

Université de Montréal

It Runs in the Family: the Bradfords, print, and liberty (1680-1810)

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Résumé

En se basant sur l'histoire des Bradfords, l'une des plus grandes familles d'imprimeurs de l'histoire américaine, ce mémoire étudie la relation entre l'imprimé, les imprimeurs, et divers discours sur la liberté au cours du « long » 18^e siècle. Il retrace la transition entre une ère de la « liberté de parole, » née des débats sur la liberté de presse et d'expression de la période coloniale, et une ère de la « parole de la liberté, » née au cours de la Révolution et entretenue sous la jeune république. Cette transition fut le produit de la transformation du discours des contemporains sur la liberté, mais s'effectua également en lien avec la transformation du milieu de l'imprimerie et de la culture de l'imprimé. Selon les circonstances politiques, sociales, économiques et culturelles particulières des périodes coloniale, révolutionnaire, et républicaine, l'imprimé et les imprimeurs américains furent appelés à disséminer et à contribuer au discours sur la liberté. Ils établirent ainsi une forte association entre l'imprimé et la liberté dans la culture de l'imprimé du 18^e siècle, qui était destinée à être transmise aux siècles suivants.

Mots-clés : imprimeurs, histoire du livre, culture de l'imprimé, journaux, opinion publique, 18^e siècle

Abstract

Based on the family history of the Bradfords, one of America's most celebrated printing dynasties, this thesis studies the interplay between print, printers, and various discourses on freedom during of the long 18th century and through the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods. It traces the transition between an era of the "speech of freedom," born out of the colonial debates on the freedom of speech and press, and an era of the "freedom of speech," born in the course of the Revolution and upheld during the early republic. This transition resulted from the transformation of the contemporaries' discourse on liberty, but also had to do with the transformation of the printing trade and print culture. As a result of the political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances of the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods, American print and printers were led to disseminate and to contribute to the discourse on liberty. They thus established a strong association between print and freedom in the 18th-century print culture, an association which was destined to be transmitted to the following centuries.

Key words: printers, book history, print culture, newspapers, public opinion, 18th century

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Philadelphia, 1830.93

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Introduction: Print, printers, and the speech of freedom

Her bold Machine redeems the patriot's fame
From royal malice, and the bigot's flame;
To bounded thrones displays the legal plan,
And vindicates the dignity of man.
'Tyrants and time, in her, lose half their pow'r;
And Reason shall subsist ...¹

These lines are from an 8-page long anonymous poem printed in March 1758 by William Bradford III in his *American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies*. Titled “On the Invention of Letters and the Art of Printing,” the poem addresses the impact of the printing press on the progress of reason and liberty in early modern Europe. The association of print with the end of obscurantism was already a common theme in the 17th and 18th centuries. Contemporaries marveled at the way print facilitated the rise of literacy and the circulation of ideas within and across national borders. It was print that allowed the Protestant Reformation to successfully mobilize masses across continental Europe, and free them from the yoke of Catholic tyranny.² It was print that made the effects of the scientific revolution of the 17th century so widespread. The seemingly endless powers of print even led English scientist Francis Bacon to assert that along with gunpowder and the compass, the printing press had “changed the whole state and face of the world.”³ But just as reformers and humanists discovered the educating and emancipating potential of print, established figures of authority discovered its subversive and unsettling potential.⁴ They accordingly adopted measures that aimed at restraining and controlling the power of print.

When European powers extended their reach over the Atlantic to the New World, they brought this association between print and liberty with them—along with these measures of control. Printing presses were forbidden, at first, in the American colonies. When they were finally introduced, in the 17th century, their number and their output were kept under close watch by metropolitan and colonial authorities. And yet, notwithstanding the efforts of authorities to

¹ *The American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies*, Vol. 1, No.6 (March, 1758), 281-287.

² As David D. Hall has noted, early Protestants often interpreted the invention of printing as a “divinely ordained means of emancipating the Church from the ‘tyranny’ of the Roman popes.” David D. Hall, “Introduction,” in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds) *A History of the book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2007, 2-3.

³ Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. By Joseph Devey. New York, P.F.Collier. 1902, 105.

⁴ See David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450-1830*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2003.

control them, American printing presses became associated with change and emancipation as much as their European counterparts, if not more. The story of this association began, appropriately, in New England, when the first press of the colonies was established to support the needs of Harvard College, and was seen by the contemporaries as a source of freedom of thought. It continued with the struggles for the freedom of speech and press of the early 18th century, sometimes interpreted as prologues to the Revolution or to the First Amendment of the Constitution. It then reached its apogee with the Revolution and its aftermath, when print became celebrated as an instrument of emancipation from British rule and as the protector of American liberty. At the same time, the association of print and freedom was given new and unexpected meanings as it was appropriated by women, African Americans, Native Americans, and other groups seeking some form of emancipation.

These considerations bring us back to William Bradford, the printer and publishers of the *American Magazine*, and an otherwise influential member of the 18th-century printing trade. The circumstances that led to Bradford's decision to publish a poem lauding the printing press as an instrument of emancipation are unknown, but the gesture hints at a common theme in his life and in his family history. From their arrival on American soil with William Penn and the Quakers until the early decades of the 19th century, the Bradfords were very active in the printing, publishing, and bookselling businesses. Throughout the duration of their involvement in the printing trade, they were also known for their commitment to what they and their contemporaries perceived as the cause of freedom. In light of his family's history, Bradford and his poem suggest that the association of print with freedom could be observed from the perspective of printers.

Freedom of speech and the speech of freedom

Building on the experience of one of America's most celebrated printing dynasties, this thesis will look at the interplay between print, printers, and freedom during the "long" 18th century. To this end, it will rely on the concept of the "speech of freedom." The term is freely borrowed from Arthur M. Schlesinger, who used it to describe the way the Patriots' rhetoric on freedom monopolized the press during the Revolution. In the 1960s and in the 1980s, Schlesinger's phrase was revisited by Leonard Levy in his work on the freedom of the press. Since then, it has featured from time to time in the scholarship on subjects as diverse as the freedom of

speech and press, constitutional theory, and the hardships of war, either in America or elsewhere. In this thesis, the “speech of freedom” will simply refer to the discourse on freedom, which meant different things to different people at different times, but always remained a feature of the print culture of 18th-century America. As a conceptual tool, the “speech of freedom” will be used not to suggest an entirely new way of looking at American history, but rather to observe the evolution of the concept of freedom and its relation to print through time.

This thesis will argue that, in the course of the eighteenth century, America saw the transition from a notion of “freedom of speech” to one of “speech of freedom,” and that this transition rested in great part on the respective but related evolutions of the country’s printing trade and its print and political cultures. In the early decades of the century emerged a concept of freedom of speech and press that allowed, in theory at least, the holding of unrestrained public debates. The colonies’ printers kept their presses “open” to all parties, but claimed they were influenced by none. This neutrality was challenged in the course of the Revolution when, in the midst of an imperial crisis, contradictory discourses on political liberty arose in the increasingly numerous newspapers of the colonies. Neutrality gave way, gradually, to partisanship. As printers aligned their presses with the Loyalists’ or with the Patriots’ cause, they began promoting two “speeches of freedom” that had the same origins but not the same aims. In order to stifle the impact of the Loyalists’ wartime propaganda, the Patriots put forward a new concept of speech freedom according to which only those who spoke the speech of freedom could do so unrestrained. It was only after the war, when the newly independent United States began setting the bases of the new nation, that the full extent of the Revolution’s impact on print culture and the speech of freedom became apparent. The legacy of political partisanship that was born in times of war endured in times of peace, but resulted in the fracturing of the young nation’s press. Newspapers in particular were appropriated not only by the emerging political factions, but also by numbers of other groups of interests. The speech of freedom, which had been relatively oriented in the colonial and revolutionary periods, was also becoming increasingly fragmented. Celebrated as a properly “American” value, freedom was appropriated by unexpected actors and given unintended meanings. Over the course of a century, the “speech of freedom” had taken root and blossomed in America, nurtured by a vibrant print culture. The era of the freedom of speech born in the course of the colonial period had given way to an era of the speech of freedom during the Revolution. Confined to the revolutionary generation’s rhetoric at first, this speech of

freedom exploded in the early republican period. It could be argued that it was in this fragmented form that the speech of freedom became truly American.

This argument will be elaborated over three chapters that correspond to three distinct phases in the history of the Bradford family and in the history of print. These phases roughly correspond to the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods, and are each characterized by a particular discourse on freedom. The first chapter, dedicated to the colonial period, will retrace the emergence of the discourse on the freedom of speech and press. Inspired by a rich literature of political opposition imported from metropolitan England, this discourse was elaborated mainly through two court cases and had a major impact on the speech of freedom of the revolutionary and early republican periods. The second chapter will pick up at the end of the colonial period and move into the revolutionary era. It will focus on the discourse on political liberty that fed the revolutionary rhetoric and durably transformed the Americans' relation to print. It will also highlight the impact of the Revolution on printers and on their relation to print, politics, and freedom. The third chapter, finally, will be devoted to the early republican period and to the relation of print with slavery. It will show how the experience of the colonial and revolutionary years contributed to foster a properly American print culture, and a properly American speech of freedom.

Print, freedom, and the Bradford family

In order to study the interplay between print and freedom over such a long period of time and across traditional temporal boundaries, this thesis will focus on the experience of a single family. The Bradfords were one of early America's most celebrated printing dynasties. Originally from Leicestershire, in the East Midlands of England, the first William Bradford migrated to the American colonies in the last decades of the 17th century and settled on the outskirts of Philadelphia, where he and his wife founded one of the first presses of the middle colonies. Soon, the couple moved the center of their activities to New York. Their son returned to Pennsylvania in the early 18th century. In the course of a few decades, the family's printing, bookselling, and publishing business became well-established in the region. When the revolutionary crisis started in the 1760s, the third generation of Bradfords lent their presses to the Patriots' cause. And when the political crisis turned into a full-blown war in the 1770s, they gave not only their presses, but

also their pens and their swords and muskets to the war effort. Hailed as great patriots during the Revolution, the Bradfords fell from prominence in the early republican period. They had set the bases of the early 18th-century print culture and carried it through a revolutionary war, but they found themselves lost in the print culture of the early republic. Still, their business endured for a few decades before it finally died in the 1830s, after five generations of Bradfords had left their mark on the American printing trade.

For the duration of their involvement in the printing world, the Bradfords presented themselves as defenders of freedom and liberty. Their family history was, indeed, intertwined not only with the American printing trade and print culture, but also with a particular story of American freedom. Only a few years after his move to Pennsylvania, William Bradford I found himself involved in the first American trial in which the concept of press freedom was at cause. Finding his professional ambitions stifled by his Quaker employers and their restrictive laws on the output of the colony's presses, he clamored for more freedom in the exercise of his functions as a printer and a publisher. Unknowingly, he set an important precedent in the elaboration of a colonial discourse on the freedom of speech and press. A little later though, during the famous Zenger controversy, Bradford found himself defending the position of the authorities and campaigning against the cause of press freedom. Years later, during the Revolution, Bradford's grandson and namesake, William Bradford III, would gain a reputation as a staunch defender of liberty. He would join the ranks of the Sons of Liberty and become known as "the patriot printer of 1776," and was at the forefront of the revolutionary movement, at least insofar as his capacities as a printer, a bookseller, a publisher, and a coffeeshouse owner allowed. But while Bradford III's commitment to what he and his contemporaries identified as political liberty was undeniable, his position regarding slavery was more ambivalent. In his youth, he had been indirectly involved in the slave trade, and may even have owned slaves of his own at some point. When time came for him and his son Thomas to take sides in the burgeoning antislavery debates of the early republican period, they hesitated to do so and opted instead for some kind of neutrality. At first sight, the Bradfords' ambiguous position on the slavery issue seems contradictory with their attitude regarding the freedom of speech and press and political liberty. On closer inspection, though, their ambivalence appears to be the sign of the complexity of the relation of printers, print, and freedom, rather than a sign of the absence of such a relation. Indeed, as we will see, the relation of printers with freedom and liberty, just like the relation of print with freedom and

liberty, was always contingent on a host of factors. These factors included not only the printers' material profit and professional advancement, but also the particular social, political, and cultural contexts in which freedom and liberty were discussed, not to mention the specific nature of freedom and liberty, which varied immensely.

Looking at the history of print through the history of the Bradford family has its advantages and its drawbacks. For one thing, studying a single family will allow us to take a long-term perspective and to observe the transformation of the American printing trade and print culture without being limited to the traditional boundaries of the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods. Likewise, it will allow us to observe the transformation of the nature of the concept of freedom as it evolved over more than a hundred years. For another thing, focusing on the experience of the Bradfords will allow us to approach the association of print and freedom from the standpoint of printers, whose task it was to act as intermediaries between those who authored books, pamphlets, and essays, and those who read them. As "brokers of the word," to borrow Charles Wetherell's phrase, printers benefitted from a highly strategic position in the formal and informal networks of communications that formed in the course of the 18th century.⁵ Although the output of their presses was often dictated by exterior forces—the authorities, the authors themselves, or the readers—printers always had the potential to influence and even shape public opinion by intervening in political debates and thus to become agents of change. Finally, studying the Bradfords will allow us to move away from a scholarship still dominated by the figure of Benjamin Franklin, and hopefully to get a sense of the experience of other printers. Franklin, who became the Bradfords' fiercest rival when he arrived on Philadelphia's printing scene in the early 1720s, certainly did great things. He no doubt transformed the colonial printing trade and helped it evolve into what it became in the course of the Revolution and its aftermath. He was an exceptional man and an exceptional printer. Precisely because of this exceptionalism, however, Franklin's experience is not representative of the state of the American printing trade during the 18th century. The Bradfords were good printers, to be sure, but they never had Franklin's genius or his flair. As such, therefore, although they may not be representative of all the printers of the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods, their experience is at least representative of the experience of some printers of 18th-century America.

⁵ Charles Wheeler Wetherell, "Brokers of the Word: An Essay in the Social History of the Early American Press, 1639-1783." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1980).

The fact that the Bradfords were not as great as their rival Franklin has a major drawback, though. They are not nearly as present as Franklin either in the primary sources or in the historiography. None of the Bradfords felt a moral duty to leave either a personal diary or memoirs to the posterity, or even to ensure the preservation of the family's archives. Over the years, most of the Bradfords' business papers and personal correspondence have been either lost or destroyed, leaving only partial traces behind. Their publications remain, fortunately. Still, many issues of the family's newspapers and magazines are either incomplete or impossible to find. The situation is similar when it comes to the scholarship. The Bradfords make an occasional appearance in surveys and syntheses on the history of American printing, but are rarely the focus of entire studies. In order to compensate for the lack of available source material directly linked to the Bradfords, attention will be given to indirect but nonetheless informative sources of information. The experience and the output of the presses of other printers and of the American printing trade as a whole will be held into account, for instance, as will local, regional, and trans-colonial or transatlantic trends, when deemed relevant. Attention will also be given to the particular social, economic, cultural, and political conditions that prevailed while the Bradfords were active, and that may have influenced their professional and personal choices.

Survey of the literature

This thesis will address a wide array of themes and issues, going from the formation of a colonial print culture to the emergence of a republican public sphere, and to the political agency of revolutionary and early republican printers. Accordingly, it is based upon a vast and varied, but highly fragmented scholarship. Before the issue of the print and freedom can be properly engaged, a few debates and issues need to be assessed and discussed, a few current trends of the historiography identified.

Print as an agent of change

The first of these debates concerns the inherent power of print to act as an agent of change. Since the advent of print culture studies and the history of the book, historians have time and again debated the agency of print.⁶ Two great trends are discernible in the scholarship. The first of these trends grants much agency to print as a technology and as a mode of communication, and can be qualified of technological or media determinism.⁷ The second trend, on the contrary, denies that technology has any agency of its own and insists that social and cultural movement are the source of technological change.

Technological determinism emerged in the first “books about books” of the 20th century. An early proponent of technological determinism was Lewis Mumford, whose 1934 *Technics and Civilization* argued that print embodied authority, and that “[m]ore than any other device, the printed book released people from the domination of the immediate and the local.”⁸ Mumford’s thesis was reiterated, decades later, by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin. In *The Coming of the Book* (1958, translated into English in 1976), they attributed to print the “role” of a “force for change.”⁹ With their respective *Empire and Communication* (1950) and *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan stirred the debate away from technology and insisted rather on the agency of print as a media. Innis argued that societies developed “monopolies of knowledge” based on their preferred mode of communications, and that these monopolies of knowledge “tended to alternate as they emphasized religion, decentralization, and time; or force, centralization, and space.”¹⁰ McLuhan, for his part, asserted that “the forms of experience and of mental outlook and expression have been modified ... by printing.”¹¹ More recently, Walter J.

⁶ See Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” in Kenneth E. Carpenter (ed.) *Books and Society in History. Papers of the Association of college and Research Libraries. Rare Books and Manuscripts Preconference. 24-28 June, 1980. Boston, Massachusetts.* New York and London, R.R. Bowker Company. 1983, 3-26.

⁷ Rodney Mader, “Print Culture Studies and Technological Determinism,” *College Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring, 2009), 131-140 and David Richard Olson, Nancy Torrance, and Angela Hildyard (eds) *Literacy, Language, and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing.* New York/Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1985 offer good surveys of the literature on this issue.

⁸ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization.* Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 2010 [1934], 136.

⁹ Lucien Febvre et Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book.* New York, Verso Books. 1976 [1958], 248.

¹⁰ Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications.* Toronto, Dundurn Press. 2007 [1950], 192.

¹¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man.* Toronto, University of Toronto Press. 1962, 1. In a later volume, McLuhan famously asserted that “the medium is the message,” meaning that technology rather

Ong's work on orality and literacy has brought technology back to the fore. "Technologies," Ong wrote, "are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word."¹²

The opposite trend, which could be called social determinism, has had much success in the past decades, especially with the emergence of cultural and material studies. Seymour Melman, for instance, asserted that human individuals and societies are always in control of technologies. "There is no unique ... technology option," he wrote. Rather, there is always "an array of options," since "[t]echnology does not, indeed cannot, determine itself."¹³ Enhancing Melman's thesis, Raymond Williams has suggested that "[d]etermination is a real social process," and that technology should thus be understood as the result of social forces.¹⁴ Jonathan Benthall has pushed Williams's argument further, writing that "a complete historical analysis of any technology must study the reciprocal action between technical and social factors—'social' including economic, political, legal, and cultural."¹⁵ Likewise, Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman have argued that "[a]s a simple cause-and-effect theory of historical change, technological determinism is at best an oversimplification," since "[c]hanging technology will always be only one factor among many others: political, economic, cultural, and so on."¹⁶

Benthall, MacKenzie, and Wajcman are representative of a third and more nuanced trend in the scholarship. "Soft" determinism, as it has sometimes been called, allows that particular communication technologies have the potential to enable or facilitate change.¹⁷ But whether change occurs or not, and the nature of this change, depend on a host of factors that cannot be reduced to technology. Indeed, to borrow Lynn White's elegant phrase, "a new device merely opens a door; it does not compel one to enter."¹⁸ Instead of "treating technology *per se* as the locus of historical agency," as Leo Marx and Merritt Roe Smith put it, "soft determinists locate it

than social or cultural factors effected change. See McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*. Toronto, Random House. 1967.

¹² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York, Routledge. 2002 [1982], 81.

¹³ Seymour Melman, "The Myth of Autonomous Technology," in Nigel Cross, David Elliott, and Robin Roy (eds) *Man-made Futures: Readings in Society, Technology, and Design*. London, Hutchinson. 1974, 57-58.

¹⁴ Raymon Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. London, Routledge. 1974.

¹⁵ Jonathan Benthall, *The Body Electric: Patterns of Western Industrial Culture*. London, Thames and Hudson. 1976, 145.

¹⁶ Donald A. MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, "Introduction," in Donald A. MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman (eds) *The Social Shaping of Technology*. Open University Press. 1999 [1975], 4.

¹⁷ See Daniel Chandler, *Technological or Media Determinism*. <<http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/Documents/tecdet/>> Online. Visited on July 12, 2013.

¹⁸ Lynn White Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1964, 28.

in a far more various and complex social, economic, political, and cultural matrix.”¹⁹ Efforts to uncover the precise ways in which print, as a technology, has acted as an agent of change in particular contexts have begun with Elizabeth L. Eisenstein in the late 1970s, and have multiplied since then. In her acclaimed *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979), Eisenstein set upon the task to retrace the “actual effects of the advent of printing” in early modern Europe.²⁰ By allowing a greater dissemination, standardization, and preservation of knowledge than manuscript, she argued, print created a more democratic culture that emancipated Europeans from the monopoly of old authorities on education and knowledge, and helped foster the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance, and the scientific revolution.²¹ These developments, according to Eisenstein, were at once the result of print’s inherent qualities as a communication technology, and the result of the combined social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances of early modern Europe.

Over the past decades, a number of scholars have followed in Eisenstein’s footsteps and have studied the ways in which print caused change in particular contexts. By stepping away from Eisenstein’s focus on early modern Europe, many have been led to challenge her theory, either in part or as a whole, on the grounds that although she claimed to reject technological determinism, she still placed technology at the heart of historical change.²² As a result, “print culture studies” and the “history of the book” have moved even further away from the determinism of print as a technology and started exploring how print interacted with other factors—political, social, economic, and cultural—to produce change in a variety of contexts. A recent collection of essays, titled *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, attests to the stimulating effect of Eisenstein’s study on the scholarship on print culture across geographic, temporal, and disciplinary boundaries. These essays cover not only early modern Europe, but also areas that lay outside the Western world, along with transnational, transatlantic, and imperial spaces. They also

¹⁹ Leo Marx and Merritt Roe Smith, “Introduction,” in Leo Marx and Merritt Roe Smith (eds) *Does Technology Drive History?: The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press. 1994, xiii.

²⁰ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. New York, Cambridge University Press. 1979, Vol. 1, xi.

²¹ See Michael and Edwin Emery, *The Press in America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*. Boston, Allyn and Bacon. 1996 [1988], 4.

²² Diederick Raven rejected Eisenstein’s thesis because it treated printing as “a monolithic phenomenon that [could] be fully understood simply in terms of a number of decontextualized technical characteristics.” See Diederick Raven, “Elizabeth Eisenstein and the Impact of Printing,” *European Review of History / Revue européenne d’histoire*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1999), 224.

include the activity of printers, publishers, and booksellers, as well as the interplay of print with other media like the spoken word and the laser printer.²³

This thesis, which will seek to uncover the relation between print, printers, and liberty in 18th—century America, stands at the intersection of these trends in the current historiography. It will consider print as a communication technology that has the potential to act as an agent of change, and more particularly as an agent of emancipation, while keeping in mind that the nature of this change is not inherent to print but contingent upon the political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances of a given time and place. It is worth briefly considering recent historiography on 18th-century America, and particularly the scholarship that has studied print and printers as agents of change.

Print as an agent of change in 18th-century America

In their respective studies of the American public sphere, Robert A. Gross and Michael Warner have stressed the contingent nature of print culture. Like all institutions, Gross wrote, print always “adapted to the dominant ethos.”²⁴ Likewise, Warner has suggested that print culture should not be understood as a “monolithic entity,” but rather as a historically contingent phenomenon.²⁵ Too often, Warner argued, “the characteristics of printing have been projected backward as its natural, essential logic,” while its “historical determinations” have been neglected. It follows that, in America as elsewhere, the nature of printing and of the changes brought by print was not determined from the start. Rather, it was shaped by political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances. If print was at times a factor of change in American history, it was as a result of these circumstances. Scholars have discerned a few major characteristics of the print culture of 18th-century America that resulted in some forms of emancipation. Two of them

²³ See Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin (eds) *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press. 2007.

²⁴ Robert A. Gross, “Print and the Public Sphere in Early America,” in Melvyn Stokes (ed.) *The State of U.S. History*. Oxford/New York, Berg Press. 2002, 247-248. See also Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (eds), “An Age of Print? The History of the Book and the New Nation, 1790-1840,” Volume 2 of *A History of the Book in America*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press. 2010.

²⁵ Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1990; -----, *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York, Zone Books. 2002, -----, “The Res Publica of Letters,” *Boundary 2*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1990), 38-68. See also the passages on print culture in Alison Piepmeier, *Out in Public: Configurations of Women’s Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2004.

particularly stand out: the association of print with republicanism and the association of print with nationalism and identities.

Building on Jürgen Habermas's work on the public sphere, Michael Warner's 1990 *Letters of the Republic*²⁶ argued that the print culture of early 18th-century America developed in close relation to a republican public sphere. This process was twofold. By circulating and fostering republican ideas and by disseminating a republican language, print allowed Americans to think of themselves as the members of an active and informed citizenry whose participation in public debates was a check to tyrannical governments. It followed that republicanism transformed print into a central instrument of political life, and as a preserver of political freedom. It was because of these early developments, Warner argued, that it became possible for the revolutionary generation to conceive of a republican form of government, and to put it in motion in the decades following the war.²⁶ More recently, in his study of letter writing and communications, Konstantin Dierks restated Warner's argument, and insisted on the divergence between the English precedent of the 17th century and the American experience of the 18th century. The republican discourse took new meanings after the Revolution, he argued, since "[t]he difference between a 'limited monarch' and a 'republic' produced an ideology ... valorizing a more direct sharing of power between rulers and ruled, government and people."²⁷ This new, properly American discourse on republicanism amplified, more than ever, the incentive to publish and read printed documents, and particularly newspapers.

Other scholars have distanced themselves, to various degrees, from Warner's argument. Some have put into question Warner's insistence on print alone as a factor in the formation of the public sphere and in the fostering of republicanism. Carolyn Eastman, for instance, has extended her study of the public sphere to the oratory. She argued that reading and listening audiences were both at the center of the emerging public.²⁸ Some have questioned the pre-eminence of the republican discourse in 18th and early 19th century America. Robert Gross suggested, for instance,

²⁶ "... an emerging political language—republicanism—and a new set of ground rules for discourse—the public sphere—jointly made each other intelligible. Both were grounded in a new way of perceiving printedness. It was not self-evidently true that the routine use of print was valuable; the Anglo-American strand of republicanism in this period made it so." Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1990, xiii.

²⁷ Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. 2009, 275.

²⁸ Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press. 2009, 5.

that republicanism was always competing with other discourses for the access to print.²⁹ Trish Loughran, for her part, went so far as to suggest that a “republic in print” emerged only in the 1830s and 1840s, when allowed by a truly national communication infrastructure.³⁰ Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan suggested that the early republican public was at best “half-found and half-created,” and neither “exclusively local nor national,” and that it fostered and circulated competing visions of republicanism.³¹

Apart from disseminating republican ideas and from fostering a republican public sphere, print is often associated with the emergence of the American nation.³² Already in the 1960s, historian of the American Revolution Max Savelle explained national identity as a construct. “The nation has no existence in the physical world,” he wrote. “Its existence, therefore, while nonetheless real, is entirely metaphysical, or mental; the nation exists only as a concept held in common by many men.”³³ Expanding on Savelle's thesis, Benedict Anderson suggested that nations could be understood as “imagined communities.” Nations were imagined, he argued, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”³⁴ Print media played a vital part in Anderson's theory of nationalism. Indeed, he argued, the formation of national consciousness made possible by the emergence of what he called “print-capitalism” in the 18th and 19th centuries. Driven by the forces of a capitalist marketplace, the printing press achieved unprecedented levels of diffusion and circulation in defined communities. It thus encouraged the formation of common discourses, and the identification of the members of these communities to larger ensembles called “nations.” In the American case, this resulted in the formation of a creole identity, driven by the ever-increasing number of newspapers founded in the course of the 18th century. This identity was European in relation to other New World

²⁹ Gross, “Print and the Public Sphere...”, 250-252.

³⁰ Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of US Nation Building, 1770-1870*. New York, Columbia University Press. 2009, 3-5.

³¹ Catherine O'Donnell, Kaplan *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2008, 129-130.

³² See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1992, 14, 61.

³³ Max Savelle, “Nationalism and Other Loyalties in the American Revolution,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (July, 1962), 902.

³⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, Verso. 1991 [1983], 224.

people, and American in relation to old Europe.³⁵ It was identity that allowed the revolutionary generation to imagine itself as a nation distinct from Britain, and eventually to emancipate itself from the British Empire.

Once Independence was achieved, the time came to define the American nation and to cultivate a nationalist sentiment among its members. In the early republican period, print thus became an instrument of nation-building. Along with rituals, ceremonies, and parades, popular print was used to reinforce the nation's commitment to the principles fostered by the Revolution and to create new and unifying myths and traditions. According to David Waldstreicher, "American nationalism emerged from the conjunction of local celebrations and their reproduction in the press," which gave "practical sense" to the "abstraction of nationalist ideology."³⁶ In a similar vein, François Furstenberg has argued that popular texts like pamphlets, biographies, schoolbooks, sermons, political orations, almanacs, newspaper reporting, and broadsides "shaped ideas of nationalism and citizenship in ways that would have lasting consequences." By "reaching out to vast American audiences in the present and the future," indeed, "these texts provided the medium through which political ideologies were disseminated and nationalism forged."³⁷

The American printer as an agent of change

The scholarship on 18th-century printers is divided between the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods, with very little dialogue between the three. The common consensus is that colonial printers, particularly in the late 17th and the early 18th centuries had very little agency. This agency came only with the Revolution, which allowed them to lend their presses to the cause of freedom, and to become major players on the political scene of the early republican period. To borrow a phrase coined by Stephen Botein in an influential 1975 essay, colonial printers were little more than "mere mechanics." After all, although their work had literary and cognitive aspects, they belonged to a manual trade, in the same respect as smiths, brewers, or coppers. Until the Revolution, moreover, they were simply too dependent upon the patronage of

³⁵ See Jim Egan, "Creole Bradstreet: Philip Sidney, Alexander the Great, and English Identities," in Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzoti (eds) *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2009, 239.

³⁶ David Waldstreicher, "Rites of Rebellion, Rites of Assent: Celebrations, Print Culture, and the Origins of American Nationalism," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (1995), 38.

³⁷ François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation*. New York, Penguin Books. 2006, 20.

religious or civil authorities to exert much freedom in the exercise of their functions. It followed that they “pursued strategies that were designed to suit a mode of political life in which partisanship and polemics were of dubious legitimacy.”³⁸ It was only with the Stamp Act crisis that “partisanship became a viable alternative,” and that American printers became actively involved in the editorial outlook of their presses.³⁹

On the whole, Botein’s thesis has been widely accepted by scholars. Printing in the colonial period was financially challenging, and having powerful and affluent patrons was certainly the best way of keeping afloat. Likewise, the printers of the revolutionary and early republican periods were certainly more inclined to take political stances than their colonial predecessors. But Botein, as many commentators since him pointed out, probably downsized the capacity of colonial printers to gain influence in their communities and to insert themselves in political debates. David Copeland has argued, for instance, that although “printers before the Revolution did not command the respect that the legacy of Benjamin Franklin has produced,” their newspapers were “a way at least to make a printer known to the citizens of a colony and region.”⁴⁰ Jeffrey Pasley, for his part, has noted that printers were the “intellectual elite of the early American working class,” and that as such they occupied a “more prominent role in their communities than most artisans.”⁴¹ This visibility, Pasley noted, rarely translated into political influence. And yet, studies by Charles E. Clark and James N. Green, among others, have shown that under the right circumstances, and particularly in times of instability, colonial printers did

³⁸ Stephen Botein, “Meer Mechanics’ and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers,” *Perspectives in American History*, Vol. 9, No. (1975), 130.

³⁹ Botein, “Meer Mechanics’ and an Open Press...”, 188. See also Thomas Leonard, *The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting*, New York, Oxford University Press. 1986.

⁴⁰ David A. Copeland, *Colonial Newspapers: Character and Contents*. Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press. 1997, 17.

⁴¹ Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*. Charlottesville/London, Virginia University Press. 2001, 25. This argument is only stronger when it is considered that printers were at the center of the colonies’ information and communication networks, both formal and informal. Indeed, as shown by Joseph Adelman, James Raven, and Richard D. Brown, through their control of the colonies’ postal system and through their inter-colonial and transatlantic connections, printers gave the colonies “a substantial infrastructure of experienced personnel and distribution networks” that would prove crucial to the success of the Revolution.” Richard D. Brown, “Early American Origins of the Information Age,” in Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and James W. Cortada (eds) *A Nation Transformed by Information: How Information Has Shaped the United States from Colonial Times to the Present*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2000, 40. See also Joseph Adelman, “A Constitutional Conveyance of Intelligence, Public and Private: The Post Office, the Business of Printing, and the American Revolution,” *Enterprise & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (December 2010), 709-752; James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers. Transatlantic Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press. 2002; Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1989.

take editorial stances in public debates of a political nature.⁴² While these stances were often dictated by the established authorities, printers sometimes chose to follow public opinion, or even their own convictions.

It is widely considered that it was the Revolution that really gave printers the opportunity to act as agents of change. The Revolution, Botein argued, politicized the press and divided printers along party lines. It thus “reshaped the self-imagery, or ‘occupational ideology,’ of the printing trade,” and turned printers into “individuals who were conscious of the role they played in forming political discourse.”⁴³ From the time of the Stamp Act crisis, as shown by the influential studies of Arthur M. Schlesinger and Edmund S. Morgan, printers were indeed deeply involved in the politics of the colonies. As they turned their presses into organs of propaganda and mass mobilization, they became increasingly influential.⁴⁴ They played a vital role in the dissemination of the revolutionaries’ rhetoric, and in the swaying of public opinion for the Patriots’ cause. Most importantly, they contributed to shape their contemporaries’ print and political cultures by making of the press a central institution of American politics.⁴⁵

This tradition of political partisanship and political participation continued and was brought even further during the early republican period. It was reinforced by the separation between the printing and the publishing and editing spheres of the printing trade, and by the emergence of actual party politics. The two processes have been nicely described in Rosalind Remer’s *Printers and Men of Capital* and in Jeffrey Pasley’s *The Tyranny of Printers*.⁴⁶ It was really in the 1780s and 1790s, Remer and Pasley argued, that the printing trade developed its own editorial “voice.” While the printers of the revolutionary era had influenced public opinion by using their presses as “conduits” for the Patriots’ rhetoric, the publishers and editors of the early republican

⁴² Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665-1740*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1994; James N. Green, “The Book Trade in the Middle Colonies, 1680-1720”, in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2000.

⁴³ Stephen Botein, “Printers and the American Revolution,” in Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (eds) *The Press & The American Revolution*. Boston, Northeastern University Press. 1981, 45. See also Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. New York, N. N. Norton. 1991.

⁴⁴ Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 1953

⁴⁵ See, for instance, David A. Copeland, “America,” in Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (eds), *Press, Politics, and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820*. Cambridge University Press. 2007, 140-153;

⁴⁶ Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic*. Philadelphia, The University of Pennsylvania Press. 1996; Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*... (2001).

period would start using their presses to initiate debates and to make editorial statements of their own, thus paving the way for the increasingly democratic print culture of the 19th century.⁴⁷

The current historiography on print and printers has shown that, in circumstances, both could act as agents of change. The nature of this change was never preordained, but rather determined by a complex combination of social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances. The same can be said of the concept of freedom, which has meant different things to different people at different times in American history.⁴⁸ In order to determine how 18th-century print and printers have acted as agents of freedom, it will therefore be useful to think of freedom not as a monolithic idea, but as a principle always in motion.

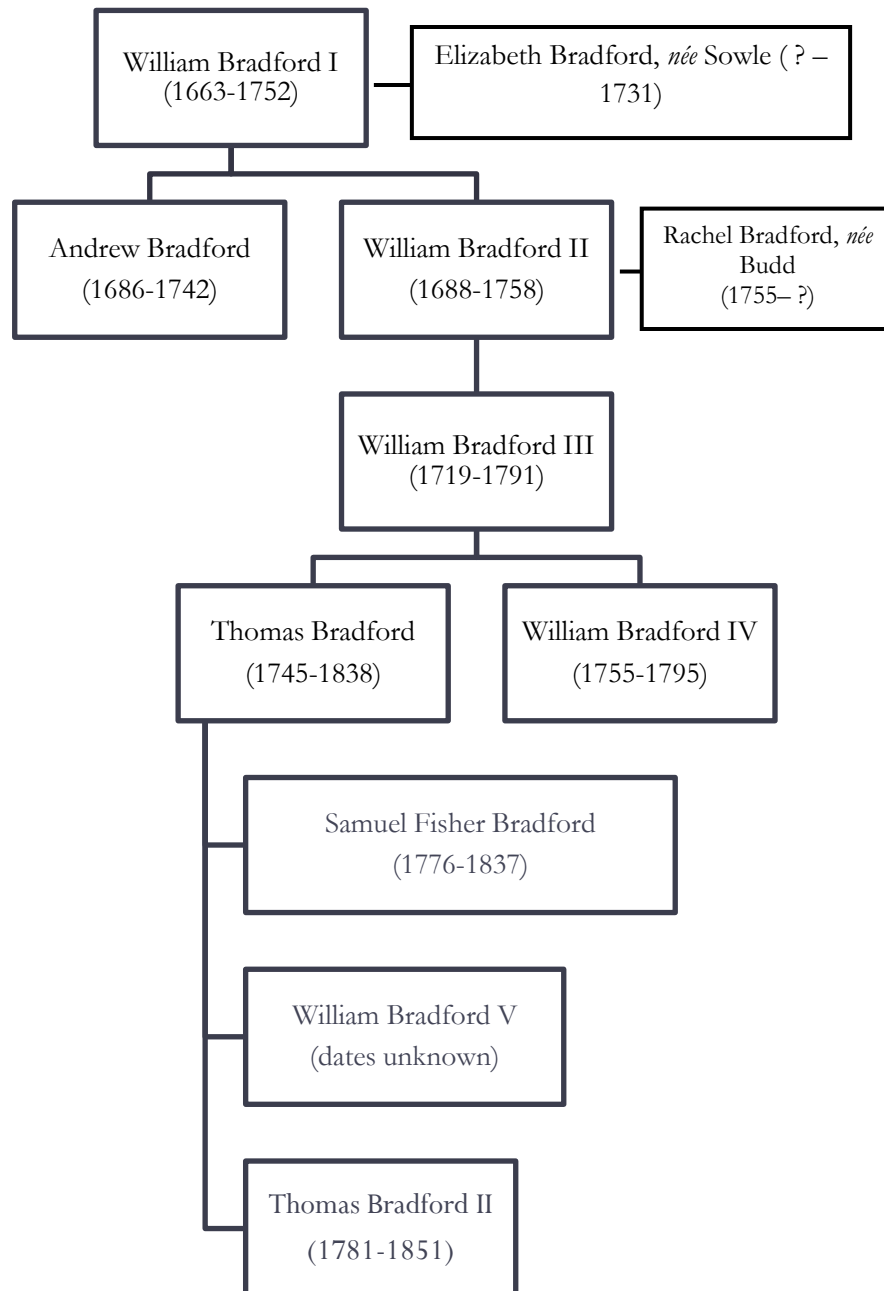
Limitations

The limitations of this thesis mostly have to do with the method and the sources used. Working on such a long period of time means that elements of continuity and major turning points will be emphasized, while details may be overlooked. Necessarily, some themes and issues will be ignored. The role of post offices in the circulation of news and information will not be addressed, for instance. The transatlantic aspect of 18th-century printing, publishing, and bookselling will be largely overlooked, as will the specificities of colonial presses within an imperial setting. While these issues are certainly worth the attention of scholars, it was felt that they did not significantly contribute to the argument, and therefore could not be discussed properly within the following pages. Working on a single family means that the experience described may not be representative of the experience of other printing families, or of printers who did not belong to a printing dynasty, be it in the middle colonies or elsewhere across the American territory. Hopefully, though, enough attention will be given to elements of context to properly situate the Bradfords within the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican print cultures and printing trades.

⁴⁷ Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*..., 31.

⁴⁸ According to Michael Kammen, “[t]he historical fact that liberty has ... meant different things to different people cannot be stressed too strongly.” Michael Kammen, *Spheres of Liberty. Changing Perceptions of Liberty in American Culture*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press. 1986, 9. See also Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*. New York and London, W. W. Norton & Company. 1998.

Cast of characters



Chapter one: Colonial printers and the struggle for press freedom

1. A pioneer printer in the middle colonies⁴⁹ (1680-1720)

a. William Bradford in America

“Hereby understand that after great Charge and Trouble, I have brought that great Art and Mystery of Printing into this part of America, believing it may be of great service to you in several respects, hoping to find Encouragement, not only in this Almanack, but what else I shall enter upon for the use and service of the Inhabitants of these Parts.”⁵⁰ With these colorful words, prefaced to Samuel Atkins’ 1685 *Kalendarium Pennsilvaniense*, William Bradford introduced himself to his readers. He had come to America with his wife, carrying a brand new press—probably a wedding gift from his father-in-law—as well as a letter of recommendation penned by none other than George Fox, founder of the Quakers. The latter described Bradford as a “sober” and “civil” young man, “convinced of the truth,” who had come to America in order to “set up the trade of printing Friends’ books,” and to keep a correspondence with fellow stationers, booksellers, and printers in England. Fox then exhorted the Friends of every colony—from Pennsylvania to East and West Jersey, New York, and Maryland all the way to Virginia and the Carolinas—to resort to his services, for he would only import and print what the American and English Friends would approve of.⁵¹

The following pages will retrace Bradford’s career as a printer, publisher, and bookseller, and highlight the ways in which his experience in the colonial world of print is representative of the evolution of the speech of freedom in the late 17th and early 18th century. At first mostly

⁴⁹ William Bradford was not, actually, the *first* printer of the middle colonies. He was preceded by a few months by the Maryland printer William Nuthead. Laurence C. Wrot, *The Colonial Printer*. New York, Dover Publications. 1964 [1931], 40.

⁵⁰ Samuel Atkins, *Kalendarium Pennsilvaniense, or, American Messinger. Being an Almanack For the Year of Grace, 1686*. Printed and Sold by William Bradford, sold also by the Author and H. Murrey in Philadelphia, and Philip Richards in New-York. 1685.

⁵¹ Fox’s letter of recommendation, dated “London, 6th Month 1685”, is cited in full in John William Wallace, *An Address Delivered at the Celebration by the New York Historical Society, May 20, 1863, of the Two Hundredth Birth Day of Mr. William Bradford*. Albany, J. Munsell. 1863, 25.

unfocused, this speech of freedom slowly but surely took the traits of a discernible concept of freedom of speech and press. It reflected not only the transformation of the colonies' print and political cultures, but also the transformation of the printer's role in colonial society.

From the start, the Quaker authorities' and Bradford's expectations were at odds. The Friends clearly intended to make of Bradford their exclusive printer. The latter, though, had no intention of sacrificing his professional and financial ambitions to the altar of the Quakers' interests. This is probably why, in his *Kalendarium* address, he carefully omitted to mention his affiliation to the Friends. This is also why he offered to print "any kind blank Bills, Bonds, Letters of Attorney, Indentures, Warrants, etc." that were brought before him. With this statement, James Green has quite correctly suggested, Bradford was making an "assertion of economic freedom that no printer in England enjoyed."⁵² In other words, he was announcing, loud and clear, his intention not only of printing, but also of participating in the legal, political, administrative, and commercial lives of the colonies. The following years would show just how serious this claim was. By the early 1690s, Bradford was printing not only from Philadelphia, but also from East Jersey's capital at Perth Amboy.⁵³ His printing presses were serving not only the provinces of Pennsylvania and Jersey, but also those of Rhode Island, New York, and Maryland. In partnership with William Rittenhouse and Samuel Carpenter, he had also set up a paper mill—the first of its kind in North America—on the border of the Schuylkill River. And he operated a shop in which he sold books, stationery, foodstuffs, and such sundry things as assorted cures and elixirs for "Feavers and Agues, Surfeits, Gripes, Plurisies, &c."⁵⁴ His business expanded so effectively that, in a matter of a few years, Bradford had become an unavoidable feature of the information networks of the middle and south colonies. His energy and business flair were, however, restricted by the meagre quantity of work he was given by the Quakers. Over the course of his Philadelphia career, he appears to have produced no more than 20 or 25 imprints for his official employers. And in each case, the issues were rather limited. Although his income was augmented by his other activities, it is thus not surprising that Bradford grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Quakers. It is no more surprising that, after a while, his choice of publications started becoming

⁵² Green, "The Book Trade . . .," 201.

⁵³ Wrot, *The Colonial Printer*, 40.

⁵⁴ Atkins, *Kalendarium Pennsilvaniense* . . . , i

more and more daring. From the start, Bradford had printed both for the Quaker and the non-Quaker communities. Most of the time, he played it safe, printing administrative documents that had no subversive value whatsoever. Increasingly, though, he started straying away from this quiet niche, and started printing legal and religious documents that were popular among readers, but feared by the authorities. Soon, Bradford would learn at his own expense that while printing for the Quakers guaranteed opportunities, it also came with drawbacks.

At first glance, the Quakers' strict attitude regarding the printing trade seems to be at odds with their experience with licensing and censorship. After all, they had left the Old World for the New in order to escape the persecution they had been subjected to since the mid-17th century.⁵⁵ One would therefore have expected them to have been much more tolerant once settled in a city of their own.⁵⁶ But the Quakers were not levellers. As Gary Nash insightfully put it, "the Quaker personality had two sides, one which emphasized control, hierarchy, and community and another that celebrated freedom, individualism, and nonconformity."⁵⁷ In the precarious colonial context, it seems that the first side of this personality came out more than the second. The early Quakers were not trying to get rid of "old social attitudes regarding the structuring of society", but rather to adapt them to their needs.⁵⁸ In other words, they substituted themselves to traditional political and religious authorities. And like all other forms of authority, they were well aware, from the start, of the dangers that subversive discourses and practices represented. Accordingly, they remained strict when it came to printing. This would not do with a man like Bradford, who not

⁵⁵ See; Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England*. Richmond, Friends United Press. 1964; John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689*. London, Longman. 2000; Raymond Ayoub, "The Persecution of 'An Innocent People' in Seventeenth-Century England", *Quaker Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2005), 46-66.

⁵⁶ The situation changed quite drastically in the 18th century. The Charter of Privileges that was granted to the colony in 1701, for instance, was a rather blunt statement of freedom of speech and conscience. What explains such a change of attitude? Surely, the new political circumstances in England played a part in the transformation. The reign of William and Mary was indeed a period of toleration. The circumstances in the colonies were also a major factor. After more than one generation in America, the years of uncertainty were over for the Pennsylvania Quakers. It now became possible for them, and for Penn, to attempt to pursue their "Holy Experiment" in the "City of Brotherly Love." See Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania State University Press. 1998; William C. Kashatus III, *Historic Philadelphia. The City, Symbols & Patriots, 1681-1800*. Lanham, Md.; University Press of America. 1992.

⁵⁷ Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.; The Harvard University Press. 1986 [1979], 53. See also Gary Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1680-1726*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1968, and Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America*. New York, Columbia University Press. 2003.

⁵⁸ Nash, *The Urban Crucible...*, 7-8.

only “disdained to walk delicately in the presence of Gods’ regents” but left England for America in order to find opportunities and gain independence.⁵⁹

It was thus that, immediately after his very first publication—without the Quakers’ approval—Bradford was admonished by the Friends and ordered “not to print anything but what shall have lycence from ye council.”⁶⁰ The tone was set for Bradford’s future relation with the Quakers. A few years later, in the midst of a political and social conflict surrounding the respective rights of the people and their political leaders, Bradford thought it would be appropriate to print William Penn’s original charter. The gesture was not as innocent as it seemed. Legal documents like charters and warrants were constantly being printed and distributed by figures of power who wanted to assert their authority. But in this case it was Bradford, the mere printer, who had taken the initiative. And even if it was commissioned, the identity of the commissioner was kept a secret, and the responsibility fell upon the printer anyway. In the context of 1689 Philadelphia, the printing of Penn’s charter thus presented the prospect of an uncontrolled printer middling not only in legal, but also in political matters. Just months before, Penn himself had recognized the dangerous potential of the press, and warned his officials to “[h]ave a care of printing there” for it could “cost [him] & ye Province Deare.”⁶¹ Accordingly, the new governor of the colony, the devout Puritan John Blackwell, was wary of everything that was being printed without his own consent or that of the Quaker establishment. The anonymous publication of a legal document did not escape his attention. As Bradford was still, at that point, the only printer of the colony, he was brought before the governor and his council to be interrogated. After having denied printing Penn’s charter in the first place, Bradford defended his position in a most heartfelt way, saying: “it is my imploy, my trade and calling, and that by which I get my living, to print; and if I may not print such things as come to my hand, which are innocent, I cannot live.”⁶² This argument was in no way naïve. Indeed, by claiming that he was little more than a simple mechanic, Bradford was arguing that he was not responsible for what came out of his press, and could therefore not be held accountable for anything that was deemed libellous or

⁵⁹ Wrot, *The Colonial Printer...*, 30.

⁶⁰ Wallace, *An Address Delivered...*, 27.

⁶¹ Penn is quoted in Nicholas B. Wainwright, “Governor John Blackwell,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 74, Issue 4 (October, 1950), 466.

⁶² The exchange between Governor Blackwell and Bradford is reported in David Paul Brown (ed.) *The Forum: of, Forty Years Full Practice at the Philadelphia Bar*. Philadelphia, Robert H. Small. 1856. Volume 1, 217-218. See also Green, “The Book Trade...”, 203.

licentious. This meant that, as a printer, he could not openly take an editorial stance on a controversial issue. But it also meant—and the events of the following years would prove that Bradford was well aware of this fact—that, if he played his card well a printer could make a statement through the output of his press, and even spread the most licentious of messages and still plead his innocence when faced with accusations of libel and sedition.

After these events, it seems that Bradford had had enough of the Friends and their town. In the records of the Friends' Meeting of the 5th Month of 1689, we read that he had “laid before this meeting his intention of transporting himself to England.”⁶³ He probably did go back to England, maybe in the hope of finding a more advantageous situation—or maybe just in the hope of convincing the Quakers to make him a new offer. Sometime in 1690, he returned to Philadelphia and resumed printing for the Friends who, having realized that losing their printer would be a great inconvenience, had promised Bradford an annual salary of £40, plus the promise of buying 200 copies of everything he printed.⁶⁴ But the respite was short-lived. Bradford's return corresponded to a major religious crisis which would shake the foundations of the Quakers' hold over the city and durably change the position of printers within the middle colonies. In a trial called an “Alice in Wonderland tale” by Edwin Wolf, the Quakers would “[do] unto Bradford what had been done unto them before they came to America”, thus proving the limits of their tolerance and openness.⁶⁵

b. “The law and the fact”

In the early days of December 1692, Bradford was arrested “upon an Information of Publishing, Uttering & Spreading a Malitious and Seditious Paper, entitled, An Appeal from the

⁶³ In a letter he wrote to the Friends' Meeting on “the first of the first month 1687/8”, Bradford recalled that he had wanted to go back to England before, having found “little encouragement” in the colonies. He had stayed, though, after having been prompted to propose the printing of a “large Bible in folio”. Unfortunately, this ambitious project was a commercial and a financial failure. It no doubt contributed to his decision to leave Pennsylvania in 1689/90. See Wallace, *An Address Delivered...*, 38.

⁶⁴ Green, “The Book Trade...”, 207.

⁶⁵ Edwin Wolf II, “The Origins of Early American Printing Shops”, *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (July, 1978), 208. See also Wolf's *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen and Booksellers: Lyell Lectures in Bibliography, 1985-6*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1988.

twenty eight Judges to the Spirit of Truth, &c. Tending to the Disturbance of the Peace and Subversion of the present Government.⁶⁶ He was thrown in jail to await trial, while his printing equipment was seized and hundreds of copies of the “Malitious and Seditous Paper” in question were burnt in a great auto-da-fé. The famous “Keithian controversy”, which would durably shake the Quakers’ hold over Philadelphia, was in motion.

The author of the text that sent Bradford to prison was the Scottish born George Keith, an itinerant Quaker preacher who had come to America in 1685. After serving as Surveyor-General in East Jersey for three years, Keith had moved to Philadelphia, where he became headmaster for the Friends’ school. By 1691, he was already disappointed by the Pennsylvania Quakers’ lax sense of organization and their lack of religious orthodoxy.⁶⁷ His disappointment would grow continually during the next two years. At first, he tried to shake things up “from the inside” by proposing a “body of rules” to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Friends, but to no avail. The Quaker establishment was wary of Keith’s position, and began accusing him and his growing number of followers of heresy. Desperate times called for desperate measures: Keith chose to overlook the strict measures of print control set by the Friends and to make his discontent public.⁶⁸ It was convenient for Keith that Pennsylvania was then going through a political crisis.⁶⁹ In its early years, Pennsylvania’s political scene was divided between a proprietary faction devoted to the Penn family, and an anti-proprietary faction that sought to limit the Lord Proprietor’s political and economic powers. The young colony’s oppositional politics reached its apogee in the late 1680s and early 1690s. As a result, Philadelphia’s public life was invigorated. In

⁶⁶ George Keith, *New-England’s Spirit of Persecution Transmitted to Pennsilvania and the Pretended Quakers Found Persecuting the True Christian-Quaker, in the Tryal of Peter Boss, George Keith, Thomas Budd, and William Bradford, at the Sessions Held at Philadelphia the Nineth, Tenth and Twelfth Days of December 1692*. New York, Printed by William Bradford. 1693. As the title of this account of the trial suggests, Bradford was not the only associate of Keith’s to face justice in 1692 and 93. He will, however, be the sole focus of this thesis.

⁶⁷ John Smolenski has suggested that the Keithians feared that “their religion had become bastardized in America”. John Smolenski, *Friends and Stangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. 2010, 10.

⁶⁸ For more detail on the intricacies of the Keithian doctrine, see Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers...* (2010); Frederick Barnes Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763*. Williamsburg, Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg. 1948.

⁶⁹ “... urban politics in Philadelphia from 1690 to 1720 involved conflicts over William Penn’s proprietary control of his colony. At first glance the struggles that developed between proprietary and anti-proprietary factions appear to have been purely political in nature, a struggle at the top for the fruits of office. Closer examination reveals that the distribution of political power was interwoven with access to economic opportunity.”, Nash, *The Urban Crucible...*, 58. See also Green, “The Book Trade...”, 207-212.

this context, it was obviously also very convenient for Keith that Philadelphia's only printer held no great love for the Quaker establishment and its licensing laws.⁷⁰

The Keith-Bradford alliance successfully diffused Keith's message.⁷¹ The author and the printer were prolific, but they also possessed an important additional advantage: they monopolized the only press of the region. The Quakers either did not realize the power of print to rally public opinion or did not want to engage into an actual print war. Or maybe they did not trust their official printer to work for both sides. In any case, they were soon overwhelmed by the "flood of print" coming out of Bradford's press, and to which they could only respond "by the inadequate means of circulating manuscripts."⁷² For months, this unequal duel went on, until Keith went just a little too far. He was arrested first, along with his acolytes Thomas Budd and Peter Boss. Shortly afterward, it was his printer's turn to be arrested and thrown into prison to await trial.

Bradford's trial opened on the printer's plea to be properly informed of the charges put up against him. When told that he was accused of having printed a seditious libel and would be judged purely on the fact of the publication, he retorted that he should be judged both on the fact and on the law. In other words, in order to convict him, the jury would have to decide whether or not he had printed Keith's pamphlet, but also whether the pamphlet's contents were seditious according to the common law's definition of seditious libel. And according to Bradford, it was not. To a bewildered jury, the printer explained that Keith's Appeal was not seditious, for it was: "wholly relating to a Religious Diference, and asserting the Quakers antient Principles."⁷³ The members of the jury were unprepared to assess the licentiousness of the aforementioned text.

⁷⁰ According to Lawrence Wroth, Bradford was one of Keith's "sturdiest partisans." While Bradford did support Keith by accepting to print and publish his pamphlets, it is unclear whether he was really committed to the particularities of the Keithian doctrine, or whether he was merely content to oppose the Quaker establishment. In any case, Bradford's participation in the controversy proves that he was willing to take a stance in public debates and even to call into question the legitimacy of civil or religious authorities. See Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Colonial Printer*. New York, Dover Publications. 1964 [1931], 34.

⁷¹ On Keith's writings, see William S. Reese, "Works of George Keith Printed in America: A Chronological Bibliography," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, XXXIX (Winter, 1978), 98-124.

⁷² Printing without an imprint had nearly become a trademark for Bradford. He had clearly understood that the law was written so that he would more likely avoid facing legal consequences if he omitted to put his name on controversial material than if he respected the law on imprints. William S. Reese, "The Bradford Imprints," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (1979), 56.

⁷³ Keith, *New England's Spirit of Persecution...*, 34. On the jury's reaction to Bradford's defense, see Andrew R. Murphy, *Conscience and Community: Revisiting Toleration and Religious Dissent in Early Modern England and America*. University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2001, 192-194.

Instead of wasting time defining what was seditious in Keith's writings, they harked back to the fact that Bradford had printed the document in the first place, adding that the offense was even greater since he had omitted to add an imprint, which went against the Act against Printing. Bradford astutely responded that since the jury could present no evidence of his having printed Keith's Appeal, he could not possibly be found guilty of not having added an imprint. It was upon this last note that the jury convened in a separate room to "find, 1st, whether or not that Paper, call'd the Appeal, had not a tendency to the weakening the hands of the Magistrates, and encouragement of Wickeness: 2dly, Whether it did not tend to the Disturbance of the Peace? And, 3dly, Whether William Bradford did not print it, without putting his Name to it, as the Law [required]?"⁷⁴ After forty-eight hours of deliberation, the members of the jury just could not agree on whether or not the young printer was guilty. If Bradford's account of the trial is to be believed, they were split not over the law but over the fact: all agreed on the licentious nature of Keith's writings, but not all were convinced that Bradford had printed the *Appeal*. Unable to reach a consensus, the members of the jury were forced to free him and return his press.⁷⁵

As a whole, the Keithian controversy was very significant in terms of its impact on the doctrinal and political leadership of Philadelphia. It led to a major schism within the Quaker community, which not only affected the Quakers' hold over the city, but also revealed the fragility of the colonial structures of authority.⁷⁶ As for the Bradford trial, its significance lies in the fact that it was the first American trial in which some notion freedom of the press was involved, even though the term itself was never evoked. As such, the Bradford trial has sometimes been interpreted as a kind of rehearsal for the celebrated Zenger case of the 1730s.⁷⁷ Charming as this parallel may be, it should not be taken too far. The immediate impact of the Bradford trial was meager. It set no legal precedent, and resulted in no reflection on press freedom within the

⁷⁴ Keith, *New-England's Spirit of Persecution*..., 36

⁷⁵ It is unclear whether Bradford was given back his press before or after the end of his trial. Indeed, he seems to have printed Keith's *The Heresie and Hatred which was falsly charged upon the Innocent, justly returned upon the Guilty* sometime between December 1692 and April 1693, when he was supposedly in prison and separated from his press and types. It is therefore not impossible that he was allowed to print while his trial was still going, whether this was in prison or not.

⁷⁶ Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers*... 10.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, John William Wallace's panegyric accounts of the Bradfords' family history: *An Address Delivered...* (1863) and *An Old Philadelphian, Colonel William Bradford: The Patriot Printer of 1776. Sketches of His Life*. Philadelphia, Sherman & Company, Printers. 1884.

courtroom. Bradford, by asking to be judged both on “the fact and the law”, did raise the question of the definition of seditious libel. But his call was not heeded by the jury, who administered the rest of the trial with the strictest observance of the English legal practice. Moreover, it is easy to read too much into Bradford’s defense. It must be remembered that Bradford was arguing his cause in front of a court of law, and was therefore bound to defend his actions to the best of his ability—even if it required going beyond his own convictions regarding press freedom. What is more, although he had always defended his right to print what was brought before him, outside of his trial he never produced any cohesive argument in favor of press freedom. Quite to the contrary—years later, in the midst of the Zenger controversy, he argued for more control over the press and less independence for printers. All evidence thus suggests that his commitment to press freedom was more contingent than principled, and depended of his personal circumstances. His unending quarrels with the Quakers, his very involvement in the Keithian controversy and the Zenger controversy, and his eventual acceptance of the post of Printer of the King, are proof enough that he believed that printers should benefit from some degree of freedom in the exercise of their functions, if only for purely economic reasons. This series of events also suggests that though Bradford may have claimed that printers were little more than mechanics, he perceived himself not merely as a printer but as a publisher.

From the printer’s standpoint, this may very well be the real significance of the Keithian controversy. In their fight against the Quakers, Keith and Bradford had shown not only the superiority of print over manuscripts in the sharing and diffusion of ideas, but also the power of print to stimulate and nurture public debates. They had shown that printers, mechanics though they may be, had the potential to intervene in, and to influence the course of these debates. In this way, it could be argued, the Keithian controversy did set a precedent. Or, at the very least, it highlighted an evolution that was still in its infancy in the 1690s, but that would blossom in the early decades of the 18th century. Indeed, in the course of the 18th century, printers would become increasingly involved in public debates. They, their readers, and the American society at large would come to see the printing trade as an integral part of colonial, imperial and, eventually, republican politics.

The turn of the century was not only a period of change for the printing world, but also for the Bradford family. After his last altercation with the Quakers, William Bradford believed the time had come to leave Philadelphia and tempt his faith somewhere else. It just so happened that as the printer's trial came to a close, William Penn fell from favor with the Crown. He was called back to England and his governorship was handed to Benjamin Fletcher, who was also assigned to be the governor of neighboring New York.⁷⁸ Fletcher came like a breath of fresh air to the middle colonies. Liberal-minded, politically astute and slightly full of himself, he knew that his first priority should be to establish his legitimacy. He also knew that print would be the most efficient means of doing this. He thus hastened to recruit Bradford, promising him what the Quakers had failed to give him: plenty of commissions and a degree of freedom in the exercise of his functions.⁷⁹ The opportunity was too good to pass up. Thus, in March or April, 1693, William Bradford turned a page on his Philadelphia days and opened a new chapter of his life in New York. More than content with his new situation, he quickly abandoned the Quaker faith, set up a shop in Hanover Square, and began printing under the pompous title of "Printer to their Majesties King William and Queen Mary".

c. The "Bradford corridor"

It has sometimes been suggested that Bradford's decision to print for the Crown was at odds with the independence he claimed in the course of his Philadelphia years.⁸⁰ If Bradford wanted more independence as a printer, indeed, why choose to print for the royal authorities? Wouldn't printing for the King and Queen make his position even more difficult? The answer is

⁷⁸ See the *Post Meridien* dated April 27th, 1693, in the *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania: From the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government. Vol. 1. Containing the Proceedings of Council from March 10th, 1683, to November 27th, 1700.* Harrisburg, Printed by Theophilus Penn. 1838, 326-327.

⁷⁹ At first, Fletcher offered Bradford a salary of £40 a year. But he also gave him plenty of work—no less than 24 imprints during his first two years in New York. Soon, Bradford became official printer for New Jersey as well, adding £25 per year to his income, in addition to the hefty sums given him to take charge of the post. Over the course of the next decades, although he sometimes bickered with the successive governors, Bradford saw his annual income reach unprecedented levels. In this time of financial stability, it is not surprising to find that the output of his press was rather uncontroversial. Indeed, he seems to have exerted a good amount of self-censorship. The events of the 1720s and 30s would, however, show that he had not totally abandoned his independence. Green, "The Book Trade...", 212-213, 215. See also Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers...* (2010).

⁸⁰ Green, "The Book Trade...", 215.

that it would not. On the contrary, printing for the royal authorities in New York, under Fletcher's terms, presented Bradford with a degree of autonomy he had never had while he worked for the Quakers. Since the governor meant to make an abundant use of Bradford's press to promote his public image and to assert his authority over the middle colonies, the printer's financial stability was assured. Moreover, Fletcher was a pragmatic: he knew that if he imposed too many constraints on Bradford's press, he risked alienating the printer's good will and being the target of heinous pamphlets. The printer and his employer thus came to a tacit agreement that was advantageous to both. Fletcher's popularity would be assured by the output of Bradford's press, and the latter would be allowed to print and publish whatever he wanted, with the reservation that it should not be detrimental to his employer's reputation.⁸¹

In these conditions, the now 30-year-old Bradford could thrive and prosper. And he did, if the output of his press is any indication. Over the course of his New York career, he is said to have printed about 400 titles, ranging from the panegyrics and legal documents ordered from Fletcher and from the provincial assembly to religious tracts and to broadsides, almanacs and other forms of popular prints.⁸² He even broadened his linguistic range, printing not only in English but also occasionally in French, Dutch, and even in Mohawk.⁸³

An additional opportunity for expansion presented itself when Bradford's son Andrew came of age. By 1712, after having served his apprenticeship with his father, Andrew was ready to spread his wings.⁸⁴ Instead of setting up a second Bradford shop in New York, he went back to

⁸¹ On Bradford's arrival in New York, and the new opportunities guaranteed by his association with Fletcher, see John P. McGuire, "William Bradford: Printer to Their Majesties", *American Bar Association Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (April 1956), 344-347; Green, "The Book Trade...", 211-213. See also James S. Leamon, "War, Finance, and Faction in Colonial New York: The Administration of Governor Benjamin Fletcher, 1692-1698." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 1961).

⁸² It is worth noting that among Bradford's first New York publications, there were a few pamphlets penned by George Keith. These included the latter's account of the 1692 trials, *New England's Spirit of Persecution Transmitted to Pennsylvania ...* (1693), which has already been alluded to, as well as a few others, including for instance *Truth Advanced in the Correction of many Gross & hurtful Errors; Wherein is occasionally opened & explained many great and peculiar Mysteries and Doctrines of the Christian Religion...* (1694). Among the publications printed expressly for Fletcher in order to promote the latter's image featured, for instance, Nicholas Bayard's *Narrative of an attempt made by the French of Canada upon the Mobaques Country* (1693), which retold the story of a punitive expedition led by Fletcher against the French and Indians in the month of February, 1693, and Fletcher's own "Proclamation", entitled *By His Excellency Benjamin Fletcher, Captain General and Governour in Chief of Their Majesties Province of New-York ... A Proclamation: ... Given Under My Hand and Seal at Arms, at Fort William Henry the Eight [sic] Day of November, 1693.*

⁸³ See William S. Reese, "The Bradford Imprints" (1979).

⁸⁴ William and Andrew Bradford seem to have been in partnership for a short while. In his *History*, Thomas wrote that he had in his possession a pamphlet reprinted in New York in 1711, by "William and Andrew Bradford." This imprint seems to belong to a pamphlet titled *A Plat-Form of Church-Discipline, Gathered out of the Word of God, and Agreed*

his native Philadelphia, where his father's financial support allowed him to establish "a thriving printing business and miscellaneous retail shop."⁸⁵ By setting up a shop in the City of Friends, Andrew Bradford and his father William created a "Bradford corridor" that bridged the New York-Pennsylvania axis and thus strengthened their hold over the printing, bookselling, and paper-making trades of the middle colonies.⁸⁶ It was against this background that the Bradfords, prosperous as never before, made their way into the 1720s.

2. A burgeoning press in a burgeoning society (1720-1750)

a. The printing trade, print culture, and press freedom before Zenger

But the Bradford monopoly was short-lived. The family's hold over the printing trade of the middle colony was cut short in the late months of 1723 by the arrival in the region of a young printer from Boston. Benjamin Franklin first went to New York, where the eldest Bradford told him that he could offer him no work but advised him to go to Philadelphia, where his son Andrew might. Franklin made his way to Philadelphia and offered his services to the younger Bradford. The latter, unfortunately, "being lately suppli'd with one", did not need a hand. He did mention, however, that a new printer by the name of Samuel Keimer was "lately set up", and might be able to employ him. In no time, Franklin was doing the odd job for the two master printers, who he soon found to be "poorly qualified for their business." Ever the opportunist,

upon by the Elders and Messengers of the Churches Assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in N. E. ... Anno 1649. The elder and the younger Bradford seem to have published a few other titles jointly, and to have "cooperated in the printing of almanacs, sharing sheets for the calendar, but each printing his own lists of local court meeting dates." Green, "The Book Trade...", 218.

⁸⁵ Clark, *The Public Prints...*, 105.

⁸⁶ Andrew Bradford could very well have chosen another town to set up his press. Records show that he once considered settling in Providence, Rhode Island, for instance. The choice of Philadelphia as a second center of operation was not innocent; as the "twin commercial centers of the middle colonies", to borrow James Green's words, Philadelphia and New York were the towns most likely to foster a dynamic print culture in the early 18th century. At that time, only Boston was of a similar size and economic and strategic importance. But the New England town already had a well-established printing industry that would be hard to penetrate. Moreover, it was much further away from New York than Philadelphia was. An additional concern of no small importance in the choice of Philadelphia was the announce, by the Pennsylvania Colonial Assembly, of its wish to have its laws printed. Of course, the Bradford would jump on such an opportunity. See Green, "The Book Trade...", 271; Anna J. DeArmond, *Andrew Bradford, Colonial Journalist*. Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press. 1949; Thomas, *The History of Printing...*, Vol. 1, 227; Walter L. Ferree, "Andrew Bradford: A Pioneer Printer of Pennsylvania", *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1954), 214-227.

Franklin waited for the right moment to set up his own press. The time came a few years later, when Franklin bought Keimer's shop and his newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*.⁸⁷ In no time, Franklin established himself as one of the most talented and business-savvy printers and newspaper publishers of the middle colonies, and soon of all of British North America.⁸⁸

It is unnecessary to enumerate Franklin's many merits.⁸⁹ His example is extremely useful, however, because it illustrates two related developments of the 1720s that would have a tremendous influence on the print culture and the printing trade of the colonies, and would also greatly contribute to the contemporary discourse on press freedom. The first of these developments was the arrival of competition on the printing scene; the second was the birth of a proper newspaper press. As we will also see, these developments had major implications for the discourse and the state of press freedom in the colonies.

Competition significantly altered the dynamics of the printing trade. It may even have been the catalyst for a first colonial reflection on the concept of freedom of the press.⁹⁰ As long as William Bradford and his son Andrew were the only printers of the middle colonies, they had no great incentive to innovate or to enhance the quality of their printing. But the almost simultaneous arrival of Samuel Keimer and Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, and of John Peter Zenger in New York, changed the rules of the game. From that moment on, rival printers had to

⁸⁷ Philip Smith (ed.) *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York, Dover Publications. 1996, 16-21, 40-42.

⁸⁸ Unfortunately, it is impossible to expand on the rivalry between Franklin and the Bradfords within the limits of this thesis. Their fight over the control of the post is however worth mentioning. Andrew Bradford, like many other colonial printers, had always yearned for an appointment as postmaster. When he was finally appointed postmaster for Philadelphia, in 1728, he benefited from a better access to news and to information and communication networks than all of his rivals. Franklin tried time and again to be appointed in Bradford's stead. His time came in 1737. From that time on, he judiciously used his position not only to make his newspaper better, but also to advance his social station. He would become deputy postmaster general for the colonies, before being appointed America's first postmaster general in 1775. He himself wrote of his appointment that "Tho' the salary was small, it facilitated the Correspondence that improv'd my Newspaper, encreas'd the Number demanded, as well as the Advertisements to be inserted, so that it came to afford me a very considerable Income." Franklin is quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. New York, Penguin Books. 2004, 53. See also Adelman, "A Constitutional Conveyance of Intelligence...", 409-452.

⁸⁹ Countless historians have studied Franklin's printing career. Among the best accounts are David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. New York, Hill and Wang. 2004, and Jeffery A. Smith, "'Infamous Practices': Risk-Taking in Franklin's Early Journalism," in J. A. Leo Lemay (ed.) *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective*. Newark, University of Delaware Press. 1993, 40-51.

⁹⁰ Charles E. Clark and Leonard Levy, among others, have acknowledged the impact of competition on the discourse on press freedom. See Clark, *The Public Prints...*, p. 105-190, and Levy, *Legacy of Suppression: Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1960, and Levy, *Emergence of a Free Press*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1985.

compete for the favor of the readership.⁹¹ And though the number of readers was constantly increasing, the demand for print was still modest in comparison to the growing supply.⁹² In order to rise above the competition, printers resorted to aesthetic innovation in order to make their publications more appealing. They also paid more attention to their readers' preferences when choosing the contents of their publications. And, most importantly, they appropriated the discourse on press freedom. A good printer was one who opened his press to all sorts of publications, and who agreed to print all points of view (except for the licentious ones). A great printer was one who went beyond himself to make sure to bring the greatest variety of opinions and news to his readership. This idea was perhaps best explained in Franklin's "Apology for Printers." In this text from 1731, Franklin contended that "the Opinions of Men [were] almost as various as their Faces," and that the "Business of Printing [had] chiefly to do with Men's Opinions, most things that [were] printed tending to promote some, or oppose others," to which he added that "if all Printers were determin'd not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed." When debates arose, therefore, printers had no choice but to give free access to their presses to both sides, regardless of their personal opinion. Franklin justified the printers' neutrality by claiming that "when Men differ in Opinion, both Sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the Publick," and that inevitably, "when Truth and Error have fair Play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter."⁹³

The apparent consequence of this "open press" strategy, which recalls notions put forward by Bradford in the 1680s, was to limit the printer's editorial input. Indeed, by printing whatever was brought before him, the colonial printer assumed little or no responsibility for the contents of the publications that came out of his press. However, as we have seen in Bradford's

⁹¹ This competition was often fierce. Its most colorful illustration probably comes from Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America, with a Biography of Printers, and an Account of Newspapers*. 2 Volumes. Worcester, Printed by Isaiah Thomas. 1874 [1808].

⁹² There was indeed an asymmetry between the growing number of printing presses and the rate at which the reading habits of the colonists transformed in the late decades of the 17th and the early decades of the 18th centuries. Many printers went into bankruptcy quite early on in their careers. The Nutheads from Baltimore, for instance, barely lasted ten years. And of Boston's five printers in 1680, only two remained in 1695, and they were working in partnership. Seen in this light, the longevity of Bradford's press is a testimony of his flair for finding opportunities and his business acumen more than his printing abilities. See William S. Reese, "The First Hundred Years of Printing in British North America: Printers and Collectors," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 99 (October 1989), 337-73. See also Thomas, *History of Printing...* (1808).

⁹³ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 10 June 1731. Jeffery A. Smith recalls that Franklin penned and printed his *Apology* after he had been accused of "abundant Malice" against religion. With the *Apology*, he was basically defending his right to print and publish texts that "may 'promote Immorality' or include 'Party or Personal Reflections'." See Jeffery A. Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom: The Ideology of Early American Journalism*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1988.

case, there was often a large gap between what printers claimed to do and what they were actually doing. The open press strategy always remained a guideline more than an actual rule for printers; its application was highly contingent. Although printers usually abided by an open press strategy, therefore, most never really abandoned their agency in public debates.⁹⁴ Moreover, the arrival of second printers corresponded to the birth of the newspaper press of the middle colonies, an innovation that would do more than anything else to bring printers into the public realm and involve them in public debates.⁹⁵

The very first American newspaper, the *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick*, was issued in Boston on September 25, 1690. Having been printed and published without licence, though, it was doomed to a very short existence. Indeed, it was shut down immediately, and no second edition ever saw the light of day. It was only in 1704 that a first continuously published newspaper was founded. But John Campbell's *Boston News-Letter*, which at first consisted of a single page printed on both sides and issued once a week, remained the only paper in the colonies until the foundation, in 1719, of William Booker's *Boston Gazette* and Andrew Bradford's *American Weekly Mercury*, which became the first newspaper of the middle colonies. They were shortly followed by James Franklin's *New-England Courant* (1721), William Bradford's *New-York Gazette* (1725), Samuel Kneeland's *New-England Weekly Journal* (1727), and Samuel Keimer's *Pennsylvania Gazette* (1728).⁹⁶ In the following years, newspapers would appear everywhere in the colonies, so that by the early 1730s there were about a dozen being circulated from Georgia to Massachusetts.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting that all printers were not equally interested in taking part in public debates. Indeed, already in the early 18th century, a gap was beginning to form between printers who belonged to the world of craftsmen, and printers who, like Bradford, had greater intellectual ambitions. The evolution of printers to publishers and editors will be assessed in the following chapters, as will the printers' wish for social advancement. The best accounts on these topics are Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers...* (2001), and Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital...* (1996).

⁹⁵ The scholarship on colonial printers often contrasts the latter's lack of agency to the Revolutionary and early republican printers' very active participation in partisan and public debates. To borrow an expression penned by Stephen Botein in his seminal 1975 essay, colonial printers were little more than "mere mechanics." Charles Clark has pointed out, though, that "few printers of that era saw their role as newspaper publishers as such passive receptacles as this now-standard view implies." Clark, "Early American Journalism: News and Opinion in the Popular Press," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2007, 397. Steven Botein, "Mere Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategy of Colonial American Printers", *Perspectives in American History*, Vol. 9 (1975), 127-225.

⁹⁶ As seen above, Keimer's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, like his press, was soon acquired by Benjamin Franklin. According to Edwin and Michael Emery, among others, the latter managed to transform it into the best newspaper in the colonies. See Emery and Emery, *The Press and America...*, 44.

The development of a proper newspaper press in British North America significantly transformed the colonial printing trade and its print culture.

For printers, newspapers were first and foremost a source of financial stability. They were cheap to produce, issued regularly, and they benefitted from a wide-circulation.⁹⁷ Newspapers, connected to the world of merchants from their inception, also brought money by selling advertising space.⁹⁸ They also gave printers an unprecedented degree of visibility, which was convenient at a time when the competition was getting increasingly fierce. Indeed, newspapers allowed printers not only to showcase their printing and publishing skills, but also to prove the “openness” of their presses. It also allowed them to address their readers when the circumstances arose—when they needed to defend their work from attacks by readers or other printers, for instance, or when they felt the need to make a statement on a controversial topic. It is no wonder, therefore, that having a newspaper was a priority for most printers. For the reading public, beside bringing news and information, newspapers created a link with printers, acted as a forum for public debates, and facilitated the tightening of local communities and the integration of the colonies—and indeed of the broader English Atlantic.

The arrival of competition on the printing scene and the emergence of a burgeoning newspaper press helped make of the 1720s a turning point in the history of American print. These developments also contributed to the elaboration of an actual discourse on press freedom in the colonies. The ins and outs of this discourse would become apparent in the course of the Zenger trial of the following decade, largely seen as the most important landmark in the American story of press freedom.

b. The Zenger trial

Time and again, historians have debated the significance of the Zenger trial. Happening “against a background of epidemic disease and the most serious economic depression in the

⁹⁷ Mark Lause, *Some Degree of Power: From Hired Hand to Union Craftsman in the American Printing Trade, 1778-1815*. Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press. 1991, 8.

⁹⁸ Steven J. Shaw, “Colonial Newspaper Advertising: A Step Toward Freedom of the Press”, *The Business History Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Autumn, 1959), 409-420.

town's history", the controversy has at times been celebrated as the prologue to the First Amendment, and at times dismissed as little more than a colonial trial like so many others.⁹⁹ At the moment, scholars agree that although the Zenger case set no actual legal precedent, it had long-term psychological consequences.¹⁰⁰ Bernard Weisberger went so far as to argue that the Zenger trial was important because it represented "an emotional and symbolic triumph for a doctrine of 'freedom of the press'."¹⁰¹ Whether or not it led to the ratification of the First Amendment is less certain. But it did encourage a debate on freedom of the press and strengthen the prevailing discourse on the open press. It also showed how the press could act as a forum for public discussion, and thus involve both printers and common citizens in political and social controversies.

The Zenger case originated in a political conflict opposing New York's recently appointed governor, William Cosby, and a faction of more liberal-minded professionals and merchants, led by Lewis Morris and James Alexander. The latter had been bred, intellectually, by the attacks on British MP Robert Walpole that "permeated" the writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, mounted a strikingly similar attack on Cosby, who was convinced of "regarding his appointment as an invitation to gorge at the public table."¹⁰² Like their British counterparts, they

⁹⁹ Historians of the 19th century have generally depicted the Zenger trial as a first step in the struggle for political freedom and the resistance to tyranny that would reach its peak during the American Revolution and eventually give birth to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In the early 20th century, interpretations of the Zenger trial have taken a legal turn. Thus was born the myth of the Zenger trial as a legal precedent, and even as a "prologue" for the ratification of the First Amendment. In the 1960s, Leonard Levy has argued, on the contrary, that the Zenger trial set no actual legal precedent. Since then, historians have mostly concluded that although the Zenger controversy set no legal precedent, it became important as a "symbolic" event in 18th-century America. To borrow Paul Finkelman's elegant phrasing, "What is most important about the Zenger legacy is not that the case failed to bring an immediate and total change in the law of libel, but rather that in the revolutionary period it was always there as a guiding light for those who were gradually developing an ideology of freedom of expression." Paul Finkelman, "Politics, the Press, and the Law: The Trial of John Peter Zenger", in Michael R. Belknap (ed.) *American Political Trials*. Westport, Conn., Greenwood. 1981, 25-44. See also David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and their Readers*. Urbana-Champaign. 2011, 67; Clark Rivera, "Ideals, Interests, and Civil Liberty: The Colonial Press and Freedom," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Spring 1978), 47-53; Leonard Levy, *Legacy of Suppression...* (1960); Leonard Levy, *Emergence of a Free Press* (1985).

¹⁰⁰ David Copeland, for his part, has argued that freedom of the case was merely instrumental to the Zenger trial. Indeed, the controversy had much more to do with "political control and partisanship" than theories of press freedom. Copeland did, however, acknowledge that the trial had an incidence on the colonial theory of press freedom—even if this was purely accidental. See David A. Copeland, *The Idea of a Free Press: The Enlightenment and its Unruly Legacy*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press. 2006, 154-155.

¹⁰¹ Bernard A. Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press. 1961, 16.

¹⁰² Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1998, 151-152. Trenchard and Gordon were the celebrated authors of two highly popular series of pamphlets:

aimed to “stir up public opinion in order to turn a narrow political struggle into a popular crusade.”¹⁰³ For this purpose, nothing was as efficient as the pages of a newspaper. The problem was that in 1733 the only newspaper of the city belonged to William Bradford. Because of the latter’s position as “Printer to the King,” Bradford’s *New-York Gazette* had a semi-official status. Although Bradford was proud of his independence as a printer, in times of political instability, his newspaper became the de facto organ of the governor’s party. Alexander, Morris, and their associates thus opted for the second best thing: they recruited Bradford’s old apprentice, the young John Peter Zenger, and gave him his own newspaper. Zenger’s *New-York Weekly Journal* was thus born out of a political crisis and for strictly partisan reasons.¹⁰⁴ Over the course of nearly two years, it would continuously attack Governor Cosby and his party, and engage in a full-fledged newspaper war with a somewhat reluctant Bradford’s *Gazette*. The editors of the *Journal* portrayed Cosby and his men as “haughty courtier,” all the while portraying themselves as the protectors of the “rights and liberties” of the common men against a “Jacobite Faction.” The *Gazette* responded in kind, accusing the “Morrisites,” as they became known, of finding their support among the “unthinking masses” who “rak’d out of Bawdy-Houses and Kennels,” and portraying itself as the voice of the rightful authorities and the protectors of traditional political and social order. At the same time, Zenger and Bradford—whose name appeared on their respective papers, after all—found themselves engaged in a petty exchange of poorly-veiled insults, in which the integrity and objectivity of both printers were questioned.¹⁰⁵ This exchange

the *Independent Whig* and *Cato’s Letters*. The latter, in particular, had a tremendous impact on the American colonists in the lead-up to the Revolution. They will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁰³ Nord, *Communities of Journalism*..., p. 65; see also Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible*..., 140-146.

¹⁰⁴ Zenger’s *Journal* was not, indeed, the “first political independent” American newspaper, as it has sometimes been called, but rather the “first political party paper.” See Vincent Buranelli’s introduction in Vincent Buranelli (ed.) *The Trial of Peter Zenger*: New York, New York University Press. 1957, 24, and David Paul Nord’s chapter on the Zenger trial in Nord, *Communities of Journalism*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ From 1733 to 1736, hardly an edition of Bradford’s *Gazette* and Zenger’s *Journal* were free from this kind of attacks. See, for instance, *The New-York Gazette*, From January 28 to Monday February 4th, 1733; From June 18 to Monday June 25, 1733; From December 31, to Monday January 7, 1733-34; From Monday September 6 to September 13, 1736; From Monday September 20 to September 27, 1736, and *The New-York Weekly Journal*, January 7, 1733; February 4, 1733; March 24th, 1734; December 9th, 1734; March 29th, 1736. It is worth noting, though, that Bradford always insisted that his press remained open to all, and that he had never really lent his press to a particular party. He had used the same argument during the Keithian controversy. In *The Heresy and Hatred*, for instance, he had added a “Printer’s Advertisement”, in which he wrote: “That notwithstanding the various Reports spread concerning my refusing to Print for those that are George Keith’s Opposers, These are to signifie, that if John Delavall or any other of his Brethern (sic) have any thing to print, I am most willing to do it for the, not that I want to beg their work, I need it not, but to leave them without Excuse, that if they be in any way wronged or falsly charged by what is published in print to the World, they may have equal priviledge to Vindicate themselves as Publickly.” George Keith, *The Heresy and Hatred that was Falsely Charged upon the Innocent, Justly Returned upon the Guilty*. Philadelphia, Printed by William Bradford. 1693, 23. Of course, we know that in both occasions, Bradford’s press was *not* open to all parties.

was the means through which newspaper readers formed and discussed their own ideas regarding freedom of the press and the printers' trade. Ironically, it was also the means through which Zenger and Bradford were led to express editorial positions dictated by their respective parties, thus straying from their so-called neutrality.¹⁰⁶

By the month of November, 1734, Cosby found that he had had enough of seeing his authority and that of his printer undermined. He decided to silence Zenger's paper by force. He had Zenger arrested under charges of publishing seditious libels, and sent to prison, where he remained for more than seven months.¹⁰⁷ The masterminds behind the controversy, Morris and Alexander, immediately began planning the printer's defence. At first, they intended to act as his counsel in court, but they were disbarred by Cosby, and had to find an alternative. In what was probably their shrewdest move in the whole affair, they enlisted the help of the ageing but very popular Andrew Hamilton of Philadelphia. It is largely to the latter's legal genius and sense of opportunity that Zenger owed both his liberty and his eventual legacy.

Zenger's trial began in August 1735. The trial was public, and attended daily by dozens of curious New-Yorkers. News from the trial was also being reported in private correspondences and in publications.¹⁰⁸ It was the first time in American history that a trial caught so much attention. No doubt aware of the unprecedented public coverage of the affair, Hamilton knew he had to play his cards right if he wanted to rally public opinion. This is why he chose to present Zenger as a martyr to the "cause of liberty."¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, unlike in the Bradford trial, Hamilton did not dispute the fact that Zenger had published the documents in question. This is also why he

Indeed, it seems that his claims of keeping an "open press" were merely a way of covering his tracks. Groundless as these claims were, they allowed him to present himself as neutral when the need arose.

¹⁰⁶ James N. Green, "English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2007, 255.

¹⁰⁷ Nord, *Communities of Journalism...*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ See Gregg Ivers, *American Constitutional Law: Power and Politics, Volume 2*. Harcourt, Houghton Mifflin Co. 2001, 167; Allison Olson, "The Zenger Case Revisited: Satire, Sedition and Political Debate in Eighteenth-Century America", *Early American Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2000), 223-245.

¹⁰⁹ See James Alexander, *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger*. New York, Printed by John Peter Zenger. 1736. This first account of the trial has been reproduced in Livingston Rutherford, *John Peter Zenger, His Press, His Trial, and a Bibliography of Zenger Imprints. Also a Reprint of the First Edition of the Trial*. New York, Dodd, Mead & Company. 1904, and in Stanley Katz (ed.) *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger, Printer of the New-York Weekly Journal*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1972 [1963].

built an argument that went against the common understanding of the notion of “seditious libel” as defined in the English jurisprudence. When told by Chief Justice James DeLancey that the jury would judge whether the words printed by Zenger were “scandalous or ironical, [tended] to the breach of the peace, or [were] seditious,” Hamilton approved, and said he was “glad to find the Court of this opinion.” However, he added that it followed that the twelve members of the jury had to decide not only the facts of publication, but also judge whether the “words in the Information” were actually “scandalous, that is to say false.” In other words, as long as the words printed by Zenger were true, they could be neither scandalous nor seditious, and therefore did not qualify as libel. DeLancey refused to play Hamilton’s game, which after all constituted a major encroachment of English legal practice. Hamilton ignored the judge’s ruling and appealed directly to the members of the jury.¹¹⁰ The latter, quite unable to prove that the words printed by Zenger were not true, decided on a verdict of “not guilty,” which was welcomed by repeated cries of “huzzas.” The young printer was then freed, and a celebration was held at the Morrisites’ headquarters, the Black Horse Tavern, to honor Hamilton and “celebrate the vindication of liberty in America.”¹¹¹

In order to really understand the impact of the Zenger trial on the speech of freedom, it is worth retracing the history of the freedom of speech and press in the English Atlantic world. The licensing and censorship laws of the 17th century ended in England in 1695, as part of the post-Glorious Revolution transformations.¹¹² This year is therefore often seen as the beginning of

¹¹⁰ Hamilton was thus encroaching on the common law practice. Traditionally, in criminal cases of seditious libel, the jury’s only task was to decide on the fact of publication. The judge only could decide on the libelous nature of a document, if he was inclined to do so. This meant that Hamilton valued the jury’s voice more than the judge’s. In other words, he believed in the opinion of a body of reasonable men more than in the opinion of a single man placed in a position of power. This was certainly in keeping with his intellectual background, and with the rest of his defense. See James Ostrowski, “The Rise and Fall of Jury Nullification”, *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2001), 89-115. See also the editor’s introduction in Paul Finkelman (ed.) *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger, with Related Documents*. New York, Brandywine Press. 1997.

¹¹¹ According to Zenger’s *Journal*, “Above forty of the Citizens entertained Mr. Hamilton at the black Horse that Day at Dinner, to express their Acknowledgment of his Generosity on this Occasion, and at his Departure next Day he was saluted with the great guns of several Ships in the Harbour, as a publick Testimony of the glorious Defense he made in the Cause of Liberty in this Province.” See Livingston Rutherford, *John Peter Zenger: His Press, His Trial and A Bibliography of Zenger Imprints*. New York, Dodd, Meade & Company. 1904, 125-126; Nord, *Communities...*, 66.

¹¹² The 17th century, mostly because of the absolutist views of the Stuart monarchy, had seen the hardening of the royal government’s attitude toward press freedom. The Civil War had, however, forced the slackening of the government’s means of control. This brief period of press freedom, albeit followed by a return to strict licensing and censorship laws during the Protectorate and the Restoration periods, was never forgotten. By the time William and Mary were “given” the throne by Parliament, public opinion was resolutely opposed to these forms of pre-publication

freedom of speech and press in the British realm. But the *Licensing Act* of 1695 only put an end to “prior restraints”; it had no incidence on post-publication forms of control. In other words, English authors and printers, throughout the 18th century, could print and publish without restraints. But if they did not exert some degree of self-censorship, there were likely to face accusations of “seditious libel” and to be brought before a court of justice. The Common Law notion of seditious libel was given its most famous definition by English jurist William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries* described libel as “malicious defamations of any person, and especially a magistrate, made public by either printing, writing, signs, or pictures, in order to provoke him to wrath or expose him to public hatred, contempt, and ridicule.” Blackstone insisted that in instances where “blasphemous, immoral, treasonable, schismatical, seditious, or scandalous libels” were punished by the English law, “the liberty of the press, properly understood, [was] by no means infringed or violated.” Indeed, freedom of the press merely consisted in “laying no previous restraints upon publications, and not in freedom from censure for criminal matter when published.” For most of the 18th century, therefore, England prided itself to have the world’s freest press on the ground that it was subjected to no prior restraints—not that it was allowed to run totally free.¹¹³

The situation was slightly different in the colonies, where the 1695 Licensing Act had no legal reach, and where official licensing and censorship endured well into the 18th century.¹¹⁴ For a long time, these measures were no great source of concern. Indeed, for most of the 17th century, the output of the colonial presses was not significant enough to spark an actual reflection on the subject. But from the 1680s onward, as the American printing trade and print culture became more dynamic, the subject of press freedom began to occupy colonial minds. As shown by William Bradford’s example, though, the discourse on press freedom remained largely unfocused at least until the early decades of the 18th century. It would take the transformations of the 1720s

controls. And since the new monarchs owed their crowns to Parliament, who was meant to represent the voices of the people, they were in no position to emulate the previous monarchs. Granting freedom of speech and press would be one of the royal couple’s greatest compromises. The classic account on this topic is Frederick S. Siebert’s slightly dated *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476-1776: The Rise and Decline of Government Controls*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press. 1952. See also Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Uniformed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 1996; John P. Feather, “From Censorship to Copyright: Aspects of the Government’s Role in the English Book Trade, 1695-1775,” in Kenneth E. Carpenter (ed.) *Books and Society in History. Papers of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Rare Books and Manuscripts Preconference, 1695-1775. 24-28 June, 1980. Boston, Massachusetts*. New York and London, R. R. Bowker Company. 1983, 173-198.

¹¹³ See William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1765-1769. For the article on libels, see Book 4: Of Public Wrongs, Chapter 11, “Of Offenses Against the Public Peace”.

¹¹⁴ Clark, *The Public Prints...*, 1-2.

and the strengthening of of the discourse on the “open press” to make of a Blackstonian notion of press freedom an actual topic of public debate.¹¹⁵ It was only then that the colonies started to abandon their laws on prior restraints and to fall back on seditious libel as a measure of control. It was also then that the American colonies’ print and political cultures began to merge, and to take the traits of their metropolitan counterparts.¹¹⁶ No single event better illustrate how the discourse on press freedom was elaborated during the colonial period than the Zenger controversy.

The Zenger trial no doubt had far-reaching consequences on the discourse of press freedom. The exact nature and incidence of these consequences is, however, subtle. On the whole, Hamilton did not stray too far from the defence elaborated some forty years earlier by William Bradford. But there were a few major differences between the Bradford trial and the Zenger trial, which can mostly be explained in terms of the shift of the legal context both in England and in the colonies. In both cases, the jury was requested to consider “the fact and the law.” But while Bradford probably did lend some value to the principles he defended, he did not elaborate a cohesive and studied concept of press freedom. Hamilton, building on decades of jurisprudence and political theory, did. Without delving into the ins and outs of this concept, it is necessary to insist upon the significance of the “principle of truth.” According to a Blackstonian understanding of the common law, in cases of seditious libel, it was “immaterial” whether the nature of the libel in question was true or false. Indeed, it was “the provocation, and not the

¹¹⁵ William Bradford himself remained, through his career, a stout defender of the “open press”, if only in theory. But, as we have seen, he never articulated his theory of the “open press” in a cohesive statement. It was Benjamin Franklin, in his 1731 “Apology for printers”, who first did. He wrote 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; and that when Truth and Error have fair Play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter: Hence they cheerfully serve all contending Writers that pay them well, without regarding on which side they are of the Question in Dispute.” It was therefore “unreasonable to imagine Printers approve of every thing they print, and to censure them on any particular thing accordingly.” Nevertheless, he noted that printers were censors of their own work, since they “[did] continually discourage the Printing of great Numbers of bad things, and stifle them in the Birth.” See *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 10, 1731. Bradford and Franklin were both borrowing from a notion first put forth by John Milton in his 1644 *Areopagitica*. The Miltonian ideal of the “open press” rested upon the belief that in some kind of “marketplace of ideas” (as John Stuart Mill would later put it), reasonable men were always able to tell the good from the bad. Milton’s writings were tremendously popular in the late 17th century, and remained popular during the entire 18th century. His ideas would have found a major echo in the political writings of the 1740s and 50s, as we will see in the following chapter. See Isaac M. Morehouse, “*Areopagitica*: Milton’s Influence on Classical and Modern Political and Economic Thought”, *Libertarian Papers*, Vol. 1, No. 38 (2009), 1-14.

¹¹⁶ The Anglicization and the simultaneous creolization of the American printing trade and print and political cultures will be addressed more thoroughly in the following chapter. As we will see, these processes had a major impact on colonial printers and reader in the decades leading up to the Revolution.

falsity,” which was to be punished.¹¹⁷ But as Hamilton told the jury, it was truth that “ought to govern the whole affair of libels,” for it was “truth alone” that could “excuse or justify any man for complaining of a bad administration.” What Hamilton failed to mention was that truth was an essentially elusive concept, which verged on opinion rather than fact. But did this omission mean, as Leonard Levy has claimed, that the argument was “shallow” and unusable? In many respects, it did not—on the contrary. Levy failed to take into account not only the contemporaries’ faith in the “authority of truth”, but also the political implications of Hamilton’s statement.¹¹⁸ These political implications are better understood in light of the avalanche of political essays that made their way into Zenger’s Journal, courtesy of Morris and Alexander. Among these texts, none featured more prominently nor were more influential than the radical Whigs Trenchard and Gordon’s “Cato’s Letters”. The latter appeared in London newspapers from 1720 to 1723, and were soon widely reprinted, referred to, and imitated in the colonies.¹¹⁹ In his letters, “Cato” defended no less than a “philosophy of liberty that had at its core the concept of freedom of expression.”¹²⁰ He argued that unless their authority was limited, all governments were bound to become corrupt and tyrannical, and that the only way to prevent such a thing was to allow individuals to freely criticize the powers in place. What Hamilton advocated was an extension of this principle. As long they were true, controversial writings could not be construed—or “understood”—as libellous, even if they consisted in virulent attacks on figures of authorities. This aspect of Hamilton’s argument certainly bore fruits in the mid- and long-term. In her study of satire, Allison Olson has found that the Zenger trial “made possible the dynamic growth of political expression in the colonies by making it relatively safe for American writers to publish political humour—particularly satire—critical of men in office.”¹²¹ And what was true of satirical sketches was also true of more straightforward pamphlets and essays. Hamilton’s defense of

¹¹⁷ The English common law on seditious libels did differentiate between criminal and civil actions. In the former, truth really was “immaterial”; in the latter, a libel had to at least appear to be “false as well as scandalous.” In practice, however, the truth or falseness of a libel was rarely taken into account. All that mattered was the breach of the peace and the identity of the authors and publishers of the libel in question.

¹¹⁸ On the “authority of truth”, see Nord, *Communities of Journalism...*, 68-69 and Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers...*, 34. Pasley wrote of a “naïve Enlightenment faith in the power of ‘correct’ information to change minds and shape events in the direction of progress.” Hamilton did acknowledge that “A man cannot see with another’s eye, nor hear with another’s ear; no more can a man conclude or infer the thing by another’s understanding or reasoning”. In other words, no single individual could pretend to behold the truth. However, it was widely believed in Hamilton’s time that an assembly of reasonable men should be capable of discerning the truth in a given situation.

¹¹⁹ See Heather E. Barry, *A ‘Dress Rehearsal’ for Revolution. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s Works in Eighteenth-Century British America*. Lanham, Md.; University Press of America. 2007.

¹²⁰ Nord, *Communities of Journalism...*, 70.

¹²¹ Allison Olson, “The Zenger Case Revisited...,” 223.

Zenger thus had a major impact on the printing trade and the print and political cultures of the American colonies, for it decisively linked freedom of the press to the cause of political liberty. According to historian Michael Warner, the Zenger trial is important because it gave the colonies a discourse on press freedom that was more republican, in nature, than the Blackstonian discourse that prevailed in England at that time. The colonial discourse on press freedom, indeed, identified the politically-inclined newspaper readers as the true judges of the government officials' vices and virtues. This discourse thus doubled as an "antidynastic theory of legitimacy," and inaugurated a long tradition of "colonial resistance to administrative power."¹²² It could thus be argued that the Zenger controversy shaped the discourse on press freedom that justified not only the revolutionary generation's massive recourse to the press as a political instrument, but also its attacks on the British Crown.¹²³

Hamilton's brilliant defence would not have had such a career if the Zenger controversy had not benefitted from so much publicity and from a "legacy in print." This was another major difference between the two trials. In Bradford's case, public opinion played no part in the jury's decision-making process. In Zenger's case, on the contrary, the whole affair was resolutely public from its inception. What had started as a newspaper war had evolved into a highly publicised court case and ended with a thriving "legacy in print." This legacy was not the work of Zenger himself, but of James Alexander, the man behind the curtain. Alexander penned his own account of the trial, and wasted no time in making it public. A first edition was printed by Zenger himself in 1736.¹²⁴ It was soon circulated and reprinted across the colonies, and even across the Atlantic. Everywhere, it became an automatic best-seller, so much so that when the Revolution came, Zenger's ghost was revived and his legacy appropriated to promote the colonists' cause.¹²⁵

¹²² Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic...*, 51. See also Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2007, 45-46.

¹²³ Obviously, Hamilton's defense in the Zenger trial was not the only reason for the appropriation of the press by the revolutionary generation or for the nature of its attack upon the British government. And yet, as Jeffrey Pasley has noted, the Zenger case set a precedent insofar as it was the first instance "in which the American gentry resorted to newspapers when they had political differences with the powers that were". Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers...*, 31.

¹²⁴ See Vincent Buranelli, "Peter Zenger's Editor", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (Summer 1955), 174-8.

¹²⁵ There had already been some political criticism in the colonies before the Zenger trial, of course, and even by printers. Benjamin Harris is the first example that comes to mind. In some ways, even William Bradford himself ventured into political criticism in the 1690s. The tone had become much more assertive, though, in the 1720s and 1730s. Outside the middle colonies, James Franklin and his younger brother Benjamin became famous for criticizing

3. From a Bradford to another

The early 1740s marked the beginning of a new phase in the Bradford's family history. The eldest Bradford retired in 1742, at the venerable age of 80. The same year, Andrew Bradford died. His printing business was taken over by his wife Cornelia, but it soon expired. Cornelia, it seems, did not have her husband's passion—or patience—for business. The family's legacy was then carried forward by William Bradford III. The grandson of the “pioneer printer of the middle colonies” and the nephew and apprentice of the most powerful printer of Philadelphia, the young Bradford would bring a breath of fresh air into the family business. He would carry the Bradford legacy through the colonial wars of the 1740s and 50s and into the American Revolution. Celebrated for his commercial flair and his social standing, Bradford would become particularly known for his unwavering commitment to liberty.

William Bradford III would accomplish all of this by building on the heritage of the early 18th century: a well-defined concept of press freedom that increasingly linked the print and political cultures of the colonies with printers. In many regards, the printers of the 1730s were subjected to the same constraints as their counterparts from the earlier decades. Printing and publishing were still very onerous enterprises, and the readership was still relatively limited. Printers, moreover, were still very much identified with the artisans and the working classes, rather than with the intellectual and commercial elites of the middle colonies. And yet, the Zenger case has shown that printers could play the political game, if only in periods of crisis and if only by lending their presses to a party or a cause. By the same token, the Zenger controversy produced a notion of press freedom that was necessarily linked to the participation of newspaper and pamphlet readers in public debates.

Boston's political establishment. In Philadelphia, Andrew Bradford got himself into trouble by criticizing the Quakers. See Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2006, 41.

Chapter two: Revolutionary printers and the quest for political liberty

1. Printers and liberty on the eve of Revolution

a. William Bradford III: upholding the family's legacy

William Bradford III was born in Hanover Square, New York, on January 19th, 1719. His father, William Jr., was of a sickly disposition. He was sent to sea for some time in his youth, and upon his return to shore chose not to become a printer like his father and his brother Andrew. He became a pewterer instead, and a rather successful one if contemporary accounts are to be believed. But the family tradition had to be upheld for a third generation. So it was that the youngest Bradford was left in the care of the able but ageing hands of his own father, the eldest William Bradford.¹²⁶ The latter looked after his grandson until he reached the age of 13, and then sent him to be apprenticed to his uncle Andrew in Philadelphia. By 1740, Bradford III had completed his apprenticeship. A year later he went to England in order to hone his printing skills, gather the finest types and press, and above all rekindle his ties with his grandmother's printing family, the Sowles, and make new acquaintances among the biggest names in the bookselling, publishing, and printing industries of London.¹²⁷ Upon his arrival in England, he was introduced to Samuel Richardson, bookseller and famed novelist; Edward Cave, founder of the Gentleman's Magazine; Andrew Millar, the publisher of Thomson, Fielding, and Hume; the latter's apprentice Thomas Cadell, who would also become a respected bookseller and publisher; and Charles Rivington and his sons John and James, all three successful booksellers and publishers.¹²⁸ Bradford would always strive to maintain a strong relation with these men, and with others he

¹²⁶ Bradford Jr.'s other son, Cornelius, followed in his father's footsteps, but seems to have also been involved in a variety of commercial ventures, including the book and newspaper trade. He is particularly known for his active contribution to the Sons of Liberty during the Revolution. Traveling back and forth between New York and Philadelphia, and working in close relation with his cousin William Bradford III, he helped ensure the circulation of news between the Sons of the two towns. For genealogical details on the Bradfords, see Samuel S. Purple, *Genealogical Memoirs of William Bradford, the Printer*. New York, Privately Printed. 1873.

¹²⁷ According to Wallace, "Bradford's purpose was to establish himself as a Publisher of Books and a Bookseller as much as or more than a Printer and the Publisher of a Newspaper." This assertion certainly has a ring of truth to it, inasmuch as Bradford was well aware that he had a lot more to gain by diversifying his activities than by restricting them. He was also no doubt aware of the increasing demand for English books in the colonies. Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 11.

¹²⁸ Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 12.

met in the course of his trip to England. These overseas acquaintances, kept alive by a lively correspondence, gave Bradford an advantage over his competitors. They allowed him to take a dynamic place within the transatlantic networks of information and news exchanges, and to be the first to receive the latest books and pamphlets from London.

Bradford's return to Philadelphia, in 1742, coincided with his uncle's death and his grandfather's retirement from business. Armed with brand new printing equipment, and with a long list of commercial and literary contacts, he was more than ready, at the age of 23, to perpetuate the family's legacy and to leave his mark on the colonies' printing trade. He wasted no time to get his business running. In an advertisement printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of July 8th, he announced that he had "set up a new printing-office in the house that Mr. Andrew Bradford formerly lived in, in Second Street." This printing office doubled as a bookstore, where Bradford sold the latest books, pamphlets, and broadsides imported from England, as well as various stationery articles, including sealing wax, wafers, ink, and quills, but also brass and leather ink-pots, "writing-paper of sundry sorts," pocket-books, blank-books, dividers, Gunter's scales, and parchment.¹²⁹ Thus nicely settled, Bradford could set upon the task of founding a family of his own. He married his childhood sweetheart, Rachel Budd, on August 15th. Coming from one of New Jersey's prominent merchant families, Rachel brought with her property, a nice dowry and a vast contact network. This promise of financial stability and these added contacts were all that Bradford needed to take his business to the next step. Like most young printers of the time, his ambition was to become a newspaper publisher.¹³⁰ Colonial newspapers were a source of regular income and of heightened visibility, but they were also uncertain enterprises. Most of the weekly or biweekly publications founded in the late colonial period were discontinued after only a few months, lacking either labor or readership. Thanks to Bradford's experience, talent, and valuable contacts in the middle colonies' merchant circles, the *Pennsylvania Journal*, or *Weekly Advertiser*, founded on December 2nd, 1742, lacked neither. On the contrary: the *Journal* was an immediate success, and would remain so for more than fifty years.

¹²⁹ See the card entitled "Books Sold by WILLIAM BRADFORD, At the sign of THE BIBLE in Second Street, Many of which are to be sold by Wholesale, with good allowance to those that sell again" in Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 16.

¹³⁰ On colonial printers' preference for newspapers, see David A. Copeland's introduction in David A. Copeland (ed.) *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group. 2000, vii-xvii; Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints...*, 165-166; 171-172.

In less than a year, Bradford had established himself as one of Philadelphia's most successful printers, booksellers, and newspaper publishers. He was happily married to a well-connected wife and was about to produce no less than nine children, six of whom would reach adulthood and two of whom would become involved in the printing trade. In the following years, he would expand his professional activities even further and try his hand in the marine insurance and in the magazine editing businesses.¹³¹ But his most important commercial endeavor was probably the London Coffee House.¹³² Founded in 1754 at the request of the merchant community of Philadelphia, it was destined to become the focus of the American metropolis's commercial and public life. Bradford's coffeehouse occupied a large three-storey building on the corner of Front and Market Street, where the printer also relocated his printing office and his bookstore. The location was highly strategic. For one thing, it allowed Bradford to publicize his other activities. Since he conducted his printing and importing activities just across the street, he could use the Coffee House as a sort of advertising and meeting space for his clients.¹³³ For another, it allowed him to reach a broad spectrum of the population. Indeed, the Coffee House lay at the intersection of Philadelphia's commercial hub and of its finest residential district, known as Society Hill. It thus catered not only to local and foreign merchants, traders, and ship captains, but also to Philadelphia's landed and moneyed gentry.¹³⁴ In no time, the London Coffee House

¹³¹ Bradford's correspondence and account books show that he was involved in the insurance business as early as the late 1740s. He seems to have been rather successful, since he founded the Philadelphia Insurance Co. in 1762, in partnership with John Kidd. As for his magazine editing endeavors, they consisted in the *American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies*, founded in 1757. The enterprise seems to have been popular at the time of its inception. It had a long list of subscribers, including members of the social elite like George Washington. But in the end, the *Magazine* was only issued once. The reasons for its failure are unclear. Most likely, Bradford was not a great magazine editor, however successful his newspaper was. See Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 64-65. A receipt for 12d signed by George Washington can be found in the Bradford Family Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

¹³² The London Coffee House was a joint commercial venture, with Bradford acting as the merchants' agent. He printed this ad in the *Journal* on April 11th, 1754: "Subscribers to a public coffee house are invited to meet at the Courthouse on Friday, the 19th instant, at 3 o'clock, to choose trustees agreeably to the plan of subscription." See William H. Ukers, *All About Coffee*. New York, The Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Company. 1922, 128-130.

¹³³ Bradford had obviously assessed the needs of his fellow Philadelphians, and the potential of the Coffee House as a center of public life, wisely. Over the following decades, all of the Bradford family's professional and personal correspondence would be directed to "The Old Coffee House," to "The London Coffee House," or simply to the "Coffee House." It was also to the London Coffee House that newspaper subscribers, advertisers, buyers and sellers would direct their correspondence and conduct their business. See, in particular, the correspondence of William Thomas Bradford in The Bradford Family Papers, coll. 1676, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹³⁴ The Coffee Houses' books are a good indicator of Bradford's patrons' diverse social backgrounds. While he catered to the likes of Thomas Willing and Samuel Powell, who occupied the very top of Philadelphia's social and financial ladder, he also welcomed doctors, lawyers, and other members of the middling class, as well as shopkeepers and artisans. The commercial vocation of the establishment, however, set it apart from the city's numerous taverns. The Coffee House was open to all, but frequented mostly by men who were looking for a "polite" form of sociability,

became a merchants' exchange where public auctions of all kinds took place, and a forum where local and international news were being read, discussed, and debated.¹³⁵ To borrow Thompson Westcott's phrase, Bradford's establishment became "the head-quarters of life and action, the pulsating heart of excitement, [and] enterprise" of Philadelphia.¹³⁶

These developments were taking place against the background of a series of imperial and inter-colonial wars. Starting with the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1739, and ending with the Treaty of Paris of 1763, these wars resulted in a surge of patriotism both in Britain and in the American colonies. William Bradford was, from the start, heavily invested in these wars. As early as 1747, he was appointed Lieutenant of the Philadelphia Associators, Philadelphia's first militia company. Ten years later, in the midst of the French and Indian Wars, he was promoted to the rank of captain. But it was perhaps in his capacities as a printer, a bookseller and a publisher that Bradford contributed the most to the British cause. From the start, indeed, the *Journal* was an organ of British patriotism, proudly sporting the royal coat of arms on its headline and boasting the virtues of the British.¹³⁷ And so was Bradford's Coffee House, which became a "center of loyalty and devotion to the crown."¹³⁸ The choice of "London" in the institution's name, and the presence of its walls of the King's portrait, the Royals Arms, and the Arms of London, suggest that Bradford intended to mold his coffeehouse after the coffeehouses of London, and thus to transform it into an outpost of empire.¹³⁹

and who were seeking commercial opportunities and political news. The historiography on American coffeehouses is unfortunately lacking. There are, however, a number of great studies on taverns and public houses in general. See Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. 1999; Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. Vintage Books, 1993; David Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2002. Thompson and Conroy, in particular, have insisted on the taverns' role as forums for the expression of popular sentiments. As such, they contributed to the emergence of a republican discourse in opposition to the official discourse of the civil and religious authorities.

¹³⁵ From the beginning, the colonial coffeehouses were intricately connected to the colonial and Atlantic commercial networks. A similar trend was observable in England, where Lloyd's Coffee House, for instance, became one of London's most important centers of commerce before converting its activities to business insurance and moving into the Royal Exchange in 1774. Bradford's Coffee House did not exactly follow in Lloyd's footsteps, but it did anticipate the creation of the Philadelphia Stock Exchange.

¹³⁶ Thompson Westcott, *The Historic Mansions and Buildings of Philadelphia: With Some Notice of Their Owners and Occupants*. Philadelphia, Porter & Coates. 1877, 75.

¹³⁷ See J. H. Shennan, "The Rise of Patriotism in 18th-Century Europe," *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (1991), 689-710.

¹³⁸ Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 53.

¹³⁹ Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 53, 55-56. See also Alice Morse Earle, *Stage-Coach and Tavern Days*. New York, Macmillan. 2007 [1900].

The coming of the Revolution, in the mid-1760s, would change everything. Bradford would remain as patriotic as ever, but this time he would defend the colonies' cause in their conflict against the British Empire. He would not only take up arms for the Patriots, but he would also turn his newspaper and his coffeehouse into instruments of mobilization for the Patriots' cause.

Bradford's career brings attention to an important transition in the American printing trade and print culture. When Bradford started printing in the early 1740s, printers occupied "a unique and contradictory niche in American society," to borrow Jeffrey Pasley's phrase.¹⁴⁰ While they provided an indispensable service to their communities' political and intellectual lives, and while printing and publishing had "cerebral and prestigious aspects," printers were still relegated to the ranks of common craftsmen in the eyes of their contemporaries. As evidenced in the Keithian and the Zenger controversies, they could influence public opinion, and therefore take stances in political debates. But their participation in these debates was limited by the prevailing discourse on press freedom, according to which they should at all times keep their presses open to all parties and favor none. The situation changed drastically in the course of the Revolution. As the gap grew between Britain and the colonies, and between the Patriots and the Loyalists, printers abandoned their political neutrality. Instead, they turned their presses into partisan organs, and set upon the task of spreading the speech of freedom, be it the Patriots' or the Loyalists'. The era of the freedom of speech thus ended just as the era of the speech of freedom began, as Bradford's career highlights.

b. Integrating the English Atlantic world

Over the past decades, historians have mapped the contours of the "Anglicisation" the British colonies went through in the first half of the 18th century. John Murrin, T.H. Breen and Richard Bushman, among others, have argued that the world in which the American Revolution happened was not starkly different from metropolitan Britain.¹⁴¹ To the contrary: on the eve of

¹⁴⁰ Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers...*, 24.

¹⁴¹ John M. Murrin, "Anglicizing an American Colony: The Transformation of Provincial Massachusetts," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University. 1996); T. H. Breen, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America,

Revolution, the colonies were closer and more similar to the metropolis than ever before. The process of Anglicisation had begun in the late 17th century when, as a result of both royal initiative and colonial enterprise, transatlantic crossings and exchanges accelerated and commercial, social, and cultural networks were formed. Through these networks, colonists began emulating their metropolitan counterparts in every aspect of life. By the 1750s, British North American colonists ate and drank like Englishmen, dressed like Englishmen, and bought the same kind of furniture and the same kind of houses as Englishmen.¹⁴² Most importantly, like their overseas brethren, they took pride in being Englishmen, and glorified in the superiority of English institutions. This meant that they were more royalist than ever, as evidenced in the multiplication of regal symbols displayed in newspapers or in public institutions like the London Coffee House. It also meant that they were increasingly attached to the “speech of freedom” that was quickly spreading in the English public prints and transforming Britain’s political culture.

The colonies’ Anglicization, paradoxically, stimulated their simultaneous Americanisation. The process of Anglicisation, as Colin Kidd put it, “[eroded] the strong particularistic identities of the seventeenth-century colonies,” and had the “ironic side effect” of provoking their unification.¹⁴³ This unification manifested itself in the colonies’ heightened mobility across the American territory, and in the intensification of trans-colonial communications. It also resulted in the development, across the colonies, of common ways and manners, and common beliefs and expectations regarding the Empire and America’s place within it. Another aspect of the colonies’ Americanisation lay in their appropriation of English ways and manners. The transmission of metropolitan models to colonial settings, as many historians have shown, is never entirely unmediated. Although they thought they were reproducing living and thinking like Englishmen, the colonists of the 18th century were actually living and thinking like North American

1690-1776,” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct. 1986), 467-499; -----, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2004; Bushman, *The Refinement of America...* (1992). See also Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England colonies, 1675-1715*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press. 1981.

¹⁴² On the colonies’ material culture, see Breen, “An Empire of Goods...” (1986) and Bushman, *The Refinement of America...* (1992). For interesting insights on gender and material culture in the English-speaking Atlantic world, see John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*. New Haven, The Yale Center for British Art. 2006.

¹⁴³ Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800*. Cambridge, The Cambridge University Press. 2004, 263. See also Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-1760*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 1997.

Englishmen.¹⁴⁴ On the eve of Revolution, the colonies' high level of Anglicisation and Americanisation would contribute not only to shape the Patriots' rhetoric, but also to shape the means of transmission of this rhetoric—namely, print.

The simultaneous Anglicisation and Americanisation of the colonies both relied heavily on the production and the circulation of print. Indeed, the very act of setting up printing presses in the colonies was at once a sign and a factor of their Anglicisation, as was the development of a newspaper press in the 1720s.¹⁴⁵ Printers who, like Benjamin Franklin and William Bradford, imported and printed enormous amounts of British texts and reproduced British articles in their newspapers were, in a way, informal agents of the Empire.

At the same time, the circulation of information and the holding of public debates in newspapers resulted both from and contributed to the unification of the colonies, and to the development of an American identity. An early evidence of this can be found in Andrew Bradford's choice of a title for his newspaper: the *American Weekly Mercury*, founded in 1719. With this name, Bradford was signalling his desire to sell his paper across the colonies. But he was also acknowledging the existence, and his belonging to, an "American" society and territory. William Bradford III echoed his uncle's enterprise when he founded the *American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies* in 1757. Founded in the midst of the French and Indian War, and at the height of the colonists' sense of British patriotism, this publishing venture is telling of the state of the late colonial printing trade. On the one hand, the nature of the magazine—literary, gentlemanly, and essentially European—made of it an element if not an instrument of

¹⁴⁴ See Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center. Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788*. Athens, University of Georgia Press. 1987. Also excellent are Shannon Lee Dawdy's *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. 2009, and Frederic Cooper and Ann Stoler's introduction to *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press. 1997, 1-56. On the "negotiated" nature of early modern empires, see Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (eds.) *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*. New York, Routledge. 2002; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2000; and Kathleen Wilson, "Introduction: Histories, Empire, Modernities," in Kathleen Wilson (ed.) *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*. New York, Cambridge University Press. 2004, 1-28.

¹⁴⁵ See Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740. An Exploration of Communication and Community*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1986, 265-271.

Englishness.¹⁴⁶ But on the other hand, its title also suggests that Bradford had the ambition of creating a properly American publication adapted from an English model.

This level of Americanisation in the world of colonial print was brought about by two decisive events of the late colonial period. The first of these events was English preacher George Whitefield's series of tours in the colonies, begun in 1739 and continued throughout the 1740s. For nearly a decade, Whitefield toured the colonies and preached the evangelical faith in front of highly receptive crowds. He combined great oratory skills with an individualistic and emotional message that found a fertile ground among those who sought to escape the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Anglican Church. Nobody understood the potential of Whitefield-related printed material more than Whitefield himself. Just as George Keith had realized that print was a much more powerful weapon than manuscript texts, Whitefield had realized that printed sermons had a deeper and more lasting impact than the merely spoken sermons of his adversaries. But others, foremost among which were the increasingly numerous printers and booksellers of the colonies, also sought to profit from Whitefield's popularity. Indeed, to colonial printers, the young preacher was a "hot commodity representing profits."¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Franklin took the lead, but others—including Andrew and William Bradford—soon caught up with him.¹⁴⁸ In the course of his first five active years, and although not an Evangelist himself, the youngest Bradford imported and printed important quantities of books and pamphlets that were written by or about Whitefield. He also opened kept the pages of the *Journal* wide open to Whitefield and his supporters. He covered the preacher's second tour (1744-48) extensively: indeed, more than half of the issues of the *Journal* during that period contained some Whitefield-related material.¹⁴⁹ But Franklin and the Bradfords were only a few of the many printers who contributed to publicize Whitefield's words. In fact, from 1739 to 1745, Whitefield remained the most-widely printed and sold author of

¹⁴⁶ See Charles E. Clark, "Early American Journalism: News and Opinion in the Popular Press," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina Press. 2010, 360-362.

¹⁴⁷ Frank Lambert, *"Pedlar in Divinity": George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1994, 128.

¹⁴⁸ On Franklin and his strategy regarding the publication of Whitefield-related material, see Frank Lambert, "Subscribing for Profits and Piety: The Friendship of Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 50 (July 1993), 529-54; James N. Green, "Benjamin Franklin as Publisher and Bookseller," in J. A. Leo Lemay (ed.) *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin. A Bicentennial Perspective*. Neward, University of Delaware Press. 1993, 98-114.

¹⁴⁹ See Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial American Newspapers: A Shifting Story*. Lanham, Lexington Books. 2012. See also Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800. The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 2000.

British North America. This was the result not only of the preacher's popularity, but also of the intense public debates sparked by his controversial message and made possible by the colonies' dynamic newspaper press and public culture.

The second event was the series of inter-colonial wars that raged on the North American continent during the 25 years that preceded the Revolution, and that have already been alluded to. The War of Jenkins' Ear, begun in 1739, was the first act of the War of Austrian Succession, which would end in 1748 and be followed by the French and Indian Wars of the 1750s and 1760s. Since these wars opposed rival imperial powers with colonial interests, and since they were largely played out on the American continent, they captured the attention of colonial readers and printers alike. So far, colonial newspapers had mostly relayed European news. More often than not, printers imported newspapers from London and reproduced entire articles or bits of articles that were deemed interesting for colonial readers, occasionally adding snippets of local or regional news. Not only was this convenient for printers, who did not have to actively seek sources of information, it was also a good way to avoid accusations of sedition or libel. During the long period of international peace that lasted from 1713 to 1739, though, newspaper printers often had trouble finding interesting and fresh material to publish.¹⁵⁰ The Zenger controversy was a relief, at least in the middle colonies and parts of the South and New England. But it constituted local news. The wars of the 1740s and 1750s, like Whitefield's tour, were events of Atlantic and imperial dimensions. They happened at a time when the printing trade and the print and political cultures of the colonies had reached an unprecedented level. The time was ripe for captivating news—what better than a charismatic preacher and his controversial views, on top of a military conflict opposing major colonial empires? It was thus that colonial newspapers began reporting news of military operations, printing official declarations and proclamations, and engaging in discussions over the ins and outs of the various wars. And it was thus that colonial readers and printers became increasingly concerned with the New World, and conscious of their “americanness.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Because of the scarcity of interesting material to publish, printers often reprinted the same articles for weeks or even months at a time. Or they picked essays of a non-controversial nature.

¹⁵¹ This does not mean that colonists thought of themselves as “Americans” in the 1740s and 1750s. In fact, until late in the revolutionary conflict, they defended themselves not as rebels but as “true” Britons. As Michael Zuckerman put it, “the bid for independence by the American colonists did touch upon discontinuities in experience and in the understanding of experience. Though Americans were neither able nor willing to see themselves as a people with a

Progressively, over the decades that preceded the Revolution, the colonies and their presses thus became increasingly more British. By feeding their readership's demand for all things British, colonial printers like William Bradford not only contributed to the Anglicisation of the colonies' reading habits and nurturing their sense of patriotism, they were also diffusing ideas and discourses. These were, at first, essentially British. But, like everything else, they were soon affected by the colonies' Americanisation: they were appropriated by the colonists and transformed into American versions of the original ideas and discourses.

c. A "dress rehearsal" for Revolution: Cato and the speech of freedom

"Rule Britannia, rule the waves; Britons never will be slaves." These words were part of a poem written and put to music in 1740, and destined to become the British Empire's anthem. They convey not only a sense of the contemporaries' pride in Britain's maritime empire, but also a sense of their conviction that being British meant being free.¹⁵² They were free from restrictions on commerce and from religious persecutions. But in the 18th century, the highest expression of a people's freedom lay in the political realm: it meant freedom from political tyranny. By the mid-18th century, as Jill Lepore has suggested, political liberty had become "the most cherished blessing in the British realms."¹⁵³ The discourse on political liberty was born out of and kept alive by an ever expanding "literature of political opposition," to borrow Bernard Bailyn's phrase. Through the well-oiled communication networks of the empire, these numerous books, pamphlets, and essays made their way into the colonies, where they were met with an instant success. They were so successful, in fact, that they "furnished the substance of the ideology of the

cultural identity of their own, they faced a far different world than those they took for fellows across the Atlantic, and they faced it in very different ways." Zuckerman may have downplayed the colonists' sense of their local and regional identities, but overall his statement seems sound. Michael Zuckerman, "Identity in British America: Unease in Eden," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds.) *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1987, 115.

¹⁵² This does not mean that colonists thought of themselves as "Americans" in the 1740s and 1750s. In fact, until late in the revolutionary conflict, they defended themselves not as rebels but as "true" Britons.

¹⁵³ Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*. New York, Vintage Books. 2006, xi.

Revolution.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, and not without irony, by diffusing the British “speech of freedom,” they lay the ground for the development of a properly American concept of political liberty.

Scholars who have addressed the “ideological origins” of the Revolution have disagreed on the relative influence of certain key texts and authors. The major debate on this matter opposes a liberal tradition to a republican tradition. On the one hand, Isaac Kramnick, Jerome Huyler, Steven M. Dworetz, and Joyce Appleby, for instance, have argued that Locke’s liberalism had the greatest impact on the revolutionary leader’s thoughts.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, J.G.A. Pocock, Bernard Bailyn, Carolin Robbins, and Gordon Wood have emphasized the importance of the ideas of republicanism and civic humanism inherited from classical and Renaissance authors and articulated in the writings of Algernon Sidney, James Harrington, and the Viscount Bolingbroke.¹⁵⁶ Notwithstanding these disagreements, historians generally agree on the representativeness and the influence of one body of texts: Trenchard and Gordon’s Cato’s Letters. Indeed, not only did the Letters synthesize both the liberal and the republican traditions with regards to political liberty, they were also immensely popular in the colonies. According to Bailyn, they “were printed again and again, referred to and quoted in every possible context.” And so they were, if Andrew and William Bradford’s business accounts and the issues of their presses are any indication. Over the course of their careers, they printed excerpts of the Letters in at least 50 issues of the *Mercury* and the *Journal*. They also advertised the Letters for sale in at least 30 of the papers’ issues.¹⁵⁷ This is not to mention the hundreds of copies they imported from England

¹⁵⁴ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins...*, xv.

¹⁵⁵ See Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1968 and Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 1999; Jerome Huyler, *Locke in America: The Moral Philosophy of the Founding Era*. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas. 1995; Steven M. Dworetz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution*. Durham, Duke University Press. 1994; Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s*. New York, New York University Press. 1984. See also Robert Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis”, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 39 (1972), 49-80.

¹⁵⁶ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins...* (2012). Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthmen: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstances of English liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*. Liberty Fund. 1959; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-87*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press. 1969.

¹⁵⁷ These numbers are only approximations. Unfortunately, several issues of the *Mercury* and the *Journal* have completely disappeared. In any case, the surviving issues of these newspapers are sufficient proof of Trenchard and Gordon’s popularity among colonial readers. See Heather E. Barry’s extremely useful “‘So Many American Cato’s’: John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s Works in Eighteenth-Century British America,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York, 2002) and her *A “Dress Rehearsal” for Revolution: John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s Work in Eighteenth-Century British America*. Lanham, University Press of America. 2007.

and sold directly in their bookshops.¹⁵⁸ These numbers suggest that the Letters had a direct influence on the colonists' thinking. Trenchard and Gordon were indeed "the most important disseminators of ideas to Americans in the prerevolutionary generation."¹⁵⁹

As Heather Barry has pointed out, the colonies only received a portion of the texts that were produced and read in England, just as they were only exposed to a "mediated" version of the ways and manners of their metropolitan counterparts. Therefore, in order to understand how *Cato's Letters* and similar texts shaped the colonists' understanding of political liberty, it is useful to focus on what the colonists read and how they read it. Many of the *Letters* were reprinted and frequently cited in the colonial newspapers. These included letters on corruption, libel, encroachment of power, public spirit, good and evil magistrates, and government officials. But of the 144 essays comprised in *Cato's Letters*, none was reprinted more often, or quoted more often, than the letters regarding freedom of the press. Particularly popular was the Letter 15, entitled "Of Freedom of Speech: That the same is inseparable from publick Liberty." In the early 1730s, Andrew Hamilton had used the rhetoric of this letter to repel accusations of libel raised against the printer John Peter Zenger, claiming that by publishing the truth upon corrupt officials, authors and printers were merely doing their duties as responsible citizens. Thirty years later, *Cato* was set to reach its full potential in the colonies.

In the Letter 15, Trenchard and Gordon argued that the freedom of speech and press was at once the symptom and the effect of a free and good government, and thus the "great bulwark of liberty." Since the "administration of government" was nothing else but the "attendance of the trustees of the people upon the interest and affairs of the people," it followed that it was "the part and business of the people, for whose sake alone all publick matters [were], or ought to be, transacted," to judge whether these matters were "well or ill transacted." It followed that it was "the interest, and ought to be the ambition" of "all honest magistrates," and the dread of the "wicked governors of men" to have their deeds publicly examined. History offered many eloquent

¹⁵⁸ William Bradford's commercial transactions were meticulously consigned to paper, and preserved through the years. In the lists of books he ordered from Britain (he did business with various booksellers from Edinburgh, Dublin, Bristol, and London), *Cato* is always a conspicuous presence. Indeed, his popularity seems to only have increased with the years. See *The Bradford Family Papers*, coll. 1676, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁵⁹ Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible*..., 348. In an often-repeated passage, Clinton Rossiter has suggested that "no one can spend any time on the newspapers, library inventories, and pamphlets of colonial America without realizing that *Cato's Letters* ... was the most popular, quotable, esteemed source for political ideas in the colonial period." Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty*. New York, Harcourt Brace. 1953, 141.

examples of this. In Ancient Rome, for instance, the virtuous magistrates Horatius, Valerius, and Cincinnatus feared nothing from liberty of speech. On the contrary, since “[t]heir virtuous administration, the more it was examined, the more it brightened and gained by enquiry.” The same was true of British administrators in more recent times. Queen Elizabeth’s secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, “deserved no reproaches” and therefore “feared none.” King James I and the Earl of Strafford, and more recently King Charles 1, on the other hand, feared being called tyrants precisely because they acted like tyrants. Since freedom of speech was likely to harm dishonest and “wicked” magistrates, it followed that the latter sought in every circumstance to curtail this freedom and to stifle all opposition to their reign. This led Trenchard and Gordon to assert that “[W]hoever would overthrow the Liberty of the Nation, must begin by subduing the Freedom of Speech; a thing terrible to public traitors.” Should this freedom disappear, indeed, “the minds of men, terrified by unjust power” were likely to “[degenerate] into all the vileness and methods of servitude.”¹⁶⁰

What transpired from Tenchard and Gordon’s musings on freedom of speech and public liberty was that limits placed upon the freedom of speech and press were signs of a tyrannical government. By the same token, it followed that an educated and politically-minded citizenry could help uphold political freedom and good government by actively investigating the deeds of public officials and denouncing excesses either orally or, more effectively, in print. In times of peace, these ideas stimulated the colonies’ printing trade and the print cultures, and fostered a widespread attachment to British liberties. They also inspired printers to adopt an open press strategy that allowed others to take part in public debates, but forced them to remain politically neutral. But in the troubled times of the 1760s and 1770, the speech of freedom of Trenchard, Gordon, and their fellow political writers would take on new meanings and have unintended consequences. As the Patriots and the Loyalists—also called the Whigs and the Tories, in reference to the British parliamentary parties—began fighting over the meaning of liberty and the means of preserving this liberty, printers would find that political neutrality was no longer an option. William Bradford’s career, which bridged the late colonial and revolutionary periods, is the

¹⁶⁰ The commentators of Trenchard and Gordon’s Letter 15 are numerous. See, for instance, Kenneth I. Kersch, *Freedom of Speech: Rights and Liberties Under the Law*. Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO. 2003; Elizabeth Powers, *Freedom of Speech: The History of an Idea*. Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press. 2011; David S. Bogen, “The Origins of Freedom of Speech and Press,” *Maryland Law Review*, Vol. 42, Issue 3 (1983), 429-465; Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*. New York, Macmillan Publishing. 2002 [1973].

perfect example. During the Revolution, he abandoned the open press strategy and favored a partisan approach to printing. Starting with the Stamp Act crisis of 1765, it was through his political involvement, rather than through the openness of his presses, that he and his fellow printers and publishers of the revolutionary era contributed to the cause of political liberty. As the era of the freedom of speech came to an end, the era of the speech of freedom began.

2. The Stamp Act crisis

a. The Stamp Act: prologue to Revolution

When the Seven Years' War ended in 1763, Britain was victorious and extremely indebted. Indeed, the national debt had almost doubled during the war, reaching £129,586,789 in 1764.¹⁶¹ And money kept being put into British North America, where a standing army was needed to protect the new territories acquired during the war. In order to avoid financial disaster, the newly-appointed prime minister, Lord Grenville, decided to raise taxes on the colonies. It was, after all, to defend the colonies that Britain had spent---and continued to spend---all this money.¹⁶² However sound Grenville's reasoning might have been, though, his decision was ill-fated from the start. The colonies were in no way prepared to pay taxes to London, and especially not taxes they had not voted on. Not only did they resent the presence of a permanent standing army on their territory and the tightening of metropolitan authority that followed the war, they were also going through a financial crisis of their own.¹⁶³ From the very start, therefore, they were wary of Grenville's measures. As soon as news of the 1764 Sugar Act reached the colonies, newspapers began advertising boycott and other mild forms of protest, and merchants and shopkeepers began

¹⁶¹ Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis...*, 21.

¹⁶² The very text of the Stamp Act attests to this conviction: "WHEREAS by an act made in the last session of parliament, several duties were granted, continued, and appropriated, towards defraying the expences of defending, protecting, and securing the British colonies and plantations in America: and whereas it is just and necessary, that provisions be made for raising a further revenue within your Majesty's dominions in America, towards defraying the said expences: we, your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the commons of Great Britain in parliament assembled, have therefore resolved to give and grant unto your Majesty the several rates and duties herein after mentioned ..." see Edmund S. Morgan (ed.) *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764-1766*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2004, 37-38.

¹⁶³ See Nash, *The Urban Crucible...*, 155.

worrying about the state of commerce.¹⁶⁴ But it was the Stamp Act of 1765 that stirred the most trouble. Rumors of tentative talks regarding a direct tax on paper began filtering through the imperial communication channels as early as March or April 1764.¹⁶⁵ These rumors, flimsy at first, were met with an unprecedented hostility that only grew as evidence of the Act's impending ratification accumulated. When voices started warning against the Act in England, Grenville did not budge.¹⁶⁶ He presented the Stamp Bill to Parliament on February 6th, 1765, and barely a month later the Stamp Act received royal assent.

In the history of the Revolution he wrote in 1789, David Ramsay famously asserted that, "In establishing American independence, the pen and the press had merit equal to that of the sword," and that:

It was fortunate for the liberties of America, that News-papers were the subject of a heavy stamp duty. Printers, when uninfluenced by government, have not generally arranged themselves on the side of liberty, nor are they less remarkable for attention to the profits of their profession. A stamp duty, which openly invaded the first, and threatened a great diminution of the last, provoked their united zealous opposition.¹⁶⁷

Ramsay quite rightly recognized that printers, in America or elsewhere, were never intrinsically devoted to the "side of liberty." But under the proper political circumstances, and when their profit margin was endangered, they were able to band together and to change the

¹⁶⁴ Schlesinger, "Colonial Newspapers...", 65. Governor Bernard of Massachusetts wrote that "the publication of orders for the strict execution of the Molasses Act had caused a greater alarm in this country than the taking of *Fort William Henry* did in 1757 ... the Merchants say, There is an end of the trade in this Province." Bernard is quoted in J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. New Haven, Yale University Press. 2007, 312.

¹⁶⁵ According to Edmund S. Morgan, Grenville had begun thinking about a stamp act as early as 1763. See Edmund S. Morgan, "The Postponement of the Stamp Act," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. 7 (1950), 353-392, and Edmund Morgan and Helen Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis...*, 54.

¹⁶⁶ The most celebrated of these voices is probably that of Colonel Isaac Barré, MP, who famously said of the colonists that they had "fled from our Tyranny to a then uncultivated and inhospitable (sic) Country—where they exposed themselves to almost all the hardships to which human Nature is liable, and among others to the Cruelties of a Savage foe, the most subtle and I take upon me to say the most formidable of any People upon the face of Gods Earth. And yet, actuated by the Principles of true english (sic) Liberty (sic), they met all these hardships with pleasure, compared with those they suffered in their own Country, from the hands of those who should have been their Friends." Barré went further, saying that the "same Spirit of freedom which actuated that people at first, will accompany them still." And yet, he did not deny Parliament's authority to impose the Stamp Act to the colonies—he merely warned against it. Notwithstanding Barré's moderation, though, his rhetoric would be appropriated by the "Sons of Liberty" in their attacks on British tyranny. See Edmund S. Morgan, *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on The Stamp Act Crisis, 1764-1766*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 1959, 26. Barré's speech is reproduced, notably, in Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1970, 32.

¹⁶⁷ David Ramsay, *History of the American Revolution*. Philadelphia, James J. Wilson. 1811 [1789], II, 319; I, 61-62.

course of events. This is what happened during the Stamp Act crisis. Printers and publishers, who were more likely than any other member of colonial society to be affected by a tax on paper, mounted a major public campaign against the Act. As a result, many of these printers and publishers began thinking of their profession in political and even partisan terms. As they acquired more visibility and political influence, they were led to suggest a new definition of press freedom that clashed with the open press strategy of the earlier period, and to transform their presses and their newspapers into partisan organs. This development would have major consequences during the Revolution, and even more so in the early republican period when proper political parties emerged.

b. Resisting the Stamp Act

When news of the Stamp Act's ratification reached America, it was met with various forms of resistance. Across the colonies, but especially in the northern seaports, spirited crowds took to the streets and manifested their discontent by burning the text of the Act in great auto-da-fé, and took part in other spectacular types of public demonstrations. In Boston, for instance, Thomas Hutchinson recounted that a few days after the arrival in town of Andrew Oliver, appointed as stamp distributor, "a stuffed image was hung upon a tree" and affixed with "[l]ables [that] denoted it to be designed for the distributor of stamps." The stuffed figure was then paraded across Boston and brought in front of Oliver's house, which was then broken into and ransacked. In Philadelphia, the crowd's first victim was the otherwise popular Benjamin Franklin. The latter had been sent to London, the previous year, in order to defend the interests of Pennsylvania's anti-proprietary party. The nature of his mission changed drastically as the colonies got wind of Grenville's plans. Although he opposed the measure from the start, and even attempted to convince a "besotted" Grenville to find an alternative measure to taxation, Franklin was unable to prevent the passage of the Stamp Act. Instead, he chose to make the best of a bad situation and had his close friend John Hughes appointed to the post of stamp distributor for Pennsylvania. Franklin's decision would prove to be as miscalculated as Grenville's. In the colonies, his actions were interpreted as a cowardly betrayal of America's interests. It was thus that William Bradford and his son Thomas, happy to have an opportunity to damage their old rival's reputation, led a small group to wait upon Hughes. They "compelled him, almost by

violence, to declare that he would not attempt to carry the new act into present execution.” Hughes resigned immediately and Franklin, shocked at the virulence of the colonies’ popular sentiment, wasted no time in altering his position. By the end of 1765, he was one of the fiercest vindicators of the colonies’ rights.

The more literary-minded members of colonial society—which also included Bradford and his fellow printers and publishers—expressed their anger in a “torrent of words,” which were most of the time published in the form of pamphlets or newspaper essays.¹⁶⁸ The reliance on print as a forum for the expression of public grievances was a means of mass mobilization was not entirely new. But in the context of the Stamp Act crisis, it was taken to a new level. Fed as they had been in the previous decades to the English discourse on liberty and active citizenship, it was only natural for colonists who were politically-inclined to use the press in order to denounce what they saw as an act of despotism. Quite early on, the *Boston Gazette* of Benjamin Edes and John Gill published a letter in which the anonymous “B.W.” warned the paper’s readers that submitting to the Stamp Act would be tantamount to accepting enslavement. William Bradford himself reemployed this language in a most dramatic and eloquent manner in the *Journal* of October 3rd, 1765:

It is impossible to conceive the consternation this melancholy news has diffused through this city. Rage, resentment, and grief appeared painted in every countenance; and the mournful language of one and all our inhabitants seem to be ‘Farewell, Farewell, Liberty!’ America—America, doomed by a premature sentence to slavery—was it thy Loyalty, thy filial obedience, thy exhausted treasures, and the rivers of blood shed by thy sons in extending the glory of the British Arms—that provoked thy mother country thus unjustly to involve thee in distress by tearing from thee the darling privileges of thy children? Or was it the perfidy—but I cannot proceed. Tears of vexation and sorrow stop my pen. O my country, my country!¹⁶⁹

This editorial comment is quite representative of the rhetoric used to oppose the Stamp Act, and later to legitimate the Revolution. In this passage, by proclaiming the unwavering loyalty of his people to “the glory of the British arms,” Bradford was also asserting that his fellow colonists were entitled to the same birth rights as any Englishman. At the same time, though, by identifying “America” as his country, he was acknowledging a break between the mother-country

¹⁶⁸ Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis...*, 75.

¹⁶⁹ *Pennsylvania Journal*, October 3rd, 1765.

and its “child.” And by defending the colonists’ opposition to the Stamp Act in terms of the classic duality that opposed liberty and slavery, he was implying that Britain had given in to despotism and was therefore no longer the repository of freedom—America was.

The same rhetoric served as a basis for the Declaration of Rights and Grievances that was penned at the New York Stamp Act Congress of October 7 to 25, and for the six colonial petitions sent to Parliament in its aftermath. These documents were the colonies’ last but ill-fated attempt at preventing the Act from coming into effect. They were largely ignored by Parliament, though, where most MPs remained convinced that it was well within Britain’s right to tax the colonies. It was not until February 1766 that a committee was appointed by the House of Commons to investigate on the matter. Shortly afterward, the stubborn Grenville was dismissed and replaced by the Marquess of Rockingham. Under the latter’s governance, Parliament finally voted the repeal of the Stamp Act. The public’s reaction, even in England, was extremely positive—the *London Gazette* even published an article entitled “Glorious News,” which was then reproduced in the colonies’ papers. And yet, as Lynne Oats and Pauline Sadler have suggested, the repeal of the Stamp Act should not be read as the full acceptance, in London, of the colonists’ views. If anything, indeed, the Stamp Act crisis and its resolution highlight the “mutual misperception” of metropolitan Britons and the colonists.¹⁷⁰

c. Printers and the Stamp Act’s legacy

That the Stamp Act met such energetic resistance in the colonies should come as no surprise. Not only did it, in the colonists’ minds, run counter to Britain’s claims of political liberty, it also affected the people who were most likely to build an effective public campaign to oppose it: printers. Because of the growth of the colonial newspaper press in the previous decades, indeed, the latter had significantly more to lose from a tax on paper than any other members of colonial society. Aware of their readers’ aversion to the Act, and of their power to nurture this aversion, they proved extremely creative in their means of resistance. Not only did they open their presses and the pages of their newspapers to public letters and essays, they also took strong

¹⁷⁰ Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Brave New World: A History of Early America*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2006, 438. See also Morgan and Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis...* (1953).

editorial stances. We have already seen William Bradford's intervention in the *Journal* of October 3rd, 1765. The latter, and other politically-inclined printers, would soon go even further, and exploit the full visual potential of newspapers.

As the fatal date of November 1st grew nearer, most printers asked their subscribers to settle their debts. Some announced their will to stop publication completely, while others claimed they would never give in to London's unjust tax. And those who were ambivalent soon found out that it was in their best interest to support the resistance movement, if only tacitly. When it became clear that Grenville had no intention of reversing his decision, printers orchestrated a "mock funeral procession" that reached its apogee, quite appropriately, on October 31st. The *Maryland Gazette* bordered its columns with heavy black rules, and titled itself the "Third and Last Supplement to the Maryland Gazette, of the Tenth Instant." The *New-Hampshire Gazette*, was decorated in a similar manner and announced that "[It] must Die, or submit to that which is worse than Death, be Stamped, and lose [its] Freedom." William Bradford surpassed all others in mortuary zeal. On top of the heavy black rules that signified mourning and that lined the margins of the *Journal*, he added urns and a death's head to the headline. To what became known as the "Tombstone Edition" of the *Journal*, he added the inscription: "EXPIRING: In Hopes of Resurrection to LIFE again." Along the margins, he wrote, "Adieu, Adieu to the LIBERTY of the PRESS," and on the last page he added the image of a coffin, symbolizing the paper's death "Of a STAMP in her Vitals." Bradford added to this heavy use of symbolism and theatricality a final editorial note, writing:

I am sorry to be obliged to acquaint my Readers, that as the STAMP Act, is fear'd to be obligatory upon us after the First of November ensuing, (the fatal To morrow) the publisher of this Paper unable to bear the Burthen, has thought it expedient to STOP awhile, in order to deliberate, whether any Methods can be found to elude the Chains forged for us, and escape the insupportable Slavery, which it is hoped, from the last Representation now made against the Act, may be effected.¹⁷¹

Although Bradford briefly interrupted the publication of the *Journal*, he soon realized that he had more to lose by ignoring his readership's needs for information than by ignoring the British law. Indeed, some printers even found that the context of the Stamp Act crisis was a good

¹⁷¹ See Martin J. Manning and Clarence R. Vyatt (eds) *Encyclopedia of Media and Propaganda in Wartime America*. Volume 1. Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO. 2011, 105.

one in which to set up new newspapers. The *Portsmouth Mercury* and the *Connecticut Gazette*, for instance, were founded expressly to oppose the Stamp Act. Listening to the Philadelphians' clamor for news, therefore, Bradford and many others kept printing on unstamped paper and denouncing the British despotic measure until news reached the colonies of the Stamp Act's repeal in May 1766.¹⁷²



Fig. 1 The “Tombstone Edition” of the *Pennsylvania Journal*, October 31st, 1765.

¹⁷² In the *Journal* issues that came after October 31st, Bradford replaced the skulls and bones with the words “No Stamp-Paper to be had,” a phrase that was reused by many other printers.

The Stamp Act crisis *per se* may have ended then, but its legacy would live on and produce unexpected results in the following decades. It would certainly affect the Patriots' strategy with the regard to propaganda and print, and it would determine the conduct of many printers during and after the war.¹⁷³ To the revolutionary leaders, the Stamp Act crisis was a lesson in mass mobilization. It showed how newspapers could be used to spread radical ideas and to rally opinion. To printers, it was a lesson in political activism. It showed them that in times of crisis, it was in their best interest to abandon the open press strategy and to favor a more partisan approach to printing and publishing. Not only did they profit financially from printing political newspapers, they also gained an unprecedented influence in their communities. And since they were defending the cause of freedom, and the accessibility to print, they could hardly be accused not to support the freedom of speech and press. Instead, by common and tacit agreement, they developed a new concept of press freedom better suited to the circumstances. Freedom of speech and press became the right to speak, write, print, and publish politically-charged material. In wartime, this logic would be taken one step further: freedom of speech and press could become the right to contribute to the Patriots' cause by spreading the "speech of freedom."

3. Printers and the war of American Independence

a. William Bradford's war

As a printer and a newspaper publisher, William Bradford had taken a strong editorial stance during the Stamp Act controversy and in the years leading to the beginning of the war. By the mid-1770s, he was well on his way to gaining his reputation as a patriot printer. In 1773, he opposed the landing of tea in the port of Philadelphia by physically taking part in the resistance movement and by advertising the boycott on English goods in the *Pennsylvania Journal*. The following year, he was appointed official printer by the Continental Congress that assembled in

¹⁷³ James Gilreath has argued that the printers' decisive action during the Stamp Act crisis "gave the printed word an ideological caste that it had not had before in America," and thus transformed the American print culture by making more public than ever before Gilreath, James. "Government, Law, Public Opinion, and the Printed Word in Eighteenth-Century America," in Carol Armbruster (ed.) *Publishing and Readership in Revolutionary France and America*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 1993, 85.

the city, and began printing the Congress's accounts. Shortly afterward, he was chosen by the British pamphleteer Thomas Paine to print the second edition of his *Common Sense* as well as a series of political essays entitled "The American Crisis." All this time, Bradford was actively involved with the Sons of Liberty, who had been founded after the Stamp Act crisis. The Sons were at first an informal gathering of men opposed to the new British taxes. Soon, though, they organized themselves and set up divisions across the colonies. Their ranks were filled with members of the professional middle class, like lawyers and doctors, and with shopkeepers, local politicians, and printers. These people were all highly literate, and they were acutely aware of the importance of communication networks in the dissemination of ideas. They relied heavily on the exchange of news both through an abundant private correspondence, and through the printing of public letters in friendly newspapers. This strategy was highly successful. Already by the end of the 1760s, they practically controlled most of the colonial ports' public life. In Boston, the Sons appropriated Edes and Gills' *Boston Gazette* and the Bunch of Grapes tavern as public spaces for the expression of their ideas and as meeting places. In New York, they relied on James Parker's *New-York Weekly Journal*, and met in the Merchants' Coffee House and in Samuel Fraunces' Tavern. In Philadelphia, they were granted access to Bradford's *Journal*, to his coffeehouse, and to his numerous contacts in the printing and bookselling circles. Over the course of a decade, Bradford had gone from a staunch defender of Britain and its empire of freedom to one of the middle colonies' most influential and radical patriot printers.

It is not surprising that Bradford was among the first to take action after the famous shots were fired at Concord and Lexington, ten years after the events of the Stamp Act crisis. Although he was now middle aged and exempt from military service, Bradford hastened to enroll in the Pennsylvania militia, as he had done in the previous colonial wars. Appointed as a major, he was later promoted to the rank of colonel. Leaving his business in the hand of his son Thomas, Bradford soon left Philadelphia. He took part in a few strategic battles, and was wounded at Princeton in early January 1777. He had to wait for more than a year before he was able to go back to Philadelphia, which had been captured by the British after the Battle of Brandywine on September 11th, 1777, and evacuated on June 18th, 1778. Upon his return, Bradford hastened to recover the Coffee House—which was increasingly referred to as such, without reference to London—and restore it to its "proper" functions as the headquarters of the Philadelphia Sons of Liberty. Now deprived of his sword and musket, he transformed his other assets—his

coffeehouse, his press, his pen, and his contact network—into patriotic weapons. Bradford’s career over the revolutionary period highlights the transition from the political press of the Stamp Act crisis to the properly partisan press of the later years.

b. Patriots and the press: freedom of speech and the speech of freedom

The American War of Independence began as a civil war opposing Britons who defended contradictory ideas of liberty, and transformed into an international war opposing the mighty British Empire to the nascent and republican United States of America, supported by their French and Spanish allies. This transformation in the nature of the war was paralleled in the discourse on political liberty. The British “speech of freedom” that permeated the minds of the colonists in the previous decades was appropriated by the Patriots and, in its American form, used as a justification for the latter’s secession from Britain. During the previous decades, this “speech of freedom” had been elaborated in, and through, the colonies’ printing presses. Appropriately, it was also in and through the American presses that the Patriots, in close collaboration with printers, elaborated and disseminated their speech of freedom during the war.

On the onset of war, most printers hesitated to lend their presses wholly to the Patriots’ cause. Indeed, William Bradford, along with Benjamin Edes and John Gill of Boston, and William Goddard of Baltimore, were some of the few printers who openly embraced the revolutionary war from the start. Even Isaiah Thomas, whose *Massachusetts Spy* would in time become one of the Patriots’ main organs, tried to maintain some degree of political neutrality at first. In accordance with his paper’s motto—“Open to all parties but influenced by none”—the latter determined, in the early years of the conflict, that “his paper should be free to both parties which then agitated the country, and, impartially, lay before the public their respective communications.”¹⁷⁴ Thomas’s position made perfect sense at the time. The Stamp Act crisis may have proven the benefits of political partisanship in times of crisis, but the American printing trade still rested upon a long

¹⁷⁴ Thomas, *The History of Printing...*, Vol. 1, 165. See also Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States, 1690-1940*. Volume 5. London, Routledge. 2000, 77-78 and Russell L. Martin, “Publishing the American Revolution,” in Scott Evan Casper, Joanne D. Chaison, and Jeffrey David Groves (eds) *Perspectives on American Book History: Artifacts and Commentary*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 79-108.

tradition of political neutrality achieved through the open press strategy. Soon, though, Thomas found that “this ground could not be maintained.” As the conflict opposing Britain and the American colonies became more serious, the opposing factions became polarized in their positions. Replicating the English tradition, they took the respective names of Tories and Whigs. While the former were “the warm supporters of the measures of the British cabinet,” the latter were “the animated advocates for American liberty.” From the start, both parties aimed at rallying public opinion by disseminating their ideas through print. Following the example of the political writers of the previous decades, they produced an impressive literature of political opposition. Broad­sides, pamphlets, books, and newspaper essays multiplied. In itself, this was not entirely new. The Keithian controversy of the 1690s and the Zenger crisis of the 1730s had also seen the use of print by opposing factions. But this time, the stakes were indefinitely higher. Britain and America were engaged in a bona fide war that could result either in the strengthening of the world’s mightiest colonial empire, or in the formation of the world’s largest republic.

Soon, even the most reluctant of printers and publishers thus had to abandon their neutrality and to pick a side, as most had done during the Stamp Act crisis. Some did so by their own volition, when their own political opinions urged them to or when they realized that they had more to gain than to lose, financially and professionally, by aligning their presses with one party or the other. This was the case with Bradford, Edes and Gill, and Goddard. Others did so because they were “strongly” incited to either by the Loyalists or the Patriots. Isaiah Thomas’s *Massachusetts Spy*, for instance, was quickly deserted by the Loyalists, and Thomas became “convinced that to produce an abiding and salutary effect his paper must have fixed character.” Since he was in principle closer to the Whig interests than to the Tories’, he started printing and publishing mainly for the Patriots, which incurred the Loyalists’ wrath. The latter first attempted to “force his compliance,” and when this attempt failed they sought to “deprive him of his press and types.”¹⁷⁵ Patriots used the same methods toward printers and publishers who lent their presses to the Loyalists’ cause. No example is more eloquent, in this regard, than that of the Tory printer and bookseller James Rivington. We first encountered Rivington in England, where he met William Bradford in the early 1740s. He had migrated to Philadelphia in 1760, before moving to New York and setting up a printing shop in Hanover Square. In 1773, he started printing *The New York Gazetteer or the Connecticut, New Jersey, Hudson’s River, and Quebec Weekly Advertiser*. In the

¹⁷⁵ Thomas, *The History of Printing...*, 165.

following year, he attempted to take a neutral stance in debates regarding the British government's controversial measures. The heading of his journal, now titled the *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer*, read that it was "Open" and "Uninfluenced." The paper was fairly popular at first, but when neutrality proved untenable, Rivintgon chose the British cause over the American. As a result, his home and press were mobbed and his property destroyed by the Sons of Liberty, whose activities he often denounced in the *Gazetteer*. Following these events, he kept operating his paper from outside New York but was soon forced to leave America for England when his house was burned to the ground. He returned to New York during the British occupation, restored his press and resumed the publication of the *Gazetteer*, but under the title of *Rivington's New York Loyal Gazette*. All this time, Rivington and the Patriots remained engaged in a vicious newspaper war. While the latter mocked the former's paper, which they referred to as "Rivington's Lying Gazette," Rivington stigmatized the Patriots as rebels and traitors to the British Empire.¹⁷⁶

Thomas and Rivington are quite representative of the polarization of the American press during the war. Most printers were neither Whig nor Tory at the start. Rather, they tried to occupy the middle ground for as long as possible. When they were forced to pick a side, they usually chose the party that best represented their personal beliefs and interests. From that point on, everything snowballed. Printers who lent their presses to one party were sure to face retaliation by the other party, which in turn led them to strengthen their position and to radicalize their discourse. In consequence, printers and publishers emerged as major players in the conflict. Their presses became instruments of mass mobilization and, as such, they contributed to disseminate contradictory discourses on liberty.

Whether they lent their presses to the Loyalists or for the Patriots, the printers of the revolutionary era justified their partisanship by claiming they only sought to secure their country's liberties. As Philip Gould has suggested, Loyalists and Patriots alike founded their rhetoric upon concepts and ideas borrowed from the political literature elaborated in England and in America over the course of the previous decades. This literature celebrated, above all things, the "Whig" principles of rights and liberties.¹⁷⁷ On the one hand, in texts like the Declaration of Independence the Patriots boasted that they defended their right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit

¹⁷⁶ See Isaiah Thomas *History of Printing...* (1808), 164-166, 306-310.

¹⁷⁷ Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in British America*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2013, 8.

of happiness.” On the other hand, staunch Loyalists like Joseph Galloway justified their positions with spirited declarations of their own. “I pray to God, that every man in every part of the world, who has a drop of English blood in his veins, may resolve to spill every drop of that blood in defense of that liberty to which he has an undoubted right by the constitution of his country!”¹⁷⁸ Both sides were defending their position by appealing to a widespread discourse on freedom.¹⁷⁹ But they appropriated this discourse to promote contradictory visions of what this freedom entailed. The Loyalists adopted a pragmatic and conservative concept of freedom, while the Patriots’ idea of liberty was much more radical. While Loyalists thought that political liberty could best be preserved within the British Empire, and under the British monarchy, Patriots began to think of liberty outside this traditional framework. Their concept of political freedom was not only republican in inspiration—it was also republican in aspiration.¹⁸⁰

The polarization of the press, in the course of the revolutionary war, was thus paralleled by the polarization of the warring parties’ discourses on liberty. Soon, the Loyalists’ concept of freedom, which rested upon the preservation of the British Empire in its current form, came to be seen as a form of oppression by the Patriots. As such, it could not be allowed to be printed and published in newspapers or other forms of print. The Patriots, whose ranks grew continually with the years, developed a new concept of press freedom which allowed them to persecute the Loyalists while preserving the appearance of maintaining the freedom of the American presses. According to Arthur M. Schlesinger, “They simply contended that liberty of speech belonged solely to those who spoke the speech of liberty.”¹⁸¹ In other words, printers and publishers were free not only to take side with the Patriots, they were also free to do all they could to speak—or

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Galloway, *A Letter to the People of America, lately printed at New York, now re-published by an American. With a postscript, by the letter, addressed to Sir W*** H****. London, T. Becket. 1778, 2.

¹⁷⁹ On the Loyalists’ rhetoric, see Elizabeth Mancke, “The Languages of Liberty in British North America, 1607-1776,” in Jack P. Greene (ed.) *Exclusionary Liberty: The English Libertarian Heritage and the Construction of Britain’s Settler Empire, 1600 to 1900*. New York, Cambridge University Press. 2010, 25-49; Janice Potter, *The Liberty We Seek: Loyalist Ideology in Colonial New York and Massachusetts*. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press. 1983; Robert Calhoun, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760-1781*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch. 1973; Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion...* (2013).

¹⁸⁰ Maya Jasanoff has shown that the Loyalists and the Patriots had, from the start, very similar ideas on political freedom. They differed mainly in their commitment to the empire on one side, and to republicanism on the other. See the Introduction, entitled “The Spirit of 1783” in Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles...* (2011).

¹⁸¹ Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence...*, 189. See also Keith Werhan, *Freedom of Speech: A Reference Guide to the United States Constitution*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group. 2004, 8. See also Robert Harvey, *A Few Bloody Noses. The Realities and Mythologies of the American Revolution*. New York, Penguin. 2002; David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America’s Founding Ideas*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2005; Gordon S. Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States*. New York, Penguin. 2011.

print—the latter’s speech of liberty. They were not free, however, to compromise the Patriots’ fight against Britain by publishing the Loyalists’ speech of freedom, which was construed as a speech of oppression in disguise. It is in light of these developments that the massive alignment of the press with the Patriots’ cause and the activism of printers and publishers like Bradford should be understood.

4. Unexpected consequences: the “contagion of liberty”

The short- and long-term consequences of the Revolution were major for American printers and publishers. Over a little more than a decade, the American printing trade had abandoned its neutrality and become resolutely political. Because they had played such a crucial role in the diffusion of the revolutionary rhetoric and particularly in the dissemination of the Patriots’ speech of freedom, printers and publishers like William and Thomas Bradford were no longer regarded as “mere mechanics,” or as “artisans with bookish inclinations.” Rather, they had become respected members of the political nation. As they made their way into the early republican period, ambitious printers and publishers would be faced with unprecedented opportunities for social and financial advancement. But these opportunities also came with challenges. Many, including the Bradfords, would fail to meet these challenges, and would be relegated to the ranks of second-class printers or publishers. A few, though, would thrive as partisan printers, publishers, and booksellers, and achieve an unparalleled degree of affluence and influence.

The Revolution also had important consequences for the “speech of freedom.” Fueled by the discourse on freedom elaborated in the political writings of the early 18th century, the Revolution provoked an unprecedented flow of broadsides, pamphlets, books, and newspaper essays that boasted of the Americans’ commitment to liberty. In order to allow this abundant literature to blossom and to reach a maximal effect, the revolutionary generation abandoned the colonial discourse on freedom of speech and press, which granted free access to the press to all parties. They chose instead to only grant this freedom to those who spoke, wrote, or printed the speech of freedom. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that this speech of freedom

became an important fixture of the young republic's print culture. The intended nature of the association of print with the republican speech of freedom was to protect America's political liberty. But it would have the unexpected—and for many the undesired—consequence of provoking what Bernard Bailyn called “the contagion of liberty.”¹⁸² Indeed, the revolutionary generation's reliance upon the printing press to spread the speech of freedom resulted in the appropriation of this speech by other groups seeking some form of emancipation. Foremost among these groups were the abolitionists, whose ranks were rapidly climbing since the mid-1770s and who would significantly transform the print and political cultures of the following century.

¹⁸² Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 1992 [1967], 230.

Chapter three: The early republic and the contagion of freedom

1. The Bradfords and the new nation

We left William and Thomas Bradford in the midst of the War of Independence. The former had left his printing, bookselling, and coffeehouse-holding businesses to his eldest son while he left to war. Injured at the battle of Princeton, the older Bradford returned to Philadelphia and to the world of printing after the evacuation of the city by British troops. Unable to defend the Patriots' cause with his sword, he transformed his coffeehouse, his pen, and his numerous contacts into war weapons, and thus gained his reputation as the "patriot printer of 76." But although he had gained in social status during the war, and although his printing press was kept alive by the unending flow of patriotic publications he was presented with, Bradford ended the war physically and mentally worn out. His personal life was affected by the death of his wife Rachel on June 20th, 1780, and his professional life was marred by his failure to profit financially from the war. The Revolution had given him a large readership, of course, and abundant material to print. But it had also disturbed his communication networks and, for years at a time, it had deprived him of regular income. Not to mention that Bradford often failed to get paid for his printing jobs, and that he invested substantial sums of money into the war effort. It was thus that, around the time when Cornwallis capitulated and the Treaty of Paris was signed, Bradford left his business in the hands of his son Thomas and retired to his daughter's house in Somerset County, New Jersey.¹⁸³

Thomas Bradford was the fourth in a line of printers that stretched back to the previous century.¹⁸⁴ He inherited from his family the secrets of the trade, and abundant contacts in the printing and bookselling circles of the English-speaking Atlantic. Despite his talents as a printer, administrator, and business, he would prove unable to restore the family business to its former glory, or to leave a significant mark on the competitive world of print of the early republican period. This was partly the result of his personal character and ambitions. Indeed, although he

¹⁸³ The Bradfords' personal and professional correspondence for this period is scarce. This scarcity could have been purely incidental, but it is most likely a sign that the family business was losing speed, and a result of the eldest Bradford's retirement from public life. Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 307.

¹⁸⁴ For more details on Thomas Bradford, see Henry Simpson, *The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians, Now Deceased*. Philadelphia, William Brotherhead. 1859, 136-139.

was a founding member of the American Philosophical Society, Thomas lacked his father's literary inclinations and his thirst for social advancement.¹⁸⁵ Mostly, though, his mitigated success as a printer was due to his inability to adapt to the new circumstances of the late 1700s and the early 1800s. The Bradfords' press, which had once been the pride of the middle colonies' printing trade, fell behind the wonders that were the printing enterprises operated by a new generation of young and driven men. The tides were clearly changing. And yet, unlike many other more unfortunate printers, Thomas Bradford kept his business running into the early decades of the 19th century. But he had to make some sacrifices and some changes. He abandoned the London Coffee House in the early 1780s, when it became clear that the locus of polite sociability had migrated to the neighboring City Tavern.¹⁸⁶ He then removed from his father's printing shop in Market Street and relocated his activities in his great uncle Andrew Bradford's old mansion in the slightly less fashionable South Front Street.¹⁸⁷ He kept a decent-sized bookstore, in which he sold a variety of political, religious, and literary books and pamphlets. He also kept the *Pennsylvania Journal* running for a while, before renaming it the *True American* and transforming it into a daily paper in 1798.¹⁸⁸ For a few years, Bradford's bookstore and newspaper achieved some success, and provided him and his family a comfortable but simple living. Soon, though, the competition proved too fierce. Bradford's bookstore could not rival Matthew Carey's extensive book trading networks, just as the *True American* could not rival Benjamin Franklin Bache's *Philadelphia Aurora* or Philip Frenau's *National Gazette*. In 1819, Bradford sold his newspaper, which merged into John Fenno's *United States Gazette*. He retired from the printing, publishing, and bookselling businesses and, like his father before him, removed to a large estate out of town, proving to be much more successful as a farmer in the Western Pennsylvania countryside than he had been in the nation's

¹⁸⁵ When his father sent him to Princeton College so that he could receive a proper gentleman's education, Thomas was more than hesitant. And when his father advised his "Dear Tommy" to work on his Greek—because it was a "useful language in the printing business"—he answered that he would sooner come back home and abandon school altogether. He was eventually called back to Philadelphia by a reluctant William Bradford III, who needed extra arms to help him deal with his various businesses. The exchange shows how much Bradford III wanted to dissociate himself from the world of lowly artisans, and that he wished to advance his sons' social station by forcing them to acquire literary knowledge and gentlemanly manners. His expectations were unfortunately disappointed. See the Bradfords' correspondence in *The Bradford Family Papers*, coll. 1676, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁸⁶ Regarding the transition from the London Coffee House to the City Tavern, see Bushman, *The Refinement of America...*, 160-163.

¹⁸⁷ Henry Simpson, *The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians, Now Deceased. Collected from Original and Authentic Sources*. Philadelphia, William Brotherhead. 1859, 139-140.

¹⁸⁸ The full title of Bradford's paper was the *True American and Commercial Advertiser*. Previous to this change in title and frequency of publication, Bradford had published another paper, *The Merchants' Daily Advertiser*, from 1797 to 1798.

former metropolis. And yet, the Bradford family had not already seen the end of its printing and bookselling days. Indeed, all three of Thomas Bradford's sons—Samuel, William, and Thomas—were printers at some point in their lives. The new generation moved away from the legacy it had inherited from the previous century and conformed to the new modes of printing and publishing of the early republic. They became more adventurous and ambitious with their publications, and they soon abandoned printing altogether to devote their energy to the publishing and editing of books and periodicals.¹⁸⁹ Samuel, the eldest and the most successful of the pack, specialized in the reediting and selling of popular classics. He reprinted beautifully crafted editions of Joseph Addison's *Spectator* and Rees' *Encyclopedia*, for instance, and sold them in the bookstores he founded in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. He was to be the last of the Bradfords' printing dynasty. When he left the printing and publishing world in the early 1830s, his business was doing well by most standards, but it had not achieved the kind of prominence Bradford had hoped for.

The Bradfords were overwhelmed by the new circumstances of the new republic. Ironically, although they had set the bases for the printing trade and the print culture of the 18th century, they found themselves lost in the print culture of the early 19th century. Their experience goes to show just how challenging the new republic's printing world could be. While some would thrive and make most of the new opportunities offered to them, many others, like the Bradfords, would be unsettled. This unease was clearly the sign of a period of change and transition.

The changes brought about by the advent of the early republican period manifested themselves by a general sense of fragmentation. The results of this fragmentation were observable on many levels, and in many contexts. They affected, among other things, the relation of print with the speech of freedom. The Revolution left in its wake a properly American and extensive print culture founded upon dissension, and a new culture of freedom, which was equally fragmented. This chapter will show how the party politics of the 1780s and 1790s contributed to further the fragmentation of the young nation's print culture, which in turn allowed to the appropriation of the speech of freedom for unintended and unexpected purposes.

¹⁸⁹ Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital...*, 70.

2. Print and partisanship

a. Party politics in the 1780s and 1790s

In 1798, not long before he became the United States' third president, Thomas Jefferson reflected on the state of national politics. "Two political Sects have arisen within the U.S." he wrote, "the one believing that the executive is the branch of our government which the most needs support; the other that like the analogous branch in the English Government, it is already too strong for the republican parts of the Constitution."¹⁹⁰ The sects Jefferson was referring to had started as mere factions in the 1780s, and had evolved into actual political parties in the following decade. As such, they determined, from the start, the dualistic nature of early national politics and contributed to shape the republic's political culture. They also affected, as will be evidenced in the following pages, the young nation's printing trade and its print culture.

United in their fight against Britain, the Patriots had succeeded in maintaining some degree of unity throughout the Revolutionary War. But after the war, when time came to set up the bases for the new republic, the Patriots' consensus fell apart and various groups of interests emerged, taking the shape of factions. The emergence of political factions was first noticeable during the ratification process that followed the Constitutional Convention of 1787. As delegates to the Convention brought the proposed Constitution to their home states in order for it to be ratified, forces for and against the ratification began mobilizing. Those who agreed with the document styled themselves as "Federalists," and their adversaries as "Anti-Federalists." The former, led by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, favored a strong central government while the latter, led by Thomas Jefferson, believed that such a government would threaten the states' liberties and be likely to become tyrannical. In order to publicize their ideas and to garner popular support either for or against the ratification of the Constitution, both the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists had recourse to the press, and particularly to the young nation's numerous newspapers. Madison and Hamilton, along with John Jay, took the lead by publishing a series of essays that would become known as the Federalist Papers. Comprising a total of 85 articles, 75 of which were published in John and Archibald McLean's *Independent Journal* and in Samuel

¹⁹⁰ Jefferson is quoted in Francis N. Thorpe (ed.) "A Letter from Jefferson on the Political Parties, 1798," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (April, 1898), 488-489.

Loudon's New York Packet between October 1787 and August 1788, these papers argued strongly in favor of the Constitution.¹⁹¹ They were reprinted time and again both in New York and in newspapers everywhere across the colonies—including Thomas Bradford's Pennsylvania Journal.¹⁹² The Anti-Federalist forces had a little more difficulty organizing their own campaign and publicizing their ideas. After all, the memory of the paper war that had pitted the Patriots against the Loyalists was still very much alive in the 1780s. As Pauline Meier has argued, opposition to the Constitution was, to many, "akin to treason."¹⁹³ It is understandable, therefore, that most newspaper printers hesitated before they agreed to lend their presses to the Anti-Federalist forces. When they did, they were immediately denounced. An anonymous writer even predicted that critics of the Constitution risked suffering "the just resentment of an incensed people" and being honored "with a coat of TAR and FEATHERS."¹⁹⁴ But the war had ended, and this kind of threat could hardly be enforced if public order was to be maintained. Gradually, therefore, voices started rising against the Constitution, and a proper debate was allowed to take place. As the Anti-Federalists asserted their legitimacy, their cause was even taken on by a number of newspaper printers and editors who boasted, like their colonial predecessors, that their presses were "OPEN TO ALL PARTIES BUT INFLUENCED BY NONE." This was the case of Philadelphia's Eleazar Oswald, who had started printing the highly successful Independent Gazetteer and had bought the London Coffee House from the Bradfords earlier in the 1780s. In his newspaper, Oswald openly defended the "rights of the press and of freemen," and printed many articles and letters that defended the freedom of the press. On September 28th, 1787, for instance, he printed a short letter by the anonymous "Fair Play," in which the author recalled the rhetoric put forward in Cato's Letters when he announced that he was of opinion that "the LIBERTY OF THE PRESS, the great bulwark of all the liberties of the people, ought never to be restrained."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ The scholarship on the Federalist Papers is incredibly rich. For an overview, see Richard B. Morris, *Witnesses at the Creation: Hamilton, Madison, Jay, and the Constitution*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1985.

¹⁹² In the course of the period stretching from October 1787 to August 1788, Bradford reprinted some of the Federalist Papers, mostly at the request of his readers. He also published many public letters in which the ins and outs of the ratification debates were discussed. At that point, though, he did not take an editorial stance in favor of either faction.

¹⁹³ Pauline Meier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788*. New York, Simon & Schuster. 2010, 71.

¹⁹⁴ *The Independent Gazetteer*, September 27th, 1787.

¹⁹⁵ *The Independent Gazetteer*, September 28th, 1787. Oswald actually printed this defense of press freedom in response to the attack on Anti-Federalists that he published the previous day. See John R. Howe, *Language and Political Meaning*

The ratification debates ended with a Federalist victory. The Constitution went into effect on March 4, 1789 and George Washington was unanimously elected as the young republic's first president. In the first couple of years of his presidency, Washington managed to steer clear of party divisions. Soon, however, the tensions that had divided the nation over the Constitutional debates resurfaced. In 1792-93, a Federalist party formed around Alexander Hamilton, who had become Secretary of the Treasury. It was opposed by Jefferson and Madison's Democratic-Republican party.¹⁹⁶ Over the course of the 1790s, as they fought over interior and exterior crises such as the Whiskey Rebellion, the Haitian and the French revolutions, and the war with Britain, these factions gradually evolved into actual political parties and formed what became known as the "first party system."¹⁹⁷ This system durably transformed the nature of national politics not only at the top, but also on a more popular level. Since they were continually placed in confrontational situations, the members of both parties found that they needed to secure the support of public opinion across the nation. Before they could do so, however, they had to find ways to assess the state of, and to influence this opinion. The Revolution and the ratification debates had clearly shown that nothing was as efficient, when it came to mobilizing and shaping public opinion, as print. It came as no surprise, therefore, that the emergence of party politics resulted in the explosion of printed materials. Books, pamphlets, broadsides and other forms of cheap print came out of the young republic's presses by the dozens.¹⁹⁸ But it was the newspaper

in *Revolutionary America*. Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press. 2004, especially the chapter on public authorship and freedom of the press, 128-169.

¹⁹⁶ James Roger Sharp has suggested that the parties of the 1790s be called "proto-parties," since, at that time, "[t]here was no acceptance of the modern definition of party as an institution representing various interests within a pluralistic society." The Democratic-Republican and Federalist "factions" were however well on their way to develop as proper political parties, taking shape as "crude political organization[s] to collect, measure, and mold the public will and to serve as a link between representative and constituent." James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis*. New Haven, Yale University Press. 1993, 134-135.

¹⁹⁷ The formation of the "first party system" and its impact on the state of national politics and on the political culture of the young republic have been abundantly discussed and debated in the scholarship. See for instance William Nisbet Chambers, *Political Parties in a New Nation: The American Experience, 1776-1809*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1963; Morton Borden, *Parties and Politics in the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited. 1968. Some historians have, however, debated the existence of such a party system. See Richard Buel, *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 1972; Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789-1840," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 68, no. 2 (Jun., 1974), 473-487; John F. Hoadley, "The Emergence of Political Parties in Congress, 1789-1803," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (1980), 757-779; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1995. On the colonial and revolutionary roots of the early republican parties, see John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2003.

¹⁹⁸ On the various uses to which the Republican and Democratic parties put the press, see for instance Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2008; Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship*. Chapel Hill, The

press that benefitted more than anything from the partisan nature of the national political system. Since the colonial period, after all, newspapers had acted as forums for public debates, and had allowed individuals and groups of interests to put forward all kinds of ideas and discourses. With the emergence of formal party politics, newspapers became an integral part of the political system. Not only did newspapers allow parties to publicize their platforms and to take position in political debates, they also helped to “link various sectors of the polity,” and to engage a dialogue between voters and their leaders.¹⁹⁹

Emulating the revolutionary generation, the political parties of the 1790s appropriated the young republic’s newspapers to their respective causes, and thus consecrated the transformation of the American press into a properly partisan press. This transformation relied in great part on the young republic’s new discourse on freedom of speech and press. In the colonial period, freedom of the speech and press meant freedom to speak, write, and print without restrictions. It followed that the press was politically neutral. This situation changed in the revolutionary period, when it became apparent that allowing the free expression of all discourses and ideas would hinder rather than aid the cause of freedom. The revolutionary generation thus adopted a concept of freedom of speech and press according to which only those who spoke the Patriots’ speech of freedom were free to do so without restrictions. Political neutrality was then abandoned in favor of partisanship. This partisanship endured in the early republican period, although some printers, like Eleazar Oswald, attempted to go back to the pre-war situation of political neutrality. What changed in the young republic was that the parties in question were fully legitimate.²⁰⁰ The freedom of speech and press consequently became the freedom to support one party or the other. Soon, this freedom would expand beyond the realm of party politics, and become the freedom to

University of North Carolina Press. 2008, and the chapter on “The Art of Paper War” in Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. New Haven, Yale University Press. 2001, 105-158.

¹⁹⁹ Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers...*, 7.

²⁰⁰ Richard Hofstadter has convincingly argued that it took at least a few years before the legitimacy of the party system was acknowledged. He gives the “Revolution of 1800” as a turning point in this regard. Even in the 1790s, though, the Republican and Federalist parties were generally accepted as part of the political system, and if doubts arose concerning their legitimacy, they were never in danger of being disbanded or declared illegal. Other historians have insisted on the Revolution’s legacy of violence and intolerance. Indeed, the early republic saw many episodes of mob violence and threats directed toward rival printers and publishers. See Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*. 1970; Philip I. Blumberg, *Jurisprudence and the Early American Republic: The First Amendment and the Legacy of English Law*. New York, Cambridge University Press. 2010, 40-42.

lend one's press to a cause or another.²⁰¹ The fragmentation of the young republic's political system thus led to the fragmentation of its press as it was appropriated not only by political parties, but also by other groups of interests.

Before we address the appropriation of the press by such groups, it is worth having a closer look at the experience of printers in the early republic. As suggested by the experience of the Bradfords, the young republic's printing trade, like its print and political cultures, would become fragmented in the decades that followed the Revolution. While some printers would fail to rise up to the challenges of the new American print culture, others would seize the opportunity to gain unprecedented political influence and financial affluence. They would thus accentuate the fragmentation of the press, and contribute to its appropriation by unexpected and unintended groups.

b. Printers, publishers, and the partisan press

As evidenced by the experience of the Bradford family, the 1780s and 1790s were a period of change and transition for the American printing trade. As it found itself confronted to the new challenges and circumstances of the young republic, the trade became fragmented. This fragmentation happened in two steps. First, concretizing a development that was already underway in the colonial period, the printing and publishing spheres became increasingly separated. While simple printers were relegated to the ranks of skilled artisans, the more opportunistic and business-minded publishers and editors moved away from the world of mechanics and joined the nation's political and intellectual circles. Secondly, partly as a result of this separation of the printing and publishing spheres, and partly as the result of the fragmentation of the young republic's entangled print and political cultures, the trade became increasingly involved in party politics. As influential publishers and editors, freed from the manual

²⁰¹ "The creation of a formal political system also clarified what stood outside it while also ... suggesting strategies to compensate for the system's limits or boundaries ... Waves of popular interest and enthusiastic participation spurred emulative and innovative maneuvers by those at the edges of the system." David Waldstreicher, Jeffrey L. Pasley, and Andrew W. Robertson, "Introduction: Beyond the Founders," in Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew Whitmore Robertson, David Waldstreicher (eds) *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2004, 13.

tasks involved in printing, transformed their presses into party organs, they opened the door to the appropriation of the press for groups that lay outside the strict realm of party politics.

Already in the 1680s and 1690s, William Bradford I had shown signs of wanting to step away from the world of “mere mechanics.” He had started his career as a printer but had quickly become involved in publishing and bookselling enterprises. He had also forayed into the paper-making and paper-selling businesses, and extended his activities across the middle colonies and beyond. He had also used his press to defend the cause of George Keith in his struggles against the Quaker establishment, and to promote the freedom of speech and press. But this was the full extent of Bradford’s editorial input. Once he was given a comfortable living with plenty of work to do, he stepped away from political controversies and contented himself with printing what was brought before him. Bradford’s experience was fairly representative of the colonial printing trade as a whole. Most printers simply could not afford to take strong editorial stances in public debates, and nor could they abandon the menial tasks involved in printing to devote themselves to loftier pursuits. Very few printers of the colonial period achieved social recognition. When they did, as was the case for Benjamin Franklin, it was by abandoning the printing trade altogether. In the decades preceding the Revolution, prominent printers like William Bradford III managed to distance themselves from smaller printers by expanding their activities beyond the confines of the printing trade. By the time he was 35, Bradford was not only one of the colonies’ most successful printers and publishers—he was also a major importer and seller of British books, he ran a coffeehouse that was quickly becoming one of the region’s most important political and commercial hub, and he was on his way to start a maritime insurance business. With the Revolution, he and his son Thomas, along with a number of other staunchly patriotic printers, had the opportunity to advance their social standing by embracing the Patriots’ cause and by turning their presses into organs of revolutionary propaganda. At that point, the printing, publishing, and bookselling spheres were still intertwined. The men who published and printed newspapers, and who imported and sold books were the same. Combining the menial tasks of printers and the more intellectual and commercial tasks of publishers and editors had some advantages. It presented much lower risks of financial demise, for instance. But it also hindered the social advancement of printers, and it limited their editorial input. The early republican period would durably change the state of things.

Regardless of the literary and cognitive aspects of their work, 18th-century printers were inevitably relegated to the ranks of artisans and mechanics “in a society that regarded manual labor as the province of those too dull, weak, or lowly to escape it.”²⁰² The situation of manual laborers did not change significantly with the advent of the republic.²⁰³ In order to achieve social prominence and to join the intellectual, financial, and political circles of the young nation, the most ambitious and adventurous members of the printing trade started abandoning the “physical process of printing” to devote their energy to the “entrepreneurial act of selecting and editing material.”²⁰⁴ This development was very gradual, and would reach its full accomplishment in the early decades of the 19th century. But its results were already observable in the 1780s and 1790s. Free from the burden of manual labor, the publishers and editors of the young republic were able, on the one hand, to become much more adventurous in their publishing and bookselling ventures. They came to assume “a quintessentially capitalist role.”²⁰⁵ The risks involved in their trade were higher than in the colonial and revolutionary period, but so were the possibilities of material gain. On the other hand, emboldened by their financial success, these publishers and booksellers were led to take much stronger editorial stances than their predecessors and thus gained unprecedented levels of influence in their communities. It would not be long before these men realized their potential in the field of national politics, and before this potential was extended beyond partisan quarrels.

Jeffrey Pasley has noted that “from the 1790s on, no politician dreamed of mounting a campaign, launching a new movement, or winning over a new geographic area without a newspaper.”²⁰⁶ Already in the last decades of the 18th century, newspapers had become resolutely engrained in the early republican’s political process, and they would remain so throughout the 19th century. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Federalist and Democratic-Republican newspapers appeared as soon as these parties began to take shape. John Fenno’s “arch-Federalist”

²⁰² Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*..., 26.

²⁰³ On the situation of manual laborers and printers in the 19th century, see James Moran, *Printing Presses: History and Development from the 15th Century to Modern Times*. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press. 1973; Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America*. New Haven, Yale University Press. 1991.

²⁰⁴ Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*..., 45.

²⁰⁵ Robert A. Gross, “Introduction: An Extensive Republic,” in Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 2: An Extensive Republic. Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2010, 7. See also Rosalind Remer’s excellent *Printers and Men of Capital*... (2000).

²⁰⁶ Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*..., 9.

Gazette of the United States was first issued on April 15, 1789.²⁰⁷ The paper's creation and the appointment of Fenno as its editor were closely monitored by Hamilton, who intended to use the semi-official publication in order to provide and foster popular support for Washington's Federalist administration and its policies. In retaliation, Jefferson recruited Philip Freneau to publish the Democratic-Republicans' own organ, the *National Gazette*, from October 31, 1791. From that moment on, partisan publications multiplied on both sides. In most cases, although these enterprises benefited from political patronage, their creation resulted from the initiative of publishers and editors themselves. Benjamin Russell founded the *Columbian Centinel* to support the Federalists, while Benjamin Franklin Bache founded the *Philadelphia Aurora* for the Democratic-Republicans. But these were only the big players. Besides them, there were hundreds of printers and publishers who, although less ambitious and politically-inclined, soon elected to follow the trend and align their own presses with either one of the two parties. This was the case with Thomas Bradford, who turned the *Pennsylvania Journal*, renamed the *True American*, into one of Philadelphia's lesser Federalist organs. Bradford's son, Samuel Fisher Bradford, emulated his father by printing and publishing Joseph Dennie's Federalist literary journal, the *Port Folio*, from 1800 until 1827.²⁰⁸ The hold of party politics of the press was such that by the end of Jefferson's first mandate as president, less than 60 of the nation's 329 newspapers did not publicly support, in one way or another, either the Federalist or the Republican party.²⁰⁹

The fragmentation of the young republic's press along party lines was in no way smooth—quite the contrary, if the tone and the contents of the editorials and public letters printed in the partisan press are any indication. From both sides, the most vicious invectives were directed at politicians and publishers alike. When Washington announced his retirement in 1796, for instance, Franklin Bache's *Aurora* proclaimed its joy at finally seeing “the man who [was] the source of all the misfortune of our country ... reduced to a level with his fellow-citizens and ... no longer possessed of power to multiply evils upon the United States.” Two years later, after the

²⁰⁷ Blumberg, *Jurisprudence and the Early American Republic*..., 38.

²⁰⁸ Thomas P. Govan, “The Death of Joseph Dennie: A Memoir by Nicholas Biddle,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, No. 75, No. 1, 36-46; William C. Dowling, *Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and The Port-Folio, 1801-1811*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press. 1999. See also Jeffrey Pasley, “The Cheese and the Words: Popular Political Culture and Participatory Democracy in the Early American Republic,” in Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew Whitmore Robertson, David Waldstreicher (eds) *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2004, 31-56.

²⁰⁹ Patricia L. Dooley, “Introduction: Newspapers in America's Early National Period,” in Patricia L. Dooley (ed.) *The Early Republic: Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group. 2004, ix-x.

fiery Republican editor had succumbed to the yellow fever, John Adams, who had also been the frequent victim of the *Aurora's* attacks, wrote that his “most malicious Libellers” had been “arrested in his detestable Career and sent ... to his grandfather from whom he inherited a dirty, envious, jealous, and revengeful Spite.”²¹⁰ The freedom of speech and press guaranteed by the First Amendment thus had the somewhat perverse effect of fostering an “irresponsibly abusive partisan press,” filled with licentious material, and to agitate the colonial debate on libels.²¹¹ Both on the Federalist and on the Republican sides, voices were raised for the adoption of legal measures aiming at restricting the activities of the “infamous scribblers” who were quickly transforming the young republic’s press into a farce, and endangering public order. Tensions grew continually during the 1790s until John Adams’ administration, weary from the Republican presses’ repeated attacks in the course of the Whiskey Rebellion, the Quasi-War, and the XYZ affair, adopted the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Sedition Act resulted in fifteen prosecutions and five convictions under charges of seditious libel, but it failed to durably restrict the freedom of the press—quite the contrary. It backfired on Adams and the Federalists, and contributed to bring Jefferson and the Republicans to power. The act was fiercely denounced by Jefferson and his followers, who saw it as “an experiment on the American mind to see how far it will bear an avowed violation of the constitution,” and accordingly turned the freedom of speech and press into a major issue in the 1800 election.²¹² In many ways, Jefferson’s triumphant election at the turn of the century crystallized the early republic’s commitment to the unhindered freedom of speech and press. It thus contributed to the growth of the partisan press, which it fully legitimated. But it also had the unintended effect to pave the way for the appropriation of the press by groups and associations whose interests lay outside the realm of party politics.

The early republican period saw the emergence of properly American print and political cultures founded on a tradition of dissent inherited from the Revolution. With the emergence of political parties in the 1780s and 90s, the American press became resolutely partisan, and the

²¹⁰ Arthur R. Landever, “Suppressed History or Distorted History? A Review of Rosenfeld’s *The American Aurora*,” *Cleveland State Law Review*, Vol. 45, No. 259 (1997), 261.

²¹¹ Blumberg, *Repressive Jurisprudence in the Early American Republic...*, 39.

²¹² Eric Burns, *Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Fathers and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: PublicAffairs. 2006, 360. See also Jeffery A. Smith, *Franklin and Bache: Envisioning the Enlightened Republic*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1990, and -----, *Printers and Press Freedom...* (1988).

discourse on the freedom of speech and press was adapted accordingly. No longer was it the freedom to speak or print for all parties while favoring none, as in colonial times, or the freedom to speak or print for a single party, as in the revolutionary period. Rather, it became the right to speak or print for any given party. This development led to the explosion of the newspaper press, in which public debates were held, and the transformation of the United States into a nation of newspaper readers. It also led the young nation's politically-minded publishers and editors to gain unprecedented influence by transforming their presses into partisan organs. Finally, it led to the appropriation of the press by groups of interests that resided outside the sphere of party politics.²¹³ One of these groups was the abolitionists. The following pages will show how the fragmented print culture of the young republic contributed to the spread of an equally fragmented speech of freedom, and how this development allowed the formation of America's first national abolitionist movement.

3. Print and slavery

a. Slavery and the speech of freedom

Throughout the colonial and revolutionary periods, the speech of freedom remained relatively oriented. It was directed, at first, toward the freedom of speech and press, before being reoriented, in the 1740s and 1750s, toward political freedom. In the early republican period, after the speech of freedom was still on everyone's lips and at the tips of everyone's quill. But it was a lot less oriented. Just like the young republic's print and political cultures, and like its printing trade, it became fragmented. As various individuals, political parties, and groups of interests started debating the true definition of American liberty, the contentious issue of slavery was inevitably brought to the fore.²¹⁴ The antislavery forces, who had slowly but surely grown in the

²¹³ Albrecht Koschnik has surveyed the emergence of voluntary associations in the period stretching from the Revolution to the 1840s. He argued that the political factions of the 1780s, and parties of the 1790s, were the result of the association movement of the previous decades. Albrecht Koschnik, *"Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together": Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840*. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press. 2007.

²¹⁴ Among these groups of interests, women were particularly prominent. They claimed their freedom with as much energy as the antislavery forces claimed the freedom of enslaved Africans. Eventually, both groups would be led to join forces, recognizing the similarities of the conditions of women and slaves. See Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 1996 [1980];

course of the 18th century, raised to the opportunity. They organized and, through the appropriation of the young republic's dynamic presses, endeavored to spark a nationwide debate on slavery.

American antislavery did not arise, in the middle of the 19th century, with the charismatic figures of Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. It developed in the course of the 17th and 18th century, gaining momentum in the early republic and transforming into a national and even international movement in the decades preceding the Civil War.²¹⁵ The transition between isolated pockets of antislavery sentiment to abolitionist action has been widely debated. The impact of the Revolution on the emergence of the abolitionist movement of the 1780s and 1790s has received the particular attention of historians. Regardless of the founding generation's antislavery pretensions, recent scholarship has shown that, overall, the Revolution had a mitigated effect on the abolitionist movement, and particularly on the circulation of abolitionist print. The Patriots, who controlled most of the press, were certainly not abolitionists. Not only did they do very little to emancipate slaves, who they regarded as lawful property, they also strived to avoid debates on slavery. Patricia Bradley has shown, for instance, how Patriot printers like William and Thomas Bradford managed to steer clear from the issue of slavery by printing only excerpts from reports of the Somerset trial of 1772, or by neglecting to print any texts regarding the emancipation of slaves by British troops after Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775.²¹⁶ In a letter he received from his good friend James Madison, the youngest William Bradford, then enrolled at Princeton, was even advised to keep the liberation of a group of Virginian slaves by British troops secret, lest it reached the eyes and ears of the public and was detrimental to the Patriots' cause.²¹⁷

Susan Branson, *These Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. 2001; Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. 2011.

²¹⁵ A number of "energetic and articulate opponents of slavery ... attacked it relentlessly and achieved significant gains in many parts of the country over the period 1760 to 1820". James B. Basker, "Introduction," in James Basker (ed.) *Early American Abolitionists: A Collection of Anti-Slavery Writings, 1760-1820*. New York, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. 2007, vii.

²¹⁶ Patricia Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution*. Jackson, University of Mississippi Press. 1998. See also Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*. New York, Penguin Books. 2005, and David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. New York, Hill and Wang. 2004.

²¹⁷ "If america (sic) & Britain should come to an hostile rupture I am afraid an Insurrection among the slaves may & will be promoted. In one of our Counties lately a few of those unhappy wretches met together & chose a leader who was to conduct them when the English Troops should arrive—which they foolishly thought would be very soon & that by revolting to them they should be rewarded with their freedom. Their Intentions were soon discovered & proper precautions taken to prevent the Infection. It is prudent such attempts should be concealed as well as suppressed." The James Madison Papers, From James Madison to William Bradford, 26 November 1774.

Sometimes, when the topic of slavery could not be avoided, Patriots went even further and used their speech of freedom to legitimate bondage slavery. François Furstenberg has argued that by insisting upon individual autonomy and resistance, the revolutionary and early republican generations created a “fantasy of consent.” Since they did not resist their condition, African slaves accepted their fate and did not deserve to be free. On the other hand, the white Americans who had risen against the specter of political slavery and were resisting the tyranny of the British Empire had deemed themselves worthy of emancipation.²¹⁸

Notwithstanding the revolutionary generation’s efforts to avoid addressing the issue of bondage slavery or to legitimate it by twisting their rhetoric of political liberty, the presence of hundreds of thousands of slaves on American soil did cause some unease both within and without the Patriots’ ranks. Already in the course of the Revolution, but even more so after the war was over, the shortcomings of the Revolution were abundantly broadcasted by American commentators like Tom Paine, Benjamin Rush, and Robert Coram, but also by foreign observers like the French radicals Mirabeau, Brissot, and Condorcet, and the British liberals Samuel Johnson, Granville Sharp, and Thomas Clarkson. These men did not only highlight the incompatibility of the revolutionary generation’s speech of freedom, and particularly their frequent use of the slavery metaphor, with the persistence of bondage slavery in what should have been the freest the nation on earth.²¹⁹ They also warned that slavery would prove to be an obstacle to the preservation of the republican character of the United States. Condorcet, for instance, voiced his hope that the “stain” of slavery “would not long sully the purity of American laws” long enough to push American into tyranny and despotism.²²⁰ In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that a number of sworn Patriots, including Paine, Rush, and Coram, adopted antislavery as a cause, and attempted to incorporate the abolitionist message into the speech of freedom of the young republic. The British Empire, they asserted, had brought the evil of slavery to the New World. The American nation, if it was wise, would get rid of it before it corrupted it

²¹⁸ Furstenberg describes the process through which the moral burden of slavery was shifted from the slaveholder to the slave. François Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (March, 2003), 1295-1330.

²¹⁹ On the ins and outs of the slavery metaphor, see Peter Dorsey, *Common Bondage: Slavery as a Metaphor in Revolutionary America*. Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press. 2009. According to Dorsey, “[t]he figurative extension of slavery was as controversial in the late eighteenth century as it would likely be today,” and that, “[c]onfronted with the inconsistency between their words and actions” the revolutionary generation was forced to “[examine] slavery in ways that had not occurred before.”

²²⁰ Condorcet is quoted in Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 2010, 41.

the way it had corrupted Britain. It was then, only, that the United States would live up to the Revolution's legacy and promises, and become itself an "empire of liberty."²²¹

These early proponents of abolition were up against a sizeable challenge. Slavery was a well-established institution in 18th-century America, even though its ideological foundations were shaken by the Revolution. It was even destined to go through a period of growth in the 1780s and 1790s, as the Atlantic slave trade knew its apogee and as Eli Whitney's cotton gin allowed the expansion of the cotton culture across the southernmost colonies. In order to convince their contemporaries that the American republic should rid itself of this abject institution, the antislavery forces were led to unite their forces and to organize a public campaign of national and even international dimensions. At the heart of this campaign lay traditional strategies that aimed at transforming the political and judiciary systems. Early abolitionists had recourse to political petitions and lobbying, for instance, and they filed a number of "freedom suits" in order to emancipate individual slaves.²²² But for the abolitionist campaign of the late 18th and early 19th century to achieve considerable success, its leaders would have to change its focus toward public opinion. It was by appropriating the means of freedom of the revolutionary and early republican generations that they would do so. By producing and disseminating antislavery print, the early abolitionists managed to instill in their supporters the feeling of belonging to a nationwide movement, and thus contributed to durably sway the opinion of most of the northern states against slavery.²²³ This in turn provoked a wave of voluntary emancipations and the transformation of the North into a "free territory." These developments were very gradual,

²²¹ See Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2011; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2009; Alfred F. Young, Ray Raphael, and Gary B. Nash, "Introduction: 'To Begin The World Over Again,'" in Alfred F. Young, Ray Raphael, and Gary B. Nash (eds) *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*. New York, Alfred F. Knopf. 2011, 3-12.

²²² On freedom suits, see for instance Kirsten Sword, "Remembering Dinah Nevil: Strategic Deceptions in Eighteenth-Century Antislavery," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (Sept., 2010), 315-343. The abolitionists' use of the pulpit, which is unfortunately impossible to discuss in this thesis, is detailed in Marissa D. King and Heather A. Haveman, "Antislavery in America: The Press, the Pulpit, and the Rise of Antislavery Societies," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Sep., 2008), 492-528.

²²³ Seth Cotlar has shown how "[b]y printing news about political initiatives and ideas around the globe and around the new American nation, newspaper editors encouraged their readers on a weekly basis to imaginatively span great geographical distances in order to sympathize with and support other like-minded democrats whom they had never met, and probably never would." Abolitionism spread through a similar process. The last decades of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century saw the formation of an "imagined community" of abolitionists, to borrow a phrase from Benedict Anderson. See Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic*. Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press. 2011, 55.

though. Before the abolitionist movement could become so successful, indeed, it had to overcome resistance in the printing trade.

b. Abolitionism and the printing trade

From the start, print was used to promote antislavery. At first, though, the printing and publishing of antislavery books, pamphlets, tracts, and newspaper essays was rather marginal, and its impact was limited to confined locales. It was in the course of the revolutionary and early republican periods that abolitionists started relying on print as a primary means of diffusion and mobilization. This is hardly surprising. The early abolitionists did not merely appropriate the Patriots' language of liberty and slavery: they also appropriate their means and methods. In the course of the Stamp Act crisis and the ensuing war, the Patriots had shown just how effective newspapers could be when it came to disseminating discourses and shaping public opinion. Most of all, they had shown that newspapers were able to create nationwide—and even Atlantic-wide—networks of information and communications. In the 1780s and 1790s, the political parties assembled around Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton had used the lessons from the revolutionary period in order to promote their respective visions of what the young republic should become. They had thus set the stage for the appropriation of the fractured print culture of the early republican period not only by political parties, but also by a variety of groups and associations who hoped to promote their respective agendas.

The very first American antislavery tract was probably the Germantown Protest of 1688. Signed by a group of German and Dutch Friends from the outskirts of Philadelphia, the Protest was written by hand and was only circulated privately among the Quakers of Pennsylvania and the neighboring colonies. News of it may have been spread through correspondence and word of mouth, but its reach was most likely limited to Quaker circles. A few years later, in 1693, a second protest was written, this time by the schismatic George Keith. Like Keith's other political and religious works, this tract, entitled *Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes*, was printed and published by William Bradford. Because of its format, the *Exhortation*

circulated a lot more than the previous protest. But since it was part of Keith's campaign against the Quaker establishment, it lost credibility in the eyes of the Friends and its actual impact remained rather modest.²²⁴ These two early protests were largely ignored by the contemporaries. And yet, the Germantown Protest did set in motion a long debate on slavery, while the *Exhortation* initiated the tradition of circulating antislavery ideas through print.

Over the following decades, an antislavery sentiment quickly grew among the Quakers' ranks. Accordingly, so did the number of antislavery pamphlets, tracts, and essays written and printed by Quakers. Among the most notable were Ralph Sandiford's *A Brief Examination on the Practice of the Times* (1729) and Benjamin Lay's *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* (1737), which set the stage for the decisive action of John Woolman and Anthony Benezet from the 1740s onward. The former published *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* in 1754, less than a year before the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting issued "An Epistle of Caution and Advice, Concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves," a document that instructed Quakers to abandon the buying and selling of slaves. Five years later, in 1759, Benezet published the very influential *Observations on the Inslaving, Importing, and Purchasing of Negroes*. At that point, antislavery ideas had gained a lot of ground among the Quakers, but had just started to reach the non-Quaker community. It was only with the coming of the Revolution that "antislavery in print" would have the opportunity to expand beyond the rather conservative boundaries set by the Quaker establishment, and to achieve concrete, if modest, results.

The Revolution put many obstacles in the way of the dissemination of abolitionist ideas through print. For one thing, the Patriots refused to add the abolition of slavery to their agenda. They also avoided engaging in debates on slavery as much as possible, since these debates tended to highlight the inconsistencies of their rhetoric. But there was another factor that made the dissemination of antislavery ideas difficult in wartime. Most abolitionists were Quakers. As such, they recognized no earthly king, and they were forbidden to swear oaths and to bear arms. Their pacifism caused little trouble in times of peace, but became problematic in times of war. Although they had quietly resisted the Stamp Act in 1765, the Friends declared themselves neutral when war

²²⁴ Katharine Gerbner, "Antislavery in Print: The Germantown Protest, the 'Exhortation,' and the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Debate on Slavery," *Early American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall, 2011), 552.

broke out a decade later.²²⁵ Worse, they maintained the transatlantic Quaker networks that tied them to their English brethren. Accusations of betrayal soon emerged among the non-Quaker population and, as a result, everything that came out of Quaker circles was regarded with suspicion, be it antislavery texts or appeals to peace. For a while, therefore, American abolitionism, which was until that time limited to the Quakers, came to a stall. In no time, though, the movement was revived as non-Quakers began adopting antislavery views. Already in 1773, at the insistence of Benezet, the Presbyterian physician and future Founding Father Benjamin Rush had published an *Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, Upon Slave-Keeping*. Rush's foray into antislavery writing was quickly followed by Tom Paine's *African Slavery in America*, which was first published in Bradford's *Pennsylvania Journal* on March 8, 1775—barely weeks before the first American abolitionist society was founded in Philadelphia, and before shots were fired at Concord and Lexington. The outbreak of war slowed the flow of abolitionist print, but it did not stop it entirely. Occasional antislavery texts, published as pamphlets, broadsides, or newspaper essays, slowly but surely began circulating, alongside the Patriots' propaganda. When the war ended and it became relatively safe for the American Quakers to take an antislavery stance and to openly rekindle their links with their British counterparts, antislavery had reached a momentum. The time was ripe for the emergence of a nationwide abolitionist campaign.

The abolitionist forces of the early republican period appropriated not only the Patriots' speech of freedom, but also their means of mass dissemination. On both sides of the Atlantic, they wrote, published, and circulated an increasing amount of antislavery books, pamphlets, and newspaper essays, using at first the Quakers' communication networks and building their own abolitionist networks on top of them. As the abolitionists' speech of freedom spread across the young republic, it contributed to fuel a nationwide public debate on slavery and to push the Northern states on the way to gradual emancipation, starting with Vermont in 1777 and ending with New York and New Jersey in 1799 and 1804. The appropriation of the press as a means of mobilization also had the unexpected effect of bringing the main stakeholders into the debate, and thus to fracture even further the young republic's speech of freedom. Indeed, as David Gellman has shown in his study of early republican newspapers, black men and women soon realized the potential of print to carry and disseminate their grievances and their own concept of

²²⁵ See Anne M. Ousterhout, *A State Divided: Opposition in Pennsylvania to the American Revolution*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 1987, 29-39.

liberty.²²⁶ Some, following in the footsteps of Phillis Wheatley, who had become famous in the 1760s and 1770s for her poetry and prose, asserted their claim to freedom through the simple act of publishing their writings.²²⁷ Others used the press to actively engage in debates, and to present to the public their own views on antislavery. This was the case of Bishop Richard Allen, whose writings inspired many abolitionists of the early republican period, and of Olaudah Equiano, whose narrative, although printed and published in London at first, was soon circulated across the United States where it was met with instant success.²²⁸

The debate on slavery, which was being carried through print and gaining increasing visibility in the public space, was sure to affect the young republic's printing trade. A few printers and publishers supported the abolitionists' cause from the start, while others favored the pro-slavery interests. Most, however, had a more ambivalent attitude toward slavery. In this respect, the Bradfords' example was quite representative of the way the printing trade dealt with early abolitionism.

The Bradfords had a complex relation to slavery. They were surely committed to the cause of freedom, understood as the freedom of the press and the political freedom of white Americans. But when it came to actual slavery, their attitude was more ambivalent. It is unknown whether William Bradford I held antislavery views or not. He did print George Keith's *Exhortation*, which was the first antislavery tract to be printed on American soil. But it is very likely that the gesture was political and economical, rather than ideological. A few decades later, Bradford's son Andrew occasionally printed advertisement for slaves to be sold in the *American*

²²⁶ See David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: Discourse, Politics, and Ending Slavery in New York*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press. 2006. Building on Arthur Zilversmit's argument that ideas and discourses were central to the political process of emancipation, Gellman has challenged Richard S. Newman's argument that the 18th-century abolitionist movement was essentially elitist and confined to the political and judiciary spheres. See Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press. 1967, and Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2002. On early abolitionism as an Atlantic movement, see also David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1999 [1975].

²²⁷ David Waldstreicher, "The Wheatleyan Moment," *Early American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Fall, 2011), 522-551.

²²⁸ See Dorothy Porter (ed) *Early Negro Writings: 1760-1837*. Baltimore, Black Classic Press. 1995; Richard S. Newman, "We Participate in Common: Richard Allen's Eulogy of Washington and the Challenge of Interracial Appeals," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 64, No.1 (Jan., 2007), 117-128; -----, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*. New York and London, New York University Press. 2008; James Green, "The Publishing History of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*," *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Dec., 1995), 562-575.

Weekly Mercury. From June 8 to June 15, 1738, for instance, he announced, under the title “Just Imported and to be Sold,” that “A PARCEL of fine young Healthy, Negroe Slaves, Boys and Girls” were to be sold for a “very reasonable” price. His nephew, William Bradford III, did the same in the *Pennsylvania Journal*. But the latter also became actively involved in the actual importation and selling of slaves. His marine insurance company, the Philadelphia Insurance Company, insured many Atlantic journeys that involved slave trading. His coffeehouse, in addition to being a locus of patriotism, also acted as a merchants’ exchange. It was there that Philadelphia’s merchant community assembled to sell and buy such goods as coffee and tea. And it was there that, from 1758 to 1774, slaves were auctioned.²²⁹ According to Gary Nash, it was the terrible spectacle of slaves being sold in front of the London Coffee House that led Tom Paine to publish a first antislavery tract in 1775. This tract, we recall, was printed and published by William and Thomas Bradford. It was followed, in the course of the Revolution and during the early republican period, by an increasing amount of antislavery and abolitionist material. The Bradfords advertised the meetings of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, for instance, and published books, essays, and letters by prominent abolitionists like Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp. But these were only bits and pieces in the *Pennsylvania Journal* and in the entire output of the Bradfords’ press. This is not to mention that neither William nor Thomas ever took an editorial stance in favor of abolition. They regularly commented on topics as diverse as the young republic’s political structures, its commercial networks, and the burgeoning movement for prison reform. But they never approached the topic of slavery.

What can be made of this series of events? Had the Bradfords suddenly changed their minds about slavery and the slave trade? Had they simply adjusted to the growing antislavery sentiment of their fellow Philadelphians? Or had their decision to interrupt the selling of slaves been forced upon them by the political circumstances, which urged the rupturing of trading connections with the British Empire? David Waldstreicher’s study of Benjamin Franklin’s

²²⁹ The arrival of slaves to the city and the ensuing slave auctions that took place in front of Bradford’s Coffee House benefited from much advertisement, both in the *Pennsylvania Journal* and in other Philadelphia publications. On May 27, 1762, Bradford’s *Journal* announced the “Sale of 75 slaves imported in the Schooner Sally from the River Gambia.” On September 29, 1763, Franklin and Hall’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* announced that John Merrit of Society Hill wished to sell “By public Vendue, at the London Coffee House,” “A Likely healthy Negro Wench, about 24 Years of Age, this Country born.”

ambivalent relation to slavery suggests an interpretation.²³⁰ Franklin came to support abolitionism only after a slow conversion, which resulted both from his religious beliefs and from his intellectual commitment to the ideals of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. Notwithstanding his personal convictions, Franklin would probably never have dared to take an open abolitionist stance had the right circumstances not arisen. Contrary to Franklin, the Bradfords were never actively engaged in the abolitionist campaign. But they were, like him, ambivalent in their support slavery. Most likely, they never developed strong antislavery views. Their correspondence and their editorials, for the last decades of the 18th century, are free from discussions of bondage slavery. They may, however, have started feeling some unease toward slavery in the course of the Revolution and in its aftermath. Or they may just have felt that it would be a better option, politically, to show *some* opposition to the selling and owning of slaves.

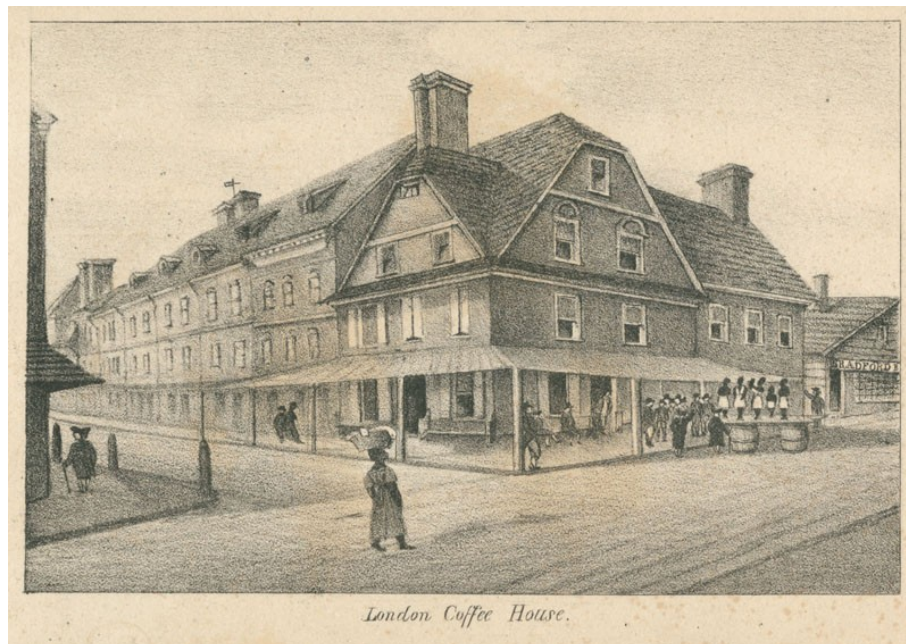


Fig. 2 A slave auction taking place in front of the London Coffee House. Litograph by W. L. Breton. Philadelphia, 1830.

²³⁰ See, in particular, David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. New York, Hill and Wang, 2004, and Waldstreicher, "Benjamin Franklin, Religion, and Antislavery," in Steven Mintz and John Stauffer (eds) *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007, 162-173.

The Bradfords' ambivalence with it came to the debates on slavery and abolition is somewhat ironic. In their capacity as printers and publishers, they had not only set the bases of the American printing trade, but they had also claimed their commitment to the cause of freedom for nearly a century. They had defended the freedom of speech and press in the colonial period, and the Patriots' speech of freedom during the Revolution. When the war ended and the early republican period began, they found themselves lost in the new and properly American print culture and printing trade. It was in great part the fragmentation of the young republic's print culture and of its speech of freedom that gave an impulse to the abolitionist movement of the 1780s and 1790s. And it was the fragmentation of the printing trade that rendered the Bradfords unable to take a decisive stance on the matter of slavery. Going through a period of change and transition, the Bradfords, like many of their fellow printers, chose not to take a stand in the most controversial debate of the day. They did allow the new speech of freedom to be nurtured and disseminated in their presses—but they did not appropriate this speech for themselves.

Conclusion

William Bradford III, the celebrated “patriot printer of 1776,” died peacefully on September 25th, 1791. On his deathbed, he used his last breath to tell his children that although he bequeathed them no estate or great riches, he was happy to leave them “in the enjoyment of liberty.”²³¹ His obituary was published less than a week later in the *Gazette of the United States*. It read that Bradford “was descended from one of the first settlers in Pennsylvania, and was one of four generations of printers” who had “universally distinguished themselves by devoting the press to the preservation and extension of the liberties of their country.”²³² Less than two months later, the First Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed the freedom of speech and press, was adopted. The two events, close in time but otherwise unrelated, throw in perspective the evolution, if not the progress, of the speech of freedom in the course of the Bradfords’ family history.

The first William Bradford had settled in Pennsylvania along with William Penn and the Quakers in order to create a name for himself as a pioneer printer in the middle colonies. Soon, he had found himself involved in colonial America’s first trials to involve the issue of press freedom. By refusing to yield his agency as a printer in the Keithian controversy, and by taking the established authorities’ side in the Zenger trial, he contributed to the formation of the colonial discourse on the freedom of speech and press. This discourse, steeped in the contemporary literature of political opposition, stressed the importance of the openness of the press and the neutrality of printers. By opening their presses to all parties while remaining influenced by none, the printers and publishers of the colonies claimed they were protecting the “great bulwark of liberty” that was political freedom. It was thus that, in the early decades of the 18th century, the era of the freedom of speech began. Decades after the Zenger controversy, Bradford’s grandson William III took an active part in the colonies’ resistance to English rule. He lent not only his sword and musket, but also his press and his pen to the Patriots’ cause. He thus gained his reputation as a defender of liberty, and helped consecrate the transformation of the revolutionary presses into partisan organs devoted to the Patriots’ speech of freedom. As the era of the freedom

²³¹ Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 31; Thomas, *History of Printing...*, 51.

²³² Bradford’s obituary appeared in the *Gazette of the United States* of October 1st, 1791. It was reproduced in full in Wallace, *An Old Philadelphian...*, 331-332. It is followed by the inscription of his tombstone, located in Philadelphia’s Second Presbyterian Cemetery.

of speech came to a close, the era of the speech of freedom began. In the years following the war, according to a pattern set by party politics, the print culture and printing trade of the young American nation became increasingly fragmented. So did the speech of freedom nurtured and disseminated through print, which was increasingly appropriated by various groups of interests that lay outside the realm of national politics. The members of the fourth and fifth generations of Bradfords managed to remain afloat by adapting to the new circumstances of the early republican world of print—but barely. Like the speech of freedom, they had lost their focus. Their ambivalence when it came to the issue of slavery attests to their unease and their uncertainty. Born with the era of the freedom of speech, the Bradford printing dynasty was, it seems, destined to die out with the era of the speech of freedom.

Building on the existence scholarship of the agency of print and assuming from the start that the association of print with freedom was neither automatic nor linear, this thesis started as a study of the interplay between print, printers, and various discourses of freedom in the context of 18th-century America. By retracing the experience of one of early America's most celebrated printing dynasties, it set out to shape the contours of the contribution of print and printers to what they perceived as the cause of freedom in the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods. It has shown that, in the colonial period, print and printers understood themselves as serving the cause of freedom by allowing the free expression of diverse points of view. This state of things came about not as a result of the inherent vocation of print or printers to effect change and promote freedom, but rather as the result of political instability and of competition in the printing trade. The potential of print as an instrument of dissemination and as a public forum nevertheless contributed to bring about the debates on press freedom that brought forth the concept of the "open press," which in turn fostered the era of the freedom of speech. In the revolutionary period, printers were torn between two adversary parties that allowed no neutrality. Forced to abandon the open press strategy and to take sides either with the Patriots or the Loyalists, printers adapted their discourse on freedom to the circumstances. They found that they could still serve the cause of freedom by disseminating the "true" speech of freedom. As in the colonial era, revolutionary print and printers did not serve what they perceived as the cause of liberty because of an inherent propensity to promote freedom. The association of print with freedom, in the course of the Revolution, resulted in great part from political circumstances. The

British government's decision to tax American paper in 1765 alienated printers from the start, and cemented the association of the press with colonial resistance. Social and cultural factors should also be held into account. From the early decades of the 18th century, republican ideas had spread in the books, pamphlets, and newspaper essays imported and printed in the colonies, and had thus permeated the colonies' print and political cultures. These ideas emphasized the role of print as an emancipating force by arguing that it acted not only as an instrument of mass education and mobilization, but also as a check upon tyrannical powers. Still, the association of print and printers with freedom in the revolutionary era did rest, at least in part, upon the capacity of print to foster and disseminate ideas and discourses, and upon the capacity of printers to influence debates. In the early republican period, print and printers remained closely associated with what they and their contemporaries understood as the cause—or the causes—of freedom. At that time, printers were no longer called upon to promote a cohesive discourse on freedom through the output of their presses. Rather, they were requested to lend their presses to groups who each advocated their own speech of freedom. This was partly a result of the Revolution's republican and democratic promises, and partly a result of the extreme fragmentation of the print culture, printing trade, and speech of freedom of the young nation.

This thesis has sought to contribute to debates on the agency of print and printers by showing how, in the context of 18th-century America, print and printers contributed to what contemporaries understood as the cause of freedom. Neither print nor printers were, from the start, determined to become agents of emancipation. When the proper circumstances arose, however, they were led to nurture and promote various discourses on freedom. The nature of these discourses, which changed continually in the course of the colonial, revolutionary, and early republican periods, depended upon social, political, economic, and cultural factors. But this is not to say that print and printers were not predisposed, in some ways, to become agents of change. Print had, from the start, the potential to act as a mobilizing force and to disseminate various ideas and discourses. Printers, for their part, had the potential to act as “brokers of the word” and to actively influence the course of public debates. On a different but related note, this thesis has shown how ideas and discourses could act as agents change. By taking a life of its own, the speech of freedom that was constantly being debated and negotiated during the 18th century produced unexpected results. The colonial discourse on press freedom, for instance, incited printers and

publishers to claim their neutrality and to open their presses to all kinds of ideas and discourses. This in turn favored the production and dissemination of controversial texts, and stimulated the holding of public debates both in the pages of newspapers, in public spaces like taverns and coffeehouses, and in private spaces like letters and parlors. A similar process also happened in the revolutionary period, when the discourse on political liberty, republican in inspiration, also became republican in aspiration. This shift considerably transformed the revolutionary rhetoric, and determined the nature of the new nation's government. Likewise, in the early republican period, the widespread dissemination of the speech of freedom resulted in its appropriation by unintended actors like black and white abolitionists. This in turn led to the production of a critical mass of antislavery material, which in time contributed to a first movement of gradual emancipation and set the stage for the "great" abolitionism of the antebellum period.²³³

Future research on the agency of print and printers or on the interplay between print, printers, and freedom could go in many directions. It could expand its scope to a greater number of printing families, or it could move across time and space. It could either focus more precisely on the colonial, revolutionary, or early republican periods, or stretch back to the early 17th century or to the later 19th century. It could also focus on a more precise locale, or expand to encompass the entire American territory, or adopt a comparative or a transatlantic perspective. It could also exploit a few themes that have not been addressed in the present study. The role of public institutions like post offices, coffeehouses, and bookstores in the dissemination of news and information, and in the shaping of early American print culture is certainly worth considering more carefully, as suggested by the work of Joseph Adelman, Peter Thompson, and David Conroy, among others.²³⁴ Likewise, future research could profit from a closer observation of the

²³³ Historians have broadly debated the relation between ideas and historical change, in this case the impact of antislavery ideas on abolition. While Bernard Bailly and his followers believe that revolutionary ideology had a major incidence on the dissemination of antislavery ideas, and that these ideas were responsible for the gradual abolitionism of the early republican period, Gary Nash and others have argued that "when it came to American slavery, the ideology of the Revolution had a superficial impact on both white Northerners and white Southerners." See Matthew Mason, "Necessary but not Sufficient," in John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (eds) *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*. Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press. 2011, 12.

²³⁴ On the early American post offices, see in particular Joseph Adelman's dissertation, "The Business of Politics: Printers and the Emergence of Political Communications Networks, 1765-1776" (2010) and his "A Constitutional Conveyance of Intelligence..." (2010). On the American coffeehouses' role in the formation and dissemination of information and discourses, see Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution...* (1999) and Conroy, *In Public Houses...* (1995). On bookstores, see especially James Green, "The Book Trade..." (2000) and Hugh Amory, "Reinventing the

role of reading and writing, understood as historical and cultural practices, in the formation of political consciousness and political participation both on an individual and a collective scale. This observation could expand to the actual production of books and other printed documents, and to the act of selling books, as suggested by the work of James Raven on the London book trade.²³⁵ In a similar line, research could also benefit from a closer study of the interplay between print, printers, and public opinion. Public opinion was a force to be reckoned with throughout the 18th century, albeit at various degrees. By the early republican period, it had taken the traits of a “Fourth Estate.” As such, it lay at the heart of the American print and political cultures, and gained an agency of its own. As James Gilreath put it, “[t]he new American government’s recognition that its legitimacy and authority were ultimately rooted in the approval of the people strengthened public opinion as an active agent in society.”²³⁶

Colonial Book,” in David D. Hall and Hugh Amory (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2010, 26-54, and Amory, “Printing and Bookselling in New England, 1683-1713,” in David D. Hall and Hugh Amory (eds) *A History of the Book in America. Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 2010, 83-116.

²³⁵ James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450-1850*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 2007.

²³⁶ Gilreath, “Government, Law, Public Opinion...,” 79.

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