
Many people of a certain age in Arkansas and some journalists beyond the borders mourn the demise of the *Arkansas Gazette*. This 1991 loss rests not only in the fact that the 167-year-old *Gazette* was the oldest remaining newspaper west of the Mississippi, but also because of its courageous stand against bigotry in a Southern state imperiling its own survival in the 1950s desegregation controversy. Roy Reed, an eight-year veteran of the newspaper before his stint as a national and foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, has included in *Looking Back at the Arkansas Gazette* some 150 interviews with former employees stretching from editors to clerks. He traces the story from William Woodruff’s founding of the paper at the same time of the Arkansas Territory’s own founding in 1819. The story concentrates more carefully through the twentieth century, through a purchase by Gannett Company, and through a distasteful newspaper war with the state’s other longtime rival. It can be seen as somewhat representative of many modern newspapers’ downfall and ruin in the contemporary era of electronic communication and by what Reed describes as the “systematic” conversion of a fine newspaper into “an imitation of *USA Today* with its splashy color, tasteless photos, and page-one stories designed to titillate instead of inform” (199).

The many quotations are rich with information and tone, lending texture to the historical voices that tell the story. What may frustrate public historians is that Reed gives too little narrative in which to embed the oral history. The organization of the material begins with snippets of what Reed calls “the Cast” (xv–xxvii) and follows with a mostly chronological collection of the broad quotations. Readers outside Arkansas and outside the newspaper industry might long for more background information to tie the extensive quotations together. For instance in Chapter 9, “Gannet and Be Damned,” Reed explains that the *Gazette* was purchased in 1986 by the national chain but does not explain why this happened until he uses the voice of owner Carrick Patterson some twelve pages later.

This one limitation does not weaken the voices, the emotions, and the facts that come clearly through the participants’ quotations. Their words easily place the reader into the context of a lively work environment, of a proud and closely knit set of newspapermen and women who experienced the disappointment of the newspaper’s sale in 1986 with the slow realization that Gannett would not keep its promise to “respect . . . and maintain its [the Gazette’s] reputation as one of the nation’s best newspapers” (199).

Past that event, the last three chapters detail the newspaper war with Walter Hussman and the *Arkansas Democrat*. Here the reader experiences the frustrations of the Gazette’s loyal workforce as they face the death of their once-respected and beloved “gray lady.” Important to this story is the sixteen-page interview with their rival publisher Walter Hussman, whom Reed thanks
in his Acknowledgements (xiii). Throughout the 277 pages of opinion and memory two fundamental concepts are echoed by all: the Arkansas Gazette’s history was a chronicle, a history of the state itself. It was “Arkansas’s paper, and they were proud of it, even though they didn’t agree with it many times” (18). The second belief by those who were the Arkansas Gazette is that the liberal voice of Arkansas is now lost: “[t]he Gazette’s influence on Arkansas was profound, critical . . . I was talking to Dale Bumpers (Democratic Senator from AR) and he said that if the Gazette fell, Arkansas would get like Mississippi and Alabama. It’s already happened, a decade later,” suggests one narrator (273). Unlike other Southern states who had joined the ranks of conservative Republicans decades before, the death of the Arkansas Gazette, which had favored Democrats editorially, meant that the winners of the newspaper war were not only the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, but also the growing Republican party in Arkansas.

This book is significant in documenting the history of an American newspaper and in chronicling the political direction of one upper South state.

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In Contested Histories in Public Space, editors Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer have assembled a collection of thirteen essays that examine museums, monuments, and other public spaces across six continents to understand how postcolonial theory has shaped the representation and construction of national narratives. Multiculturalism and identity politics in an era of decolonization, the editors argue, has irrevocably challenged such narratives by illuminating “the history of race and empire in public spaces” (viii). Contested Histories is the second volume in a two-part Radical History Review series, “Radical Perspectives.” Volume 1, Memory and the Impact of Political Transformations in Public Space (2004) also edited by Walkowitz and Knauer, explores how memory and interpretations of the past in public spaces belong not just to academics and public history professionals, but have become locations for broader political and social debates. The volume’s contributors show how contests over public representations of a nation’s historical narratives go beyond the scope of current political regimes, and often reveal longer-standing struggles that resurface in the wake of political upheaval—the fall of the Soviet Union, for example. Contested Histories builds on Memory, dealing with many of the same themes, but focuses specifically on the role of postcolonial theory in shaping the “interrogations of how race and empire are implicated, referenced, or obscured in the construction of national narratives”