



**THE DEMOCRATIC EXCHANGE  
OF READING AND WRITING:  
Americanization and Periodical Publication, 1750-1810**

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This essay considers the relationship between “Americanization” and print culture prior to the American Revolution and during the early years of the new republic. It is concerned mainly with periodical publication, especially the claims made by early American printers and publishers about the utility of magazine publication in a free, democratic society. The claims were paradoxical since American newspapers and magazines were imitating the forms and cribbing the contents of popular British periodicals. Nevertheless, as Charles E. Clark points out, “readers began to develop a limited intercolonial ‘American’ consciousness” when American periodicals began to crib from each other and to cover world and domestic events that affected the colonies closely, such as, in 1739, Britain’s war with Spain and George Whitefield’s first evangelical tour [Clark: 358-359]. Let us suspend for the moment, however, the many interesting questions we might ask about the form and content of early American periodicals and concentrate on what printers and publishers generally aspired to do. My contention is that their enterprise was idealistic and ambivalent. They were devoted to the idea that periodical publications—especially monthly magazines—were the best means of realizing in printed form republican principles of freedom and social equality. However, they were plagued by economic difficulties and doubts about whether an “Americanization” of the public sphere in accordance with republican principles was possible.

What could magazine publishers before and after the American Revolution have had in mind? We are prompted to ask the question by the apparently whimsical nature of their enterprise. As several historians have pointed out, most of the magazines that appeared before the end of the eighteenth century were unprofitable and short lived, victims of insufficient capital investment; a sparse, indifferent population of readers and writers; inefficient means of production and distribution; and unreliable subscription payments.<sup>1</sup> These pitfalls were plain for early American publishers to see. “The expectation of failure is connected with the very name of a Magazine”,

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<sup>1</sup> See Mott: I, 106; Richardson: 297-300; Shipton: 48.

wrote Noah Webster in launching *The American Magazine* in New York in 1787 [*The American Magazine*, I (1787) 130]. Nevertheless, he was sanguine about his prospects, proposing in 1788 to enlarge the magazine “so as to make it a federal publication”, which he expected to attract as many as 5,000 subscribers [Warfel: 172]. In reality, Webster probably had fewer than 500 subscribers and was forced to call it quits after a year of publication, but not before trying to unite his efforts with Isaiah Thomas to produce a viable magazine of national importance.

More experienced publishers than Webster were even more devoted to magazines despite their economic liabilities. Thomas, for example, was persistent in his efforts to establish a “well-regulated magazine”, even after his expansive book trade made it superfluous. He recalled enduring “considerable trouble and expense in bringing [*The Royal American Magazine*] before the public” in 1774, only to see it fall victim after six months to the British blockade of Boston harbor. When a tax on advertisements in 1786 compelled him to suspend publication of his weekly newspaper, *The Massachusetts Spy*, he issued *The Worcester Magazine* in its place until the tax was repealed in 1788 [Thomas: 279, 285-6]. It appears that this was more than a stopgap measure, since even before the *Spy* was reinstated Thomas was projecting a monthly periodical to succeed the *Worcester Magazine*. Appearing in January 1789 *The Massachusetts Magazine* attracted few subscribers and, although enjoying a long run for the time, was a financial drain. By November 1792 Thomas’ partner in Boston, Ebenezer T. Andrews, who printed and managed the magazine, was reporting a yearly loss of one hundred and eleven pounds. “Indeed”, Andrews wrote, “it appears to me that if you should sell or give up the Magazine we can make as much again money by other work”.<sup>2</sup> However, Thomas hung on until 1793, selling the magazine only when assured that it would continue.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas’ rival in Philadelphia, Mathew Carey, staked his fortune early in his career on the success of *The American Museum*. Forced to flee Ireland in 1784 for publishing seditious pamphlets, Carey rapidly established himself in Philadelphia as a printer and patriot and joined an ambitious plan to found a national periodical, *The Columbian Magazine*, which appeared in 1786. Finding his partners timid and his share of the profits too small, Carey broke away to start the *Museum* in January 1787, promoting it aggressively for six years despite the constant strain of production costs and tardy subscription payments. *Museum* transactions always appear first in Carey’s account books, indicating that he considered it the flagship of his publishing business. He also welcomed other magazines into the field, telling Webster, for example, that he hoped to see “six or seven monthly publications on this continent, all rewarding the labours of the printers, editors, etc.”.<sup>4</sup> However, Carey confided to a bookseller that, “If Killock [Webster’s printer] knew as

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<sup>2</sup> Ebenezer Andrews to Isaiah Thomas, 3 November 1792. I am grateful to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA, for permission to quote from unpublished correspondence in the Isaiah Thomas Papers.

<sup>3</sup> See correspondence of Andrews to Thomas, 26 November 1792, 2 January 1793, and 18 April 1793 (American Antiquarian Society).

<sup>4</sup> Mathew Carey to Noah Webster, 9 September 1788. I am grateful to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia for permission to quote from unpublished correspondence in the Lea and Febiger Collection.

much as I do about the disadvantages of publishing a magazine, I doubt he would undertake it".<sup>5</sup>

What prompted these publishers and others in Massachusetts, New York, and Philadelphia—men of different religious faiths, social backgrounds, and political persuasions—to hazard their fortunes in periodical publication? As Mott and others have noted, early American magazine publishers intended to preserve and disseminate important public documents and, provoked by British condescension, to prove America capable of cultural as well as political independence [Mott: I, 21-24].<sup>6</sup> Some of them reaped indirect benefits, which may have encouraged them. As James Green has observed, the *Museum* helped Carey to establish a national reputation and distribution network, which contributed ultimately to the success of his book trade [Green: 7]. The same can be said more or less about Webster and Thomas. There is evidence also to suggest that some of them were seeking to rise above the status of "mere mechanicks" to achieve distinction as public servants and men of letters. Dispatching his brother John in 1789 to collect subscriptions in the South, Carey declared desperately that, if the *Museum* failed, he would have to settle for the life of a journeyman printer or pack up and return to Ireland.<sup>7</sup> He was encouraged also by supporters like Nathaniel Hazard, who assured him that he *was* performing a valuable public service and would benefit from associations in the *Museum* with American literati.<sup>8</sup>

Still, Carey's and Thomas' growing book trades and Webster's interests in publishing indicate that they could be useful and influential, instructing Americans and thwarting British critics, without the trouble of publishing a magazine. Their persistence, despite every expectation of failure, highlights an idea that they shared about the special relationship between periodical publication and republican society. They believed that a "well-regulated magazine" could embody in printed form an ideal republic and help to foster a democratic public sphere of rational discourse, commerce, and entertainment.

Notions of printing in early America emerged from contradictory yet complicit principles of republican thought and capitalist political economy. The diffusion of knowledge through printing was thought to be necessary in a republic to sustain political freedoms, maintain a stable social order, and stimulate commerce. Republican thinkers argued that knowledge about a variety of subjects empowered citizens in a free society, enabling them to make rational judgments and choices in politics and business. An axiom of republican thought was that tyranny and bondage rested on ignorance. As a writer in Thomas' *Worcester Magazine* proposed,

Let us for a moment examine the state of those nations where monarchy presides; there we find the common people but little superiour to the untutored herd. It is the interest of this kind of government to keep them in total ignorance of their natural rights, to

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<sup>5</sup> Carey to Thomas Allan, 8 January 1789 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

<sup>6</sup> See also Richardson: 1-3; Wood: 12-13, 24; Tebbel: 3-23.

<sup>7</sup> Mathew Carey to John Carey, 25 February 1789 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

<sup>8</sup> See Nathaniel Hazard's letters to Mathew Carey, 30 October 1787, 26 May 1788, and 10 August 1790 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

cramp their minds, and bend them to servitude [*Massachusetts Magazine*, IV (October 1787): 56-57].

Tyranny cannot hold sway, according to the editors of *The New-York Magazine*, when “the rudiments of literature” are circulated.

A few incautious expressions in our constitution . . . can never injure the United States, while literature is generally diffused, and the plain citizen and planter reads and judges for himself [*New-York Magazine*, I (January 1790): 24-25].

Periodical publications were intended to counteract tyranny and make republican freedom possible by diffusing knowledge widely. As Hugh Henry Brackenridge argued in launching *The United States Magazine* in 1788, in a republic even a farmer or mechanic may serve as a magistrate of a commonwealth or fill a seat in Congress. It “becomes him”, therefore, to know something about the “history and principles of government, or at least the policy and commerce of his own country” [*United States Magazine*, I (January 1799): 9]. Because, Brackenridge argues, not every one has the resources to acquire a large library or the leisure to travel widely or converse with learned men, “The want of these advantages must therefore be supplied by some publication that will itself contain a library, and be the literary coffee-house of public conversation” [9].

Linking magazines metaphorically with two popular republican institutions—public or circulating libraries and coffeehouses—Brackenridge confirms Michael Warner’s thesis about print media generally in eighteenth-century America. Drawing on Jurgen Habermas’ ideas, Warner argues that the press helped to establish a “bourgeois public sphere”. By diffusing information widely, books and periodicals empowered “private persons” to criticize government authorities and to act independently for the common good. In this public sphere, reasoned debate among relative equals replaced traditional forms of authority and social status as the basis for deciding issues of common interest. In books, periodicals, and pamphlets, even more so perhaps than in public gatherings and associations, private persons could exercise reason and freedom, reading, writing, and judging for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

However, the institution of the press was not uniform, and books, periodicals, and pamphlets were not equally republican as far as many Americans were concerned. The special virtue of magazines, according to Brackenridge and others is that they are inclusive, enabling participation across the social and ideological spectrum of the republican public sphere. As virtual libraries, they may serve the interests of a book-owning elite, and as coffeehouses of conversation, they may appeal to the commercial, newspaper-reading classes. What is really being proposed metaphorically is mediation between conflicting interests, such as actually took place in coffeehouses between leisure and commercial classes and pursuits. Magazines were to provide an ideal, virtual space for republican society, where readers of books and newspapers, federalists and republicans, could meet amicably to instruct and entertain each other.

The inclusiveness of the community of discourse in a magazine is often extolled in prefaces and essays about periodical literature. As *The New-*

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<sup>9</sup> See Warner, ch. 2, and Habermas, chs. 1-3.

*York Magazine* editors explained, “A well conducted Magazine . . . must, from its nature, contribute greatly to diffuse knowledge throughout a community,” since the “universality of the subjects which it treats will give to every profession, and every occupation, some information, while its variety holds out to every taste some gratification.” Moreover,

Its conciseness . . . will not require more time for its perusal than the most busy can well spare; and its cheapness brings it within convenient purchase of every class of society [*New-York Magazine*, I (April 1790) 197].

The chief form of periodical literature—the essay—was understood to share the virtues of its medium. According to the “General Observor” in *The Massachusetts Magazine*,

An essay may be penned and communicated to the public, in a periodical paper, by a person, who, if he has abilities, may not have leisure for long and elaborate performances; and many persons, either through want of inclination, or being engaged in business and active scenes of life, not having many leisure moments, will be more likely to read a short essay on a subject, than to set down and peruse in course a lengthy dissertation, though well composed . . . [*Massachusetts Magazine*, I (1789) 9-10]

In a busy society, the author contends, periodical essays offer the best chance for “extensive diffusion of science among all ranks and orders of men”, which is bound to make them “better members of society, more useful to their fellow citizens”, and more “disposed to pay due obedience to the rules and regulations established by government” [10].<sup>10</sup>

Drawing on Habermas’ treatment of England as a “model case,” Jon Klancher observes that periodicals seem “to have formed the textual institution of . . . England’s ‘public sphere’ in the eighteenth century” [Klancher: 19]. That is precisely what magazines proposed to do in America. As Klancher notes, British periodicals generated a public sphere in part by encouraging “correspondents”, inviting readers and writers to exchange roles. In this way periodical writing took on “the aura of the democratic and the communal”. Citing several essays in the *Edinburgh Bee* in 1790, Klancher notes that periodical writing was defined against sermonic, “dictatorial discourse cast down from the pulpit”, and identified with coffeehouse conversation: “it is a mode of interdiscourse, a text of ‘equality’ where ‘men of all ranks’ leave their social identities at the door of what the *Bee* calls the ‘masquerade’ of periodical performance” [21-23].

Although more like coffeehouses than churches, periodicals tended actually to displace public meeting places and oral communication, enabling readers to enjoy an expanded public sphere in print and in private. They enacted Habermas’ idea of the “bourgeois public sphere” as a domain of

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<sup>10</sup> The language tends to exclude women from the “public sphere” of magazines, though publishers sought increasingly after the Revolution to court readers and writers of the “fair sex,” usually by directing their attention to the few pages of “entertainment” at the end of each number. Republican ideology and periodical publication were gendered in interesting ways. See for example Webster’s *American Magazine*, I (December 1787) 3 and *The New-York Magazine*, I (January 1790) 9 and I (April 1790) 198.

“privacy”, bounded by the family circle and apparently free of the coercion of the state and the marketplace [Habermas: 43-51].<sup>11</sup> As the *Bee* imagined it,

A man, after the fatigues of the day are over, may thus sit down in his elbow chair, and together with his wife and family, be introduced, as it were [by reading a periodical], into a spacious coffee house, which is frequented by men of all nations, who meet together for their mutual entertainment and improvement [Klancher: 23-4].<sup>12</sup>

Greatly influenced by their British models, American periodicals in the eighteenth century also promoted a secular public sphere, especially in the years leading up to and after the Revolution, one that was similarly conceived to be both “private” in Habermas’ sense of the term and cosmopolitan. In March 1788, anticipating the arguments in the *Edinburgh Bee*, an author in *Carey’s Museum* calling himself “Crazy Jonathan” made a radical connection between the periodical press and public sphere in America. He argues that “a candid reading once a week” of newspapers is likely to benefit society more than weekly attendance at church. Like the writers in the *Bee*, he suggests that periodicals are superior to sermons as a means of instructing the public: “The benefit resulting from Sundays is not so much in the article of knowledge and general science, as in the refinement of manners and behaviour, in taste and civility” [*American Museum*, III (March 1788) 270]. Church-going, as far as Crazy Jonathan is concerned, is mainly a social activity, like attendance at “balls and assemblies”. Newspapers, on the other hand, provide useful instruction in politics, history, philosophy and morality for the kind of public gathering in American churches, which is likely to consist

Of all kinds—black, white, and copper-coloured—of all ranks—officers and privates—of all degrees—rich, poor, and beggars—of all occupations, from the first minister of the state to the scavenger in the street [270-1].

This democratic assembly requires a miscellaneous, secular, and easily accessible medium of communication.<sup>13</sup>

This essay in *Carey’s* magazine touting the “Advantages of Newspapers” may seem to confuse matters, but I cite it in part to point out that not even all forms of periodical publication were thought to be ideally

<sup>11</sup> Habermas notes that the autonomy of bourgeois family and public sphere was an effect after all of dependence upon capitalism, the freedom of male heads of households deriving significantly from their participation in a market economy, however much they associated that freedom with the private sphere [46-47].

<sup>12</sup> The metaphor springs from the practice of reading periodicals in coffeehouses and related social spaces, like taverns and clubs, in the eighteenth century. Addison’s “Mr. Spectator” frequents coffeehouses and, emulating Socrates, claims to “have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses.” [Bond: I, 44]. For the connection between coffeehouses and the public sphere, see Habermas: 32-43 and Shields: chs. 3 & 6.

<sup>13</sup> This secular notion of a republic of letters was pervasive despite the fact that religious literature, including magazines devoted to it, was a staple of the press, addressing the interests of many who believed that republican citizens needed to be informed mainly about salvation and damnation. The secular and religious joined in the magazines in various ways, but my concern in this essay is mainly with the secular impetus of periodical publication. On religion and print culture in the early republic, see Gilmore: 199-201, 277-80, 290-301; Hatch, “Elias Smith and the Rise of Religious Journalism in the Early Republic”: 250-277; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*: 11, 24-27, 68-81, 125-133, 141-146.

republican. Although magazines and newspapers were often conflated in republican rhetoric about the virtues of the press, magazines were conceived to have a special role. Long before the Revolution, William Bradford justified the publication of *The American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle* (1757-58) by pointing out the defects of newspapers. Although they were useful “for giving a speedy circulation to any occurrence of public moment, by which means the spirit of liberty is kept awake and the designs of tyranny and ambition often detected and defeated,” they provided merely “an account of facts as they happen . . . without waiting their confirmation or issue, in order to trace them from their causes and connect them with their consequences . . .” Newspaper accounts, in other words, circulated an incomplete kind of historical knowledge, “not to mention how liable they are to be lost in their loose and detached manner of publication.” What was needed to give a “just idea” of the public state of affairs in America was something “that is durable in its nature, and convenient for being transmitted and preserved entire, for future as well as present reading” [*American Magazine and Monthly Chronicle*, I (October 1757) 3-4]. Bradford implies that a monthly magazine, publishing periodical essays, allowed for more consequential examination of events and provided a lasting, yet still “convenient”, vehicle for transmitting knowledge. By 1787 Carey had to concede that newspapers contained many “excellent and invaluable productions”. However, the problem was still “that the perishable nature of the vehicles which contained them, entailed oblivion on them, after a very confined period of usefulness and circulation” [*American Museum*, I (January 1787) iii]. More durable than newspapers and more convenient than books, magazines lay claim to republican virtue by extending the spread of *useful* literature. Their role was to select and preserve, as well as diffuse, knowledge worth saving: hence the titles or subtitles of many early American magazines—“Museum”, “Asylum”, “Repository”, “Anthology”, and “Library”. The titles and prefatory arguments suggested that news and gossip could not sustain a republic and that magazines were ideally suited to mediate between “fugitive” newspaper articles and inaccessible tomes.

Moreover, as newspapers became more political and sensational after 1750, magazines assumed the role of guardians of republican virtue and good taste. One advantage of monthly magazines, Carey argued in adding a “chronicle of events” to the *Museum* in 1788, was that they “cull the *grain of truth* from the *chaff of rumour, hearsays, and lies*, which inevitably occupy a large portion of all newspapers” [*American Museum*, III (January 1788) xv].<sup>14</sup> Reflecting widespread concerns about the licentiousness of the press, Fisher Ames complained in 1801 that “newspaper wares were made to suit a market” rather than to enlighten their readers.

Pray tell us, men of ink, if our free presses are to diffuse information,  
and we, the poor ignorant people, can get it no other way than by

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<sup>14</sup> When Carey invited Jeremy Belknap to contribute a monthly “historical register” to the *Museum*, he balked, not wanting to “dish up a fricasse of newspaper Intelligence” instead of well-considered history. See Belknap’s letter to Carey, 18 May 1787 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

newspapers, what knowledge we are to glean from blundering lies, or the tiresome truths about thunderstorms.<sup>15</sup>

Magazines were supposed to solve this problem, providing an accessible and reliable source of useful knowledge and entertainment.

It is easy to dismiss the rhetorical flourishes of magazine prefaces and essays about the utility of periodical publication as hype, since they do not tell us very much after all about what magazines actually published. Still, the persistence of the rhetoric well into the nineteenth century commands our attention. As Shields suggests, in their prefaces magazine publishers were attempting to call a readership into being, in effect to fashion an inclusive, "American" public sphere of rational discourse and entertainment [Shields 435]. However, magazines and the rhetoric about them reflected conflicts in republican ideology and the emerging nation. They were supposed to function as a means of social integration, instituting a public sphere such as Habermas describes. However, as Klancher notes of British periodicals, the "democratic exchange of reading and writing" that took place in them displaced readers only momentarily into "a phantom social world—an alternative society of the text" [Klancher 23]. Periodicals may have provided an illusion of equality and autonomy, but they did not erase real social differences represented in and between libraries, coffeehouses, and church assemblies.

In America the disjunction between magazine text and actual society had perhaps a greater ideological significance since the "alternative society of the text" was supposed to institute revolutionary principles of the republic. As a cross between book and newspaper, library and coffeehouse, the magazine was intended to create a space without social difference, diffusing knowledge so that enlightened citizens, regardless of rank, could participate in the public sphere. However, as Warner notes, the metaphor of diffusion, so pervasive in American rhetoric about the virtues of the press, "presupposes a recalcitrant social difference", in that knowledge is figured as radiating out from a center of learning to a periphery of ignorance [Warner, 129]. In England, Klancher observes, periodicals were supposed to "circulate" information, thus stimulating the health of the body politic—a physico-economic metaphor that seems more egalitarian than the metaphor of "diffusion" [Klancher 30]. As Richard Brown puts it, "Levelling up, not down, was a central legacy of the [American] Revolution, so that the extensive reading of the few became a model for the republican many" [Brown 304-305]. Magazine publishers and editors were ambivalent about their mission. Was it possible after all to enlighten ignorant farmers and mechanics, and even if they could be enticed to read periodical essays, who would write for them?

Thomas argued that a magazine could not be trusted "in the hands of the unskilful, either for its execution or supply". To their incompetence he attributed the "hasty decline and extinction" of so many magazines, which "were not fostered or nourished by a sufficient number of the intelligent, the

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Rice: 128. Rice argues that criticisms of a licentious press should make us wary of the importance that scholars like Michael Warner place upon republican print ideology. However, when aimed at newspapers, the criticism tends to evoke a republican ideal of a rational, disinterested medium of information.



learned, the sentimental and refined". A "well-regulated magazine"; he asserted, is "supplied by men of genius, and erudition" to "gratify the curiosity and taste of a discerning publick" [*Massachusetts Magazine*, I (January 1789) 7-8]. Calling upon the patronage of these men of genius, however, he was forced to acknowledge that, "busily engaged in learned professions", they might be reluctant to throw their work "into a promiscuous heap where no individual contributor can hope to be distinguished . . ." [8]. Introducing *The United States Magazine* Brackenridge asked, "Is it not more eligible that the greater part [of the public] be moderately instructed, than that the few should be unrivaled in the commonwealth of letters?" [*United States Magazine*, I (January 1779) 11]. But by the end of a year he was pouring contempt upon those whom he had hoped to enlighten, "people who inhabit the region of stupidity, and can not bear to have the tranquility of their repose disturbed by the villainous jargon of a book" [483].

The ambivalence confirms what several historians have argued about the evolution of republican principles in America. The language of classical republicanism deplored the corruption of self-interest in politics and commerce and extolled the virtue of disinterested action for the common good. After the Revolution, federalists like Madison were making virtues of private interests and individualism, arguing that republican government and the commonwealth were more likely to prosper through competition.<sup>16</sup> The classical republican duty of "men of genius" was to pitch in for the common good without regard for distinction or personal gain. Increasingly, however, fame and fortune were being recognized as positive incentives in politics and business.

Magazines also struggled to reconcile the competing claims in republican culture of reason and pleasure. Shields has noted that periodicals were associated not only with coffeehouses but other social institutions, such as clubs, salons, and tea tables, which sought to establish a public sphere of shared pleasure rather than rational debate [Shields: xxiv-xxx, 210-269]. Magazine publishers uniformly adopted the formula Addison and Steele had used in the *Spectator* to appeal broadly. Their aims, they claimed, were to instruct *and* amuse. The paucity of entertaining material in their magazines makes these claims seem perfunctory, but again I would argue that magazine publishers were seeking to mediate in the culture wars, such as they were, of the new republic. They proposed to amuse readers but with forms of "rational entertainment". In this way they sought to preserve their republican virtue and fend off conservative criticism of a licentious press that was feeding appetites for pleasure. After launching the *Museum*, Carey, no doubt, was pleased to elicit Nathaniel Hazard's praise for preferring to publish "judicious Essays" on the subjects of politics, commerce, and manufactures rather than "flimsy novels" or "Whip Syllabub Poetry" or demagoguery.<sup>17</sup> However, as Carey's own federalism waned, and he

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<sup>16</sup> See for example Wood: 606-615; Kerber: 485-495; Appleby: 21, 104; Nord: 45-46. The historical literature on American republicanism is voluminous and contentious. There is space here only to acknowledge its broad outlines and establish the importance of magazine rhetoric and production in the ideological formation of the new republic.

<sup>17</sup> See Hazard's letter to Carey, 16 February 1788 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

recognized the need to compete with more entertaining magazines and newspapers, he devoted more pages of the *Museum* to amusement.

As David Paul Nord's study of *The New-York Magazine* subscription list suggests, American magazines were remarkably democratic, reaching farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, and merchants. However, the disjunction between audience and content prompts Nord to ask, "Was *The New-York Magazine* the province of the elite, as the magazine's tone suggests, or of 'every class of society,' as its editors declared?" [Nord: 47]. Indeed, the "public sphere" in early American magazines often seems like a forum for privileged men of letters rather than for ordinary citizens participating as equals in civil discourse. "Talents and Eloquence are the only Road to Greatness in Republics", Hazard told Carey.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu may be nearer the mark than Habermas in suggesting that "distinction" rather than social integration was the motive underlying the formation of a "bourgeois public sphere".<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that republicanism in early American magazines became essentially a tool of an elite class anxious to impose order on a nascent, unruly democracy. This "redcoating" of America, as Robert Lawson-Peebles has called it, reflects the tendency of political elites in postcolonial nations to deploy language and print culture in ways that mimic colonial rule. According to Lawson-Peebles and others, debates among elite factions in postcolonial America drowned out the voice and suppressed the revolutionary principles of the populace and transformed republicanism into a conservative ideology [Lawson-Peebles: 63].<sup>20</sup> However, it is difficult to see the many editors and publishers who produced magazines in the new republic, including Carey, Brackenridge, Webster, and Thomas, as belonging to a univocal or even factional, elite class. The fact that Brackenridge and Webster were, relatively speaking, privileged "men of genius", upon whom Thomas and Carey ("mere mechanicks"?) called for help, explains perhaps why they gave up on magazine publishing more quickly than Thomas and Carey. Still, neither can be said to have abandoned the democratic principles that magazines were supposed to inscribe. Edward Watts argues, for example, that when Brackenridge moved to western Pennsylvania after *The United States Magazine* folded in 1788, he began to combat in fiction the "recolonization" of America by elite political factions spreading the influence of European culture. As Watts reveals, however, Brackenridge's commitment to writing revolutionary novels was no more consistent than his commitment to publishing a national magazine [Watts 27-50]. As entrepreneurs of print culture, Brackenridge, Carey, Thomas and Webster are best envisioned, not as an elite class of neo-colonizers plotting in the halls of power, but as a mixed social gathering in a coffeehouse, intent upon an exchange of knowledge and entertainment but never completely at ease with each other or the democratic, republican principles they espouse.

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<sup>18</sup> Hazard to Carey, 26 May 1788 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

<sup>19</sup> On Bourdieu's challenge to Habermas, see Fraser: 114-115.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of postcolonial approaches to American print culture and literature, see Watts: 1-26 and Buell: 411-442.

In their rhetoric and practice, magazine publishers and editors in early America reflected conflicts in republican thinking about the virtues of the press. They were unable to resolve tensions between private interests and the public good, or between authority and social cohesion. Ambivalent about their obligations, these men of letters appear anxious to distinguish themselves from European aristocrats on the one hand and from the plebeian class they are supposed to enlighten on the other. Hence the ambivalence of magazines, which aspired to establish a textual middle ground between newspapers and books where plain and privileged citizens might converse, but which tended to represent the interests of the few to the many. Envisioning a liberal, democratic public sphere, magazine publishers remained doubtful about whether farmers and mechanics could level up and whether men of letters could be induced to join them. Publishers worried that, in seeking to instruct *and* amuse, magazines would, like newspapers, inevitably stoop to please, succumbing to increasing appetites for sensational news, gossip, and partisan politics. "Americanization" in this context was a process by which entrepreneurs of print culture struggled to combine republican principles and periodical forms to define an American public sphere.

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