

Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press

Troy Bickham



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The War for American Independence was essentially a civil war throughout the colonies: loyalists and patriots who had grown up together as countrymen found themselves fighting on opposing sides. Troy Bickham asserts that the war proved almost as divisive in the motherland, as the British wielded the almighty pen and went to battle on the pages of the press in Britain. Surpassing the breadth of previous studies on the subject, *Making Headlines* offers a look at the British press as a whole—including analysis of London newspapers, provincial newspapers, and monthly magazines.

The free press in Britain, Bickham argues, was too widespread and too lucrative to be susceptible to significant government interference and therefore provided in-depth coverage on all aspects of the war. Private letters, official dispatches, extracts from foreign newspapers, maps, and detailed tables of fleet strengths and locations filled the pages of daily publications that provided more extensive and more rapid information than even the government could. Due to the inexpensive and easily accessible printed news, the average British citizen was often as well informed as a cabinet minister. The open editorial nature of the press also allowed someone as socially low as a blacksmith's wife, under the cloak of anonymity, to scrutinize and offer commentary on every political decision and military maneuver, all in front of a national audience.

Bickham adeptly leads the reader on an exploration into the varied national debates that raged throughout Britain during the American Revolution, one of Britain's historically most unpopular wars. The British public debated how to defeat George Washington—whose perseverance and conduct was much admired in Britain—whether captured Americans should be held as prisoners of war or hung as traitors, and the morality of including American Indians in the war effort. *Making Headlines* also reflects the global perspective of the war held by most Britons, who saw the conflict not only as a fight for America but also as a struggle to protect their worldwide empire as America's European allies turned the conflict into a world war, threatening even the British Isles themselves. This study will appeal to those interested in early America, the American Revolution, British history, and media studies.

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