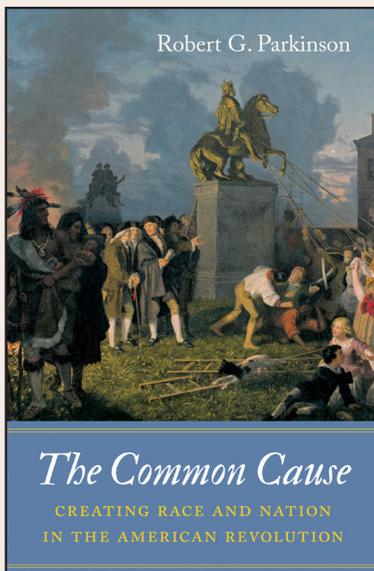


BOOK EXCERPT

From “The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution”



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Binghamton University



“The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution” (University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

From The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution by Robert G. Parkinson. Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Copyright © 2016 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher. www.uncpress.unc.edu.

The interior of the newspaper, where the bulk of the actual news appeared, deserves its own advocate. The succinct paragraphs, the extracted accounts, the mundane details: these items—largely hidden in plain sight from scholars thus far—were essential to political and, especially, military mobilization during the Revolutionary War. On these inner pages, most of the stories usually focused on the eastern side of the Atlantic even as late as the mid-1700s. Hawthorne’s reader put it better: “Without any discredit to the colonial press, these [papers] might have been, and probably were, spread out on the tables of the British coffee-house, in King street for the perusal of the throng of officers who then drank their wine at that celebrated establishment.” “To interest these military gentlemen,” he continued, “there were bulletins of the war between Prussia and Austria; between England and France, . . . and in our own trackless woods, where white men never trod until they came to fight there.” Hawthorne’s narrator was right; before the 1770s, news from mainland North America did get precious little space in these six weekly columns. But on the eve of war, patriot political leaders managed to dominate the interior of the newspapers. With that

closer management came the ability to promulgate singular representations.

The methods by which printers assembled these interior pages made them crucial to mobilizing support for the common cause after 1775. One of the primary professional rules governing printing in the eighteenth century was that editors would send free copies of their weekly paper to colleagues outside their city for the purposes of “exchanging” stories. Through the common practice of “exchanges”—the clipping of pieces from other papers to insert into your own—colonists across colony and region learned much of the same information and read many of the same stories. The printers’ exchanges had an effect akin to modern newswires; once a story entered into one newspaper, it very likely would be picked up and, over the next several weeks, be reprinted in faraway papers. The role this commonplace practice of “exchanges” played in Revolutionary mobilization was essential, but it has received little notice.

Those who were emerging as patriot leaders certainly understood the power of the middle pages, the exchange system, and its potential to cement unity. An illuminating episode involving one of those men, John Adams, indicates the patriots’ recognition of the potential impact of the press and their subsequent management of it to their advantage.

On Sunday, September 3, 1769, Adams wrote in his diary that he was in the company of his cousin Sam, James Otis, and Boston Gazette print-

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ers Benjamin Edes and John Gill. “The evening [was] spent in preparing for the Next Days Newspaper,” he noted, “a curious Employment. Cooking up Paragraphs, Articles, Occurrences etc.—working the political Engine!” What, exactly, did Adams, Otis, and the printers “cook up?” Not a front-page political essay, and much more than a bed of poppies.

The front page of the September 4 issue of the Boston Gazette did not feature an extended essay on natural rights or sociability but rather petitions and excerpts of English newspapers. The back page, true to form, contained notices of runaway servants and apprentices as well as advertisements of items for sale, including Madeira wine, spermaceti candles, choice chocolate, lost pieces of gold, houses to let, and a “Likely Negro Girl,” for which interested buyers should “Inquire of Edes and Gill.” Neither side of the exterior sheet, it seems, was what Adams referred to by “cooking up” or “working the political engine.” Inside the Gazette was a different matter. There, readers found an assortment of private letters, closely crafted “news” about Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s recent importation of tea, and pseudonymous poems attacking Governor Francis Bernard. All of these items showed evidence that this was the fare the patriots scrupulously prepared. Focusing on the exterior pages of the weekly papers, historians have overlooked the Bostonians’ labor. Adams, Otis, and the Gazette printers spent their time and attention on items scholars have largely ignored ever since. Not only have interpreters downplayed the importance of these items, but they also have missed the effect of the “exchanges.” Adams and his friends knew their “cooking” would



Robert G. Parkinson discusses his award-winning book at the History Division business meeting in Chicago. Parkinson received the 2017 History Division Book Award.

reach readers far outside Boston. Because of the exchange system, over the next few weeks, fourteen other newspapers—half of active colonial prints from New York and Philadelphia to Williamsburg and Savannah—included some parts of their handicraft. The political commentary Bostonians fashioned in the waning daylight on the Gazette’s type tables found its way to hundreds of other tables, in public and private houses across New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Georgia.

The word most often enlisted to describe this kind of effort to manipulate information is “propaganda.” “Propaganda,” though, is problematic for several reasons, not least because it was a word unknown to late-eighteenth-century colonists. Also, because it recalls totalitarian systems, mass media, corporatism, and disinformation campaigns, “propaganda” fits awkwardly with the American Revolution. To match that word to the late eighteenth century, it has to be stripped of two key elements: the mass delivery systems that can saturate images and the

centralized clearinghouses that operate those systems. Only the husk remains.

“Propagate,” or “propagation,” is a far superior descriptor. This endorsement of a return to the Latin root, however, is much more than a shift of suffixes. “Propagation”—with its organic connotations to agriculture, nature, breeding, and disease—is a term contemporaries would have recognized as a central part of their lives. No matter where one lived in North America, everyone did his or her best to propagate: increase crop yields, breed animals, extend families, build estates for posterity. Or, in the case of smallpox or dysentery, one tried to limit propagation. For three generations, colonists throughout the Atlantic had become familiar with Anglican missionaries from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel who sought to convert Catholics, lapsed Christians, and “heathen” Indians or Africans. Less charged than “propaganda,” “propagation” better describes what the patriots were trying to do with the common cause—that is, grow more patriots.

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Notes

ⁱ Hawthorne, “Old News,” in [Pearce, ed.], *Tales and Sketches*, 259. For more on the European content of colonial newspapers in the early to mid-eighteenth century, see Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665–1740* (New York, 1994); Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers*.

ⁱⁱ Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763–1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1941), 245. In studying the effects of the exchanges, my thinking is influenced by theories of the role print played in the social construction of nations and nationalism, especially Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1983; London, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York, 1988); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997).

ⁱⁱⁱ Entry for Sept. 3, 1769, in L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, series 1 of *The Adams Papers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), I, 343.

^{iv} *Boston Gazette*, Sept. 4, 1769; *Boston Chronicle*, Sept. 11, 1769; *Essex Gazette*, Sept. 12, 1769; Bos-

ton News-Letter, Sept. 14, 1769; *Connecticut Gazette*, Sept. 15, 1769; *Connecticut Journal*, Sept. 15, 1769; *New-Hampshire Gazette*, Sept. 15, 22, 1769; *Providence Gazette*, Sept. 16, 1769; *New-York Gazette*, Sept. 18, 1769; *Newport Mercury*, Sept. 8, 1769; *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, Sept. 18, 1769; *Pennsylvania Journal*, Sept. 21, 1769; *New-York Journal*, Sept. 21, 1769; *Georgia Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1769; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), Sept. 28, 1769.

^v For generations, historians have grappled with the role of propaganda in the American Revolution. Progressive historians in the early twentieth century (themselves influenced by the propaganda campaigns of World War I) were the first to argue that the Revolutionaries, especially Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, and Benjamin Franklin, were master propagandists who used false arts to manipulate the American public into embracing radical political positions against their best interests—a claim that echoed contemporary loyalist critiques. But totalitarian techniques of mass propaganda, especially Joseph Goebbels’s black disinformation campaigns, in part discredited this interpretation, especially the Progressives’ insinuation that the populace was deceived. See John C. Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (Boston, 1936); Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution*. When historians at mid-century emphasized ideas or ideology as the engines driving the Revolution, they argued that there was no false consciousness; patriot writers and their readers believed in the arguments about rights and representation they espoused.

Modern theoretical studies of propa-

ganda, influenced especially by Noam Chomsky, focus on the world wars, the Cold War, the “War on Terror,” and current corporate advertising campaigns. Their reliance on contemporary examples loads this work with too much cultural baggage. As one of the most important scholars of modern propaganda, Jacques Ellul, put it, before the twentieth century, propaganda “did not appear as a specific phenomenon that needed to be defined and considered in itself” (Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* [1962; rpt. New York, 1973], 5). In the eighteenth century, he argues, there was no recognition of propaganda. For an overview on theories of propaganda, see Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1999). For the philosophical underpinnings of propaganda, see Stanley B. Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction* (Westport, Conn., 2002). Chomsky’s critiques of modern propaganda techniques by corporations and the state are in his *Letters from Lexington: Reflections on Propaganda*, rev. ed. (Boulder, Co., 2004); Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2d ed. (New York, 2002); Edward S. Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 1988).

^{vi} For a modern defense of the patriots as effective propagandists, especially in print, see Russ Castronovo, *Propaganda 1776: Secrets, Leaks, and Revolutionary Communications in Early America* (New York, 2014); William B. Warner, *Protocols of Liberty: Communication Innovation and the American Revolution* (Chicago, 2013).

History Division 2017 Business Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the 2017 Business Meeting AEJMC History Division Chicago

Outgoing Chair Mike Sweeney (Ohio) called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 11.

The membership accepted the minutes from last year's meeting as reported in the Fall 2016 Clio.

Book Award: The winner this year was Robert G. Parkinson, assistant professor of history at Binghamton University, for "The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution" (University of North Carolina Press). Book Award Chair John Ferré (Louisville) indicated that the judges selected from among 26 nominated books. Judges were Fred Blevens (Florida International), Kathy Roberts Forde (Massachusetts-Amherst), and Linda Steiner (Maryland).

Ferré described the book as "chilling and gripping," centered on the argument that those leading the American Revolution united the colonies by turning them against a common enemy that had to be more than just England. By unifying

the public against Native Americans and African-American slaves, the book argues, the nation's founders built racism into the country's foundation.

Parkinson said he wanted to write something about the Revolution and race, so he started by reading all the colonial newspapers. "I was really shocked about what I found," Parkinson said, "and that's a massive amount of material in the middle pages of the newspapers—what everyone else has overlooked." Parkinson argued that the Revolution's leaders needed to scare people into fighting, and they did that by preying on people's fear and outrage.

Newspapers allowed those leaders not only to strike while the iron was hot but to keep striking, Parkinson said. They did that in part by reprinting the same items in every newspaper. Parkinson advised young researchers not to rely on databases; he said he never would have reached the argument he did if he had just "dipped in" to the available resources. "I needed to read them all, one after the other," he said.

Covert Award: For the second time, Sheila Webb (Western Washington) received the division's Covert Award for best mass communication history article. Her piece in *Journalism Monographs*, "Creating Life: 'America's Most Potent Editorial Force,'" was selected from among eight nominees. Webb said she became interested in *Life* magazine as a graduate student; she described hauling issues home from the library in garbage bags to go through them. In total, she viewed 55,000 images, of which she ultimately coded 4,500.

"I was always interested in the start-up of media forms," Webb said. "My project was on the first decade of *Life* magazine, which was a new pictorial, and how does a magazine position a cultural moment in order to become the most successful magazine launch in history."

Webb acknowledged the late James

Baughman for his assistance with her research.

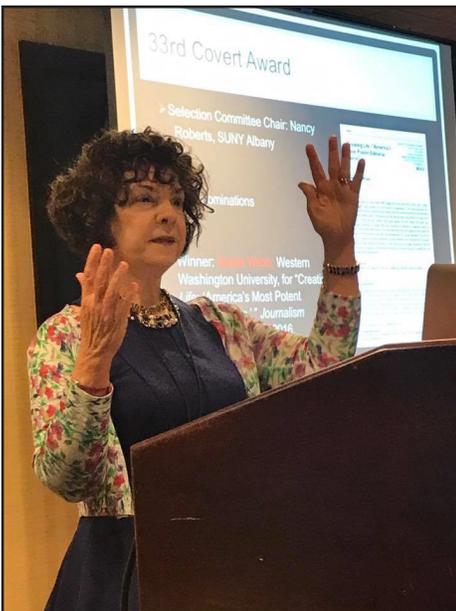
Conference Papers: Outgoing Research Chair Doug Cumming (Washington and Lee) reported that the division received 50 total paper submissions. The division accepted 28 faculty papers and 3 student submissions for a total acceptance rate of 62 percent. None of the papers had to be scrubbed for identification, which was a problem in the previous paper competition.

Each paper had three reviewers. Cumming thanked the judges for their feedback and role in the process of generating knowledge.

The following authors received awards for their work: Linda Lumsden (Arizona), first-place faculty paper; Ken Ward (Ohio), first-place student paper; Stephen Bates (Nevada, Las Vegas), second-place faculty paper; Steven Holiday (Texas Tech), second-place student paper; Kenneth Campbell (South Carolina), third-place faculty paper; Jane Weathered (South Carolina), third-place student paper.

Elections: The membership confirmed the appointments of Teri Finneman (South Dakota State) as Secretary/Newsletter Editor and Melita Garza (Texas Christian) as PF&R Chair. These officers had been nominated by the division's leadership. The membership made no nominations from the floor. [NOTE: The following additional appointments were made after the convention: Amber Roessner (Tennessee), Membership Co-Chair; Christopher Frear (South Carolina) and Ken Ward (Ohio), Graduate Student Co-Chairs.]

Journalism History: Frank Fee (North Carolina, emeritus) chaired an ad-hoc committee Sweeney appointed to investigate the division's adoption of the



Sheila Webb of Western Washington University won this year's Covert Award.