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Myers, Cayce. *Public Relations History: Theory, Practice, and Profession*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2021, pp. 184, \$44.95 (paperback). Reviewed by Pam Parry, Southeast Missouri State University (pparry@semo.edu)

Deciphering the history of any field is difficult, but the historiography of public relations is particularly dicey. For instance, historians do not agree on the origins of public relations, when it began, and how to define it. Public relations historian Karla Gower likened the task to “nailing jelly to the wall” (Back Cover). But author Cayce Myers accepted this herculean challenge in his new book, *Public Relations History: Theory, Practice, and Profession*, and his work helps historians see public relations history in a brighter light.

Acknowledging that public relations history may always be elusive, Myers sought “to provide an overview of where public relations history is today,” (p. x) from the “perspective that early public relations histories needed to be rethought and re-examined” (p. xi). It is his exploration and correction of the historiography that is this book’s greatest contribution. For instance, in Chapter 2, Myers surveys the development of public relations, positing that early histories focused on founders, like Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, Arthur Page, and the four models of public relations espoused by James Grunig and Todd Hunt. This limited approach ignores much public relations history, and the four models have focused narrowly on public relations practice in the entertainment and corporate arenas – missing much of the industry, Myers writes.

His book takes a fresh look at the definitions and theories of public relations, while examining public relations in several sectors: politics, non-profit, education, religion, corporate, and entertainment. The work studies propaganda, public opinion, ethics, professional organizations, credentialing, and the future of public relations history. Building on the current historiography, Myers expands it to be more inclusive and therefore more accurate. In his last

chapter, he discusses the future of public relations history and encourages a continuation of his efforts.

The author does not want to throw out existing history, but he argues that much of it has yet to be written, and his book strongly assembles and categorizes where public relations history stands today. The first step to expanding historiography is to know where its boundaries are and then to push beyond them. He does this very well. For example, he argues that public relations is not solely an American brainchild, as is sometimes taught, but American public relations has borrowed some public relations methods and strategies from other countries. The American practice of nonprofit fundraising first began in Britain, he notes as an example. He also asserts that much history has focused on corporate public relations and press agency that grew out of entertainment from the likes of P. T. Barnum, but that historical view limits the achievements of minorities, women, and volunteers whose public relations efforts often go unnoticed as such.

One strength of the book is that the author brings the existing historiography into a work that is less than 200 pages – so its conciseness makes it ideal for a graduate course, perhaps even an upper-level class on public relations or media history. Myers also pushes the readers to look beyond the current history through provocative discussion questions at the end of the ten chapters, which would fit comfortably in a semester. The questions would provide for classroom discussion – with some of them having no easy solution from the book itself. These questions could lend themselves to Forums or Essays on Canvas or Blackboard pages. Such questions would prod students to think critically for themselves. One example is a question from Chapter 1: “What role does technology play in the changing definitions of

the field of public relations? Can you think of how the definition of public relations may change in the next 10-20 years?" (p. 12).

Media historians will appreciate this book because it is interesting and it expands the current historiography in a digestible writing style. It would be a great addition to university libraries and/or text for a course on public relations/media history.

The primary frustration with the book is the same as with public relations history itself – the

author and the readers know there is history that has been excluded from its pages and the field has yet to produce a comprehensive work. This is not the author's fault, as he pushes readers to dig deeper to find it, but it does leave them wishing they could unravel the mystery once and for all. But history does not really work that way, and no one knows that more than the author who just took a significant step in that direction.