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For a number of years, historians have emphasized the importance of the press in creating a sense of community and national identity, but they have failed to investigate this conclusion to any depth. The essays in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America* seek to fill that gap. This series of studies look at specific countries and other areas (like Ireland and pre-revolutionary America) that have a common sense of identity. The springboard for these studies is the work of Jurgen Habermas on the role of the press in creating a political public sphere. Although the details vary from place to place, throughout the Western world the press played an increasingly important role in creating the context necessary for the rise of mass politics that occurred in the nineteenth century.

The book begins with a study of the cosmopolitan press by Simon Burrows that looks at the urban media throughout Europe. The international gazettes that appeared all over Europe appealed to the intellectual elite and helped to tie these people together, no matter their nationality. According to Burrows, the international gazettes served as "agents for the diffusion of Enlightenment, cosmopolitanism and confident reformism among Europe’s francophone elites" (p. 41). But the French Revolution ultimately undermined the cosmopolitan press as these newspaper and journals reflected the increasing fears of the European aristocracy in the face of the Reign of Terror and Napoleon Bonaparte. With the rise of strong nationalism in Europe in the 19th century, the pan-European community, and its press, disappeared.

Three of the essays deal with nation-states that experienced a variety of press developments during the period under study. Nicholas van Sas discusses the Netherlands and the role of the newspapers in keeping people informed about events elsewhere in Europe. The Dutch media helped create a civil society that challenged the government and helped set the stage for the political crises in the Netherlands in the 1790s. Hannah Barker studies the media in England. She finds that English newspapers in this period were intensely political and worked to shape public opinion about issues important to British interests, both at home and abroad. Increasingly, people from all walks of life read newspapers and engaged in political discussions. A strong belief in the freedom of the press helped protect publications from much government interference. As a result, the English press was "instrumental in the development of public opinion and, with it, the political public sphere" (p. 109). Miranda Beaven Remnek considers Russia, pointing out that changes came more slowly east of the Ural Mountains. Because of censorship, Russian media proved unable to have a major impact on the development of a public sphere. However, more Russians gained access to the press during this period and this slowly increased the discussion of politics and set the stage for the Great Reforms that began in 1861.

Because of the impact of the French Revolution, two chapters are devoted to the press in France. Jack Censer discusses the press in pre-Revolutionary France. Censer finds a press that challenged the government on occasion (particularly during the Seven Years’ War) and then supported the government at other times (during the American Revolution). The French media did not turn completely against the monarch prior to 1789. Hugh Gough finds that the French press was transformed during the Revolution because it was forced to take on new roles and to adopt new vocabularies. In a little over a decade,
the French press became the focal point for political discussions. Newspapers and journals provided the forum for the debates that had to take place as France restructured the world of politics in the vacuum created by the collapse of the monarchy.

Beyond these studies of nation-states are studies of areas that did not yet have a single political identity. Eckhart Hellmuth and Wolfgang Piereth consider the role of the press in Germany. They conclude that press censorship in the wake of the French Revolution and the invasion by Napoleon still helped create a public sphere as those who sought to control the press discussed politics and issues of identity. Maurizio Isabella discusses Italy and the great increase in newspapers during this period. The press was relatively free in Italy until 1796, but even the controlled press of the early 1800s helped create a national identity through the development of a growing reading public and a more united public opinion. Douglas Simes studies the press of Ireland during this era. The religious divisions ultimately prevented a press unity that could have created a united public sphere. Rather, Irish publications served to unite their particular community (Protestant or Catholic) while adding to the division and animosity between these two groups. Thus, it failed to play much of a role in the creation of a national identity in Ireland. David Copeland looks at the media in the British colonies in North America. Here, the press played a very important role in the formation of public opinion and the creation of a public sphere. The weekly newspapers became the catalyst for all sorts of political discussions as the conflict developed with Great Britain. Without the press, the colonies would probably never have gelled into one nation.

Together, these ten essays provide a fascinating and detailed look at the role of the press in developing the public sphere in Revolutionary Europe and America. Some consideration of others parts of North America, particularly Canada, would have added to the rich information provided. Each author provides a good overview of the literature related to the particular country they are considering, while going beyond that literature to ask new questions and reach new conclusions. This book provides a good overview of the role of the press in politics in Western culture in the Revolutionary Era and should provide a springboard for further discussion and study.

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