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Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, eds.: Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet Age

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**Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, eds.: *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 263 pp. £50.00/\$95.00, hardcover.**

News is a public good in two senses: in economic terms, news is non-rivalrous, meaning consumption by one person does not preclude others from consuming it, and in political terms, news is vital to civic life because it informs citizens' decisions. So it is natural that the edited volume *Making News* focuses on the economic and political institutions that shaped the evolution of newspapers over the four centuries of their history, as well as the complex and ever-changing relationships between journalism and political-economic authorities. This collection of essays is substantively and intellectually cohesive, in large part because the contributors, a mix of distinguished and newer scholars, met at two conferences to present and discuss their chapters. As befits historical work, the chapters are arranged in chronological order, and each covers both Britain and America to some extent (there is, reasonably, less on America in the earliest chapters, when news production there was rudimentary). Cross-national comparison prevents the narratives from becoming a series of "just-so-stories," as all contributors assess the often vastly different political and economic institutions in both locations. And the long view afforded by such a temporal sweep overcomes the common tendency to assume that recent conditions have always held.

The editors' introduction presents the volume's central research questions: given that news reporting is expensive to produce but information wants to be free, what institutional supports are required to generate high-quality journalism, how have those supports changed over time, how have they differed between Britain and America, and what lessons can we learn from the past to understand and protect journalistic quality today? The editors also justify their collective decision to focus primarily on newspapers (rather than newsletters, broadsheets, pamphlets, telegraphy, or other later forms of news transmission) and describe the forces that today imperil print newspapers: declining subscription and advertising revenues, and competition from an ever-expanding array of broadcast and Internet news outlets.

The first two substantive chapters cover the period from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Will Slauter documents the commercial origins of news reporting and the often-acrimonious relationship between news outlets and state authorities. Despite state authorities' persistent efforts to control the flow of information through censorship and taxation, by the eve of the

American Revolution, newspapers had begun to flourish in both Britain and America, supported by a mix of subscriptions and advertising. Then, Joseph Adelman and Victoria Gardner trace the divergent paths of the British and American press over the next four decades. Although newspapers became the predominant outlet for current events and political opinion in both locations, in America the state supported newspapers (through state investment in the postal system and low postage rates) to inform citizens, while in Britain the state imposed various limits on the press (taxes, libel laws, and pressure from individual members of Parliament), creating a sharp distinction between "respectable" and radical outlets.

Next, David Paul Nord relates how from the mid to the late nineteenth century "new journalism" developed in America's growing urban areas and then spread to cities in Britain, making lavish use of headlines and illustrations; offering cheap newsstand prices subsidized by advertising; hiring dedicated reporters who launched investigative crusades; diversifying their content to include human interest, sports, entertainment, and women's interests; and relying on new technologies for printing, illustration, and long-distance reporting via wire services. His analysis highlights two of the most successful nineteenth-century newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Manchester Guardian*, which like other papers of the era focused on urban political economy and supported progressive municipalism (in America) or the New Liberalism (in Britain), although the *Tribune* and the *Guardian* were less flashy than papers that epitomized the new journalism. A complementary chapter by James Brennan surveys international reporting during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It focuses on major international news agencies, Reuters in Britain and the Associated Press in America, which arose because the invention of the telegraph made it easier for any paper to gather news at a distance, thereby making it more difficult to acquire exclusive reporting; the solution was to create cooperative organizations and subscribe to receive their reports. Michael Stamm further expands the organizational field by analyzing the development of radio broadcasting in the early twentieth century and its impact on print newspapers. He details the separation between communication of facts about past events (primarily through newspapers) and broadcasting of live accounts of ongoing events (through radio), which occurred in both America and Britain even though radio broadcasting took very different forms: a single licensed monopoly (the BBC) in Britain, which soon became a state-owned corporation and whose activities were initially constrained to limit competition with newspapers, versus multiple private broadcasters in America, which freely competed with each other but, because they were often owned by newspaper publishers, ended up cross-subsidizing print news.

The title of James Baughman's chapter, "The Decline of Journalism since 1945," may surprise some because he begins by chronicling a rise in serious journalism, independent of state or political party, and attributes this improvement in quality to the promotion in both America and Britain of competition among print and broadcast outlets. But then the decline foreshadowed by the title is revealed, with Baughman arguing that even more intense competition, first from cable providers, then from Internet sites, was the driving force. A related chapter by Heidi Tworek describes how nineteenth-century newspapers benefitted from the lack of copyright protection, as they could freely reprint material from other sources. Yet newspaper publishers and wire services

continually sought copyright protection, although they seldom prevailed in legislation or court decisions. The last substantive chapter, by Robert Picard, surveys efforts by news organizations to protect and profit from their intellectual property in the Internet age. His analysis makes clear that though radio and television are complements to print news, the Internet is a substitute, one that lured away readers, dried up revenues from classified advertisements, and—despite strenuous legal maneuvering—opened up news producers to unreimbursed reproduction.

Overall, this collection offers interesting interpretations of how political and economic institutions jointly altered the number and nature of players in the newspaper field, although like most historical work, the chapters only hint at theory. Despite a few overly terse and poorly organized chapters, such as the one on copyright law, this volume's contents offer cogent and informative descriptions of this field. Most notably, they reveal not just how news media are embedded in political and economic institutions but also how those institutions shape the use of new technologies. Although it's not mentioned as a theme of the collection, each chapter pays considerable attention to technology as a driver of change in the news field, from the development of the postal network in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the rise of Internet-based news outlets in the twenty-first, demonstrating strong causal connections among material culture (technology), political culture, and economic action. This collection will be a useful introduction to this vital and vibrant industry for scholars of organizations and the economy who are analyzing its recent past and its future.

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