

## CALCULATED IDEOLOGICAL PUBLISHING

### *How the Business Interests of American Revolutionary Printers Transformed the Role of Newspapers*

by Zoe Magley

*Abstract*

Today's newspapers and news outlets are critical actors in our public sphere as entities with political agency that inform and shape most aspects of public opinion. The causes and implications of newspapers' evolution into ideological platforms broadens our understanding of the American Revolution and the role of news media today. This paper challenges the assumption that newspapers merely reflected revolutionary fervor in the colonies, and instead argues that newspapers actively shaped colonial attitudes toward Great Britain, fueled by the business concerns of Printers. Through analysis of newspaper responses to the Stamp Act in 1765 and efforts in 1773 to rally support for the American postal system, this paper examines the explosion of anti-British and pro-American rhetoric in Revolutionary-era newspapers. This paper argues that the transition of newspapers into ideological platforms occurred as a result of active choices by Revolutionary-era Printers. Prompted by economic concerns over the effects of the Stamp Act and imperial post office on the newspaper business, Printers helped mobilize colonial opposition to Great Britain by publishing rhetorically-charged pieces that shaped colonial attitudes and led newspapers to become enduring influencers of public opinion.

American historians and scholars broadly recognize that the shift of newspapers from solely informational outlets into ideological mouthpieces occurred during the American Revolutionary Era. Existing scholarship recognizes the role of colonial-era newspapers as catalysts for the American Revolution, responsible for mobilizing colonial resistance against Britain by publishing ideologically charged pieces that both stoked and encouraged colonial opposition. Carol Sue Humphrey has deeply examined the early newspaper enterprise and the role of the press in the American Revolution. Other scholars such as Stephen Botein and Arthur M. Schlesinger have reviewed the financial motivations behind Printers' responses to British enactment of the Stamp Act and their subsequent role in the American Revolution. Historian Joseph Adelman has further discussed the business implications of the British imperial post office for Printers.

This paper recasts the relationship between colonial newspaper Printers and the American Revolution to consider the business motivations and ideological publications of Printers in a broader context. Financial concerns of Printers in relation to the Stamp Act initially fueled Printers' decisions to publish anti-British rhetoric and encourage colonial opposition to the Crown. This pattern of ideological publishing persisted to mobilize colonial resistance against further areas of concern for Printers. As a result, newspapers acquired political agency in the public sphere. The roots of modern, ideologically-charged news media are found in this era of rhetorical resistance.

This analysis will argue that Printers' business concerns in direct response to the Stamp Act crisis in 1765 and the push against the British imperial post office in 1773 the American Revolution led newspapers to become enduring and effective influencers of public opinion. Invoking widespread anti-British and pro-American rhetoric that espoused revolutionary fervor, newspapers and their Printers played a vital role in shaping colonial attitudes and mobilizing opposition to Great Britain. Colonists and Printers alike were emboldened by their new rhetorical powers, giving birth to modern day ideological newspapers and the business of journalism.

*Colonial-Era Newspaper Printing: A Business*

Printers' business concerns played a large role in the colonial newspaper enterprise. Managing a print shop and newspaper as a colonist in the eighteenth century was not lucrative. Unlike today's newspaper industry, the colonial newspaper in the 1700s was a small-scale business, typically run by one or two Printers in a one, two, or three-press shop, with a daily output averaging around 2,000 to 2,500 pages.<sup>1</sup> Operating in the undeveloped colonial economy, the businesses of American colonial Printers were modest compared to such businesses in London; the costs of printing

**1** Carol Sue Humphrey, *This Popular Engine: New England Newspapers During the American Revolution, 1775-1789* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 27.

often outweighed its earnings.<sup>2</sup>

Printing presses were expensive and frequently in need of repair; a Printer's typefaces were "the costliest to maintain" as they broke, wore out, or needed replacement.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Printers often resorted to importing typefaces, ink, and quality paper from Britain because American production of necessary supplies could not meet colonial printing demand. Particularly problematic was the lack of paper supply. American paper mills often could not keep pace with demand, resulting in a number of paper shortages that forced Printers to reduce their newspaper sizes.<sup>4</sup>

Colonial Printers were thus burdened by the tools necessary for printing itself, and so print shops regularly operated as general stores to stay competitive. Colonial Printers "sold whatever they could get their hands on" including everything from dry goods to book collections.<sup>5</sup> Botein characterized eighteenth-century printing as a "slender living," compelling Printers to adapt and "play more varied roles in their communities than was customary for their brethren in London."<sup>6</sup>

Acquisition of news was also problematic. Printers depended on the mail system to obtain fresh news about Britain and other colonies and to distribute papers to their subscribers.<sup>7</sup> Any obstruction of a postal route could impact fresh news and Printers' business outputs because "late mail delivery meant delayed news."<sup>8</sup> The combination of an undeveloped colonial economy, costly materials, and the precarious postal routes delivering their news made printing an unstable career from the onset.

Business concerns were determinative factors in the decisions of colonial Printers. They knew operating a press was a "risky venture," and financial security was dubious at best.<sup>9</sup> Printers were especially concerned about subscription sales, and in colonial America, a newspaper was often unable to rely on the "favor of any one group of his neighbors."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, many Printers took the Benjamin Franklin approach of impartiality in their newspaper printing. Franklin, the Deputy Postmaster General and head of a large printing network, co-published the *Pennsylvania Gazette* with David Hall in Philadelphia.<sup>11</sup>

Franklin's argument for the impartial press was launched in his 'Apology for Printers' published in the 1731 issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, where he asserted that "Printers are educated in the Belief, that when Men differ in Opinion, both Sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the Publick."<sup>12</sup> Appearing too partisan could result in a loss of business and ad revenue from opponents, and Franklin's words indicate an early belief in liberty of the press.<sup>13</sup> Printers thus published pieces with diverse opinions because it "suited their business interests to serve all customers."<sup>14</sup> However, the balance of neutrality could also be tipped. Printers sometimes catered to the partisan attitudes of the colonies, finding that "in periods of political turmoil" abandoning neutrality proved to be more advantageous, and newspapers began serving "those

who insisted on and were willing to pay for partisanship."<sup>15</sup>

The Stamp Act of 1765 was a direct tax on the British American colonies enacted by the Parliament of Great Britain. The act required all printed materials and legal documents to bear a tax stamp from which British commissioners in the colonies collected revenue. The first notable instance in which Printers abandoned their neutral stances occurred at a politically tumultuous time in the colonies—after Britain's passage of the Stamp Act in 1765. At the outbreak of the Stamp Act crisis, publishing newly ideologically charged pieces became the *best* business tactic of Printers, who had a direct economic stake in the Stamp Act tax. Twenty-two newspapers were printed in the colonies when the Stamp Act took effect.<sup>16</sup> The tax, levied on printed materials, "saddled the burden directly on the backs of [P]rinters" and sparked anxiety among the Printers, who worried they could not pass much of the tax onto their customers.<sup>17</sup> In this context, Printers began retreating from their standard of neutrality as they realized the economic threat the Stamp Act posed to their businesses. David Hall, co-publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, reported to Franklin that customers "were already 'leaving off fast' in anticipation of the Stamp Act," because as a matter of principle, customers did not want "to pay anything towards that Tax that they can possibly avoid."<sup>18</sup>

Not only did the stamp tax itself endanger newspapers, but some printing businesses began suffering at the hand of others that had taken more stringent positions on the Stamp Act. Colonists mounted public pressure against Printers perceived to be too 'lukewarm' or neutral toward the stamp tax. Hall, who considered the Stamp Act a horrible law, did not publicly oppose it. As a result of his "policy of equal access for competing views," colonists cancelled subscriptions and began personally haranguing Hall.<sup>19</sup> He wrote to Franklin complaining that "all the Papers on the Continent, ours excepted, were full of Spirited Papers against the Stamp Law, and...because I did not publish those Papers likewise, I...got a great deal of Ill-will."<sup>20</sup> Other Printers who did not publish critical responses to the Stamp Act were also punished economically. Peter Timothy, a Printer in the South, temporarily suspended his paper instead of taking a stance on the stamp tax. As a result, Charles Crouch started up a new *South-Carolina Gazette* that espoused "the cause of American liberty more boldly" and prospered because of its "warm criticism of the Stamp Act" that appealed to patriotic readers.<sup>21</sup> Printers who spoke out against the Stamp Act were often rewarded, whereas those who did not suffered declines in their political reputation and economic success. Recognizing that the stamp tax posed "a threat to their livelihoods" Printers started taking clear sides.<sup>22</sup>

In what Humphrey deemed "one of the first mass-media editorial campaigns" in American journalistic history, newspapers overwhelmingly

- 2 Stephen Botein, "Printers and the American Revolution," in *The Press and the American Revolution*, edited by Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 16.
- 3 Humphrey, *This Popular Engine*, 29.
- 4 Humphrey, 31, 34.
- 5 Botein, "Printers," 17.
- 6 Botein, 17.
- 7 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): 712; Humphrey, *This Popular Engine*, 35.
- 8 Humphrey, 35.
- 9 Humphrey, 27.
- 10 Botein, "Printers," 19.
- 11 Ralph Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network and the Stamp Act," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 71, no. 4 (2004): 406, 409.
- 12 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 10, 1731, quoted in Botein, "Printers," 20.
- 13 William B. Warner, "Communicating Liberty: The Newspapers of the British Empire as a Matrix for the American Revolution," *ELH* 72, no. 2 (2005): 346; Botein, "Printers," 19.
- 14 Botein, "Printers," 19.

- 15 Botein, 21.
- 16 Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 403-404.
- 17 Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers," 65; Botein, "Printers," 24.
- 18 Botein, "Printers," 25.
- 19 Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 410.
- 20 Hall to Franklin, June 20, 1765, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 12: 188-89, quoted in Botein, "Printers," 25.
- 21 Botein, "Printers," 26.
- 22 Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 407.

- 23** Carol Sue Humphrey, *The American Revolution and the Press: The Promise of Independence* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 50.
- 24** S. F. Roach, Jr, "The Georgia Gazette and the Stamp Act: A Reconsideration," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1971): 478; Willi Paul Adams, "The Colonial German-language Press and the American Revolution," in *The Press and the American Revolution*, edited by Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 183.
- 25** Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 407.
- 26** Letter to the commissioners of stamps in London, October 12, 1765, *Pennsylvania Journal*, September 4, 1766, quoted in Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers," 73.
- 27** *New-Hampshire Gazette*, October 31, 1765, quoted in Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 407.
- 28** Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 412.
- 29** Roach, "The Georgia Gazette," 9; Ralph Adams Brown, "New Hampshire Editors Win the War: A Study in Revolutionary Press Propaganda," *The New England Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1939): 36.
- 30** Humphrey, *This Popular Engine*, 38-39.

influenced colonial response to the Stamp Act.<sup>23</sup> Printers firstly kept colonists informed and energized regarding the status of the Stamp Act by publishing a continuous flow of information. Stories were published all over the colonies detailing "anti-stamp collector displays," and Printers like Henry Miller of the Pennsylvania German *Staatsbote* kept readers incessantly up-to-date: "news concerning the Stamp tax could be found in almost every number of the *Staatsbote*."<sup>24</sup> Printers further fired up colonial readers by publishing ideologically charged pieces.

Printers packed their papers with implicit—and even explicit—appeals to colonists to rally opposition to the stamp tax, urging American nationalism and calling for colonists to oppose the Stamp Act. Although the stamp tax was most onerous to Printers, newspapers published pieces rendering it a colonial-wide assault. With "ringing denunciations," Ralph Frasca asserted that Printers began "equating the tax with despotism and proclaiming that taxation without parliamentary representation constituted tyranny."<sup>25</sup> John Hughes, the stamp distributor of Pennsylvania, testified that "the [P]rinters in each Colony, almost without exception, stuffed their papers weekly for some time before with the most inflammatory pieces they could procure and excluded everything that tended to cool the minds of the people."<sup>26</sup> The *New-Hampshire Gazette* likened the tax to slavery, declaring the Stamp Act to be "as fatal as almost all that is dear to us."<sup>27</sup> Henry Miller of the *Staatsbote* also took a "vigorous anti-tax posture."<sup>28</sup>

Alongside widespread condemnation of the Stamp Act itself, Printers were able to mobilize colonial opposition by creating an enemy. To unite colonists, Printers published "patriot propaganda" that repeatedly portrayed the actions of British troops as unjust, Britain as inimical, and criticized anti-patriot sentiment.<sup>29</sup> The *Boston Gazette*, consistently in support of the patriot cause, published pieces that depicted the British as oppressive enemies and endorsed American nationalism.<sup>30</sup> While the ostensible goal of Printers was to rally opposition against the Stamp Act, such pieces effectively demonized the British in the minds of colonists. Anyone who did not oppose the Stamp Act or who worked in imperial posts was targeted, such as when the *Boston Gazette* printed lists of stamp-tax collectors, labeling them "mean mercenary Hirelings or Parricides among ourselves, who for a little filthy lucre would at any time betray every Right, Liberty, and Privilege of their fellow subjects."<sup>31</sup> In New Hampshire, press was almost entirely Whig, and "its columns...were filled with...warnings to Tories, or to those who might consider espousing the Loyalist side."<sup>32</sup> Newspapers were communicating a clear message: if you are not with the colonists, you are with the British.

Beyond criticism of British actions and the stamp tax, Printers published explicit calls to protest the Stamp Act to further energize colonists. In reference to stamps, the *Connecticut Courant* expressed, "it is hoped that

every lover of his Country will spurn, with the highest Indignation, the base Thought of ever purchasing a single one."<sup>33</sup> Such language sought to deter colonists from purchasing stamps by invoking patriotic rhetoric and encouraging colonial solidarity. The *Boston Gazette* published an essay urging its readers to oppose the Stamp Act, crying, "AWAKE!--Awake, my Countrymen, and, by a regular & legal Opposition, defeat the Designs of those who enslave us and our Posterity. Nothing is wanting but your own Resolution."<sup>34</sup> Such open denunciations of the Stamp Act undoubtedly influenced colonists to some degree, and continuous disparagement by newspapers buoyed opposition to the stamp tax.

The single-issue *Constitutional Courant*, published pseudonymously, attacked the Stamp Act, containing phrases like "the vile minions of tyranny," "the chains of abject slavery just ready to be riveted about our necks," and the demand to "never...pay one farthing of this tax."<sup>35</sup> These rhetorical declarations represented a new and bold wave of intense criticism that characterized the Stamp Act as an unjust act of oppression. The paper consisted of two anti-tax essays and a reused propaganda cartoon first run by Benjamin Franklin before the meeting of the Albany Congress in 1754. Displayed on the front page, the image represented "the colonies as a snake broken into bits, with the admonition: 'JOIN OR DIE,'" and was intended to evoke colonial opposition to the Stamp Act and British authority.<sup>36</sup> The anti-tax essays of the *Constitutional Courant* were so compelling that in 1765, the English Annual Register referred to them as "the most influential Stamp Act essay[s] to appear in North America."<sup>37</sup> That the *Constitutional Courant* was recognized contemporarily demonstrates the substantive impact its essays had on readers. Such an acknowledgement of the *Constitutional Courant's* influence establishes that it had a registered effect on colonists and implies that other published pieces of the same nature were effective too.

The significant effects of newspapers on colonial response to the Stamp Act are further evident in the reflection of revolutionary contemporaries and newspaper Printers themselves. Joseph Galloway, a close ally of Benjamin Franklin, noted the impact of newspapers on the attitudes of colonists: "the people are Taught to believe the greatest Absurdities, and their Passions are excited to a Degree of Resentment against the Mother Country, beyond all Description."<sup>38</sup> This recognition is seen again by an anonymous writer 'Civis' in the *Connecticut Gazette*, who wrote, "alas, a perfect Frenzy seems to have seized the Mind of the People and renders them deaf to all Reason and Consideration."<sup>39</sup> A "Son of Liberty" in *A Providence Gazette Extraordinary* then lauded newspapers' role in the Stamp Act crisis, proclaiming "the press hath never done greater service since its first invention."<sup>40</sup> Recognition by non-Printers confirms that the broader public had been palpably affected by the newspapers' publications, and Printers themselves reflected on this. Henry Miller stated that

- 31** *Connecticut Courant*, October 28, 1765, quoted in Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 408.
- 32** Brown, "New Hampshire Editors," 36.
- 33** Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 407.
- 34** Humphrey, *The American Revolution and the Press*, 47.
- 35** Albert Matthews, "The Snake Devices, 1754-1776, and the Constitutional Courant, 1765," in *Publications, Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, xi (1906-1907): 417, 412-436, quoted in Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers," 69.
- 36** Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers," 69.
- 37** Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 413.
- 38** Joseph Galloway to Benjamin Franklin, January 13, 1766, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 13:36, quoted in Frasca, "Benjamin Franklin," 407.
- 39** "Civis" in the *Connecticut Gazette*, August 30, 1765, quoted in Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers," 72.
- 40** "A Son of Liberty," *A Providence Gazette Extraordinary*, March 12, 1766, quoted in Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers," 81.

- 41 *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*, January 5, 1768, quoted in Adams, “The Colonial German-language Press,” 192; *Virginia Gazette*, May 16, 1766, quoted in Humphrey, *The American Revolution and the Press*, 51.
- 42 Frasca, “Benjamin Franklin,” 414.
- 43 Thomas C. Leonard, “News for a Revolution: The Expose in America, 1768-1773,” *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 1 (1980): 32, 33.

*Continuation of Ideological Publishing After The Stamp Act*

“the spirit of resistance [in New England and Virginia] spread through the public newspapers like a brush fire,” and William Rind commented in the *Virginia Gazette* that “a well conducted NEWSPAPER would, at any Time, be important, most especially at a Crisis, which makes a Circulation of Intelligence particularly interesting to all the AMERICAN COLONIES.”<sup>41</sup> Printers could control the messages their papers espoused. After recognizing the economic impact that both the tax and their neutrality on its enactment could produce, newspapers seemingly “manufactured a reality for their audience” and made their fight “one for colonists more generally.”<sup>42</sup> Printers effectively transformed their newspapers into ideological mouthpieces by centering their arguments upon a framework of British oppression, American nationalism, and a call for colonial unity in opposition to the Stamp Act.

Though concern for the economic success of their printing businesses initially and primarily motivated the Printers’ broadly waged war against the Stamp Act, the ideological role of newspapers was secured in the following years. Newspapers were used as an instrument of political force to rouse support for the nonimportation movement and became “a standard part of revolutionary action.”<sup>43</sup>

Separate from business concerns, Printers published ideologically-charged pieces in response to British actions in the Massachusetts Bay colony. Invoking anti-British rhetoric, Samuel Adams penned an anonymous piece encouraging colonists to assert their right to freedom. Since the Stamp Act crisis, liberty had become a growing claim among the colonies, and papers including the *Boston Gazette*, *New-York Gazette*, and *Virginia Gazette* defended “liberty of the press.”<sup>44</sup> Isolated from the business interests of the Printers, newspapers demonstrated their new political agency in a piece pseudonymously published by Samuel Adams in the *Boston Gazette*. Under the title “DETERMINATUS”, Adams responded to accusations by Thomas Hutchinson, the royal governor of Massachusetts Bay colony, of the Boston Whigs’ “unruly and unlawful mob behavior.”<sup>45</sup> John Hancock’s ship *Liberty* was seized by the royal navy for customs violations, prompting a riot by the people of the Boston province that forced customs commissioners to “flee Boston.”<sup>46</sup> In “Determinatus,” Adams declared that the actions of the people in response to the unjust seizure were reasonable, and that the accusations against them were unfounded. “I am no friend to ‘Riots, Tumults, and unlawful Assemblies,’” Adams said in agreement with Hutchinson, but went on to justify the liberty of the people in expression.<sup>47</sup>

But when the people are oppress’d, when their Rights are infring’d, when their property is invaded, when taskmasters are set over them,

- 44 Schlesinger, “The Colonial Newspapers,” 75-78.
- 45 Warner, “Communicating Liberty,” 354.
- 46 Warner, 354.
- 47 “Determinatus,” *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, August 8, 1768.

when unconstitutional acts are executed by a naval force before their eyes, and they are daily threatened with military troops...in such circumstances the people will be discontented, and they are not to be blamed...they will *boldly assert* their freedom; and they are to be *justify’d* in so doing.<sup>48</sup>

In his essay, Adams admonished British authorities for their unjust actions, taking a clear patriotic stance by rattling off British oppression, infringement of rights, invasion of property, and asserting the unconstitutionality of their actions. Adams made use of earlier rhetoric published by Printers during the Stamp Act crisis to demonize Britain and paint them as the enemy of the colonists. Adams declared that “the people are seldom if ever discontented, without just cause,” and in making a case for freedom of expression, the publication of his assertions in a newspaper was a clear statement.<sup>49</sup> The press was newly minted as an ideological platform, and Adams’ strong opinions about personal liberties fit right into place. Newspapers had “become makers and molders of opinion,” and the publication of such a blatantly patriotic piece, outside of the Stamp Act’s context, exemplifies how Printers had paved the way for further ideological warfare.<sup>50</sup> After the initial growth of ideological publishing in response to the Stamp Act, the press was now being used as the powerful tool of influence that Printers had made it.

*Printers and The British Imperial Post Office*

Before the American Revolution, Great Britain operated the British Imperial Post Office that mostly connected ports along the Atlantic seaboard. It had legal monopoly over the circulation of materials between colonies, and its lack of comprehensive connections frustrated Printers. Business concerns did not disappear from the front of Printers’ minds. The same newspaper campaign waged by Printers against the Stamp Act resurfaced when Printers began reexamining the British imperial postal system in 1773. The postal system was of primary importance to Printers because it played a vital role in their acquisition of news and the distribution of their newspapers.

In colonial America, mail delivery in the North was controlled by the imperial post under the British Post Office Act.<sup>51</sup> This control was strengthened with a new and reformed Post Office Act in 1765.<sup>52</sup> The British post office itself was part of a larger British communications network, and it mainly served imperial needs. Its chief goals were to generate revenue, surveil colonial correspondence, and facilitate intergovernmental communication.<sup>53</sup> As a result, inadequacies plagued the imperial postal system in the colonies. The routes covered by the post office did not provide sufficient intercolonial connections and instead linked colonies only to Britain itself.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, postage rates were high and Britain

- 48 “Determinatus,” *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, August 8, 1768.
- 49 “Determinatus.”
- 50 Schlesinger, “The Colonial Newspapers,” 81.
- 51 Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 716.
- 52 Adelman, 718.
- 53 Adelman, 724.
- 54 William Smith, “The Colonial Post-Office,” *The American Historical Review* 21, no. 2 (1916): 273.

55 Smith, “The Colonial Post-Office,” 267-268.

56 Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 716, 724.

57 Adelman, 722.

58 Adelman, 723.

59 Adelman, 715.

60 Adelman, 725.

61 Adelman, 726.

62 William Goddard, *The Plan for establishing a new American post-office* (Boston, MA: American Antiquarian Society and Newsbank, inc, 2002).

63 Goddard, *The Plan for establishing a new American post-office*.

possessed a legal monopoly over pricing and postal routes.<sup>55</sup> As a result, two avenues of communication existed in the colonies: the imperial postal system, and the informal “web of connections” constructed by colonists, who, to supplement services provided by the British imperial post office, established ad hoc networks between towns and colonies.<sup>56</sup>

Printers were dependent on these links and operated in both the imperial and informal networks of communication. Mainly, they aimed to avoid the high rates and insufficiencies of the imperial system and devised alternative methods, such as hiring boys to deliver their newspapers locally or paying riders to deliver newspapers to other subscribers.<sup>57</sup> However, Printers grew frustrated with such an inconsistent arrangement. Postmasters across the colonies had different pricing standards for mailing newspapers, and the “absence of a standard policy regarding the distribution of newspapers and their pricing” became a source of aggravation for Printers.<sup>58</sup> Saddled with the insufficiencies of the monopolistic British imperial post office, and tired of operating within ad hoc colonial routes, Printers harnessed the ideological influence of their newspapers.

Printers employed the rhetorical strategies used in the Stamp Act crisis to advocate for a better, more comprehensive, *American* postal system from which they would benefit. Evident in their dependence on the postal systems for their news and revenue, Printers “had a direct financial and business interest in promoting a post office to their liking.”<sup>59</sup> Knowing this, Printers’ arguments were most effective by framing the need for an American post office within the narrative of British imperial oppression.

William Goddard, a printer who owned the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* in Philadelphia and *Maryland Journal* in Baltimore, championed the push for an American post office.<sup>60</sup> Goddard’s “Constitutional Post” was created after he enlisted a personal post rider to deliver his papers, and grew to become a broader plan for an American post office.<sup>61</sup> Goddard introduced his idea to the Boston committee of correspondence, producing “*The PLAN for establishing a new American POST-OFFICE*.”<sup>62</sup> The Boston committee’s support of the post office plan lay in its underlying connection to British imperial oppression. The British post office operated as an imperial arm, and with its explicit goals of revenue generation and imperial surveillance, the British post office was another grievance to colonists. In his plan, Goddard characterized British monopoly over postal rates as a “dangerous and unconstitutional Precedent of Taxation without Consent.”<sup>63</sup> Goddard, himself a Printer aware of the ideological power of newspapers, enlisted other Printers to support his plan. These fellow patriotic Printers knew of the economic potential an American post office could bring, and therefore a network of Printers emerged to publish support.

Newspaper Printers including Isaiah Thomas, Benjamin Edes and John Gill (*Boston Gazette*), John Holt (*New York Journal*), and Daniel

Fowle (*New-Hampshire Gazette*) began reprinting letters of endorsement that expressed support of the postal system by prominent colonists.<sup>64</sup> A letter from “A Gentleman at New York’ to a friend in Boston outlining the main arguments for the new post office” that “urged his friend [in Boston] to ‘use all your influence in the town of Boston’ to gather support for the plan” was printed in the *Massachusetts Spy*, *Connecticut Gazette*, *New-Hampshire Gazette*, and *Virginia Gazette*.<sup>65</sup> Newspapers published articles emphasizing approval of the American post among the community, such as a letter claiming that the American post was “supported by the most eminent merchants & other gentlemen in those places.”<sup>66</sup>

The pieces Printers published framed the establishment of an American post office as necessary to combat British imperial policies in the same way they had framed opposing the Stamp Act as a logical protest of unjust British taxation and oppression. Printers did not explicitly acknowledge their own financial stake in the post office, despite how essential mail systems were to their businesses. Instead, support of the new post office in newspapers embodied a broader intercolonial cause. Newspapers propelled the ideological argument that the British post office was a form of imperial oppression. In the assertions of newspapers, the post office “represented unconstitutional taxation” and was used by British officials “to censor their communication” and “prevent...newspapers from circulating.”<sup>67</sup> The *Connecticut Gazette* published a piece declaring that the post office was

a parliamentary Establishment, that hath been the Foundation of, and Precedent for a Stamp-Act, a declaratory Law for binding the Colonies in all Cases whatsoever, a Tea Duty, and other Attempts to extort our Money from us, and infringe on our Rights and Privileges.<sup>68</sup>

Though the writer in the *Connecticut Gazette* condemns the British post office’s “attempt to extort our Money,” the post office primarily impacted Printers. The British post that writers and Printers were advocating against was not the dominant source of communications among colonists because there were not adequate routes between colonies. Most colonists did not use the post, and instead sent letters “via traveling friends or servants.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, when couched in a broader call for intercolonial unity and resistance to British oppression, an American post office became the best interest of all colonists: “patriot [P]rinters and their allies therefore placed the post office in the growing line of oppressive imperial institutions.”<sup>70</sup> Although less widespread, Printers’ advocacy for the American post office paralleled their response to the Stamp Act crisis. In both instances, Printers were faced with an economic obstacle that, when given extensive publicity in their papers, they could frame as a widespread colonial concern. Though Printers suffered the most significant burden under the

64 Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 733.

65 Adelman, 734.

66 *Massachusetts Spy*, March 17, 1774, quoted in Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 734. The letter was reprinted in *Boston Evening Post*, March 21, 1774; *Connecticut Courant*, March 22, 1774; *Essex Gazette*, March 23, 1774; *Norwich Packet*, March 24, 1774; *Connecticut Gazette*, March 25, 1774; *Connecticut Journal*, March 25, 1774; *New-Hampshire Gazette*, March 25, 1774, *Virginia Gazette*, April 14, 1774.

67 Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 735.

68 *Connecticut Gazette*, April 1, 1774, quoted in Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 736.

69 Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance,” 720.

70 Adelman, 736.

Stamp Act and the British imperial post office, publication of patriotic rhetoric painted each act as an attack on colonial rights, paving the way for newspapers to take the charge on helping shape colonial response.

### Conclusion

Today's news media has a distinctly ideological role: news outlets maintain distinct partisan stances and often amplify polarized public opinions. We look to newspapers not just for informational news, but for editorial takes on the latest domestic and international crises, for intellectual opinions on the actions of the government, and for ideologically-charged political statements from party lawmakers. Although in their colonial-era infancy newspapers acted as "mere disseminators of information," often balancing opinions to maintain neutrality, newspapers became a powerful political force as a result of these events leading up to the American Revolution.<sup>71</sup> Newspapers grew from disseminators of information into ideologically distinct entities that broadly publicized partisan ideas and patriotic ideals. Since newspapers were such small-scale endeavors in the colonies, the essays and articles published were chosen by Printers themselves. The transition of newspapers into platforms elevating undeniably partisan and ideological views occurred as a result of active choices by Printers. Printers were prompted by business concerns and published pieces with clear calls to oppose the Stamp Act and to support an American post office. These pieces then shaped colonial attitudes by framing the Printers' arguments in wider rhetoric that portrayed Great Britain as an oppressive enemy, whose actions were unconstitutional and adverse to colonial interests. Such rhetoric mobilized intercolonial opposition to Great Britain. Business concerns may have prompted the significant and widespread charge that Printers and their newspapers took in criticizing the British; without this prompting, the revolutionary fervor generated among colonists might not have been as extraordinary. Printers acting in their best economic interests and in response to the opinions of colonial readership thus transformed their newspapers into important entities with political agency, whose crucial role in the public sphere endures today.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers and the Stamp Act," *The New England Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1935): 81.

### About the author

Zoe Magley is a first-year undergraduate student double concentrating in History and Political Science. In the future, she hopes to attend graduate school to further study the history and evolution of American politics.

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## ACCORDING TO THE FASHION

### *Elite Cultural Tensions and the Eighteenth-Century Russian Lubok*

by Emma George

Abstract

While much scholarship has investigated the ways in which the eighteenth-century Russian state displayed its power to its subjects, popular prints remain a little-explored source base through which to understand the popularization of the state's Enlightenment-era cultural reforms. *Lubki* (singular *lubok*)—cheap popular prints produced via engraving—combined elements of Western European prints with romanticized, "uniquely Russian" visual and textual characteristics, and functioned to communicate ideas of imperial power to a broad audience. A primarily visual medium able to effectively reach a population whose level of literacy was limited, the *lubok* combined illustrations with brief prose or verse captions. *Lubki* could depict narratives, news events, or even political satires. Although they were produced in state-licensed factories and targeted an elite and emerging middle-class urban audience from the mid-18th century onwards, much scholarship from the nineteenth century to the present day has consistently and incorrectly identified *lubki* as reflective of a unified, agrarian Russian folk culture. This paper seeks to reinterpret *lubki* as a medium through which conceptions of Russian identity with their origins in the state's Enlightenment-era cultural reforms were communicated to an elite and middling audience.