects of contemporary life. The following topics were among these studied in 1931: unemployment, party politics, the World Court, prohibition, and the industrialization of the South. Credit toward the major course allowed in any one of the departments concerned. Admission only by consent of the instructors. One hour.”

Critical Reviews. “Newspaper and magazine reviews of plays, novels, short stories, moving pictures, poems, music, and the graphic arts. Study of the work of important American critics of the present day, practice in writing original reviews, text-book, lectures, and recitation. The course aims at a discriminate critical appreciation. Open only to juniors and seniors. Three hours.”

Editorials. “Survey of the development of the editorial from the eighteenth century to the present, study of the work of notable American editorial writers, discussion of material in current newspapers and magazines, and practice in original composition. Text-book, lectures, and exercises. Open only to juniors and seniors. Three hours.”²⁶³

Without written consent from Brannon Smith’s only living relative, the University of Alabama’s current registrar could not, because of governmental privacy rules, divulge which classes Brannon Smith took or how she scored. Nor was I able to discover any indications of Brannon Smith’s favorite classes, but I do know that the last class listed in the catalog,

²⁶³ *The University of Alabama Course Catalog, 1932–1933*, 100–102.

“Editorials,” was the type of writing for which she would become celebrated. Editorials were the one place readers expected opinion, not news. I could not find any evidence that Brannon Smith had written an editorial before her entrance to Alabama, however, because she would have taken “Editorials” in her course of study, she would have read the editorials of the day and been familiar with the argument that journalists should move beyond news to truth.²⁶⁴ Possibly she wrote them for class assignments. In Brannon Smith’s editorial roles at the *C-W*, she would have contributed her voice to the editorial page. Though without bylines, it is not possible to say exactly in what or how she participated. However, it is possible to infer that her editorial voice was being developed.

The distinction between news and opinion, according to Robert Ezra Park, journalist and founder of the Chicago School of Sociology, separated journalists into reporters and editorial writers. In an essay discussing journalism and social science Park is quoted as saying, “The interpretation of the news is not the role of the reporter, but that of the editorial writer.”²⁶⁵ The debate over the press’s responsibility went national when a commission was established--The Commission on Freedom of the Press. As a result of its inquiry, the Commission recommended, among other things, that the press provide “a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning.” In making this recommendation, they said that “journalists should go beyond simply orienting people to their world (and acquainting them *with* things) to providing them with information and knowledge *about* things.”²⁶⁶ Brannon Smith would revel in that prescription, and as she applied it to her own newspapers she found what she described as “a distinctly new pleasure”--that of being the “recipient of a \$50 bill at the

²⁶⁴ Maxwell E. McCombs and David H. Weaver, “Journalism and Social Science: A New Relationship?” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Winter 1980), 487.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 486.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 487.

Mississippi Press Association's banquet for an editorial about the Mississippi Free State Fair.²⁶⁷

When she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1964 for her editorial writing, she said, "I'm really happy but I've never had the thought of winning any award in anything I ever wrote in my life."²⁶⁸ She added, "I run my newspapers in the way I think they should be run . . . for the public interest."²⁶⁹

The roots of this philosophy may be tied back to the modus operandi of the *C-W* and its advisor, Clarence Cason. They are echoed in an article published by the *C-W* that actually stated "a college newspaper should attempt to discuss problems of national and international newspapers [and] should attempt to discuss problems of national and international interest when it can with any degree of intelligence."²⁷⁰ The article continued, "To fail to take an interest in such affairs is an admission of blindness. "College editors aren't able to discuss all matters with same breadth of understanding as elders in the dailies but nevertheless, it is their duty to attempt to bring an interest and understanding of these problems so vital to us all."²⁷¹

As journalism major and a *C-W* staff member, Brannon Smith's first formal philosophy of journalism was shaped by Cason's leadership and the department's course of study. As for the influence of teachers on their students' accomplishments, journalist and contemporary of Brannon Smith, Christopher Morley was quoted, "The teacher is justified by his scholars." President William Lewis of Lafayette College agreed, "Through the zeal and example of their teachers, students must breed the courage which will make them stand for truth, whatever the cost." According to historian Bailey Thomson, Cason's job was to lead UA's journalism program by the principles he believed in, to teach the next generation to further these principles, and to

²⁶⁷ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 37

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 5, 1964.

²⁷⁰ *Crimson-White*, January 18, 1935.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

serve as advisor to the newspaper.²⁷² In an article for *The Alabama Review* Thomson quoted *C-W* editor Carroll Kilpatrick as remembering that Cason “for four years drilled the fundamentals of good journalism into our heads,” but Cason also gave editors “absolute freedom at all times.”²⁷³ His final job was to get out of their way because running the newspaper was the student staff’s responsibility.

Through journalism classes, Brannon Smith expanded on the hands-on experience she had gained at the *Etowah Observer*. As managing editor of the *C-W* she was second in command during her freshman year and would have been involved in all content decisions, therefore closely connected to its advisor Professor Cason. She was also exposed to the frequent commentary published by the *C-W* that often included the philosophies of other professors. For example the January 1935 issue said:

One of our highest duties is to unsettle and disturb the minds. Students must have their minds cleared of prejudice. They must be taught to weigh evidence, to look at things objectively, to follow arguments to their logical conclusions, and to think straight and true. It is not the duty of the college to tell the students what to believe but to supply them with information and to stimulate their thinking so that they may work out their own beliefs, their own philosophies, their own attitudes toward life and the world.²⁷⁴

Brannon Smith would echo this philosophy in a later editorial: If you give the people the information then they can make up their own minds about issues. I just provide the information.” Her education at the University was more than just a first step on a career path, though it was critical that she took it. It was a time of development, of craft, of discovering who Hazel Brannon was, who she wanted to become.

²⁷² H. Bailey Thomson, “Clarence Cason: Journalist in the Academe” *The Alabama Review*, volume 53 no. 3, July 2000, page 191.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, 91.

²⁷⁴ *Crimson-White*, September 23, 1932.

A Portrait of the Artist as Shown through her College Newspaper, the *Crimson-White*, 1932–1935

This dissertation has established the cultural contexts that played a part in shaping Brannon Smith and leading led up to her entrance into The University of Alabama. Now this study will examine the student newspaper and Brannon Smith's work on the staff of the *Crimson-White*. Reflecting on his own experience as managing editor from 1973–1974, Rick McCammon said, "The *Crimson-White* is the student voice of The University of Alabama. The *C-W* has always been about community. The *C-W* has always also been the great leveler. Everybody gets a chance to speak. The opportunity to be involved is always there."²⁷⁵ This notion was spelled out in the September 30, 1932 issue: "ATTENTION! There are still a number of positions to be filled on the CW staff." All interested students were to meet at the *C-W* office, Room 2, union building Monday at 2 pm to receive assignments. "No definite appointments have yet been made and positions on all staffs are still open for capable writers."²⁷⁶ The following week, Brannon Smith's name was on the masthead as assistant to the news editor with a *C-W* staff that consisted of 68 students, more than one-third of them women. The front page included the article "Religion, Sex are chief problems for modern students." Of the two, a YMCA official said, "Religion seems to be the most puzzling to students."²⁷⁷

By this time, Brannon Smith had gotten a taste of campus life. According to Whalen, while she was awaiting admission to the Delta Zeta sorority house, she stayed in a dormitory

²⁷⁵ *Crimson-White*, Special Publication of *C-W* front pages, 2001.

²⁷⁶ *Crimson-White*, September 30, 1932.

²⁷⁷ *Crimson-White*, September 30, 1932.

with two other women from Gadsden who said they didn't see much of her in that brief time span. Brannon Smith went there to mostly sleep and change clothes for various rush week activities, dates, and parties. "Hazel loved people," Whalen wrote, "and being in the midst of things."²⁷⁸

Whalen also wrote that Brannon Smith's first byline was an interview with the famous novelist Richard Halliburton,²⁷⁹ an error Whalen likely propagated from *Look* magazine's article "The 11-Year Siege of Mississippi's Lady Editor" by senior editor T. George Harris.²⁸⁰ But the interview piece didn't actually appear until the following year in the October 20, 1933, issue. However, on November 11, 1932, her byline and article about campus honor society tappings did appear on the front page. In addition to listing the names of the new members, Brannon Smith added depth to the story by referencing politics and using political figures throughout U.S. history to illustrate different political methods.²⁸¹ Cason, with his progressive, liberal arts bent, had been teaching her well.

²⁷⁸ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 25.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁸¹ *Crimson-White*, November 11, 1932.

A Co-Ed Issue

Indicative of this progressive nature, the *C-W* published in 1931 the first of its planned annual “Co-ed” issues. Edited, written, designed and printed exclusively by the women on the staff, it was a chance for them to orchestrate and to participate within territory normally claimed by men. A theoretical lens that might be applied in addition to or beyond the historiographer’s view for further research and clarification is Elisabeth Noelle Neumann’s “Spiral of Silence” a theory that correlates how omission can snowball.²⁸² If women have had little say or there have been few voices, then their absence echoes beyond a singular issue into the future. With the advent of this co-ed edition, women spoke not only out, but up, potentially reversing a downward spiral. Although my research concentrates on documentation and historiography, Brannon Smith offers rich and fertile ground for future research in a variety of areas.

After the success of the first issue, editor Paul Duncan said he favored having such an issue every year. After the success of the second annual co-ed issue he said that “the *C-W* favors a Women’s Issue every week.”²⁸³ This was especially important to Brannon Smith who, because she would run a one-woman operation for much of her career (except for the linotype operator), put out a co-ed issue every Thursday.²⁸⁴ She used all she had learned at Alabama, and most likely the long hours needed to get the paper out on time each week, took their toll. This was a reality of her career choice that no classroom could have prepared her for.

²⁸² See Elisabeth Noelle Neumann and especially for historical context “Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s ‘Spiral of Silence’ and the Historical Context of Communication Theory,” *Journal of Communication*, vol. 46, no. 3, (September 1996), 149–171.

²⁸³ *Crimson-White*, April 14, 1933.

²⁸⁴ Damon Runyon, *Commercial Appeal*, July 26, 1940.

Walter B. Pitkin's "Can Intellectual Women Live Happily?" appeared in the *C-W* Brannon Smith's senior year, discussing the conundrum facing intellectual women along with the shrinking job market. He defined an intellectual woman as one who could graduate from one of our best colleges and cites statistics for journalism openings: "I cannot find more than 2,000 openings, and I find those only on the wild assumption that women will by and by operate half of the small newspapers in the country."²⁸⁵ Not only did Brannon Smith become one of these women, she had company. At the *C-W*, Brannon Smith found she was not alone in her ambitions. Nor was she an oddity as a female. When, during her freshman year, the complete masthead first appeared, she was one of 25 women on a staff of 68. She was assistant to the news editor. The student newspaper would have functioned for Brannon Smith as a laboratory, where all journalistic experiments would have impact on the "scientists" regardless of the results. The daily dose of progressivism through fellow staff members, professors—especially Clarence Cason—and the wire service were delivered through local and national stories. She was not only among "practicing" newspapermen and women, she was in the academy with critical thinkers, many who believed the role of the evolved newspaper went beyond transmitting facts to informing and interpreting them.²⁸⁶ The positions she would take in her career over the years to come would echo this juxtaposition. For example, in a 1954 issue of *The Lexington Advertiser* Brannon Smith discusses Senator McCarthy on the front page beside headlines "Methodist Revival to Begin Sunday Evening" and the Farm Bureau Members Barbecue.²⁸⁷²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Walter B. Pitkin, "Can Intellectual Women Live Happily?" *North American Review*, vol. 227, no. 6 (June 1929), 701.

²⁸⁶ Maxwell E. McCombs and David H. Weaver, "Journalism and Social Science: A New Relationship?" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Winter 1980), 491.

²⁸⁷ *Lexington Advertiser*, July 8, 1954

²⁸⁸ *Lexington Advertiser*, July 8, 1954

Managing Editor Plus

As Brannon Smith moved through different positions on the *C-W* staff, she gained experience, learned new skills, and developed an appreciation for the multiple jobs on a newspaper staff. It would be the last time she was subject to someone else's direction or worked in tandem with colleagues on a newspaper. Brannon Smith's name appeared on the masthead of the *C-W* as Managing Editor in the March 17, 1933 issue. It was only her second term at the University and already she was second in command. This meant she decided the content for the entire paper. Although we cannot know what was rejected, seeing what she "allowed" will offer insight into what Brannon Smith sanctioned as newsworthy for the campus. Here the tension of the day can be seen through the ironic content and headlines. While she was managing editor story topics included Albert Einstein's visit and prohibition alongside who should wear the pants in modern married life, sorority gossip, and football.

However, Brannon Smith's judgment of newsworthy, she would discover the year after she purchased the weekly in Durant, Mississippi, sometimes clashed with her readers' views. In her 1937 editorial "Venereal Disease Problem," she congratulated the State Department of Health and its work with the Present Day Club for bringing the battle out in the open for the first time. "Only by dealing frankly and openly with the issues involved can any problem be solved successfully. The problem of venereal disease is no exception."²⁸⁹ A minor furor ensued and she was told, "Ladies just don't talk about venereal disease." She responded, "Well I ain't no lady.

²⁸⁹ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 36.

I'm a newspaper woman."²⁹⁰ The audience in a small Mississippi town (population 2,500) was not the same as she was accustomed to on a University campus.

In that first issue of the *C-W* a headline read, "Napoleonic Power is Jap Vision Claims Chinese Lecturer." An editorial "Intrusion of Commercialism" discussed victimization and materialism and how "at this youthful state" ideals" and "appetites" were already clashing. For instance, a *C-W* article claimed that advertisements were now being included on the editorial page. The editorial said, "unsullied by such evidences of materialism. However the business manager informed us that it was a ase of commercialize or go hungry."²⁹¹ This battle of the *C-W* over the division of the editorial side and the financial side of the paper would re-appear. Brannon Smith would experience this power of the advertising dollar later, during the boycott catalyzed by the White Citizens' Council, which contributed to her eventual bankruptcy.

Race was also covered in the *C-W* during her time there but not in support of integration. In the second *C-W* issue published after she became Managing Editor, race emerged in an editorial that asked:

Who put the idea in Hocutt's head to try to enter NC University?
We do not attempt to account for nor to offer a solution for a social caste system that denies the plaintiff entrance but such a system existing, it does seem that people can have common sense enough not to create controversial situations nor to stir up feelings that are better left dormant. There are many fine negro schools in the south to teach pharmacy to Hocutt.²⁹²

Progressive for women with their "Co-ed Issue" did not mean the *C-W* was yet progressive for all. The *C-W* might have been progressive with its co-ed issue but that did not mean that the *C-W* was progressive for all.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ *Look Magazine*.

²⁹¹ *Crimson-White*, March 17, 1933.

²⁹² *Crimson-White*, March 31, 1933.

²⁹³ *Ibid*.

Brannon Smith would maintain the separate but equal philosophy through the 50s and only support *Brown v. Board of Education* on legal grounds after the Supreme Court's ruling. These two issues, race and advertising support, would cause Brannon Smith to evaluate what she believed about journalism and require her to hunker down and apply the principles that appeared when the *C-W* published a wire (IP) report headline in the April 14 issue that read, "Journalism is modernized at Washington and Lee School." The article relayed that the college took possibly one of the most important steps ever taken by an American School of Journalism.²⁹⁴ The amount of technical journalism would change, and the amount of background material in history, economics, political science, languages, and literature would increase. A *C-W* article stated,

If it is something more than a profession or an art it must comprise more than the relatively easy task of non-interpretive transcript of the minutia of the run of the mill news . . . take the long view in training young men for journalism . . . modern conditions favor the informed newspaper man capable of coping with perplexing problems of national and international economy.²⁹⁵

Three objectives were outlined in the article. First, it was to present a realistic picture of the press as a social force, with more frank analysis of strength and weakness replacing blatant and often ignorant popular criticism of the American newspaper and its place in contemporary civilization. Second, it was to acquaint students with at least the fundamentals of business and editorial practice. Third, it was to correlate the mass of various information and methodology acquired in various college courses had to be applied to the reportorial and editorial treatment of public questions. It was as if this article not only summed up the transition the profession had been undergoing for the previous decades, but it also suggested that "coping with perplexing problems" would be part of the job. The clash of justice with sorority gossip at the *C-W* and garden parties in her weeklies reveal a layer of irony that, taken out of context, can be humorous.

²⁹⁴ *Crimson-White*, April 14, 1932.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

The Lighter Side

On the same page as the piece relaying journalism's objectives, story topics hit a lighter note: "Middlebury College in VT has added a course in lovemaking to its curriculum. Many faculty members as well as first second and third students have enrolled for the course which includes demonstrations by seniors," "Pituitary gland found," and "Curators Find Egyptians Had Head Disease." Journalism, while apparently serious, had a lighter side. The ironic juxtaposition along with the random mix of topics shows both a complexity and absurdity of social progress not revealed in many other mediums of the time.

Progress for women was apparently neither uniform nor logical. Next to Einstein's photo was the result of a survey: "Students want husband to wear the pants in modern married life. Men and women agree that the average family income must be \$184/month, that two children make a good family, and that the man of the house should have the better education."²⁹⁶ In addition, a survey taken by a Columbia graduate showed that Phi Betas made better husbands and wives, "It seems they are bright enough to shun matrimony for a longer time than most people."²⁹⁷ Hazel Brannon was not a Phi Beta and she did not shun matrimony. However, that she did not marry early like many of her contemporaries suggests her main focus was on her career. She met her first and only husband, "Smitty," on a cruise. He was the Purser and apparently also quite the pursuer. She became Hazel Brannon Smith in 1950. She was 36 years old.

Brannon Smith's first year of college journalism exposed her to new ideals, introduced

²⁹⁶ *Crimson-White*, January 13, 1933.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

her to like-minded students, and provided her with her first and last staff experience where she was part of a large and dedicated team. As a freshman, being appointed to the position of managing editor showed ambition, ability, and energy, especially since she was engaged in numerous other activities including the Glee Club's first soprano, staff member of the Rammer Jammer humor magazine and of the Corolla yearbook, a YWCA officer, a Delta Zeta sorority member, and a program chair of the new Quill club. It is a wonder she had time to sleep.

The Other Side

Lest the *C-W* be considered one-sided, it is important to note that the existence of a lighter side implies a darker side. With the advent of the wire and the *C-W*'s use of the International Press (sourced only as I in the *C-W*) a variety of comments and articles supplemented what the staff wrote. So while the *C-W* did not shrink from the darkly serious and heavy topics of the day, its combination and juxtaposition of the light and dark, the local and international evoked an incredulity akin to irony. Part of this irony is due to hindsight. We know now what they did and could not know. Hitler, for example, received his share of attention. The *C-W* quoted an Oberlin College professor as saying that "Hitler may be the Savior of Germany." This professor also warned everyone to take the "stories of atrocities against the Jews by the Hitler government with a grain of salt—in fact several grains."²⁹⁸ Also, in a *C-W* editorial "Clothes Make the Dictator," Herr Hitler had "gone up in the world." The IP wire editorial managed political commentary through appearance and image when it said:

The Groucho Marx mustache that decorates the underside of the Hitler nose indeed would be confusing to students of Hitlermania . . . Napoleon wore no mustache. Caesar was clean-shaven. Mussolini wore no whiskers. . . . The exponent of pure German everything wears the trick mustache to detract attention from his Slavic nose.²⁹⁹

In a regular feature that highlighted quotations only, Emil Ludwig was quoted saying, "It is indeed a great mark of honor for the Jews that this little admixture of them in foreign blood

²⁹⁸ *Crimson-White*, May 5, 1933.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

can so arouse a whole people (the Germans).”³⁰⁰ This feature also included a quote from Bennett Craig: “War is the industrialists’ tantrum.” Indeed the *C-W*’s balance of light and dark seems all the more ironic today.

On the front page of the *C-W*’s “Summer School” Issue (May 12, 1933), a headline read: “Rosenbloum wins office; Prominent Staff Member Chosen Women’s Editor for ’34.” For the first time the “Women’s Editor has been elected by a co-ed vote. It was appointed heretofore.”³⁰¹ The requirements for the position of “Women’s Editor” included Board of Publication approval, a high scholastic average, and having served on the *C-W* for at least a year. Other candidates that year had been junior Ethel Jackson and freshman Hazel Brannon.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ *Crimson-White*, May 12, 1933.

Her Sophomore Year

The 1933–1934 year at the *Crimson-White* began with the September 6 issue. The *C-W*, recognized as “one of the outstanding college weeklies,” would hold interviews in room 22 of the Union Building. An article stated the *C-W*’s mission, “The everyday life of the University, its various activities sports and social life are reflected weekly in the *C-W*, the official newspaper published weekly since 1883. The department of journalism is closely linked with the *C-W* offering its assistance and encouraging those enrolled in its course to take advantage of the opportunity it offers for practical experience in newspaper work.”

In addition to covering campus news, the *C-W* spent a great deal of its ink on the field of journalism. Understanding the philosophy behind the practice had been critical to Cason, who served as its sponsor. Cason combined both through teaching and practice. Professor Cason worked in the summer with the Washington bureau of the *New York Times* and looked into the “New Deal.” In the article, “Roosevelt forgets ‘New Deal’ to ask Cason about the Crimson Tide,” it is reported that Roosevelt said the fall visit of the Crimson Tide to Georgia was quite the occasion, noting that Warm Springs was his summer home. When Cason was first introduced to the president as a newspaper correspondent and college professor, President Roosevelt said, “Don’t tell me that the *New York Times* has started a brain trust of its own.”³⁰² What better way to show the *C-W*’s success of combining the practical and theoretical than to have its director singled out as an example of journalism’s marriage to the academy?

During Brannon Smith’s sophomore year, Cason demonstrated his philosophy of

³⁰² *Crimson-White*, September 15, 1933.

journalism again when he said that newspapers were indispensable to the “New Deal.” “Washington is divided into two camps: idealists and skeptics,” he wrote in the *C-W*. “Never before have newspapers played such a significant part in government as they are at present time.” Cason went on to say that solving an economic depression has forced the erection of an absolutely unprecedented social and economic structure in the United States. The “newspaper[s] have risen to their gigantic task of making the masses of people resound favorably to the flight of the blue eagle.”³⁰³ The following month, an article’s headline, “A Liberal Art is Aim of Cason,” posited his journalism education philosophy. “Training the Newspaper Reporter is only one of the Functions of Journalism,” opined Cason within the article.³⁰⁴

Brannon Smith spent a good part of her sophomore year on the Technical Staff, meaning that although she got an interview with novelist Halliburton and a byline for her story, she worked the machinery and design aspects more than she composed stories. Just how adept she was at technical aspects is not noted. Two years later at her first newspaper, though, she performed all functions except working the linotype.³⁰⁵ She hired someone for that. Apparently the technical aspects were not her forte, or else they just didn’t suit her.

In 1934, Brannon Smith became a section editor for Women’s Activities. She featured an opening reception of the Tuscaloosa American Association of United Women in which the guest speaker talked about Hitler and bemoaned the lack of freedom of speech and the amazing censorship of the press in Italy and Germany. Most of the articles in her section tended to feature sorority happenings and fashion, but women’s sports were becoming popular. And popular or not, the *C-W* gave advice. It advised that a good student sees things in perspective, not just in

³⁰³ *Crimson-White*, September 15, 1933.

³⁰⁴ *Crimson-White*, October 13, 1933.

³⁰⁵ Damon Runyon, “Durant Editor, Says Runyohn, Is Prettiest Party Delegate,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 26, 1940.

small fragments; is polite and courteous; has his or her own opinions but is willing to listen and consider the opinions of others.³⁰⁶ Judge Price of the police court issued a list of “32 Don’ts” that included “don’t drive while intoxicated, don’t drive with insufficient brakes, don’t drive wrong way on a one way street, don’t give bad checks, don’t curse in the presence of women, don’t kill birds or squirrels in the city limits, and don’t appear in public places insufficiently clad.”³⁰⁷

Ironic and insightful random or poignant the articles from the *C-W* point to an overall philosophy of freedom of the press that would shape Hazel’s newspaper career.

³⁰⁶ *Crimson-White*, September 21, 1934.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Freedom of the Press and Its Echoes

The very first *C-W* issued during Brannon Smith's freshman year trumpeted the First Amendment. A controversial and candid column, "Peep's Diary," penned under the pseudonym, Peep, had apparently been in jeopardy of being dropped but was back in print under the banner of Free Press: "somewhat curbed by popular opinion but with the freedom of the press still inviolate, Peeps returns."³⁰⁸ Brannon Smith's first official First Amendment Rights incident would not occur for several years when she was charged with libel and slander. She would face other charges throughout her career but her first went all the way to the State Supreme court where Justice Percy Lee sided with her, reversing the charges. In his decision Justice Lee wrote, "The freedom of speech and of the press shall be held sacred."³⁰⁹

Echoing the *C-W*'s "inviolable free press" position, Brannon Smith continued reporting and writing the truth as she understood it, regardless of popular opinion throughout her five decades as a journalist. Setting the tone for the difficulties of being an editor, a letter from former *C-W* Editor Gould Beech, who would become the focus of an historical documentary "Against the Mainstream"³¹⁰ and with whom she worked every year between 1932–1934 said, "An editor's job is a hard one, particularly if he attempts to take a stand on the various matters which are called to his attention and naturally it is necessary to make some enemies."³¹¹ Brannon Smith saw firsthand how enemies could be made. She had planned on making a good living—not

³⁰⁸ *Crimson-White*, September 9, 1932, 4.

³⁰⁹ In the Supreme Court of the State of Mississippi, *Mrs. Hazel Brannon Smith Appellant Versus No. 39,755 Richard F. Byrd Appellee*, September Term, 1955, filed November 19, 1955.

³¹⁰ *Against the Mainstream*, producer Mike Letcher, Broadcast on Alabama Public TV, February 16, 1995.

³¹¹ *Crimson-White*, September 21, 1934.

making enemies—when she bought the “*Durant Excuse*.”³¹² She had attended summer school each year, including 1935, graduating in three rather than four years. With her degree in hand she began scouring the trade classifieds for a paper that wouldn’t require a down payment. She made her first trip to Durant, Mississippi, where a broken down weekly, the *Durant News*, was for sale. On her third trip to the state, she bought it, becoming an owner and publisher of a newspaper at 22 years old. Three years later she told International News Service writer Damon Runyon that she “confines the paper largely to strictly local news, and does not bother much with politics.”³¹³

Considering just how political her newspapers became and the dozens of awards she received for commenting on her community, that statement is almost amusing. Perhaps having learned firsthand in UA’s journalism department that serious journalism could result in suicide, she thought local news would be less “costly.” Had she possessed a different set of values or not believed so adamantly in the freedom of the press she might not have kept fighting, kept writing controversial articles, kept doing whatever it took to keep her newspapers alive.

When in 1968 NBC hired Hazel to cover the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, the fourth and last weekly that she ever bought the *Northside Reporter*, was bombed. Hazel, in the next issue, responded:

To the Person or Persons Responsible for the Bombing of the
Northside Reporter:

If you hope to kill this newspaper, you are doomed to failure. It takes more than the sneak act of a criminal to destroy a free and independent press. A hundred bombs will not stop our publication. If it was your purpose to frighten harass or intimidate, you’d better think again.³¹⁴

This same fighting spirit could be seen earlier in the *C-W* but much more subdued. In the

³¹² Damon Runyon, “Durant Editor, Says Runyojn, Is Prettiest Party Delegate,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 26, 1940.

³¹³ *Memphis Commercial Appeal* July 6, 1940.

³¹⁴ Hazel Brannon, *Northside Reporter*, September 3, 1968.

Sept 14, 1934, issue an article noted that a baseball team in the American Legion recently forfeited its place in the final round of the national competition because a Negro member of the team was denied accommodations in a hotel.³¹⁵ The player was offered a room at a local doctor's house but the team refused and left. "Any southern hotel would lose prestige by accommodating a Negro, no matter what the private feelings of its owners. It is a business proposition. The team could have accepted the hospitality of the Doctor quite gracefully without losing either its self esteem or its convictions."³¹⁶ The supposed "fighting spirit" of the *Crimson-White* that also noted on the next page that Alabama had been rapidly taking the lead among universities of this region and claimed "co-education as a priceless possession" did not "fight" for the baseball players' equality but justified negotiation instead on the basis of the bottom line.³¹⁷ The November 1932 issue The November 1932 included an article in support of freedom of speech in another newspaper. Columbia's student newspaper, the *Spectator*, had come under fire for being too political. "The *Spectator* will not go back to the days when college editors discussed teas and the timeline of collegiate dancing," the article said.

The *C-W*'s November 23 issue also included commentary on the college press's freedom in an editorial about Huey Long, We don't take his verbal attacks of our brand of football seriously but we do believe that when Louisiana's self-styled kingfish takes it upon himself to muzzle the college press of that state, the *C-W* is justified in taking notice of him because of certain bonds of sympathy that exist between all college newspapers.³¹⁸ Fellow publisher Hodding Carter Jr., Ira Harkey, Bill Minor, ed. Other publishers in the state Biographer Whalen said.

Without knowing the specific articles Brannon Smith weighed in on editorially, it's difficult to say how she felt personally. Since the articles were abundant, it seems she concurred.

³¹⁵ *Crimson-White*, September 14, 1934.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Crimson-White* September 14, 1934.

In the November 30th Without specific cases, edition the degree of the press's freedom came up for discussion. In an open letter to Mr. William Randolph Hearst by the Association of College Editors set forth various questions on Internationalism vs. Nationalism. It was featured with the report that Mr. Hearst refused to answer.

The *C-W* joins with the *Daily Princetonian* in saying for our humble part, we hate the system that Hearst upholds, and hope with all the fervor which we are capable that those whom Hearst doesn't sway will someday smite the system such a terrible blow as to leave nationalism and competitive armament only a bitter and nauseating memory. The descriptor totalitarian capitalist was not used but the discussion came close as media ownership and independence became a serious issue.

Also the an edition of the *C-W* printed an article on the trouble at Baton Rouge that reported that the entire staff of the *Reveille* resigned after being told they couldn't print anything derogatory to Senator Long.³¹⁹ Brannon Smith and the staff seemed to support actions disavowing collegiate press censorship of other papers.

The *C-W*, itself dared to print controversial questions about the government's role and in the 1934 "Christmas Issue" asked, "Do you believe the U.S. can stay out of another great war? Do you believe in the conscription of capital in time of war jus[t] as has been our historic procedure in drafting man power in time of war?"³²⁰ Page three included an article about President Roosevelt, noting that in his sophomore year he became interested in the Harvard *Crimson* and was elected managing editor and alter president. He wrote "vigorous and crusading editorials, was enthusiastic in praise and bitter in criticism."³²¹ It is a description that could be made of Brannon Smith upon reflection of her newspaper career, except for being president.

³¹⁹ *Crimson-White*, November 30, 1934.

³²⁰ *Crimson-White*, December 7, 1934.

³²¹ *Crimson-White*, December 14, 1934.

Smith continued to fight for a free press, believing as she had been taught that a free press was critical to a democracy. Often she would publish informative, educational pieces around The Fourth of July that included background and facts about America's beginnings, especially during the years when the White Citizens' Council was trying to shut her up. During National Newspaper Week in 1961 "A Free Press" was the topic of her article titled "Americans Must Be Informed, Not Intimidated." In the October 19, 1961, issue of the *Lexington Advertiser* she published: "We should pause and consider what freedom of the press means to us individually and our country. This freedom did not come easily but can be lost before we realize it." Earlier in the July 6, 1961, *Lexington Advertiser* issue she published, "Freedom remains the highest aspiration and ultimate goal of most people and nations throughout the world." The *C-W*, although not a professional publication, set the tone years before, incorporating free press ideology into its contents. It was a tone that continued while she was on campus, sometimes even with a light touch a la "Uncle Peeps," and it would reverberate into her future publications profoundly.

The Effects of Hazel Brannon Smith's Newspapers—A Little Alabama Girl Kickin'

Butt”³²²

The *C-W* was ahead of its time when it introduced “media effects” for contemplation.³²³ It asked, “Suppose what Socrates thought and said would have been put on the wires for all the then known world to read. Two results would have followed: Socrates would have been more careful of what he said and he would have secured a better and more sympathetic hearing.”³²⁴ The effects of Brannon Smith's media—her newspapers—rippled and resounded in her community as she was transformed from a traditional southern lady to a “newspaper woman,” having the courage to face down community powerbrokers, lose her garden club standing, and fight for the press's freedom in spite of being “bombed, burned, and boycotted.”³²⁵

At the beginning of her career, Runyon in his IP wire article described the 26-year-old journalist as having “soft brown hair, gleaming white teeth and nice eyes and is just the right size . . . a true and loyal daughter of the Deep South.”³²⁶ Fifty-four years later, veteran Mississippi journalist Bill Minor stood at her grave site and eulogized her as “Hazel, this Alabama girl who loved The University of Alabama, and worshiped Bear Bryant, was touched by the spirit of liberty. . . . If ever the martyrs to a free press in America are assembled in Heaven, there is one thing I know: Hazel Brannon Smith will be in the front rank.”³²⁷

³²² Hodding Carter, III, Videotaped interview, Jackson, MS, April 2006.

³²³ *Crimson-White*, November 17, 1933.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Hazel Brannon Smith, “Bombed, Burned, and Boycotted,” <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF0702/Smith/Smith.html>.

³²⁶ *Memphis Commercial Appeal* July 6, 1940.

³²⁷ Bill Minor, *Eulogy*. Personal Files, Jackson, MS, April 2006.

This dissertation began with her FBI file. She had come under suspicion for her nosiness. When she came under fire during the Civil Rights Movement for writing stories that she thought accurate, albeit unflattering and accusatory of politicians and lawmakers, she asked the FBI for assistance. They had been the ones to inform her of the threats, but they could not provide her any protection. About all they could do was to warn her to be careful. Something else was indicated, though, when Brannon Smith received a letter to the editor. She published it July 12, 1962, in the *Lexington Advertiser*:

The principles on which our Nation was founded are far too meaningful to be compromised by public apathy, and my associates and I would like to thank you for keeping your public informed.

Sincerely Yours,
J. Edgar Hoover

Informing the public had been but one element of Cason's journalism philosophy. Along with it, he taught his students that journalism encompassed much more. As we can see, Brannon Smith was fully involved in UA's journalism program, where her transformation from a provincial would-be weekly newspaper publisher to a Pulitzer Prize-winning "newspaper woman" began. While her time at UA was indeed a bridge spanning various cultural gaps, it could only offer connection by being built. Each article and report, each assignment and inch, operated as these building blocks. Each one might be important individually, but of utmost importance was that they were created in the first place. And each one represents a combination of the technical and ideological concepts that fueled the debate between journalism as a profession or vocation.

The process and the product worked together to shape the end result. For Brannon Smith, college journalism was an important first step in her journalism career. And her philosophy of journalism reflected the principles Cason passed on to her. "A successful journalist should have a

wide-ranging education, including political science, history, business, anything that would provide the reporter with a broad background of knowledge,” she told Charles Reed, a Texas attorney during a National Federation of Press Women cruise in the early 1970s. And in a great moment of irony she also told him, “Given such knowledge, it wasn’t essential that he or she possess a journalism degree.”³²⁸

In the current climate of media transformation, Brannon Smith’s legacy illustrates what one woman can accomplish in spite of resistance and flux. “There are already too many jellyfish in the world. We don’t need any more in the form of editors,” she wrote in a bio for the *Press Woman* in 1971. She added, “But if the whole world turns against you, and sometimes it may, you still have your own self-respect.”³²⁹

As a product of various cultural influences it is difficult to summarize Brannon Smith in terms of shaping and development. However, it is not difficult to see how her paradoxical nature mirrored many of the paradoxical elements existing in her society during that time. This study examined her college journalism and found it difficult to extrapolate what *Crimson-White* content bore her signature and what topics she championed or disdained. But it is not difficult to note the newspaper’s function as a laboratory, where principles of journalism could be tested and applied. It served as a place that the staff could practice the various duties required at dailies and weeklies and learn about reporting, writing, layout, editing, bottom lines, and publishing. The members could experience cohesion as a part of the staff as they worked toward similar objectives; plus, each member could be exposed to new opinions and evolving thought like, and unlike, his or hers.

In response to the final research question “What impact did UA and its journalism

³²⁸ John A. Whalen, *Maverick Among the Magnolias, The Hazel Brannon Smith Story* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 247.

³²⁹ Hazel Brannon, *Press Woman*, National Federation of Press Women publication, need date.

program under Clarence Cason have on Brannon Smith?” the following quote from her last year on the *C-W* staff offers an answer: “Your life here at the University may be looked upon as a mirror to your future life, for experience has shown that as a man lives while he is in college so will he continue to live after he has finished.”³³⁰ This came to pass with Brannon Smith. She sought social acceptance alongside social responsibility and she worked obsessively, expecting to succeed.

But what came also was that she surpassed many expectations. By building on her earliest foundations Brannon Smith worked toward becoming “what a journalist ought to be but usually isn’t” as Hodding Carter III described her. Under Professor Cason she did more than learn about journalism; she developed her core ethics that would lead her through the coming years.

Anything but smooth, those years in her own words were “the most exasperating, time consuming, hard work that anyone can imagine.” She added though, “—and at the same time it can be the most rewarding task in the world, not financially perhaps but in other ways. . . . Everyone ought to be an editor just for a week.” She did it for at least 1144. Those fifty plus years were at times treacherous territory, yet her navigation--while not perfect nor a perfect example—was sure. “If I were to do it over again and I knew what I know now, yes, I’d do it all over again”³³¹ In the University of Alabama’s journalism department, she found a laboratory that nurtured her talents and ambitions, one that cultured her provincial elements. She had arrived, a young woman with a destination in mind, and the drive to get there. What she needed was direction. After three years on staff of the *C-W* and the completion of all the journalism major requirements, she left a journalist. And she had samples to prove it. With a big smile and those examples, she walked into a bank and asked for a loan to buy a broken down weekly--lack of

³³⁰ *Crimson-White*, September 12, 1934.

³³¹ *Lexington Advertiser*, August 1962.

professional experience be damned. She had determination, confidence and the compass she'd forged from her time at the University.

She walked out with the money.

SOURCES USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Federal Files

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