FRANK LESLIE'S
ILLUSTRATED
NEWSPAPER

NEW YORK MAY 7, 1878.

ANTIQUE MONUMENT

The question of the antiquity of man in America has received some merit and very serious and important consideration as the hands of Professor W. F. Poern, in the Proceedings of the Chicago Academy of Sciences, and Mr. E. N. Darwin, in the American Journal of Science, have already been paid to the subject.

The most interesting points in Professor Poern's paper will be preserved in the essay of the essayist of this paper, in which the results of his researches are briefly stated.

The theory of the antiquity of man in America has been widely discussed, and the results of the researches of Mr. E. N. Darwin have been most influential.

In the essay of Professor Poern, the most interesting points in his researches are briefly stated, and the results of his researches are briefly stated.

The theory of the antiquity of man in America has been widely discussed, and the results of the researches of Mr. E. N. Darwin have been most influential.

The theory of the antiquity of man in America has been widely discussed, and the results of the researches of Mr. E. N. Darwin have been most influential.

The theory of the antiquity of man in America has been widely discussed, and the results of the researches of Mr. E. N. Darwin have been most influential.

The theory of the antiquity of man in America has been widely discussed, and the results of the researches of Mr. E. N. Darwin have been most influential.

The theory of the antiquity of man in America has been widely discussed, and the results of the researches of Mr. E. N. Darwin have been most influential.
62 Goodbye
Patrick S. Washburn, Ohio University

63 Stories of Today: Rebecca Harding Davis’ Investigative Fiction
Mark Canada, University of North Carolina-Pembroke

74 The Colonial Virginia Press and the Stamp Act: An Expansion of Civic Discourse
Roger P. Mellen, New Mexico State University

86 Popular Chinese Images and “The Coming Man” of 1870: Racial Representations of Chinese
Mary M. Cronin, New Mexico State University, and William E. Huntzicker, Minneapolis

100 When Elm Street Became Treeless: Journalistic Coverage of Dutch Elm Disease, 1939-80
Phillip J. Hutchison, University of Kentucky

110 Standing By: Police Paralysis, Race, and the 1964 Philadelphia Riot
Nicole Maurantonio, University of Richmond

122 Book Reviews, Katherine A. Bradshaw, Editor

Children, War, and Propaganda, by Ross F. Collins

Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life, by Thomas B. Connery


Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space, by Alice Fahs

Dangerous Ambition: Rebecca West and Dorothy Thompson, New Women in Search of Love and Power,
by Susan Hertog

Housework and Housewives in American Advertising: Married to the Mop, by Jessamyn Neuhaus

Branding Obamessiah: The Rise of an American Idol, by Mark Edward Taylor


Journalism History is published four times a year by the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. Articles and reviews in the journal express the opinions of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editors.

The annual subscription rate is $20 for individuals, $65 for institutions, and $15 for students. For subscriptions outside North America, please add $20 per year. Single copies may be ordered for $10 apiece. ISSN Number: 0094-7679. Those wishing to subscribe should send a check or money order, made out to Ohio University, to: Michael S. Sweeney, Journalism History, E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701.

For permission to use copyrighted material before Vol. 16: 3-4, please contact the Department of Journalism, California State University-Northridge, Northridge, Calif. 91330-0001. For permission to use copyrighted material from Vol. 16: 3-4 to Vol. 26, please contact the Hank Greenspun School of Communication, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Box 45007, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, Nev. 89154-5007.

©2012 E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
The Colonial Virginia Press and the Stamp Act
An Expansion of Civic Discourse

The Stamp Act, which was imposed on the American colonies by the British government in 1765, was an essential preface to the American Revolution. Historians have observed that it brought about an important transition for colonial printers, politicizing them and turning them into influential purveyors of propaganda. The act had a critical impact on print culture in Virginia, which was the largest of the colonies and one that was crucial to the formation of a new nation. This study helps to clarify an historical debate regarding the colonial printers' supposed unanimous opposition to the tax. Focusing on the print-related cultural shifts of this period, it concludes that a newly critical Virginia press and an accompanying broadening civic discourse led to a new regard for freedom of the press.

The colonial Virginia press took a dramatic turn away from censorship and toward dissent during the Stamp Act crisis. This change cannot simply be explained by the evolving political situation; it also was the result of an increase in print competition and an overall increasing influence of print at that time. The hated tax imposed by the English Parliament in 1765 marked the beginning of an alteration in the role of all colonial newspapers and their printers and was most dramatic in Virginia, where the controversial stamp tax law polarized political opinion and led to dissatisfaction with the only printer in the colony. While most of the mid-Atlantic and northern colonies had more than one printer, leading to competition for customers and a wider range of printed viewpoints, the more rural colony of Virginia did not. Contemporaries expressed the opinion that the royal governor kept tight control over the only printer and the output of his press. Such limitations had serious political and social consequences because the printer was the sole gatekeeper for information published in the one mass medium based in the colony. With management over the selection and distribution of messages, the printer—or anyone who controlled him—had a great deal of influence over political discourse in the colony.

The British ministry appeared to have aimed the Stamp Act directly at those with this influence and the disseminators of such dissidence, and members of a new, more broadly based civic public saw their most important source of information threatened by government action. The outcry was immediate and the subsequent changes were dramatic. The subordinate relationship of the printer to the royal governor in Virginia soon gave way to a much more adversarial role, political dissidence became more evident on the printed page, and new radical political ideas eventually led to the Revolution and to the protection of press freedom. Locally printed material, such as pamphlets and newspapers, helped to drive this change, and that same printed material particularly reflected this transformation.

The American Stamp Act of 1765 was a watershed event in the relations between Great Britain and her colonies and was a major part of the dispute over taxes and representation that led to the American Revolution. The British ministry designed the tax to defray the cost of defending the American colonies, but those politicians did not anticipate the intense opposition that ensued.
In the summer of 1764, new Prime Minister George Grenville warned colonial governors that his government was considering a stamp tax in the colonies. It was one of several taxes imposed to help pay the debt incurred from fighting the French and the Indians in the Seven Years' War and the continued posting of British soldiers on the frontier to protect colonists. Parliament passed an act for "granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expenses of defending, protecting, and securing the same," which was to take effect on November 1, 1765. The tax required legal and business documents to be printed or issued only on paper with a royal stamp. Legal and business forms were to be taxed from three pence to six pounds, paperwork for indentures from 2.5 to 5 percent, almanacs two pence and up, newspapers a halfpenny to a penny per sheet, and advertisements in newspapers two shillings. College students would have to pay two pounds to matriculate and another two pounds to graduate while lawyers were to pay ten pounds for admission to the bar. Penalties for paper without the stamps were substantial: from forty shillings to twenty pounds. Residents of England were among the most heavily taxed in Europe, and Grenville assumed that the colonists would be willing to pay their share of defending American lands. The outcry from the colonies and their allies in England caught the ministry unprepared.

Although there were precedents for such a stamp tax, several differences led to the colonists' refusal to pay this levy. In England, a stamp tax of one penny per sheet of paper, plus an additional tax on advertisements, had been in effect since 1712. While the stated purpose was to raise revenues, it also served to restrict newspaper circulation. Such a stamp tax on the American colonies had been suggested as far back as 1722. Even the colonies had used stamp taxes: Massachusetts passed its own stamp tax in 1755, and New York in 1757. Parliament's 1765 act was different, however, because it was an internal tax rather than a tax on trade (which colonists had learned to accept), and it was viewed as taxation without representation. The local assemblies did not vote on it; instead it was enacted by a Parliament lacking any delegates from the colonies. Of greater importance for publicity and propaganda, it also hit American printers hard and in the process radicalized them, which virtually assured that all the colonists would be well-informed about why this tax should never be paid.

Contemporaries saw the tax as intentionally aimed at sources of disdissence, and some historians agree. John Adams wrote that the ministry was intentionally trying "to strip us in a great measure of the means of knowledge, by loading the press, the colleges, and even an almanack and a newspaper, with restraints and duties." With the price going up, printed material would not be distributed as widely nor as far down the economic ladder. And if newspapers were more expensive, the poorest members of society could not afford them. Even low-income farmers usually could afford an annual almanac, but this tax raised the price by two pence or more. Michael Warner theorized in 1990 that "it was an attempt by authority to curtail civil liberty" by restricting press freedom. However, evidence from historians, British records, and Grenville's papers do not support this claim. Whatever the intent, by challenging the printers' viability, the tax had the effect of strengthening the ties among the printers and among the separate colonies, thereby increasing printed dissidence.

Adams observed that reaction from the colonies was sharply negative: "In every colony, from Georgia to New Hampshire inclusively, the stamp distributors and inspectors have been compelled by the unconquerable rage of the people to renounce their offices. . . . Our presses have groaned, our pulpiits have thundered, our towns have voted; the crown officers have everywhere trembled." There was no stamped paper available as popular pressure forced the resignation of the stamp officials and prevented importation of stamped paper. The Maryland Gazette stated that it was being forced to stop publishing because of the uncertainty of the cost of stamped paper and asked subscribers to pay more before printing could resume: "But even that advanced Price cannot yet be known, as the Paper, the —— Stamped Paper, Must be Bought of the —— Stamp Master, but what Sort or Size of Paper, or at what Price, it is impossible yet to tell." Jonas Green and his partner William Rind filled their Gazette with comments sharply critical of the tax and notices that they could no longer publish the newspaper. The last regular issue on October 10, 1765, had a new statement in the masthead, "The Stamp Act put Virginia printer Joseph Royle, as well as all colonial printers, in an untenable political and financial bind. It forced them to decide whether to stop printing, publish without stamps and face prosecution, or attempt to get expensive stamped paper and risk angering many critics, who opposed any payment of the tax."

Meanwhile, only one issue of the Virginia Gazette from that year is extant, and while it included much on the unpopularity of the tax, it contained none of the theatrings included in the Maryland Gazette. Comparison of these two newspapers from neighboring colonies affords a better understanding of political bias of the Virginia press.
The Stamp Act put Virginia printer Joseph Royle, as well as all colonial printers, in an untenable political and financial bind. It forced them to decide whether to stop printing, publish without stamps and face prosecution, or attempt to get expensive stamped paper and risk angering many critics, who opposed any payment of the tax. For newspapers, the tax might have added a direct cost of only 4 percent. The price of pamphlets would have escalated even more with a tax of up to one shilling for each four pages on a document that typically would have cost less than two shillings. The tax on almanacs was 27 percent or more, but no tax was placed on books. Two hidden costs added to the expense beyond the tax: printers had to purchase imported paper from London that had been stamped, instead of using cheaper paper made in the colonies, and taxes had to be paid in hard-to-come-by sterling instead of colonial currency. Thus, all colonial printers faced tough choices that politicized the output of their presses. The newspapers of both the Chesapeake colonies took a short hiatus, perhaps for fear of the penalties for not paying a tax that there was no way of paying."

Not all historians have agreed on why the new tax generated such stiff defiance. The prevalent theory was that the colonists united against the Stamp Act because it was a tax on their internal affairs, something Parliament had previously left to local legislatures. In their 1995 definitive history of the Stamp Act crisis, Edmund Morgan and Helen Morgan undermined the internal tax theory and concluded what emerged was an important reaffirmation of the principle of taxation only by representative government. Another important aspect of their work was they recognized the Stamp Act as uniting the various colonies against the tax and the newspapers had an important role in spreading information among regions. Arthur Schlesinger concluded in 1958 that the Stamp Act's impact on printed material generated a universal opposition from colonial printers and they became a crucial influence on public opinion. He suggested the importance of American newspapers in rallying opposition to new British taxes and argued the Stamp Act changed the actual role of printers in colonial America, transforming them from merely transmitters of ideas to actual makers of opinion. He also saw the Stamp Act as an unprecedented internal tax "as though deliberately to provoke resistance, it saddled them (the taxes) largely on the printers, lawyers and merchants who, along with the clergy, formed the most literate and vocal elements of the population." He noted newspaper opposition was unanimous and concluded that, in response to this tax, the press presented a rare united front.

Neither Schlesinger's assumption about the printers' influence nor his conclusion regarding the unanimity of printers' opposition to the Stamp Act can withstand closer examination. While he posited a powerful press influence, he had no support for causality, whether the press caused the dissent or rather reflected public opinion. As Stephen Botein wrote in 1975, historians had often overstated the role of the press in the radicalization of American politics. Sociologist Michael Schudson observed in 2003 that while claims regarding media influence are common, they are nearly impossible to prove. Critical analysis often reveals that any effect assumed is indeed not that of the media; rather what is being reported has the actual influence. Regarding the unanimity of the printers' reaction, contemporary printer and early historian Isaiah Thomas had first-hand knowledge of the stamp tax opposition, its effect on printers, and their reaction to it: "[S]ome of the more opulent and cautious printers, when the act was to take place, put their papers in mourning, and, for a few weeks, omitted to publish them; others not so timid, but doubtful of the consequences of publishing newspapers without stamps, omitted the titles, or altered them as an evasion." He suggested that opposition to the tax was not universal, ranging from opposition to neutrality, with no American printers supporting the act but some rather weak in their opposition. He reported that in both Virginia and New Hampshire, some patriots thought the colony's sole press was under the influence of crown officials and brought in a second printer at the time of the Stamp Act. More recent research on colonial printers and the Stamp Act has supported Thomas' claims and has concluded that while no American printers supported the tax, their opposition was not as universal as Schlesinger posited. The research in this study suggests the Maryland printer was more visibly opposed to the Stamp Act than his Virginia counterpart, who took a more moderate editorial position. Thus, the printer who was more financially dependent on—and therefore more easily
I n May 1765, firebrand Patrick Henry succeeded in getting support for some strong declarations against the Stamp Act, but many in Virginia would not read about it for some time. After heated debate, the House of Burgesses passed the Virginia Resolves: “That the General Assembly of this Colony, with the Consent of his Majesty, or his Substitute, HAVE the Sole Right and Authority to lay Taxes and Impositions upon It’s [sic] Inhabitants.” It then went on to insinuate strongly that Parliament was destroying American freedom.25 These challenging words were never printed in the Virginia newspaper. According to the Morgans, “the resolves were too much for Joseph Royle, the conservative editor of the Virginia Gazette. He failed to print them, and consequently other colonies got news of Virginia’s action from the more ardent supporters of the resolutions, instead of obtaining a relatively reliable text from a publication in the colony itself.”27 Meanwhile, the resolves were published in Maryland and in other newspapers throughout the colonies.

Several letters appeared in the Maryland Gazette, complaining about the resolves not being printed in Virginia. The demand for civic discourse, including controversial criticism of the British government, created tension between the public and the Virginia colony’s sole mass-media gatekeeper. Williamsburg printer Royle complained in August about the accuracy of the resolves printed elsewhere: “It is with no small Degree of Surprize [sic] that we have of late observed several Northern Newspapers stuffed with Paragraphs of Intelligence, Extracts of Letters, &c. respecting Virginia, which are as destitute of Truth, as they are of right Reason.”28 This elicited a response in the Maryland Gazette in October: “If Mr. Royle had been pleased to publish those Resolves, the Authenticity of his Intelligence, would have been undisputed, and he would not have had any Reason of Complaint on that Story; But if Mr. Royle is under such Influence as to be obliged to Print what he is directed, and nothing else, he may very truly be considered the most Independent and Self-Sufficient Man in the Colony.”29

A direct comparison of the reactions to the Stamp Act in the Virginia Gazette and the Maryland Gazette reveals a great deal about political bias and the two newspapers’ perspectives on contemporary politics.30 Unfortunately, few of Royle’s Williamsburg newspapers are extant,31 but the issues that do exist demonstrate that by 1765, the Maryland newspaper was much more likely to run articles critical of the government in Britain than its Virginia counterpart. For example, the Annapolis newspaper had printed a sharp criticism earlier in the year of British attempts to undermine the system of trial by jury: “Without Liberty, no Man can be a Subject. He is a Slave.”32 After passage of the Stamp Act, the Maryland newspaper published a remarkably disparaging comment on King George III:
“Two issues of the two newspapers from 1765 afford a direct comparison supporting the postulation of differing biases. The Annapolis paper put out an October 24, 1765, supplement, and the Williamsburg paper published a supplement on the next day. The contrast between the two supports the conclusion that Green’s newspaper was more whiggish or patriot in its leanings, and Royle’s was more royalist or conservative politically.”

Two issues of the two newspapers from 1765 afford a direct comparison supporting the postulation of differing biases. The Annapolis paper put out an October 24, 1765, supplement, and the Williamsburg paper published a supplement on the next day. The contrast between the two supports the conclusion that Green’s newspaper was more whiggish or patriot in its leanings, and Royle’s was more royalist or conservative politically.

The Annapolis newspaper featured a full-page copy of the “Remonstrance of the Freeholders and Freemen of Anne-Arundel County” that was sent to the colony’s assemblymen. This was a sharp protest of the Stamp Act, arguing it was a tax passed by Parliament without their representation: “How then in Point of Natural or Civil Law, are we rightly chargeable, or liable to be burdened, by the Stamp-Act, attempted to be imposed upon us by the Mother Country? Have we assented to it personally or representatively?” This radical political protest argued against the claim of “virtual representation,” alleged the tax was a violation of Maryland’s charter, and requested that delegates be sent to the Stamp Act Congress. On the next page, a short letter to the printer argued that no one individual should be punishable for transacting business without stamped paper; none was available because the people as a whole prevented stamps from being imported. There was a short item on New York’s Royal Governor Cadwalader Colden giving representatives to the Stamp Act Congress: “He received them very coldly, and told them that the Meeting of the Commissioners was unconstitutional, unprecedented, and unlawful.” Several items regarding what took place at the Congress and who attended followed. One noted the Virginia governor prorogued the assembly, not allowing members to meet as scheduled. Several items from England ridiculed the party in power for bringing back a disgraced minister and praised the “Great Patriot Mr. [William] Pitt,” the former prime minister now in great favor with the Americans. Overall, the Maryland newspaper contained a great deal of politically dissenting material with few articles appearing royalist in nature.

In contrast, Royle’s Virginia Gazette contained warnings against opposition to the British action. A speech by Massachusetts’ royal governor, Francis Bernard, taking up most of the first page, admonished and threatened legislators for refusing to obey British law. He called upon the assembly to help enforce the Stamp Act, decreed recent acts of violence against public officials, and declared the colony on the precipice of disaster, warning of “the consequences if you should suffer a confirmed disobedience of this act of Parliament to take place.” This long article was supportive of the royal position. The second page reported apologies for instances of mob violence against court justices in smaller cities in Massachusetts. The identical story about the New York governor meeting the Stamp Act Congress delegates ran as in the Maryland paper, noting the same letter from Rhode Island as the source. One story from London indicated hope that the Stamp Act would be repealed and another noted that the appointed Stamp Act distributor for North Carolina resigned following public pressure. However, the Williamsburg paper did not mention proroguing of the Virginia assembly. A story on page three detailed the unfriendly reception that the appointed distributor of stamps for Virginia received when he arrived in Williamsburg from England. George Mercer “was accosted by a concourse of Gentlemen assembled from all parts of the colony, the General Court sitting at this time. They insisted he should immediately satisfy the company (which constantly increased) whether he intended to act as a Commissioner under the Stamp Act.” This first-hand report of the incident was highly negative of the crowd’s reaction to Mercer, demonstrating bias toward the official British position and being the opposite of the Maryland paper with the similar date. Clearly, Royle was politically allied with the royal governor, a situation that was generating unrest among those Virginians who were critical of the British government.

This new tax placed the Virginia printer in the middle of a
power struggle, but exploring the few financial records available reveals much about potential political restrictions on the content while at the same time uncovering an expansion of viewpoints being disseminated. As a printer, Royle was at both the center of growing commercial activity and the intellectual heart of the colony. Williamsburg was the market hub for a region without an urban center, and his shop was a retail outlet for the entire colony. His printing office journals, or daybooks, exist only for part of 1750-52 and 1764-66, but they indicate a substantial trade in books, stationery, business forms, legal blanks, almanacs, newspapers, postal services, and other miscellaneous items. A particularly important income source for this Virginia tradesman came from printing official documents. The colony's government paid him and his predecessors to print laws and the *Journal of the House of Burgesses*. The House of Burgesses voted on this appointment, which then had to be approved by the Governor's Council as well as the royal governor. The annual salary was increased from 200 to 350 pounds a year in 1762, and again to 375 pounds a year in 1764, and printers also sometimes got additional personal and governmental work from the governor for additional pay. The Williamsburg printers also ran a post office, so Royle received income as the local postmaster, but this lucrative position was subject to the whims of the British government and anyone invoking the wrath of the royal governor was likely to lose this job. As colonists began to take divergent positions over the Stamp Act dispute, printers had difficult editorial decisions to make, any of which could subject them to possible financial disaster. The governor, who supported the official British position, and the Virginia printer could lose royal support and his government salary. Anger potential customers, who were on both sides of the issue, and he could lose considerable retail business. Printers had no stamps or stamped paper to allow them to print legally, but if they stopped printing altogether, they would lose income and anger the patriots by not defying the tax. On the other hand, if they printed without stamps, they risked an expensive prosecution. Sources of revenue were shifting for the Williamsburg printer. Retail products were becoming more important, and the major source of printing income was no longer government work, but rather the private output of the press: primarily newspapers, the yearly “almanack,” printed forms, handbills, lottery tickets, and the occasional pamphlet or book. While the office printed its own books, bound books, and even had a papermaking facility, most of the books sold there were printed in England. The printer's records indicate a growth in customers faster than the rate of the colony's population increase, an expanding range of the social class of his customers, and a shift in the content of books between 1752 and 1766. Royle made an estimated profit of £240 per year on book sales alone, more than double what his predecessor had made just fifteen years earlier. While his total profits cannot be determined, his daybooks show that he received £1,742.19.00 in credit sales of non-book items for the last two years (1764-65) of his life with part of this income from the newspaper, stationery sales, and post office revenues. As the almanac sales are known to have been quite profitable, it can be assumed that figure also must have been considerable. As David Rawson suggested, the role of the printer at this time began to shift from "a dispenser of privileged and controlled information, whose success was tied to government contracts," to one more tightly bound to the commercial marketplace, which sought a wider variety of information. Thus, while Royle still received £375 per year from the colony's government, the importance of this subsidy lessened as the retail business increased. The types of books sold and the demography of the customers had shifted by this time as well. While a majority of sales was to the gentry—planters and other members of the wealthy elite—an increasing amount of business was with the middling classes, craftsmen, tavern keepers, and merchants, but there is no evidence that sales were made to those lower in the social scale, such as wage workers, subsistence farmers, servants, or slaves. The types of books sold shifted as well in this period. The number of religious works dropped dramatically, political tracts increased, and there was even a trend toward the new novels. Controversial works began to appear, starting with dissenting religious tracts and eventually pamphlets on politically divisive subjects such as the Parson's Cause and the Stamp Act. The demand for politically oriented books and pamphlets increased by 1765 while demand for religious and classical works noticeably decreased.

Pamphlets of this period helped broaden the range of people involved in political conversations in Virginia. The political pamphlet was an important aspect of the dramatic rise of the colonial press by the mid-eighteenth century, and this encouraged wider political debate.

“Pamphlets of this period helped broaden the range of people involved in political conversations in Virginia. The political pamphlet was an important aspect of the dramatic rise of the political press in the colonies by the mid-eighteenth century, and this encouraged wider political debate.”

*Journalism History* 38:2 (Summer 2012)
and they also would sell pamphlets produced outside the region. Royle's successor, Alexander Purdie, ran an advertisement in the Virginia Gazette for Richard Bland's pamphlet denouncing the Stamp Act, "An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies," which sold for 1 shilling, 3 pence. Bland argued forcefully against taxing the colonies without their approval and against the concept that the colonists were "virtually, represented in Parliament," and accused those favoring the tax of attempting to "to fix Shackles upon the American Colonies." One of the best known pamphlets, Daniel Dulany's Considerations on the Property of Imposing Taxes on the British Colonies for the purpose of raising a Revenue by Act of Parliament, was printed in Maryland in 1765 but sold in Virginia by the next year. These pamphlets, along with the newspapers, were an increasingly important part of a widening public debate of political issues in Virginia.

By the time of the Stamp Act and increasing political dissent in the mid-eighteenth century, several cultural shifts were evident within Virginia society. First, what was primarily an oral culture began to shift to one that was primarily print based as reading and writing became more common. Records portrayed a wider range of reading customers, and clearly literacy in Virginia had increased; after originally being the exclusive province of the elite, print culture had spread to include at least a majority of the white men in the colony. Historian Richard D. Brown suggested in 1989 that more than half of the white male population of the British-American colonies could read by the eighteenth century, but literacy in the Chesapeake colonies was considerably lower than in New England, where the predominant Puritan religion required all of the faithful to read so that they could interpret the Bible for themselves. In both regions [north and south] literacy was more frequent among propertied men, but even the poor were often literate, wrote Brown. These statistics showing that the colonies had a higher reading rate than in England helps to alter the view of reading being the exclusive domain of the Virginia elite in the mid-eighteenth century. Warner found it worth noting that by the end of the century, "more people could read than statistics suggest." Rawson estimated that by this period, Virginia was heading toward universal literacy with it permeating the middling sorts, and illiteracy was becoming a characteristic only of the lower classes. Newspaper reading had become widespread, and as Schlesinger suggested, these prints were an integral part of the move toward independence.

A second cultural shift was evident in the way that the colonists were becoming more Virginians and Americans and less focused on England. This change was reflected in the popular prints and was partly driven by the media. By 1765, newspapers in the Chesapeake colonies had changed in several ways. Improvements in the postal service strengthened the connections between the various British-American colonies. As Brown noted, an information revolution was happening at this time, and it was changing society. Transportation changes and postal developments, combined with increased education and printing, drove what eventually led to a major shift of power. Instead of having to send all mail through England, the official post now could deliver directly between colonies with overland couriers from Philadelphia through the southern colonies to Charleston, and by 1775, there was a weekly courier south from Philadelphia through the Chesapeake region to South Carolina. Private letters and public news were traveling much faster than just a half-century earlier with newspapers being exchanged between colonies and printers for free and at greater speeds. By 1765, the Virginia newspaper was reporting what happened in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York just two to four weeks earlier without the news having first to travel through England.

The shift driven by postal changes was visible in the source of the stories. Just a few decades earlier, there were few articles in the Virginia newspaper from other colonies except two close neighbors, Maryland and North Carolina. The emphasis by the 1760s shifted to local and inter-colonial news and away from England, which was indicative of major shifts in loyalists and politics. Both the Virginia and Maryland papers included more stories from the other British-American colonies and fewer from Britain or Europe, although items on ministry matters and Parliamentary debates on the colonies did appear regularly. Even the trivial items, which once came from England, were more likely now to come from New England or the middle colonies. For example, in 1768 there were reports of the latest ships that had arrived in the Boston and a lightning strike in Charles-Town, South Carolina, that had demolished a house although no one was hurt. There was no obvious reason for including these stories except that all these places were now considered part of the same region as Virginia, and the mails now brought these stories to the printers. Writers were beginning to refer to the colonists as "Americans" instead of Virginians or British-Americans. In 1766, one article criticized unfair taxation on "Americans," and referred to anyone who supported the Stamp Act as "an enemy to this country," referring to America and not to Britain. Until direct and speedy communication was established, there could have been no shared sense of crisis and no American unity or nation could have been imagined. As Benedict Anderson posited in 1991, a common language and shared printed material, especially newspapers, helped Virginians to shift their views; they saw themselves for the first time not as British but as part of a new nation.

The third cultural shift evident in this period was an increasing emphasis on consumption and a growing market economy that helped to tie the separate colonies together. Expanded emphasis on consumption was visible in the advertising in the Virginia newspaper. The percentage of ads in the papers grew over the years. By the 1760s, advertisements commonly took up more than a full page, and often there were more than two pages. Most common were advertisements for land to sell, slaves to sell, or runaways whom their masters wanted returned. One twenty-one-year-old man, about six feet tall, was "in want of a young Lady, of a good family" for marriage. The breadth of what could be found in the newspaper advertisements was extolled in verse:

"By the time of the Stamp Act and increasing political dissent in the mid-eighteenth century, several cultural shifts were evident within Virginia society. First, what was primarily an oral culture began to shift to one that was primarily print based as reading and writing became more common."
If any gentleman wants a wife,
(A partner, as 'tis termed, for life)
An advertisement does the thing,
And quickly brings the pretty thing.
If you want health, consult our pages.
You shall be well, and live for ages;
Our empiricks, to get them bread,
Do every thing but raise the dead.
Lands may be had, if they are wanted,
Annuities of all sorts granted,
Places, preferments, bought and sold,
Houses to purchase, new and old,
Ships, shops, of every shape and form,
Carriages, horses, servants sworn,
No matter whether good or bad,
We tell you where they may be had.
Our services you can't express,
The good we do you hardly guess;
There's not a want of human kind,
But we a remedy can find.79

These advertisements and the popular prints in which they appeared were an important part of an increasing market economy and expanding consumer culture that led to social and political changes, creating a “consumer revolution” in the colonies that was a critical development prefiguring the Revolution. In colonial Virginia, this evolution was evident in the public prints of the 1760s. Extending T.H. Breen’s recognition of newspapers as an essential part of new marketing techniques, this study also sees evidence of consumer growth in the Chesapeake colonies’ prints and finds that the newspapers were an important impetus behind that expansion. The printing process, which was the first form of mass production,80 was an integral part of, and intrinsic to, the beginnings of an important consumer revolution that helped bring competition and new press freedom to Virginia. As items to buy or sell, the newspapers, plus the increasing number of advertisements within their pages, helped to expand the economy. Thus, they were a crucial vehicle for the new marketing techniques that drove business and also helped to propel social changes. The relevance was that the increasing market economy led to a commonality now referred to as “a consumer public sphere,” which brought together residents throughout the British-American colonies, which was a key to the Revolutionary political changes in the period. Breen noted, “advertising copy might best be seen as fragments of cultural conversations linking ordinary colonists to a larger Atlantic economy.”76 This economy of consumption connected the Chesapeake residents through trade and merchandise and brought a sense of commonality with the other British colonies. In a larger sense, the rise of printing and its influence in Virginia was part of a wider trans-Atlantic rise of mercantile capitalism and the consumer revolution. The large and politically influential colony of Virginia was a critical part of this evolution and without print competition and the commercial and civic discourse it spurred, this development could not have happened. This commercial marketplace was a necessary precedent for a new American national unity and the Revolution: “trust [was] established across space, impersonally, a product of a print culture.” Breen wrote.77 Increased consumer marketing, visible on the pages of the Virginia colony’s prints, helped to preface revolutionary changes. That consumer growth was visible in both of the Chesapeake colonies’ prints, and the newspapers were recognizable as one important driver of that growth.78

This increased personal consumption also was evident in the growing popularity of taverns and coffeehouses that developed into hotbeds of political dissent. In a cultural center such as Williamsburg, which many Virginians visited for court appearances or other business, people in the taverns and coffeehouses read the newspapers and discussed what was in them. Virginians wrote letters, played cards, gambled with dice, and joined in conversations even if they could not read. For example, Charlton’s “Coffee-House” opened for business as early as 1755, and newspapers were available for customers to read.39 By 1765, Governor Francis Fauquier wrote of sitting there with members of the council and almost being accosted by a Stamp Act mob.80 There were as many as four to five coffeehouses in Williamsburg, although not necessarily all at once, according to a 1956 research report based on archeological and documentary evidence.81 The coffeehouses sometimes served liquor, and were often the site of gambling, but the main entertainment typically was political discussion because coffeehouses, as well as taverns, were places to read and discuss the news. As David Waldstreicher wrote in 1997, “Men repaired there to read the newspapers and discuss politics; they were ideal sites for these public acts of affiliation,” such as toasts against importation or for Revolution.

In brief, they were important locations for the development of a critical political culture.82

The movement of religious disidence was the fourth cultural shift observed in the Virginia prints. “New Light” evangelical beliefs, practiced by Baptists and Methodists in colonial Virginia, were a form of dissent against the established church and faith, empowering the poor and uneducated and questioning the power of the religious elites.83 Such religious dissent was evident in the public prints prior to the appearance of political dissent. Some of the earliest issues of the Williamsburg newspaper followed George Whitefield’s preaching both in England and in the colonies, noting the popular response to his message. As early as 1738 in the Virginia Gazette, among the stories of pending war with Spain and details of the lives of royalty, was an observation of Whitefield’s popularity: “Several Hundred Persons stood in the street during his preaching of the [London] Church, which was incredibly full early in the Morning.”84 By 1767, the Gazette included a poem critical of the Methodist style of preaching and an article claimed a Methodist preacher became so emotional during a service that he tore up a Bible, and the next issue had a reader suggesting that perhaps it was a Deist, rather than a Methodist, ripping the religious text.85 Religious debate became visible in these popular prints, and this was an important preface to
critical political discourse. Challenges to the power structure began with the Great Awakening, as those non-elites with less education began to insist on being involved in civic conversations. As Rhys Isaac suggested in 1999, the American Revolution was prefaced in Virginia by this religious and social transformation.

A fifth cultural shift evident in Virginia was the increased participation in political discourse in the press and increased debate in public gatherings. Jürgen Habermas viewed such civic discourse spurred by printed materials in Europe as a crucial aspect of the transition from monarchy to democracy. Warner emphasized the relevance of print in this development and saw this transition taking place in the British-American colonies. The disputes over taxation by Parliament became a major subject in the newspapers of this period and of the discourse that people had in public spaces. Printed material generated discussions centered on this subject in coffeehouses and taverns. Participants in civic discourse were initially the elites, but by 1765, the discussion had expanded to include a larger, middling group, encompassing smaller farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen. This broadening of civic discourse was essential to the development of political dissent, operating for the first time outside of the government. One key to understanding what happened in pre-revolutionary Virginia is to recognize that printed material combined with public discussions to create a civic public that was independently critical of government. A growing and changing print culture, and the public discourse it spawned, played an important role in social and political transformations.

Thus, the expanding market nature of colonial society was a force for expansion of the reading world as well as a force that made printers tend to avoid anything controversial that might lose them business. Botein noted that colonial printers were more of a working-class “meat mechanic,” interested primarily in making money rather than ideologically driven revolutionaries. But he also noted that the political dispute over the Stamp Act dramatically changed their business and their political outlook: the threatened loss of income brought a dramatic end to printers’ usual tendencies to stay out of controversies. The standard viewpoint had been that a free press meant presenting varied opinions while staying out of extreme disputes that might alienate any business. Benjamin Franklin had suggested in 1731 that commercial pragmatism encouraged neutrality: “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.”

The Stamp Act directly threatened the printers’ business by raising the prices of their products, encouraging many of them to abandon impartiality. In addition, political writing became more popular with an increasingly important consumer market, making it financially worthwhile to take a more radical stand with their printed products. Botein suggested that most printers then abandoned their normally neutral position, being virtually forced to take the more popular patriots’ position. However, he said printers for the most part did not become partisan until the decade after the Stamp Act, when the Revolutionary controversy was well developed. That was clearly not the case in the Chesapeake colonies. By 1766 in Virginia and Maryland—after Royce had died and two printers had competed in Williamsburg—the press became clearly supportive of the patriot position. Botein and many other historians viewed colonial American newspapers as being driven by the marketplace. Commercial concerns, not political ideas, drove Franklin’s concept of press liberty: “printers were attracted to the principle because it suited their business interests to serve all customers.” Thus, in Virginia as in other colonies, the idea of a press open to all who would pay to express their ideas in the commercial marketplace helped to both expand the reading world and create the foundation for a new concept of liberty of the press.

Opposition to the Stamp Act was initially not universal in the colonial press. Virginia’s printer was cautious and largely controlled by the royal governor. Civic discourse did not flower on the pages of the Virginia Gazette prior to 1765, and the political crisis over the new tax—combined with an expanding consumer marketplace—led to a demand for an unfeathered press. As a result, print competition came to the colony for the first time. The Virginia press had finally broken free from the informal censorship by the royal governor. A new public discourse critical of government began to emerge at the time of the Stamp Act, due in part to this newly competitive and uncensored print medium. A simultaneously emerging print culture not only reflected this
dissidence but, in fact, was a precedent for it, although it was not the entire cause of this new dissent. The expanding economy of consumption was an important force behind both the increasing importance of books, newspapers, and pamphlets as well as the increasing discourse in public places of consumption. Driven by commercially burgeoning print media, critical political debates continued in taverns and coffeehouses, allowing both dissident lawmakers and their constituents to take part in political decisions for the first time. Because Virginia was one of the most populist and politically important states in the revolutionary new nation, understanding how this new civic discourse developed is helpful in better understanding how this new nation came about.

Cultural change was both reflected in, and driven by, the Virginia press of the 1760s. It was the market commodity of print that allowed the colonists to relate together in new ways and imagine a new community: a nation. In the British-American colonies, it was the new distribution of political pamphlets and newspaper stories among colonies, especially during the Stamp Act crisis, which helped to bring about public support for a new nation. In contrast to Habermas’ public sphere, this colonial discourse began with the gentry because nobility was virtually nonexistent in the colonies. It started with a literary focus as in Europe, expanded to include debate on religion, and then matured to incorporate
political debate and dissent. While Habermas suggested the civic discourse devolved in later centuries as the capitalist profit motive consumed it, what occurred in Virginia was that such discourse was spurred by the beginnings of capitalism, which was an expanding market economy. The burgeoning drive for consumption actually rewarded dissent, which was influenced by an unpopular new tax on paper.

While Habermas suggested the civic discourse devolved in later centuries as the capitalist profit motive consumed it, what occurred in Virginia was that such discourse was spurred by the beginnings of capitalism, which was an expanding market economy. The burgeoning drive for consumption actually rewarded dissent, which was influenced by an unpopular new tax on paper.

31 The nearly complete online collection at Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Digital Library (the Rockefeller Library) contains only three copies of Rind's *Virginia Gazette*. Six issues were located and examined for this article.

32 "The Sentinel no. III," reprinted from the *New-York Gazette* and the *Maryland Gazette* (Green and Rind), May 23, 1765.


34 The territory became a royal colony in 1624. 

35 Virginia originally was a land grant to the Virginia Company, but following the bankruptcy of that joint stock corporation, the territory became a royal colony in 1624.

36 See Francis Fauquier to the Board of Trade, Williamsburg, April 7, 1766, in George Reese, ed., *The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia*, 1758-1768 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980-83), 3:1352-55; and *Maryland Gazette* (Green and Rind), Oct. 3, 1765. Fauquier is referred to here and in contemporary writings as "governor," when, in fact, the acting governor in colonial Virginia was typically a lieutenant governor; the actual royal governor was a figurehead, who remained in England.

37 Second Supplement to the *Maryland Gazette* (Green), Oct. 24, 1765. Green's partner, William Rind, left Annapolis about this time, and this issue lacked his name. For Rind's move from Annapolis to become a second printer in Williamsburg, and historians' errors regarding Thomas Jefferson's role in this move, see Roger P. Mellen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Origins of Newspaper Competition in Pre-Revolutionary Virginia," *Journalism History* 35 (Fall, 2009): 151-61.

38 This prevented Virginia from sending representatives to the Congress. 

39 Second Supplement to the *Maryland Gazette* (Green), Oct. 24, 1765. He is known now as "William Pitt, the Elder." 

40 It is important to recognize that colonial newspapers did not order their stories in regard to importance, to the page placement is not directly relevant. See *Burke, Newspapers, Politic's and English Society*, 1695-1855, 44.

41 *Virginia Gazette* (Royle), Oct. 25, 1765. This newspaper report was remarkably similar to the detailed account sent by the governor to his superiors in London despite the fact that separate eyewitness accounts of any event are rarely consistent. Although the two accounts are not exact enough to suggest the same author, neither report is supportive of the crowd's action. The newspaper account was neutral enough that Governor Francis Fauquier included a copy of the newspaper in his letter. See Fauquier to Board of Trade, Nov. 3, 1765, handwritten transcript in Great Britain PRO CO 5, Container v. 1331 [Public Record Office] 97-106 [137-148], Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress.


43 John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia* (Richmond: Colonial Press, E.WaddcyCo., 1906), 10:11, 22, 38, 158-59, 164-66, and 221. See, for example, William Hunter's will, in which his estate was valued in excess of 8,614 pounds, and information about Joseph Royle leaving four separate Williamsburg properties. They are in "Old Virginia Editors," *Colonial Williamsburg Daybooks*: 1770-1774 [1765-1766] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library, 1967), 5-8.


45 The pay of Virginia ministers had been written into law in pounds of tobacco rather than in rare currency. When tobacco prices tripled, the Virginia legislature passed a law allowing tobacco debts to be paid in currency at the former equivalence, which in essence cut back what would have been a pay raise for the clergy. See Berg, "Agent of Change or Trusted Servant," and John Camm, *Single and Distinct View of the Act, Vigourously Entitled, The Two Penny Act* (Annapolis, Md.: Green, 1763).

46 Landon Carter, "Address to the Freemen of the County of Richmond," sent to Joseph Royle, June 3, 1765, Fairfax Proprietary papers, Brook Collection (BR box 229), Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.


49 *Rind's Virginia Gazette* (Rind), May 16, 1766.


51 While estimated numbers are subject to many questions, it is believed that 60-70 percent of white men in Virginia and as many as 30 percent of white women were able to read by 1765. See Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Epistolica* (New York: Norton, 1984), 165-78; and Philip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Putnam, 1910), 1:450-59, who is quoted in Rawson, "Contestual History of Print Culture in Virginia Society," 54.


55 *Virginia Print Culture*, 53.


60 *Virginia Gazette* (Royle), July 6, 1764. This recently recovered issue (from the Rockefeller Library in Williamsburg) had a story from Philadelphia datelined just sixteen days earlier but none datelined from Europe. The Gazette on Nov. 4, 1763, had a story from Philadelphia just two weeks old, but on Oct. 25, 1765, it had European stories nearly four months old because shipping speeds from London did not change substantially; see Arthur Pierce Middleton, *Tobacco Coast: A Maritime History of Chowanoke Bay in the Colonial Era* (Newport News, Va.: The Mariners’ Museum, 1953); and *Virginia Gazette* (Royle), March 16, 1764.

61 See *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 1751-1766; and Paul David Nord, "d
Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2001), 50-52. Regarding the English model, see also Barker, Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695-1855, 4; Clark, The Public Print, 3-5; and Thomas, The History of Printing in America, 2-164.

69 See Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), Aug. 4, 1768; and Virginia Gazette (Rind), May 12, 1768. There were still many stories of British or European origin, but the mix had now shifted to a greater number of American stories.

70 See Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), April 4, 1766.

71 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 24-37. He understood how "print as commodity" (newspapers and novels) was essential to tying people together with a shared common language, but he did not note how an efficient post office also would bring that sense of commonality and community, making it crucial to the functioning of a newspaper.

72 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), March 16, 1769.

73 This was a variant spelling of empiric, who is a charlatan or one who believes that practical experience is the source of knowledge.

74 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), Jan. 18, 1770.


76 T.H. Breen, Marketplace of Revolution, 133.

77 Ibid., 252.

78 See ibid., xvi, 133-58, 248; and Amory and Hall, The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World, 6-7.


80 Francis Fauquier to Board of Trade, Nov. 3, 1765; in Reese, The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758-1768, 97-100; and Virginia Gazette (Royle), Oct. 25, 1765.


84 Virginia Gazette (Parks), Jan. 6, 1738.

85 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), Jan. 1, 1767, and Jan. 8, 1767.


88 See Jürgen Habermas, Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, introduction; and Warner, The Letters of the Republic.


90 Benjamin Franklin, from "Apology for Printers," which was first printed in the Pennsylvania Gazette on June 10, 1731, and was quoted in Botein, "Printers and the American Revolution," 20.


92 In 1776, Virginia was the first of the newly declared American states to write a new constitution, and it included a Declaration of Rights, which contained for the first time a guarantee of press freedom. This was an important precedent to the federal Bill of Rights. See Roger R. Mellen, The Origins of a Free Press in Pre-Revolutionary Virginia: Creating a Culture of Political Dissent (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 225-78.

93 Anderson, Imagined Communities. A common language was an important preface to the shared print commodity.