



The Selling of the Constitutional Convention: A History of News Coverage (Culture)

John K. Alexander

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During the long summer of 1787, while half a hundred men deliberated in utmost secrecy over the fate of a nation, newspaper editors went to great length to win support for the federalist cause. By launching one of the greatest media marketing campaigns in American history, publishers repeatedly promoted the anticipated results of the Constitutional Convention while actively stifling its antifederal critics.

In this revealing expose of media management in the eighteenth century, historian John K. Alexander demonstrates how publishers' tacit political assumptions and their tightly woven information networks channeled public debate over the issue. He quantitatively and qualitatively shows how publishers turned their papers into propaganda instruments in an effort to create and solidify a popular consensus around the yet unknown results of the Convention. In the words of one New York editor, "they conceived it a duty incumbent on them to prepare the minds of their readers for [the Constitution's] reception."

"The evidence from 1787," writes Alexander, "suggests that independent ownership and operation offer no guarantee of a truly free and informative press." *The Selling of the Constitutional Convention* is a fascinating analysis of news management in the 1780s that sheds new light on the role of the press in early American political culture.

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