Abstract

Viewing journalism as a key site for the construction of collective memory, this paper examines how US news media employed historical analogies to the Great Depression and New Deal as the 2008 recession unfolded. News provided space for competing liberal and conservative claims about the lessons of the 1930s for contemporary policy; journalists also remembered the Depression--figured as a time of frugality, common purpose, and a simpler lifestyle--in order to guide behavior during economic hard times. Newfound attention to the New Deal did not, this paper argues, effect consensus around the importance of government involvement in the economy. Liberal calls for a new New Deal met with conservative attacks on the first New Deal, and calls to emulate the values of the Depression resonated with a cultural politics of personal responsibility, implying that the nation’s economic well-being rested on whether or not individual Americans lived within their means.