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“Containing the Freshest Advices Both Foreign and Domestic”: Early News Values in the American Colonies

Abstract

This study examines the first or early issues of 19 of the 60 newspapers published in the American colonies prior to the Stamp Act of 1765. It asks whether, prior to a political moment credited with binding the community of printers together, the printers of colonial newspapers had shared news values. From their very instantiation, newspapers in the American colonies did articulate opinions of what is important for the public to know about—that is, what constitutes news. 16 of the 19 newspapers published some kind of purpose statement and/or clear articulations of news values, and these articulations become increasingly direct over time. By 1764, news values including accuracy, timeliness, and attention to the public interest were firmly in place; further, that newspapers reprinted content from each other and commented upon the work of others suggests that newspaper printers across the colonies shared these news values.