

Historian Mines ProQuest Historical Newspapers™ to Show How Early Broadcasters Impacted Society

Donna Halper is a media historian, author, former broadcaster, and one of the leading authorities on how broadcasting has affected U.S. society since the 1920s.

She's also an avid user of ProQuest Historical Newspapers, crediting the collection with helping her uncover many important stories about broadcasting that others have missed—in some cases for nearly 100 years.

"As a media historian, it's my job to tell the stories of people whose major contributions to society were overlooked by the media, as well as uncover and share new insights about the people who became famous," she says. "ProQuest Historical Newspapers has been an indispensable resource in all the research and writing I've done over the past few years."

Halper has written four books, dozens of research-based encyclopedia and magazine articles, and is working on her dissertation for a Ph.D. in Communications from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. In addition to her research and writing, Halper is Assistant Professor of Communications and Coordinator of the Media and Technology Program at Lesley University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Find new information others have missed.

"ProQuest Historical Newspapers has greatly expanded my ability to tell the story of how broadcasting has affected our society," she explains. "In doing

research for my dissertation and one of my books, I was writing about how early African-Americans were kept off the air. The prevailing view was that an announcer named Jack Cooper was the only black in mainstream radio."

To find out if this was true, Halper used ProQuest Historical Newspapers—Black Newspapers to research on keywords like "black announcer" or "negro announcer." The research uncovered details about Jocko Maxwell, an African-American sports announcer who was working in the mainstream media as early as the 1930s.

While Jocko Maxwell went virtually unrecognized in most newspapers of the day, he received considerable coverage in African-American newspapers like *The Philadelphia Tribune*. "African-American newspapers had all kinds of articles on him," she explains. "It was like a whole other world in the African-American news media where his accomplishments as a major force in the sports world were recognized." Using ProQuest Historical Newspapers—Black Newspapers, Halper was able to uncover other important, but less-well-known broadcasters whose careers were influenced by Jocko Maxwell.



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In addition to finding information other historians have missed, Halper also credits ProQuest Historical Newspapers with making her research more efficient. For example, Halper wrote her third book, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting*, before ProQuest Historical Newspapers was available. "I had to summon research materials from 50 libraries," she says. "Not only is it very time consuming to go through physical media, it's virtually impossible to do the kind of analysis enabled by ProQuest Historical Newspapers."

Halper was able to use ProQuest Historical Newspapers in researching her latest book, *Icons of Talk: The Media Mouths That Changed America*, and found the databases to be a tremendous help. "In writing *Icons of Talk*, my objective was to have a broad perspective on each of the top 20 talk-show hosts," she says. "ProQuest has been a valuable resource in making sure that my information is accurate and informative, and in helping me do the analysis that is critical for the project to be successful."

Speed fact checking and enhance accuracy.

"ProQuest also has made my fact checking a lot more accurate," she says. "With ProQuest Historical Newspapers, you can cross-check multiple newspapers and consequently assess and verify the claims that people made about an event."

She says ProQuest Historical Newspapers enabled her to gain new insights into the prevailing view that radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh was the first station to broadcast commercially in the U.S. "Using the research capabilities of ProQuest Historical Newspapers, I was able to uncover news

reports about stations in other cities that claimed they were first," she explains. "It was fascinating to compare the stories of radio's origins and read about how these stories were told in various cities. I could never have done this without ProQuest Historical Newspapers."

Become more productive quickly.

According to Halper, one of the key benefits of the ProQuest Historical Newspapers collection is its ease of use. "I didn't grow up in the Internet world and Facebook world," she says, noting that the early days of her research and writing involved gleaning information from books, periodicals, and microfilm, or through interviews. Halper says, "ProQuest is one of the most user-friendly databases that I have ever used. With some databases you practically have to take a course before you can use them. But with ProQuest, I was up and running in 15 minutes with no one showing me how."

Since her initial experience with ProQuest, Halper has become an enthusiastic user. "I use the databases on a regular basis and, as new capabilities and titles are added, I re-ask many questions to see what I get. For example, I uncovered Jocko Maxwell by conducting a previous query about black announcers a second time when the ProQuest Historical Newspapers—Black Newspapers database was launched."

"I absolutely adore ProQuest and its historical newspapers collection," Halper concludes. "It's clearly the definitive digital archive. It has helped me in a million ways, and I sincerely believe that ProQuest has the potential to put sophisticated research capabilities into the hands of millions of people."



For more information about ProQuest Historical Newspapers

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