"Extracts from some Rebel Papers":
Patriots, Loyalists, and the Perils of Wartime Printing

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The eight years of the Revolutionary War were difficult for the printing trade. After over a decade of growth and increasing entanglement among printers as their networks evolved from commercial lifelines to the pathways of political protest, the fissures of the war dispersed printers geographically and cut them off from their peers. Maintaining commercial success became increasingly complicated as demand for printed matter dropped, except for government printing, and supply shortages crippled communications networks and hampered printers' ability to produce and distribute anything that came off their presses. Yet even in their diminished state, printers and their networks remained central not only to keeping open lines of communication among governments, armies, and civilians, but also in shaping public opinion about the central ideological issues of the war, the outcomes of battles, and the meaning of events affecting the war in North America and throughout the Atlantic world.

What happened to printers and their networks is of vital importance for understanding the Revolution. The texts that historians rely on, from *Common Sense* and *The Crisis* to rural newspapers, almanacs, and even diaries and correspondence, were shaped by the commercial and political forces that printers navigated as they produced printed matter that defined the scope of debate and the nature of the discussion about the war. Contemporaries recognized this fact, which made printers the target of rhetorical and physical violence as each side attempted to enforce its own notions about the "free press." In order to understand the war of words, therefore, one must first turn to those who produced and circulated those words.

Building the Networks: The Imperial Crisis[1]

Prior to the outbreak of war, printers were crucial to the development of an intercolonial infrastructure for political communications. As publishers of political news and men whose commercial interests were affected by imperial policy, printers were at the hub of political and commercial networks that included other artisans, merchants, and political leaders. Oral, manuscript, and printed forms of political communication intersected in the printers' shops, where printers repackaged them into printed newspapers, pamphlets, and almanacs through which political news and opinion traveled around the colonies. Printers and their political allies gradually built up an intercolonial system of communications that included several layers: the

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[1] This section will not appear in the actual chapter, as it largely summarizes the material that precedes it. It is provided here for background on where the narrative picks up.

spectrum of print media that printers produced; the various modes of transportation, such as the Post Office, private carriers, and networks of individual travelers that distributed unpublished and published political communications; and the spaces where political news, debate, and opinions took shape, including the printing office, the post office, coffee houses, libraries, bookshops, and taverns. Printers stood at the nexus of this emerging infrastructure.

Printers first became political activists in 1765 during the Stamp Act crisis. This moment is particularly instructive because the Act taxed nearly all printed matter, and thus amounted to a tax on printers' livelihoods. At first, printers (like most other colonists) expected the Act to take effect as scheduled on November 1, 1765. Therefore, many printers reckoned first with how to address the tax and maintain their businesses. Some even sought to take advantage of, and to stoke, the growing protests against the Act by selling it as a cheap pamphlet or publishing it in excerpted form in the pages of their newspapers and almanacs. Once widespread opposition seemed assured, printers carefully decided whether to continue printing without stamps (in violation of the Act) based on a matrix of their political and business interests. Throughout the crisis, printers helped to create and publicize resistance and to project a unified public opinion against the Act because of the economic threat it posed.

By the early 1770s, printers were integrating their commercial networks with political groups such as the Boston Committee of Correspondence. Printers and print were central to the activities of extralegal committees, but they often exerted their own financial interests above and beyond the call to the public good that the committees issued. As part of that relationship, printers were central to the effort to overthrow the British imperial post office and replace it with an American post office in 1774 and 1775. Just as with the Stamp Act, printers saw British postal regulations as a direct commercial threat, since they were its primary users and faced enormous difficulties using the post to circulate their newspapers and other forms of communication. Led by William Goddard, a printer in Philadelphia and Baltimore, these printers claimed that the post office represented unjust and oppressive taxation, and cited its governmental power to censor and restrict news circulation. In order to effect the creation of a "Constitutional Post," printers wielded their influence with the Boston committee for sponsorship, funding, and publicity.

The protests against the Tea Act in the fall of 1773 served as a culmination of the efforts of printers to develop effective networks for circulating information. In particular, printers used the circulation of information about protests in other towns to shape the nature of protests in their

own towns. In the wake of the Tea Act and the responses to the Boston Port Act, the printing trade fractured along political lines as printers aligned with Patriots and Loyalists; the calculation of economic benefit for printers by 1774 became very clearly identified with political interest.

Their success continued early on in the war, before the full effects of dislocation had taken hold. Most notably, printers distributed widely Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, which first appeared in Philadelphia in January 1776. Several scholars have shown recently that the pamphlet's publication history owed a great deal to local disputes in Philadelphia as they affected the local print market. Paine's political conflicts with his first publisher, Robert Bell, led to a series of competing editions of *Common Sense*.[2] Yet within just a few months, *Common Sense* appeared in local editions in seven colonies, mostly in the mid-Atlantic and New England and began to circulate throughout the Atlantic world.[3] It was advertised for sale in a number of other printing markets and was excerpted in many newspapers, including the *Connecticut Courant*, the *Norwich Packet*, and the *Virginia Gazette*. It generated a range of responses from other writers, most notably the pamphlet *Plain Truth* by Loyalist James Chalmers.[4]

Furthermore, its wide circulation pushed the pamphlet into the discussions and debates of colonists across the political spectrum. Nicholas Cresswell, a Loyalist in Virginia, described it in mid-January as "Full of false representations, Lies, Calumny, and Treason whose principles are to subvert all Kingly Government and erect an Indepen[d]ent Republic."[5] General Horatio Gates, stationed with the Continental Army in Cambridge, Massachusetts, called it "an excellent

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[2] Trish Loughran, "Disseminating *Common Sense*: Thomas Paine and the Problem of the Early National Bestseller," *American Literature* 78, no. 1 (March 2006): 1-28; idem, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), ch. 2; Michael Everton, "'The Would-Be-Author and the Real Bookseller:' Thomas Paine and Eighteenth-Century Printing Ethics," *Early American Literature* 40, no. 1 (2005): 79-110; Ryerson, *The Revolution is Now Begun*, 152-55. On Paine's career and ideology, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: OIEAHC, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 439-79; Jack Fruchtman Jr., *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Paine* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); idem, *Thomas Paine: Apostle of Freedom* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1994); Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005); John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995); David Freeman Hawke, s18 Paine (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). On Bell see Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: OIEAHC, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), passim; James N. Green, "English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin," *CBAW*, 283-89.

[3] Thomas R. Adams catalogued twenty-five American editions printed in thirteen towns. Editions were also published in London, Edinburgh, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Rotterdam. *American Independence: The Growth of an Idea* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965), xi, 164-72.

[4] "Candidus," *Plain Truth; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, Containing, Some Remarks on a Late Pamphlet entitled Common Sense* (Philadelphia: Robert Bell, 1776).

[5] Harold B. Gill, Jr. and George M. Curtis III, eds., *A Man Apart: The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1781* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), January 19, 1776, 104.

performance," and speculated that "our friend Franklyn [sic] has been principally concerned in the composition.[6] The pamphlet sold very well: a bookseller in Annapolis requested that Thomas Bradford send him "three Or four dozen Pamphlets of Common sence," and printer John Carter in Providence forwarded 500 copies to the American camp in Massachusetts in March.[7] Thus it is unsurprising that Pauline Maier pointed to the publication of *Common Sense* as the moment that sparked the independence movement of 1776 by making it seem both legitimate and possible.[8]

The publication of *Common Sense*, and the Declaration of Independence in the summer of 1776, would prove to be the apex of effective circulation during the war. After the British capture of New York City in September 1776, the continent's communications networks were effectively split in two, and often fractured even further in the years that followed. Yet printers continued to publish and pursue their trade. In the process they undertook a range of activities to keep open channels of communication and support the war effort on both sides. Although the networks that printers had cultivated during the imperial crisis frayed during the war years, they nonetheless sought to adapt and stay afloat in often precarious circumstances. Over the course of fifteen years, then, printers enhanced their commercial networks and in the process developed them into a potent force for shaping public opinion. Printers attempted to reconcile their own political beliefs with the prevailing sentiment of their communities to determine how best to manage their commercial enterprises. In so doing, they both individually and as a group made critical decisions that determined what political news and information circulated and where during the imperial crisis.

Disconnected Networks

The Revolutionary War was damaging for the printing trade on many levels, as the onset of war diminished overall demand for printed material and fractured communications networks

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[6] Horatio Gates to Charles Lee, January 22, 1776, Sol Feinstone Collection, DLAR. Gates was not alone in his estimation of Franklin's involvement.

[7] William Whitcroft to Thomas Bradford, February 19, 1776, Bradford Family Papers, HSP; John Carter to Joseph Trumbull, March 6, 1776, Book Trades Collection, AAS. On the publication history of the pamphlet, see Loughran, "Disseminating *Common Sense*;" Maier, *American Scripture*, 28-34; Richard Gimbel, *Thomas Paine: A Bibliographical Check List of* Common Sense *with an Account of Its Publication* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956).

[8] Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 28-34.

that printers had spent years developing. Many of the personnel of the trade were directly affected. At the outset of the conflict in 1775, 100 printers were active in British North America.[9] After years of slow but steady increase through the colonial period, that growth flatlined as men joined the fight, fled their towns, or simply closed up shop at a time when the demand for printing services contracted. At its minimum, the trade contracted to ninety-three members in both 1777 and 1778. After the conclusion of the main fighting in 1781, the trade began to grow again, and was up to 134 master printers by 1783. Of those, only 65 had been active at the start of the war eight years earlier, meaning that the postwar trade would only slightly resemble that of the imperial crisis.

The printers active during the Revolution ran the spectrum of political affiliation. Of the 106 printers with known political leanings, sixty-one appeared to have been Patriots, thirty-nine Loyalists, four neutral, and two switched sides during the course of the war.[10] Most of these printers eventually self-identified with one side or the other either through their publications, their affiliations, or their actions (e.g., those who evacuated for England with the British Army). Nearly forty fought in the Revolutionary War, most of them for the United States, and a few rose to significant positions. William Bradford, in his mid-fifties, turned from his press and activities

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[9] Aggregate data in this paper was compiled from a database of 700 printers, editors, and publishers active between the years 1756 and 1796. I constructed the database using several sources. First among these is the Printers' Card File at the American Antiquarian Society. I would like in particular to thank Ashley Cataldo, who has helped me enormously in locating the files of additional printers held separately from the main catalog. To supplement those files, I consulted several works on bibliography and the history of printing, including: Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America, with a Biography of Printers & an Account of Newspapers*, ed. Marcus McCorison from the 2d ed. (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970); Leona M. Hudak, *Early American Women Printers and Publishers, 1639-1820* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978); Marie Tremaine, *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952); Benjamin Franklin V, ed., *Boston Printers, Publishers, and Booksellers: 1640-1800* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980); Frank Cundall, *A History of Printing in Jamaica from 1717 to 1834* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1935); Howard S. Pactor, *Colonial British Caribbean Newspapers: A Bibliography and Directory* (New York: Greenwood, 1990). I have also consulted numerous monographs and articles on individual printers.

[10] A total of 184 printers were active during the years 1775 to 1783, which means that seventy-eight have indeterminate political leanings. It is certainly likely given estimates of the ratio of Patriots, Loyalists, and neutrals, that many of these other printers had no strong inclinations. On the ratio of Patriots, Loyalists, and neutrals, see Robert M. Calhoon, "Loyalism and Neutrality," in Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 247-59. On printers during the American Revolution, see Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 229-72. On Loyalists, see George Edward Cullen, Jr., "Talking to a Whirlwind: The Loyalist Printers in America, 1763-1783" (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1979); Timothy M. Barnes, "Loyalist Newspapers of the American Revolution, 1763-1783: A Bibliography," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 83 (1973): 217-40.

as a Son of Liberty to join the Continental Army and served several years as Chairman of the Pennsylvania Navy Board.[11]

Just as the number of printers stagnated during the war, so too did the number of publications. The number of imprints spiked sharply just before the war began as printers put out a plethora of essays, pamphlets, and broadsides about the imperial crisis, but the number dropped off each year during the war, not to recover its heights until after the ratification of the Constitution (see Figure 1). The number of newspapers in North America similarly stagnated over the course of the war, hovering between forty and fifty until 1783, when the trade began to recover and expand once again (see Figure 2).[12] Despite the interest and need for news during the war, there was little economic incentive to start a newspaper as prices on raw materials soared due to inflation and the capital required to operate a printing office was difficult to come by.[13]

Many of the difficulties in communication and the printing trade stemmed from the military campaigns waged across North America. Between 1775 and 1783, the Continental Army and the British Army engaged in a long series of chases across eastern North America that moved progressively southward. The earliest phase of the war focused in New England, where British troops had been stationed since the late 1760s because of unrest in Boston. After Washington and the Continental Army forced their evacuation in March 1776, the British launched an invasion of New York City in the summer of 1776. By September, the British controlled the city and its harbor, which they would hold until a full peace treaty was ratified in late 1783. Around the same time, the British took the lucrative seaport of Newport, Rhode Island, occupying it for over three years. In the meantime, the main thrust of the campaigns shifted to the mid-Atlantic, prompting two years of fighting in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and culminating in the British occupation of Philadelphia from September 1777 to May 1778. Beginning in 1779, the British abandoned the mid-Atlantic in pursuit of a Southern strategy, hoping to capitalize on the large numbers of Loyalists they assumed would rally to fight in

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[11] John William Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian, Colonel William Bradford, the Patriot Printer of 1776. Sketches of His Life* (Philadelphia: Sherman & Co., Printers, 1884), 120-227.

[12] See also G. Thomas Tanselle, "Some Statistics on American Printing, 1764-1783," in Bailyn and Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution*, 315-63.

[13] E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill: IEAHC, University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 25-47. On the capital required to open a printing office, see Wroth, *The Colonial Printer* (Charlottesville, VA: Dominion Books, 1964), 65-67; John Bidwell, "Printers' Supplies and Capitalization," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, v. 1 of *A History of the Book in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161-81.

Georgia and the Carolinas. As such the British invaded and occupied first Savannah in 1779 and Charleston in 1780, ports which (like New York) they would only relinquish at the conclusion of peace negotiations.[14]

For the most outspoken partisans of each side, the arrival of an opposing army posed a direct threat to their personal liberty and exposed their persons, families, and property to violence from opponents. On top of that, the overtly partisan political atmosphere meant that even in the absence of violence or the threat thereof, there would often be little in the way of commercial prospects so long as the opponent's army was in town. Finally, the war forced most printers to finally take sides—something most had avoided doing overtly for much of the imperial crisis. For many printers, therefore, relocation was a defining feature of the war years as they moved away from opposing armies. In total, fifty-one printers (representing thirty-nine offices) had to evacuate at some point during the war, including twenty-one Patriots, twenty-six Loyalists, and four others.[15]

A significantly higher proportion of Loyalist printers evacuated, and most left for good, largely as the obvious result of the war's conclusion. A number of the Loyalist printers were placed on proscription lists by state legislatures during the war or immediately thereafter, had their property confiscated and sold off, or simply could not bear to live in the United States. The beginning of hostilities in April 1775 by itself prompted several printers, in particular Loyalists, to pack up and leave the rebellious colonies. William Aikman, an Annapolis bookseller, fled to Kingston, Jamaica, where he again sold books, worked as a stationer, and was King's Printer until his death in 1784.[16] Similarly, Robert Luist Fowle was forced to flee after "at length he became so obnoxious to the Usurpers" in his native New Hampshire. Fowle served in the British Army first in Canada and then New York until 1782, when he left for London to plead his case

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[14] On the military campaigns of the Revolutionary War, see Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[15] For the locations and affiliations of evacuating printers, see the map available online at http://josephadelman.wordpress.com/research/relocated-printers/. One, Christopher Sower, Jr., was neutral as a Dunker, and one, Hugh Gaine of New York, leaned in each direction at different points of time. The political affiliations of two evacuees—Daniel Fowle of Portsmouth, NH and John Pinckney of Williamsburg, VA—are unknown.

[16] Frank Cundall, *A History of Printing in Jamaica from 1717 to 1834* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1935), 32-33.

before the Loyalist Claims Commission.[17] Even far from the battle lines, therefore, the war affected the decision-making of printers.

When motivated by military action, Patriot and Loyalist evacuations followed very different patterns. Patriot printers for the most part fled into the hinterland only upon the arrival of the British Army in their town, and most returned to their original locations shortly after the British departed. In Boston, for example, the outbreak of fighting at Lexington and Concord prompted a massive shake-up in the local trade. Benjamin Edes and John Gill published the *Boston Gazette* in Boston on April 17, two days before the British march. Edes then moved the printing press and other equipment to nearby Watertown, some eight miles west of Boston; the *Gazette* would not appear again until June. Once the leading anti-imperial press in New England, Edes and Gill never worked together again.[18] Isaiah Thomas moved even further, secreting his Boston printing press "out of town at Midnight by water" and moving it all the way to Worcester, over forty miles away.[19] Intriguingly, Thomas was able to turn the escape into a way to avoid an ordinary commercial lawsuit in the British courts; just a week earlier, one of his paper suppliers had taken out a warrant for his arrest for a debt of fifteen pounds.[20] John Boyle, another Boston printer, took his family south to Hingham for the duration of the occupation.[21] Similarly, printers John Holt and Samuel Loudon fled New York in the fall of 1776 as the British stormed the city and headed north to towns along the Hudson River. In the fall of 1777, when the British took Philadelphia, Patriots headed west to Lancaster, York, and other towns. Some of them followed the Congress in order to continue government printing.[22] In nearly all of these cases, printers returned home shortly after the British departed, surveying the damage and resuming business.

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[17] Memorial of Robert Luist Fowle, Papers of the Loyalist Claims Commission, AO 13/52/234, viewed at DLAR.

[18] Maurice R. Cullen, Jr., "Benjamin Edes: Scourge of Tories," *Journalism Quarterly* 51 (1974): 213-18; Rollo G. Silver, "Benjamin Edes: Trumpeter of Sedition," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 47 (1953): 248-68.

[19] Isaiah Thomas, *Three Autobiographical Fragments; Now First Published upon the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of the American Antiquarian Society, October 24, 1812* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1962), 14.

[20] Warrant for arrest of Isaiah Thomas, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, April 13, 1775, Tileston & Hollingsworth Co. Papers, AAS.

[21] John Boyle, *A Journal of Occurrences in Boston, 1759-1778*, 1: 147, Ms Am 1926, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[22] Rollo G. Silver, "Aprons Instead of Uniforms: The Practice of Printing, 1776-1787," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 87, no. 1 (1977): 112-31.

For most Loyalist printers, on the other hand, the departure from their towns was permanent. These printers came from across the one-time colonies, including Boston; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; New York; Albany; Philadelphia; Annapolis; Williamsburg; Charleston; and Savannah. Of the twenty Loyalists who left the United States as a result of the Revolution, the largest group (nine) headed to Canada, while five went to the British Isles, and three to the West Indies. The Loyalists who left the United States provided an extensive documentary record of their wartime travails through petitions to the Loyalist Claims Commission, established by Parliament in 1783 to hear claims for reimbursement by American Loyalists who suffered property losses as a result of the war.[23] These printers came from across the continent and included some fairly prominent names: Margaret Draper of Boston, publisher of the *Massachusetts Gazette*; Christopher Sower, Jr. and Christopher Sower, 3d, from the most important German-language printing family in Pennsylvania; and the Wells family of Charleston. Claims most commonly referenced the materials of their trade, other property, lost wages, and revenue forewent. For example, the brothers James and Alexander Robertson claimed to have lost over £600, including £311 for their printing office and nearly £78 in wages they owed to two journeymen.[24] Similarly, James Humphreys, a onetime Philadelphia printer, claimed damages of £1,713 to his property, asserting that he had started his *Pennsylvania Ledger* in 1775 "at considble expence and risque," and that he "perseveringly supported and published till November 1776" in favor of the British government.[25]

In places where there was little military action, most printers remained in place throughout the war. For many, fighting simply never reached them. For those who were either neutral or aligned with the Patriots, there was little incentive to go anywhere unless the British Army approached. In addition, a small number of printers attempted to manage the transition between Continental and British control with only brief departures from their offices. These printers, who often suffered ridicule and criticism for their decision, either wavered themselves in their political convictions or lacked particularly strong feelings. Hugh Gaine, for example, fled New York on the British invasion and began publishing his *New-York Gazette* from Newark, New Jersey. The British Army, meanwhile, confiscated his press and began publishing its own

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[23] On the Loyalist Claims Commission and the Loyalist diaspora, see Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), passim.

[24] Ibid., 284-85.

[25] Claim of James Humphreys, February 22, 1784, Loyalist Claims Commission, PRO AO 12/38, 101-102, viewed at DLAR.

version of the *Gazette*, still under Gaine's imprint, from his office. Within two months, Gaine was back in New York at his own press and pledging allegiance to the British. His decision may very well have sprung from a cold-blooded assessment of the Americans' odds, but he nonetheless sought to stay in business by choosing a side he thought might win.[26] Similarly, Benjamin Towne, a Philadelphia printer, remained in that city during the British occupation of 1777-1778 and then when the British left. Throughout the war, he continued publishing the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*.

Other Loyalists had more complicated histories. James Johnston was a Loyalist printer in Savannah who left when the local Committee of Safety began investigating his commitment to the Patriot cause in January 1776. For the next several years, Georgia struggled to find a printer who could manage the printing of the government, including the laws of the state. Johnston returned to Savannah briefly while the British occupied it from 1779 to 1782, serving as King's Printer and publishing his newspaper as the *Royal Georgia Gazette*. This earned him the enmity of the Patriots controlling the state government. In 1782, the restored government of Georgia placed him on a list of 117 Loyalists banished forever from the state and began the process of confiscating and selling his property. Within a few months, however, tempers cooled and the assembly rescinded its earlier decision, in part because it faced a shortage of printers in a continental backwater. Within a few days of passing an act allowing his return in January 1783, Johnston returned to work in Savannah as State printer and publisher of the *Gazette of the State of Georgia*.[27]

In addition to pushing printers away, each side in the conflict drew printers toward military and government headquarters to serve their needs. Both the Continental Congress and the rump British government (based in New York City for most of the war) required printing services for official notices and broadsides, for the publication of laws and legislative journals (particularly in the case of Congress), and to publish newspapers to promote the circulation of information and the promulgation of official viewpoints on battles, alliances, and other occurrences during the war. For instance, in the fall of 1775, Isaiah Thomas was publishing 288 copies of the *Massachusetts Spy* each week just for the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, and

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[26] Ruma Chopra, "Printer Hugh Gaine Crosses and Re-Crosses the Hudson," *New York History* 90, no. 4 (2009): 271-85.

[27] Douglas C. McMurtrie, "Pioneer Printing in Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1932): 77-113; Silver, "Aprons Instead of Uniforms," 149-52.

charging them just a penny each—leaving the Congress £31 in debt to him even at a steep discount.[28] For the Continental Congress and Continental Army, finding printers was typically straightforward, because Patriot printers worked in most of the places where the army was stationed. Congress sanctioned official printers in Philadelphia throughout the war, and employed others when necessary, such as when Mary Katherine Goddard published the first edition of the Declaration to include the signers' names in January, 1777.[29] During the British occupation of Philadelphia, Congress fled west, first to Lancaster, where it employed John Dunlap and David Claypoole, and then to York, which lacked a printer until Congress convinced the firm of Hall and Sellers to establish themselves temporarily in the town.[30]

The Continental Army enlisted the services of whatever printers were nearby or used those in Philadelphia who already contracted with Congress. As militia units gathered in Cambridge, Massachusetts in late spring 1775 to form what would become the Continental Army, Samuel and Ebenezer Hall, who had been printing in Salem, moved to the college town to take up business there and provide services to the fledgling military. In that first summer, other Boston area printers, including Isaiah Thomas (Worcester) and Benjamin Edes (Watertown) also printed for the army or the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. During the winter of 1778-1779, the need for news was so great with the army encamped at Morristown in northern New Jersey that Congress released printer Shepard Kollock from his enlistment and subsidized him to start a newspaper, the *New Jersey Journal*, with the Army supplying at least some of his paper.[31] Even the French Army under the Count de Rochambeau, stationed at Newport during 1780 and 1781, brought a shipboard printing press, not only to provide for administrative printing needs, but also to publish a newspaper, *La Gazette Française*, and an almanac for 1781.[32] The *Gazette* appeared

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[28] Isaiah Thomas to Daniel Hopkins, October 2, 1775, Isaiah Thomas Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

[29] Declaration of Independence (Baltimore: Mary Katherine Goddard, 1777), Early American Imprints, ser. 1, no. 15650.

[30] Silver, "Aprons Instead of Uniforms," 121.

[31] Ibid., 142-43. Kollock forewent the custom of publishing an address in the first number of the *New-Jersey Journal* (February 16, 1779), which makes it difficult to evaluate his publicly stated motives.

[32] Trenton C. Jones, "Displaying the Ensigns of Harmony: The French Army in Newport, Rhode Island, 1780-1781," *New England Quarterly* (forthcoming, 2012); Eugena Poulin and Claire Quintal, eds., *La Gazette Française: Revolutionary America's French Newspaper* (Newport, RI: Salve Regina University, in association with University Press of New England, 2007). According to Poulin and Quintal, most of the material for the French newspaper came from the *Newport Mercury*.

in seven issues in November and December of 1780 and was, as its translators note, meant to inform "quasi-idle and eager-to-fight young military men of happenings elsewhere."[33]

Printers, the Continental Congress, and others interested in information also struggled to continue their pre-war communications structures. Printers had long used a range of techniques to compile material for their newspapers, including exchanging newspapers with other printers, publishing private correspondence, and reproducing in print verbal conversations with local merchants, ship captains, and other connected people. The commercial and political networks that printers developed were essential to this process, providing clear channels through which to send and receive pertinent information.[34] In cultivating contacts, printers sought to gain an advantage over their competitors by providing the freshest information possible. For instance, Samuel Loudon corresponded with Matthew Visscher, an Albany patriot, to get effective news about troop movements and the progress of the war, information that was "by far the best I reckon from your parts."[35] Peter Timothy of Charleston coordinated information with Henry Laurens and Richard Henry Drayton in London.[36]

The Continental Congress also struggled with the task of ensuring communication throughout the fledgling nation. As one of its first acts in 1775, it had established a Continental Post Office and named Benjamin Franklin as Postmaster General. The post office had long been an important institution in the British empire for the circulation of information, and in particular for the circulation of political news in newspapers.[37] Because their business depended on it, in early 1774 a group of printers led by William Goddard joined forces with the Boston Committee

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[33] Poulin and Quintal, *La Gazette Françoise*, xxiv.

[34] Clark, *The Public Prints*; Wm. David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Early American Press, 1690-1783*, vol. 1 of *The History of American Journalism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994); David A. Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1997); Kevin Barnhurst and John C. Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 2. Daniel R. Headrick suggests that newspapers organized the information they broadcast into a coherent world view. *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[35] Samuel Loudon to Matthew Visscher, Aug. 20, 1777, Sept. 4, 1777, Samuel Loudon Papers, New-York Historical Society.

[36] Peter Timothy to Henry Laurens, Feb. 14, 1779, Miscellaneous Personal Name File, NYPL.

[37] On the post office in British North America, see Kenneth Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Administrative History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); J.C. Hemmeon, *The History of the British Post Office* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912); Wesley Everett Rich, *The History of the United States Post Office to the Year 1829*, Harvard Economic Studies, vol. 27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924); Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948); William Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America, 1639-1870* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973; original ed., 1920).

of Correspondence to attempt to establish a "Constitutional post" that would better guard against official censorship and ensure the free passage of news through the colonies.[38] Congress picked up the idea when it reconvened in Philadelphia shortly after Lexington and Concord. In establishing a post office for the thirteen colonies, Congress adopted a plan nearly identical to Goddard's, but with one important change: it insisted on a broad mandate of service, stretching from Maine to Georgia, but struggled to reach that goal. As of late summer 1776, Congress reportedly hoped to have 3 posts weekly, "to ride Night & Day" with "a Rider for every 25 or 30 Miles."[39] Keeping open lines of communication was critical for Congress to ensure that news from Philadelphia could reach all parts of the new country, and that information from around the United States reached them.

During the war, most of Congress's decisions about the post office related to getting information to and from the Continental Army. Congress set up, for example, express routes and riders to carry news between Army units and between the army and Congress. With the British capture of New York and other locations, Congress orchestrated the relocation of specific offices: officials moved the New York post office some twenty-five miles north of New York City to the Hudson River town of Dobbs Ferry.[40] Many postal employees had simply transferred over from the defunct British postal system, which posed potential issues of political loyalty. Security of the mails was one of the primary motivations to avoid the British postal system, so even the appearance of anyone unfaithful to the American cause was problematic for ensuring that letters would not be intercepted by the British. Congress therefore tried to expunge "persons disaffected to the American cause" who might have gotten positions in the post office.[41] In particular, Congress worried about the possibility of letters being stolen or transmitted to the British, potentially embarrassing the American cause or, worse, compromising a military campaign. Communication was of such importance that Congress exempted postal employees

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[38] On the path to an American post office, see Joseph M. Adelman, "'A Constitutional Conveyance of Intelligence, Public and Private:' The Post Office, the Business of Printing, and the American Revolution," *Enterprise & Society* 11, no. 4 (2010): 709-52; Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communication in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 192-206.

[39] Ezra Stiles, Sept. 16, 1776, in Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed. *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D. LL.D.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 2: 54.

[40] George Washington to John Hancock, September 4, 1776, Papers of the Continental Congress (National Archives Microfilm Publication M247, roll 186), item 169, 2: 202-205.

[41] Jan. 11, 1777, Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789,* 34 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904-37). 7: 29-30 (hereafter *JCC*).

from military service.[42] After the major fighting had concluded, Congress returned to the issue of newspaper circulation that had bedeviled postal service in North America for decades. In 1782, Congress gave the Postmaster General the power to "license every post-rider to carry any newspapers to and from any place or places within these United States" at "moderate rates," but left it to the Postmaster General to determine what those rates should be.[43]

At the same time, Congress and the Continental Army had trouble solving one of the most intractable difficulties of eighteenth-century communications: overland travel in the South. For decades, postal officials had struggled with how to provide cost-effective service across the sparsely populated colonies marked by vast distances and difficult river crossings. In fact, William Goddard's 1774 proposal for the "Constitutional post" never envisioned providing post riders throughout the South.[44] And in an era when oceangoing travel could be as fast as or faster than by land, North Carolina was effectively the most distant link in the Atlantic circulation network, far from the mid-Atlantic ports of New York and Philadelphia and the Southern entrepôt of Charleston.[45] Even towards the end of the war, transportation was slow in the Carolinas. In early 1783, North Carolina's Congressional delegates urged Gov. Alexander Martin to ensure that roads were under proper repair and that the state was not overcharging for ferry crossings.[46] The delegates feared that "if the post should suffer or should be impeded by the neglect of Government--he doubtless must change his rout or be absolutely discontinued."[47] In other words, the state government had to step up to support transportation infrastructure or North Carolina would lose access to information.

While Americans faced disruptions and difficulties in information flow, the British Army struggled to meet its communications needs. In most cases, Loyalist printers were eager to enter the relative safety offered within British lines, but they tended to move with the army, and

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[42] May 12, 1777, *JCC* 7: 347.

[43] Oct. 18, 1782, *JCC* 23: 677.

[44] "*The* PLAN *for establishing a New* American POST-OFFICE" (Boston: n.p., 1774). The broadside was reprinted in such papers as: *Boston Post-Boy*, April 25, 1774; *Connecticut Journal*, April 29, 1774; *Boston Gazette*, May 2, 1774; *Massachusetts Spy*, May 5, 1774; *Providence Gazette*, May 7, 1774; *Essex Gazette*, May 10, 1774; *Newport Mercury*, May 16, 1774; *Connecticut Courant*, May 31, 1774; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), June 2, 1774.

[45] Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 64.

[46] Benjamin Hawkins and Hugh Williamson to Alexander Martin, Jan. 28, 1783, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 1774-1789, 25 vols., ed. Paul H. Smith (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1976-1998), 19: 633-34.

[47] Ibid.

therefore had to re-establish offices anytime the British transferred headquarters.[48] Transporting the materials of a printing office was expensive and onerous for Loyalists already on the run. Ambrose Serle, the secretary to General William Howe, attempted to set up a system whereby the British Army would subsidize printers to publish pro-British news. American newspapers, he argued to the Earl of Dartmouth in 1776, had had "a more extensive [and] stronger Influence" than nearly any other form of communication in creating "the present Commotion." From his perspective, of course, the American press—which printers portrayed as free and defended liberty, was actually an "engine" of propaganda directed by Congress. In order to "restrain the Publication of Falsehood" in the pro-American press, Serle proposed a plan for the British to support printers at a cost of about £700 to £800 per year. He knew whereof he spoke. After the British takeover of New York City, he headed the captured press of Hugh Gaine and distributed a newspaper under Gaine's name. "Ever since the Press has been under my Direction (from the 30th of September)," he noted, he had "seen sufficient Reason to confirm this Opinion," and had received reports that the newspaper had been well-received.[49]

The British did not explicitly adopt Serle's plan to subsidize printers, but officials typically designated a King's Printer in each city they occupied. Yet the British had to manage enormous difficulties in communications because they could not maintain circuits beyond the territory they occupied—unlike the Americans. As Konstantin Dierks argues, "the sheer weakness of the British military communications infrastructure in the colonies can be seen in the extraordinary resourcefulness needed to convey letters overland."[50] Serle's proposal aimed to counteract that deficiency by creating a web of explicitly Loyalist printers who could communicate with one another. In envisioning such a system, Serle explicitly acknowledged that the Patriot press had been an enormous influence on public opinion. Furthermore, because of the war, the news networks of most Loyalist printers collapsed. They could not do business freely with anyone outside the British lines and the circulation of information from one side to the other, while not completely stopped, was significantly limited.

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[48] Janice Potter and Robert M. Calhoon, "The Character and Coherence of the Loyalist Press," in Bailyn and Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution*, 229-72.

[49] Ambrose Serle to the Earl of Dartmouth, November 26, 1776, in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Journals of Hugh Gaine, Printer* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1902), v. 1, 57-58. On Serle's editing of the Gaine *New-York Gazette*, see Chopra, "Printer Hugh Gaine Crosses and Re-Crosses the Hudson," 283.

[50] Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 209.

The stoppage of circulation severely curtailed available sources for Loyalist newspapers. James Rivington, publisher of the *Royal Gazette*, relied on a very small set of newspapers from New Jersey and Pennsylvania for most of his news from North America, and on London newspapers for anything else. The circulation networks that had operated before the war essentially closed off for him, and he became reliant on fellow Loyalists and those newspapers that easily crossed the British lines. Only occasionally and in a delayed fashion was Rivington able to print news from the "rebel papers." While the London newspapers would have come from continuing shipping to New York for the war effort, it is likely that his other news came from two sources. First, during the occupation of Philadelphia, he got a significant amount of news from there, in particular the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, since the British had direct communication links between the two cities. Rivington also appears to have had some access through the porous military lines to newspapers, in particular the *New Jersey Gazette*, published in Trenton by Isaac Collins.[51] Compensating as best he could, Rivington frequently published second-hand "extracts from Rebel Papers" and filled the *Royal Gazette* with essays and critiques mocking Americans. Successful adaptation in trying circumstances was key to commercial survival.

Financing in a War Environment

One of the major communications issues printers faced during the war was the acute problem of supply. In particular, it was very difficult to finance the work of printing because of wartime shortages in ink, paper, and other supplies.[52] Printers had trouble repairing broken equipment, and when they had to evacuate, often had to leave behind a significant portion of their printing materials. This was particularly damaging because it was impossible to stock a printing office without European supplies. Americans began making paper in the eighteenth century, but not until after the Revolution was there an entirely American-manufactured printing press or sets of type. Until the 1770s, no sets of type were manufactured in North America, so all had to be purchased from Europe. The first American type founder was Abel Buell of Killingworth, Connecticut, a watchmaker, who produced his first batch of type in 1769. Still,

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[51] On Collins, see Richard F. Hixson, *Isaac Collins: A Quaker Printer in 18th Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968); *Memoir of the Late Isaac Collins, of Burlington, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: printed by Joseph Rakestraw, 1848).

[52] Carol Sue Humphrey, *"This Popular Engine:" New England Newspapers during the American Revolution* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 23-43.

until the 1790s, most printers only had two options for acquiring type: buy up used sets from another printer, or order them from England. Because a printing press was made largely out of wood, most of it could be built in the colonies. However, no American manufacturer produced the necessary iron screws until at least 1775.[53] On top of the ordinarily high expenses, therefore, came the added difficulty of trading with the enemy.

Some printers tried to manage as best they could with the commercial networks that remained. Those with transatlantic connections struggled to maintain their links. William Strahan, who had a decades-long friendship with printer David Hall, continued to write to his son William Hall (who was named after Strahan) after the outbreak of war. In the summer of 1775, for instance, he expressed hope that Franklin—also a longtime friend—would be able to exert his influence to bring hostilities to an end. With that letter, he enclosed "many of the new Pamphlets regarding America," lest the business relationship and its accompanying ability to profit off of controversy suffer.[54] Printers continued to try to adapt colonial commercial techniques to their businesses long after the war made it nearly impossible for them to succeed. In 1777, Samuel Loudon, exiled from New York City to the town of Fishkill, nearly seventy miles north on the Hudson River, lost his usual supply chain for paper from mills around Philadelphia because of the British Army's presence. Based on information he received from fellow exiled New York printer John Holt (in nearby Poughkeepsie), Loudon dispatched a friend to New Haven with fifty dollars to try to acquire ten reams of paper from bookseller Isaac Beers. Beers was not his only option, but Loudon feared for his press should his queries fail: "I have wrote to Milton near Boston, but have got no Answer; if I can't get supplyed from boston [sic] or from you, I must stop—for I don't know that a supply can be had nearer."[55]

Because of the financial obstacles, few printers sought to start new ventures, and those who did often saw them flounder quickly. Francis Bailey, for example, published the *United States Magazine* in 1779 under the editorship of Hugh Henry Brackenridge, an up-and-coming lawyer who had been a student of John Witherspoon at Princeton.[56] Yet the vagaries of the war

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[53] Bidwell, "Printers' Supplies and Capitalization," 168-71; Wroth, *The Colonial Printer*, 82-85, 98-102.

[54] William Strahan to William Hall, July 5, 1775, Letters to David Hall (Am.162), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[55] Samuel Loudon to Isaac Beers, Nov. 3, 1777, Samuel Loudon Papers, New-York Historical Society.

[56] On Brackenridge, see Daniel Marder, *Hugh Henry* Brackenridge (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967); Joseph J. Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles of Early American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), 73-110. On his editing of the *United States Magazine*, see Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge*, 44-57.

prevented the magazine from achieving success, and Brackenridge and Bailey called it quits at the end of one year. In his parting editorial, Brackenridge wrote that "it was hoped" at the magazine's outset that "the war would be of short continuance, and the money, which had continued to depreciate, would become of proper value." Given that in December 1779, both the war and inflation of Continental currency were running rampant, he concluded that they were "under the necessity of suspending it for some time, until an established peace, and a fixed value of the money, shall render it convenient or possible to take it up again." Ever attached to the cause of Revolution, Brackenridge also used the occasion to take a pot shot at critics, arguing that only those "disaffected to the cause of America" or "who inhabit the region of stupidity" could possibly be happy about the magazine's demise.[57]

The one area of the printing business where demand remained high—and in some cases rose—was for public printing. As during the colonial period, therefore, printers eagerly sought out public printing contracts to buttress the finances of their operations. Even in exile and with a war raging, Samuel Loudon and John Holt spent years vying for business with New York State.[58] States also frequently interjected themselves into aspects of the printing business beyond publishing laws, assembly journals, and official proclamations. In New Jersey, the legislature, at the behest of Governor William Livingston, sponsored Isaac Collins' *New Jersey Gazette* in order to maintain a steady flow of information.[59] The Virginia House of Delegates went even further. When the government moved its capital to Richmond, the state bought Benjamin Franklin's printing press and type from Richard Bache for the office of Alexander Purdie, who had been given the position of state printer.[60] Politics occasionally invaded the regular commercial functioning of the trade: Yale College, for example, sent to Hartford in 1781 for the publication of its "Commencem^t Theses, Catalogues, & Quaestiones Magistrales" because "The Press in New Haven (Tho. Green) is a Tory press & unobliging to College."[61] With opportunities for commercial gain narrowed, printers and their employers retreated to tried-and-true methods of maintaining their businesses.

Printers as Objects of Attention

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[57] *United States Magazine*, Dec. 1779, 483.
[58] Silver, "Aprons Instead of Uniforms," 131-35.
[59] Ibid., 141.
[60] Ibid., 144.
[61] Dexter, ed. *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 549.

During the Revolution, printers came to be seen widely as important political actors in their own right. This marked a departure from the colonial period, when printers were seen and sought to portray themselves as "meer mechanics."[62] The imperial crisis made it difficult to sustain that fiction; the war made it impossible. Because of their centrality to information circulation, the loyalties of printers and their ability and willingness to print for one side or the other became a crucial if occasionally vexed question. In particular, printers' persons and offices became the objects of attack as mobs on both sides of the political equation vented frustration, righteous indignation, and played politics by other means to silent undesirable voices.[63] In Norfolk, Virginia, John Hunter Holt—son of John Holt of New York—faced British troops who confiscated his press at the end of September, 1775. According to a letter published in the *Virginia Gazette*, they claimed that "they want to print a few papers themselves; that they looked upon the press not to be free, and had a mind to publish something in vindication of their own characters." The letter noted further that the soldiers had not acquired any ink, nor had they captured a compositor to help work the press, but that a printer might be on board one of the British men-of-war in the harbor. The author seemed not to relish the idea of the soldiers printing, and appeared pleased that Holt had "luckily made his escape" during the raid.[64]

William Goddard, who made a career out of finding trouble in a number of cities, encountered trouble with a faction of Patriots in Baltimore in 1777. During his service as surveyor of the Continental Post Office, Goddard passed off the duties of his printing office to his sister, Mary Katherine Goddard, who published their newspaper, the *Maryland Journal*, and sundry other items. Her name remained on the masthead in February 1777 when the *Journal* published a letter by "Tom Tell-Truth," ironically (or so the Goddards thought) praising the offer of peace by General William Howe in the fall of 1776.[65] In response, the Whig Club, a self-appointed group that policed the patriotism of Marylanders (the word "vigilante" may very well apply) accosted William Goddard to discover the author of the piece. Ever the defender of the free press, Goddard refused "to suffer the Secrets of his press to be extorted from him in a

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[62] Stephen Botein, "'Meer Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers," *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975): 127-225; "Printers and the American Revolution," in Bailyn and Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution*, 11-57.

[63] On violence against printers generally, see John C. Nerone, *Violence Against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18-52.

[64] *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter), October 7, 1775.

[65] *Maryland Journal*, February 25, 1777. For a general narrative of the events, see Ward L. Miner, *William Goddard: Newspaperman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962), 150-62.

tumultuous way," and was summarily expelled from Baltimore city and county.[66] After the assembly granted him a return to Baltimore, the Whig Club continued to harass him, culminating in an assault on his printing office in which Goddard and several of his workmen were injured, and Goddard was taken captive to a nearby tavern. Fearing for her brother's safety, Mary Katherine dispatched a neighbor to the tavern to keep an eye on the proceedings.[67] Goddard was again barred from Baltimore, and remained in Annapolis until a reprieve from the governor later in the spring.

James Rivington, the most hated and voluble Loyalist printer in the colonies, faced particularly long-lasting scorn. As early as late 1774, Patriots were already trying to destroy Rivington's business. In a letter addressed to Stephen Ward and Stephen Hopkins of Newport, an anonymous group of Patriots styling themselves the "Freinds [sic] of America" excoriated Rivington and sought a total boycott of his business.[68] The group described Rivington as a "Pensiond Servile Wench" who was "Insulting, Reviling And Counteracting this whole Continent." They urged Ward and Hopkins to obtain a general agreement in Rhode Island not to purchase his *New-York Gazetteer* or deal with anyone advertising in it. He had to face economic sanction, they argued, lest he continue to distribute information harmful to Congress and the unity of the colonies. If Rivington continued to publish, the "Enemies of America" would distribute his invectives and false rumors more broadly. They noted that he was now acting "with the Greatest Safety" and "with but very little Prejudice to his Interest." Permitting him to operate so freely, they concluded, would delay peace, encourage the British government to deal more harshly with the colonies, and ruin the sense of "Common Cause" that the colonists felt.[69] In large part, their argument boiled down to this: Rivington should be boycotted because he was too popular.

By the fall of 1775, the scruples of some Patriots had diminished to the point that mere commercial harassment would not suffice. As part of a mission "to disarm Tories" in New York

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[66] "Memorial of William Goddard," March 6, 1777, Goddard Family Papers (MSS 442), Rhode Island Historical Society.

[67] "Deposition of Andrew Wilson," April 2, 1777, Goddard Family Papers (MSS 442), RIHS.

[68] "Freinds of America" to Stephen Ward and Stephen Hopkins, December 5, 1774 (postmarked at Newport January 9, 1775), Ward Family Papers, ser. 4, RIHS.

[69] There is an annotation in the letter that refers Hopkins and Ward to "an Advertisement in his last Paper relative to A Proposed Raffle for Books Than which, can Any thing be more daring or Insolent." After scouring *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer* for the surrounding dates in December and January, I have been unable to locate the advertisement in question.

City, a group of Sons of Liberty led by Isaac Sears marched from New Haven, Connecticut to New York in November 1775 with two goals: to round up Loyalist leaders and "to deprive that Traitor to his Country James Rivington of the means of circulation pison [poison] in Print."[70] According to news reports that later circulated, the force of about one hundred men set up guards outside Rivington's office, and a delegation entered. There, they seized his types—which were of high value as a scarce commodity for printers—and "destroyed the whole apparatus of the press."[71] Most newspaper reports took it for granted that readers knew of Rivington and his alleged misdeeds. A report in the *Virginia Gazette*, however, speculated that the raid "was intended as retaliation for lord Dunmore's conduct, and others attribute it to an apprehension of his relapsing into his former iniquitous publications."[72] For his part, Sears reported to Connecticut's delegation to the Continental Congress that he hoped that his actions would be "a great means of putting an end to the Tory Faction there, for his press hath been as it were the very life & Soul of it." Anticipating criticism for crossing colony lines to conduct such a raid, Sears also wrote that "it wou'd not otherwise have been done, as there are not Spirited & Leading men enough in N. York to undertake such a Business, or it wou'd have been done long ago."[73]

The attack ended Rivington's career in New York for the time being; he next appeared in colonial newspapers just seven weeks later as one of a number of Loyalists who had taken passage on a ship to London.[74] He returned a year later and served as King's Printer and publisher of the *Royal Gazette*, devoting considerable ink to the foibles and frailties of the

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[70] Isaac Sears to Roger Sherman, Eliphalet Dyer, and Silas Deane, November 28, 1775, Sol Feinstone Collection, DLAR. A letter in the *Constitutional Gazette* (New York) of November 29, 1775, identified three Loyalists as particular targets: "Parson Seabury, Judge Fowler, and Lord Underhill." See also Dwight L. Teeter, "'King' Sears, the Mob and Freedom of the Press in New York, 1765-1776," *Journalism Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1964): 539-44; Leroy Hewlett, "James Rivington, Tory Printer," in *Books in America's Past: Essays Honoring Rudolph H. Gjelsness*, ed. David Kaser (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1966), 172-74.

[71] *Constitutional Gazette* (New York), November 25, 1775. Reprinted in *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 29, 1775; *Connecticut Journal*, November 29, 1775; *New England Chronicle*, December 7, 1775; *Essex Journal*, December 8, 1775; *Boston Gazette*, December 11, 1775. Other versions of the story appeared in *Connecticut Journal*, November 29, 1775; *New England Chronicle*, November 30, 1775; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), December 8, 1775.

[72] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), December 8, 1775.

[73] Sears to Sherman, Dyer, and Deane, November 28, 1775, Feinstone Collection, DLAR.

[74] *New-York Gazette, and Weekly Mercury*, January 15, 1776; reprinted in *Connecticut Journal*, January 18, 1776; *Pennsylvania Evening-Post*, January 18, 1776; *Pennsylvania Ledger*, January 20, 1776; *Pennsylvania Packet*, January 22, 1776. Rivington returned to British-occupied New York and published the *Royal Gazetteer*. He remained there after the British left in 1783 and continued as a publisher and bookseller for several years, but died deeply in debt in 1797.

American cause—even as, historians suspect, he may have been a double agent for George Washington.[75] He also remained a rhetorical target for Patriots. In 1779, in the first issue of the *United States Magazine*, Hugh Henry Brackenridge published an essay (probably penned by his mentor, John Witherspoon) entitled, "The Humble Representation and Earnest Supplication of James Rivington." [76] In the essay, "Rivington" begged for the mercy of Congress, arguing that he could be no danger to the Americans, even with his publications, because he had already "expended and exhausted my whole faculty of that kind in the service of the English. I have tried falshood and misrepresentation in every shape that could be thought of, so that it was like a coat thrice turned, that will not hold a single stitch."[77] Rivington's real-life bombast and his promotion of pro-British and anti-American propaganda in his publications continued to make him an easy foil and focus of Patriot anger at Loyalists.

Other Loyalist printers also faced violence at the hands of Patriots. The brothers James and Alexander Robertson had been printers in Norwich, Connecticut, and Albany, New York since 1773.[78] During the winter of 1775-1776, they printed items in Albany for the British Army campaigning in upstate New York led by Guy Carleton, including a battle account "differing widely from that held out to the public by the Friends to the American Cause." The "occasional Newspaper" also contained letters purportedly from John Adams and John Hancock stating that they intended independence along with "sundry other Pieces to awaken the Jealousy of the Loyalists, and put them on their Guard against the Machinations of their insidious Enemies."[79] Because of his Loyalist leanings, James Robertson was forced to evacuate Albany, leaving his paraplegic brother behind. According to their statement made as part of their claim for compensation after the war, Alexander was arrested, imprisoned in Albany, and left for dead when the jail caught on fire. He saved himself only "by lying on his belly and chewing [on

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[75] Catherine Snell Crary, "The Tory and the Spy: The Double Life of James Rivington," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 16, no. 1 (1959): 61-72.

[76] *United States Magazine*, Jan. 1779, 34-40. For the attribution to Witherspoon, see Claude Milton Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1932), 48.

[77] *United States Magazine*, Jan. 1779, 36.

[78] On the Robertsons, see Marion Robertson, "The Loyalist Printers: James and Alexander Robertson," *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1983): 83-93.

[79] Claim of James and Alexander Robertson, March 25, 1784, Loyalist Claims Commission, PRO AO 12/19, 280, viewed at DLAR. It appears that the Robertson brothers received approximately £250 in compensation. AO 12/109, 256-57.

cabbages] to prevent being suffocated."[80] Such accounts were common during the war as printers' offices, homes, and bodies became sites of conflict.

Editorial Decision-Making

[*NB: The discussion in this section is at this point speculative and sketched out only briefly. The full chapter will analyze these incidents and activities in much greater detail.*]

Many of the political issues during the war were refracted through the unique business and professional perspectives of printers. While the progress of the war mattered a great deal on the battlefield and across the lands of eastern North America, printers, editors, and authors waged equally fiercely to define the narrative of the military struggle and to control the discussion about other issues. As they had been during the imperial crisis, printers were uniquely situated to shape those narratives. Furthermore, several of the most pressing issues related directly to issues of publication and communication, placing printers at the center of political controversy during the Revolutionary War.

Printers frequently found themselves at the center of controversies about rumors involving either the fate of military encounters or foreign diplomatic efforts during the war. Rumors ran rampant about American dealings with France, Spain, and other European nations; the actual winners of individual battles; even whether George Washington had lived through a fight.[81] Because editors constructed newspapers out of disparate reports received in spoken, manuscript, or printed form, they exerted a great deal of control over what material to publish and how to portray it. During the Revolution, information was often unreliable. In May 1776, for instance, Newport minister Ezra Stiles noted in his diary several news items, then cautioned himself that "the Post is so irregular, the News so intercepted & the Prints so few, & the Coasters so much obstructed that we have no authentic News."[82]

Letter writing was central to the Revolutionary effort. As the means by which politicians, soldiers, and families could convey not only information about whereabouts and activities but also political opinions, Konstantin Dierks has argued, they "were granted a truth value, to expose 'true' political allegiances and activities in a revolutionary time when there were many

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[80] Ibid., 282.
[81] On rumor and news in the Revolutionary Atlantic, see William Slauter, "News and Diplomacy in the Age of the American Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007).
[82] *Diary of Ezra Stiles*, May 6, 1775, 1: 546-57.

incentives to hide truth beneath a facade."[83] Yet letters were not always so transparent. Epistolary correspondence was critical to printers for many of the same reasons, but the transition from manuscript to print offered the printer the opportunity to edit or mediate how his readers encountered the letter. Even more importantly, the diminished scruples of wartime encouraged printers, editors, and publishers to publish letters of indeterminate veracity, those stolen from an opposing courier, or that were completely fabricated. In fact, the publication of stolen letters (or purportedly stolen, in many cases) was a common means of transmitting rumors about the war, but these events could also be controversial. During the imperial crisis, the illicit publication of letters led to Benjamin Franklin's ouster from his post as Deputy Postmaster General for North America.[84]

Such publication could be embarrassing for the parties involved if proven to be authentic. For instance, John Adams in the summer of 1775 had two letters captured by the British when the courier he had employed to carry them from Philadelphia to Massachusetts was captured. The two letters, one to his wife Abigail and the other to political leader James Warren, detailed his thoughts on independence and his disdain for fellow delegates.[85] British officials rushed the letters to General Thomas Gage in Boston, who passed them on to Margaret Draper, a Loyalist printer, who dutifully inserted them into the *Massachusetts Gazette*.[86] They appeared in London in the fall and then back in North America in January 1776, circulating in both print and manuscript. The time lag provoked a far different response in North American than intended, because by early 1776 many Americans saw independence as a far more viable option than they had just months earlier.[87]

The authority of printers as compilers and editors gave them the ability to present as true even letters that strained credulity. Such was the case with a pamphlet reprinted by James Rivington in 1778 of letters supposedly written by George Washington.[88] The letters were fabricated, but the editor of the New York pamphlet edition nonetheless gamely described the

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[83] Dierks, *In My Power*, 191.

[84] Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 145-47; Christopher Looby, "Franklin's Purloined Letters," *Arizona Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1990): 1-12.

[85] See John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 24, 1775; John Adams to James Warren, July 24, 1775; *The Adams Papers Digital Edition*, ed. C. James Taylor (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008).

[86] *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, August 17, 1775.

[87] *Norwich Packet*, Jan. 15, 1776. Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 1: 652, Jan. 6, 1776; Cresswell Journal, *A Man Apart*, July 9, 1776, 111-12.

[88] *Letters from General Washington to several of his friends in the year 1776* (London: printed for J. Bew, 1777).

letters' origin, acknowledging that "the public will naturally be inquisitive as to the authenticity of the following letters." The editor described receiving a letter from "a friend, now serving in a loyal corps under Brigadier-General De Lancey of New-York" who described an encounter with a "mulatto servant" named Billy, who was a servant of Washington, in a prison camp. Billy had with him "a small portmanteau of his master's" which included an almanac with a journal, some letters to Martha, and several letters from Lund Washington with drafts of responses from George Washington. "I read these with avidity," reported the editor's anonymous friend, "and being highly entertained with them, have shewn them to several of my friends, who all agree with me, that he is a very different character from what they had supposed him. I never knew a man so much to be pitied."[89] Over the course of seven letters, Washington was alleged to have expressed doubts about the revolution, cast aspersions on the character of fellow Virginians Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee, doubted the intellectual capacity of New Englanders, and expressed fears to his wife about the threat of unmarried slaves at Mount Vernon.

As one of the most essential sources for news in the eighteenth century, both printers and readers attended carefully to written correspondence. During the war, its importance increased because of the fissures in the print communications pathways that ordinarily circulated massive amounts of information. Yet even as letters became a more important part of the communications circuit, their reliability also came into question. Printers and editors grappled with how to verify information they received and present it to the reading public within paradigms of authentication that seemed ill-suited to wartime. Printers had been central to creating the functions of authentication during the colonial period for letters, print, paper money, and other forms of lending credit to ideas and concepts.[90] During the Revolutionary War they continued to serve that function, filtering the news for their readers—and occasionally presenting as authentic news and letters that were not.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *</p>

Between the end of the war and the time George Washington took office as the first President under the new Constitution in 1789, the printing trade underwent massive changes. Most important, it grew considerably. The first daily newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Evening Post,*

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[89] *Letters from General Washington*, 1-2.

[90] On credit and authenticity, see Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jennifer J. Baker, *Securing the Commonwealth: Debt, Speculation, and Writing in the Making of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

and Daily Advertiser, appeared in 1783.[91] The number of printers also expanded rapidly as men and women sought commercial opportunities in new markets away from the coast—Vermont, not yet a state, already had two newspapers by 1789—and competed more vigorously in the older seaports. Many of the staunchest Patriots, however, emerged from the war with their careers in tatters. They did not adapt quickly enough to their rapidly changing environment, or they simply ran out of energy. John Holt struggled to regain his position as State Printer after returning to New York City in November 1783, but died within two months.[92] A similar case was Benjamin Edes, likely the most important anti-imperial printer in the colonies. He was central to the activities of the Sons of Liberty, worked closely with the Boston Committee of Correspondence, and hosted Samuel Adams, John Adams, John Hancock, and other Patriot leaders in his office where they wrote write anti-imperial pieces for the *Boston Gazette*. The war ruined him. The flight from Boston in 1775 dissolved his twenty-year partnership with John Gill, and by the time he returned to the city, his politics were already out of step. He resumed printing in Boston after the war, but he never regained the audience he had enjoyed beforehand. His political principles seemed out-of-touch in the postwar period, and business difficulties left him destitute when he died in 1803.[93]

For younger printers, on the other hand, the end of the Revolution provided economic opportunities that propelled several to great prosperity. Isaiah Thomas, who had risen to prominence as the youthful printer of the *Massachusetts Spy* in the 1770s, began to develop in the 1780s a broad network of partnerships in New England that would expand his influence and his commercial success. He remained in Worcester from 1775 onward, but partnered with Boston printers such as Benjamin Russell, who published the successful Boston *Centinel* in the

[91] Edward Connery Lathem, *Chronological Tables of American Newspapers, 1690-1820, being a tabular guide to holdings of newspapers published in America through the year 1820* (Barre, MA: American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1972), 14-22; David D. Hall, "The Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century," in Amory and Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 158-59. The *Evening Post* was published by Benjamin Towne. Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*, 2 vols. (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1947), 2: 931-32.

[92] See *The Independent Gazette; or the New-York Journal Revived*, January-February 1784; Proposal to Print New York State Laws, December 19, 1788, American Historical Manuscripts Collection - Greenleaf, Thomas, N-YHS.

[93] Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America: With a Biography of Printers & an Account of Newspapers*, ed. Marcus A. McCorison, 2nd ed. (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970), 134-37; Robert E. Burkholder, "Benjamin Edes and John Gill," in *Boston Printers, Publishers and Booksellers: 1640-1800*, ed. Benjamin Franklin V (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), 117-34; Maurice R. Cullen, Jr., "Benjamin Edes: Scourge of Tories," *Journalism Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1974): 213-18; Rollo G. Silver, "Benjamin Edes, Trumpeter of Sedition," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 47 (1953): 248-68.

1780s, and Henry Mycall in Salem.[94] Immigrant printers also continued to join the ranks of American printers. Mathew Carey is the best known of this cohort. In 1785 he emigrated from Ireland to Philadelphia, where he began a career that would last decades and founded a publishing house that survived into the twentieth century.[95]

The United States and Britain agreed to the Treaty of Paris in September 1783, formally ending the war and bringing recognition of the United States' independence. As negotiators wrapped up in Europe, Americans were beginning to put the pieces back together and Loyalists were making their way to other British territories. For the printing trade, the war had been devastating. It cut off standard pathways of communication and supply, making it vastly more difficult for printers to gather the intelligence and news required to publish their newspapers, almanacs, and other printed matter, not to mention the paper and ink with which they were printed. Printers became a focal point for rhetorical attack and physical violence. The war scattered printers from their seaport offices and homes. With neither the option nor the desire to return to what would amount to political exile, many Loyalists began to forge new lives in other parts of the British Empire. The Revolutionary War thus defined the development of the printing trade (as so much else) into the early United States. The eight-year conflict reshaped the personnel of the trade, sweeping out many of those loyal to the Crown and dispersing others. At the same time, printers adapted to the circumstances as best they could, seeking out opportunities with governments, armies, and wherever they could. At the same time, the printing trade defined the Revolution as the presses of printers throughout North America vied to depict the struggle on their terms. In so doing, they set the stage for a new national communications infrastructure that would take hold in the 1780s.

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[94] Clifford K. Shipton, *Isaiah Thomas: Printer, Patriot and Philanthropist, 1749-1831* (Rochester, NY: Printing House of Leo Hart, 1948); John B. Hench, "The Newspaper in a Republic: Boston's 'Centinel' and 'Chronicle,' 1784-1801" (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1979).

[95] On Carey see James N. Green, *Mathew Carey: Publisher and Patriot* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1985); Kenneth W. Rowe, *Mathew Carey: A Study in American Economic Development*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in History and Political Science, ser. 51, no. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1933). On the legacy of his business see David Kaser, *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia: A Study in the History of the Booktrade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957).

Figure 1. Number of Newspapers Published in North America, 1775-1783
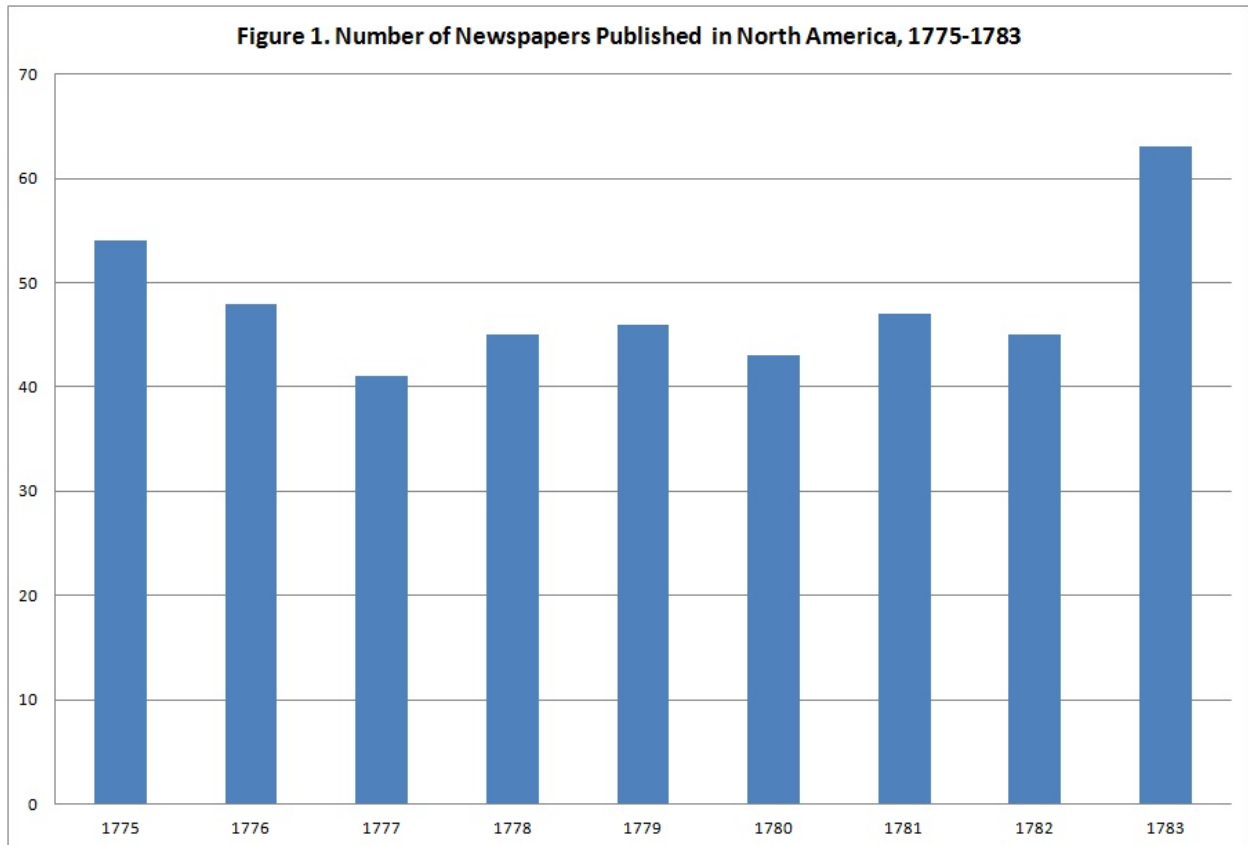
Sources: Edward Connery Lathem, *Chronological Tables of American Newspapers, 1690-1820, being a tabular guide to holdings of newspapers published in America through the year 1820* (Barre, MA: American Antiquarian Society and Barre Publishers, 1972), 9-22; Marie Tremaine, *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952); Frank Cundall, *A History of Printing in Jamaica from 1717 to 1834* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1935); Howard S. Pactor, *Colonial British Caribbean Newspapers: A Bibliography and Directory* (New York: Greenwood, 1990).

Figure 2. Number of Imprints in the United States, 1775-1783
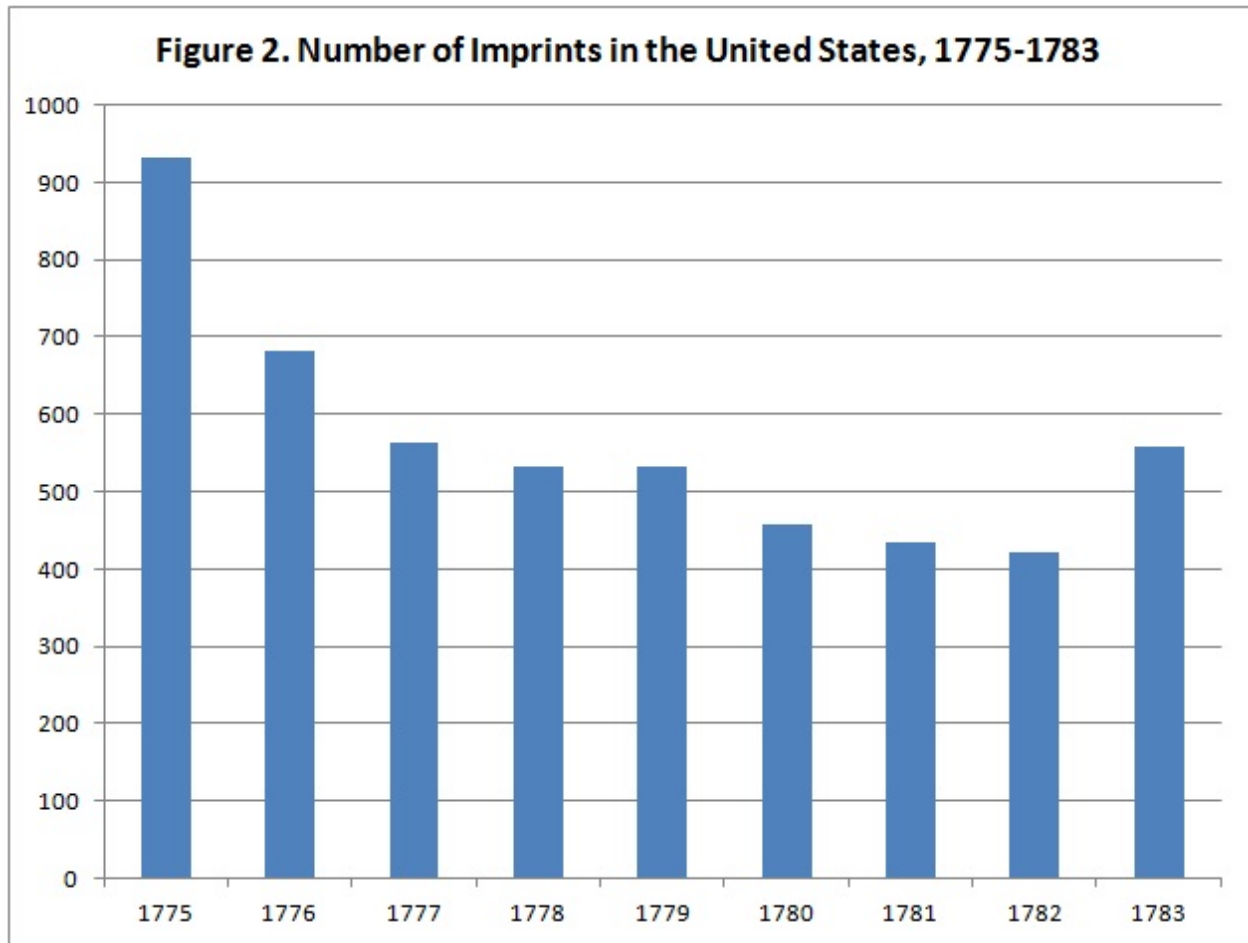
Source: Early American Imprints, series 1, Evans (1639-1800), online edition.