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HEADLINE: Book on Yellow Journalism Doubts Existence of Infamous Telegram

It's a tale familiar to history buffs, media critics, and fans of Citizen Kane. In December 1896, about 14 months before the Spanish-American War began, William Randolph Hearst sent the artist Frederic Remington to compose illustrations of the Cuban insurgency for the New York Journal. Soon thereafter, Remington is said to have cabled his intention to leave, because "there will be no war." Hearst replied, "Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I'll furnish the war." Hearst then used his newspaper to whip up American sentiment against Spain.

As they say in the news business, it's a story too good to check. But **W. Joseph Campbell**, an assistant professor of journalism at American University and a former newspaper reporter, has concluded that it's probably bunk. Skeptical historians have long noted that the legendary telegrams have never surfaced. Now, Mr. Campbell has dug up myriad other reasons to doubt the story. Among them: The only source, a reporter named James Creelman, was in Europe that month; the telegrams were not likely to have cleared Cuban censors; and Hearst's words were at odds with his newspaper's editorial position at the time.

In a forthcoming scholarly history of yellow journalism at the turn of the century (Praeger, 2000), Mr. Campbell hopes to squelch "some of the myths and misunderstandings" about the genre. But the truth may be no match for the power of a good yarn -- one that has recently resurfaced in media-studies journals, a cable-television movie about Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and even on the U.S. Postal Service's World-Wide Web site.

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If William J. Maxwell is right, Moscow-on-the-Hudson may have been in Harlem. In *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (Columbia University Press), Mr. Maxwell argues that the Harlem Renaissance was not only black, but Red as well. "The history of African-American letters," he writes in the new book, "cannot be unraveled from the history of American Communism without damage to both."

Nearly every major figure of the Harlem Renaissance was affiliated at one time or another with the Communist Party. That's significant, says Mr. Maxwell, an assistant professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, because those associations predate the Depression and "the heyday of the Old Left." Not only did Communism supply African-American writers with intellectual fuel, he argues, but those writers in turn helped to rev up the engine of American radicalism for the 1930s.

That's a radical proposition itself. Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible*

Man have long provided what was thought to be the final word on the African-American encounter with Communism: White radicals sought black spokesmen for deracinated views that robbed the writers of their vernacular culture.

That story, writes Mr. Maxwell, "joins fifty years of red squads in assuming that black intellectuals were incapable of transforming their party or their white radical counterparts, save through denunciations issued after escape."

In fact, writes Mr. Maxwell, "Red interracialisms of word and deed opened two-way channels between radical Harlem and Soviet Moscow."

Communism, says Mr. Maxwell, brought Wright to Zora Neale Hurston and African-American vernacular culture, and provided Langston Hughes with readers who "internationalized" his poetry. Meanwhile, the poet Claude McKay made the journey in body as well as in words, traveling to Moscow to write and publish -- in Russian -- his 1923 *The Negroes in America*, a book that contributed directly to the deliberations of the Comintern on "the Negro question."

"There were as many stimulating interactions as not," says Mr. Maxwell. "Communism's conviction for the death of the renaissance is something of a frame-up."

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It probably won't come close to the continuing sales of *The Fountainhead* (several hundred thousand a year), but Chris Matthew Sciabarra hopes that *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* will be another coup in his campaign for the conquest of academe in the popular author's name. Mr. Sciabarra, a visiting scholar at New York University and the author of multiple works on Rand, has predicted an unstoppable wave of Randianism in academe (*The Chronicle*, April 9). With this month's publication of his new semi-annual journal, he hopes to push the crest higher still.

He'd like to sweep the naysayers along with him. Mr. Sciabarra says the journal will be open not only to Objectivists -- orthodox believers in Rand's philosophy of selfishness and capitalism -- but to those of every perspective and in every discipline. "We're actively seeking Marxists, leftists, socialists," he says. "I hope we'll have literary critics, feminists, whatever."

The first issue will include an essay by Mr. Sciabarra on Rand's college education; an essay by the co-editor, Stephen Cox, a professor of literature at the University of California at San Diego, on Rand's celebration of capitalism; and two essays challenging Rand's views.