

Book Reviews

Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

Adelman, Joseph. *Revolutionary Networks: The Business and Politics of Printing the News, 1763-1789*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019. 280 Pp.

In *Revolutionary Networks*, colonial newspapers and the men and women behind the presses dominate the headlines. Joseph Adelman explores the oft overlooked business of printing in colonial America and how the industry influenced the American Revolution and the formation of the United States. He attempts to determine how colonial printers, most located in the major ports and towns of British North America, conducted the everyday business of printing and disseminating the news in the politically turbulent period of the late 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s. Colonial printers flowed between the working class and elite society, forming information and business networks that spanned the entire Atlantic Ocean. As a result, printers developed enormous influence by curating the news; they played a central role in the political turmoil of the American Revolution and development of the United State Constitution.

Adelman charts the role of printers in Britain's North American colonies in shaping the political economy of colonial America and the early United States in six chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Few authors attempt to place the American Revolution as a secondary focus, but Adelman does so successfully, placing printers and their business practices at the forefront of the political and social developments. He begins, in chapter one, with a description of the economic and business practices of printers in the colonies, including mundane details such as advertising and subscription rates. He argues that printers were at once artisans and social elites, moving between social classes as both purveyors and collectors of information. Their businesses depended on steady access to information from throughout the Atlantic World, and each newspaper reflected the curatorial choices of the printer and his/her readers.

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Chapter two explores how the Stamp Act affected the business, content, and livelihoods of newspapers and printers. The Stamp Act placed a duty on every sheet of newspaper printed in the colonies, effectively a tax to merely print a newspaper. It also placed a duty on every advertisement placed in those papers, which depressed demand. In every sense, the Stamp Act genuinely threatened to shutter the already marginally successful print shops. It is not surprising then that colonial printers, overall, were willing to print and distribute political diatribes condemning the Stamp Act and participate in non-importation agreements. Chapter three shows colonial printers realized the profits to be made from printing the growing debate over imperial efforts to consolidate control over the increasingly rebellious colonies. Perhaps not surprisingly, Adelman finds that printers purposefully printed opposing viewpoints to capitalize on the controversy, not that dissimilar from modern media outlets.

In the fourth chapter, Adelman explains how printers faced an increasingly dire situation from 1774-1775 as the American colonies edged ever closer to all-out war with Britain. Patriot printers continued to print news and pamphlets stoking revolutionary sentiment, entrenching their networks with committees of correspondences and radicals such as the Sons of Liberty, but for loyalist printers, business and politics did not mix well. Often, loyalist printers were dependent on government or royal contracts for much of their business, and as those governments became less and less popular, loyalists faced both economic and violent threats to their livelihoods. By the time war arrived in the colonies, the subject of chapter five, printers had to manage and navigate growing political pressures and scarce supplies of paper, ink, customers, and information. War effectively cut the colonies off from the rest of the Atlantic, and printers felt the strain of war more acutely than most sectors of the colonial economy. In the final chapter, printers exited the Revolutionary War bruised, but largely still in business. The aftermath of war left many struggling to regain their pre-war glories, but the growing nation provided enormous opportunities to both fledgling and established printers. Some moved into rural areas to capitalize on the new nation's westward expansion, while east coast cities offered newly expanded access to Atlantic, European, and even global, information and news networks. As

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the newly formed United States began to debate the benefits and perils of the Constitution in the late 1780s, printers once more took up the mantle as key proponents and carriers of its ratification. Opportunity was abundant as the number of printers in the U.S. increased nearly exponentially growing from roughly 100 in 1775 to more than 450 in 1796.

Adelman's greatest contribution is recreating how printers merged the demands of business and profit with the perils of political expression in early America. He details the various economic concerns, needs, and precarities that confronted printers with every issue they printed. Printers faced enormous pressure from their peers, neighbors, and customers to participate in the political turmoil of the 1760s and 1770s. Some printers were quick to join in, but economic concerns limited the choices of others. In all cases, political choices aligned with the need to protect one's business.

For economic and business historians, the book does not contain as much data and information on the business of printing as one would expect. Other than a fantastic section in chapter one on the production, pricing, and profits of a weekly newspaper business, the book moves on to largely anecdotal evidence of how printers decided between business and politics. Nevertheless, Adelman supplies some fascinating data on the time that news and articles appeared in newspapers throughout the American colonies, and he argues that newspapers adopted similar politicized symbolism. This reader would have liked to see more images of newspapers to show the ways in which newspapers adopted similar structures, symbolism, and layouts, but this is not a criticism of the author, as it was more likely a decision made by the publisher. No matter these minor limitations, the book is an excellent marriage of business and political history that adds significant depth to our understanding of how printers and printing fundamentally shaped the American Revolution.

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