

## The Capital Times: A Proudly Radical Newspaper's Century-Long Fight for Justice and for Peace

Frank Durham  
*University of Iowa*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2018 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

Durham, Frank. "The Capital Times: A Proudly Radical Newspaper's Century-Long Fight for Justice and for Peace." *The Annals of Iowa* 77 (2018), 330-331.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12494>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

generation will apply its energies. Some of the essays in *Civic Labors* point to ongoing struggles for fair treatment and a decent living standard. Iowa is no longer the industrial powerhouse it once was in coal mining, meatpacking, and agricultural implement manufacturing. The essays in this collection point to future battles in new arenas for workers of all sorts and the scholar activists who will continue the struggle, much as those represented in this fine collection have done.

*The Capital Times: A Proudly Radical Newspaper's Century-Long Fight for Justice and for Peace*, by Dave Zweifel and John Nichols. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017. xv, 319 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, note on sources, index. \$25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Frank Durham is associate professor of journalism in the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. His research interests include journalism history and media framing analysis.

Full of clear, engaging writing and photos depicting a century of progressive activism by the *Capitol Times*, this history of the Madison (Wisconsin) daily afternoon newspaper recalls a time when there were giants on the Left in America. Much more than nostalgia, however, the essays in this volume offer a meaningful history of the newspaper's glory days. This well-written account by the newspaper's longtime former editor Dave Zweifel and current associate editor John Nichols celebrates the iconic media outlet's career as a local newspaper with a national voice and, especially, a *progressive* voice. As the authors make clear, one need not look further than the 2011 occupation of the state capitol by anti-Scott Walker protesters to see that liberal legacy alive and kicking in Madison today.

In the book's introduction, Zweifel and Nichols describe the "*Cap Times*" as a newspaper with a "soul." Then they proceed to show it. By using the vast resources of the Wisconsin State Historical Society and their own files, the authors have researched a detailed narrative that I enjoyed for its "energetic morality." If that term seems odd, the look in the eye of progressives, both early and late, shown in the book's dozens of documentary photographs will make it clear. At that core level, the authors succeed in bringing to life the time when William T. Evjue could define progressivism in his editorials and take it to the ballot box, too.

Offering detailed accounts of aggressive reporting and pointed editorializing, the authors describe the positions to which Evjue staked the *Times*, detailing one signal liberal moment after another, both in their engaging narrative and through photos. Evjue left the conservative *Madison Wisconsin State Journal* in 1917 to oppose war profiteers and the U.S. entry

into the war. In pursuit of his goal to publish a "people's paper," Evjue would train his sights on big business and industry from then on.

Among the many liberal causes Evjue championed or challenged, perhaps none had more impact than his founding of the Progressive Party with Robert "Bob" La Follette in 1924. Although in his "insurgent" presidential run La Follette won only Wisconsin, by then the course was set. The authors explain, "Progressivism, as espoused by La Follette and his allies at the start of the twentieth century shaped the ideology of the *Capital Times* and its crusading spirit." That spirit was quickly tested when, in the same year, the paper exposed and condemned a mass meeting of the Ku Klux Klan in Madison.

In 1951 the newspaper's editors recognized Joseph McCarthy early on as a demagogue and a fear monger. At a time when many state and major national newspapers were supporting McCarthy, the *Times* fought him relentlessly "with all its resources," even as it would take on environmental, civil rights, racial, and antiwar issues over time.

Between them, Zweifel and Nichols reflect a key transition for their newspaper from hard copy to digital format. Indeed, the published edition of the *Times* outlived most other city afternoon dailies elsewhere in the country by decades, largely due to a joint Madison Newspapers, Inc., with the *State Journal*. Today a quick search of the Web finds the "*Cap Times*" alive and well with "front page" editorial content by Nichols that Evjue would applaud.

As a "house history," this book offers insight to future historians of journalism. As a memoir of another era, it reminds us that progressivism has faced down war and famine before. And that it can, again.

*The Floppy Show*, by Jeff Stein. Images of America Series. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2018. 128 pp. Illustrations. \$21.99 paperback.

Reviewer Phillip J. Hutchison is associate professor of Integrated Strategic Communication at the University of Kentucky. He is the author of "The Lost World of Marshal J: History, Memory, and Iowa's Forgotten Broadcast Legend" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2009).

Local entertainment television may be one of the most overlooked social legacies of the mid-twentieth century. Most local television stations broadcast two to five hours of locally produced entertainment programming each weekday from the 1950s through the 1970s. Moreover, viewers did not just watch these local television programs passively; rather, they actively engaged these television rituals as part of their experience of local life. Yet often these realities have been lost to history for two reasons: First, few of these programs were documented, much less