

Early U.S. Journalism

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To understand **contemporary**
journalism, it is helpful to
understand **its past**

A Different Aesthetic

- No images or headlines
- Focus on international news
- Single person as publisher, editor, and reporter
- Written for the political and mercantile classes
- Subsidized directly by either the government or wealthy patrons

Early Newspapers of Massachusetts

Numb. 1.

PUBLICK OCCURRENCES

Both FORREIGN and DOMESTICK.

Boston, Thursday Sept. 25th. 1690.

IT is designed, that the Country shall be furnished once a month (or if any Glut of Occurrences happen, oftener,) with an Account of such considerable things as have arrived unto our Notice.

In order hereunto, the Publisher will take what pains he can to obtain a Faithful Relation of all such things; and will particularly make himself beholden to such Persons in Boston whom he knows to have been for their own use the diligent Observers of such matters.

That which is herein proposed, is, First, That Memorable Occurrences of Divine Providence may not be neglected or forgotten, as they too often are. Secondly, That people every where may better understand the Circumstances of Publique Affairs, both abroad and at home; which may not only direct their Thoughts at all times, but at some times also to assist their Busineses and Negotiations.

Thirdly, That some thing may be done towards the Curing, or at least the Charming of that Spirit of Lying, which prevails amongst us, wherefore nothing shall be entered, but what we have reason to believe is true, repairing to the best fountain for our Information.

from them, as what is in the Forces lately gone for Canada; made them think it almost impossible for them to get well through the Affairs of their Husbandry at this time of the year, yet the Season has been so unusually favourable that they scarce find any want of the many hundreds of hands, that are gone from them; which is looked upon as a Merciful Providence

While the barbarous Indians were lurking about Chelmsford, there were missing about the beginning of this month a couple of Children belonging to a man of that Town, one of them aged about eleven, the other aged about nine years, both of them supposed to be fallen into the hands of the Indians.

A very Tragical Accident happened at Water-Town, the beginning of this Month, an Old man, that was of somewhat a Silent and Morose Temper, but one that had long enjoyed the reputation of a Sober and a Wise Man, having newly buried his Wife, The Devil took advantage of the Melancholy which he thereupon fell into, his Wives discretion and industry had long been the sup-

Numb. 1.

The Boston News-Letter.

Published by Authority.

From Monday April 17. to Monday April 24. 1704.

London Flying-Post from Decemb. 2d. to 4th. 1703.

Letters from Scotland bring us the Copy of a Sheet lately Printed there, Intituled, A Reasonable Alarm for Scotland. In a Letter from a Gentleman in the City, to his Friend in the Country, concerning the present Danger of the Kingdom and of the Protestant Religion.

This Letter takes Notice, That Papiests swarm in that Nation, that they traffick more avowedly than formerly, & that of late many Scores of Priests and Jesuites are come thither from France, and gone to the North, to the Highlands & other places of the Country. That the Ministers of the Highlands and North gave in large Lists of them to the Committee of the General Assembly, to be laid before the Privy-Council.

It likewise observes, that a great Number of other ill-affected persons are come over from France, under pretence of accepting her Majesty's Gracious Indemnity; but, in reality, to increase Divisions in the Nation, and to entertain a Correspondence with France: That their ill Intentions are evident from their talking big, their owning the Interest of the pretended King James VIII. their secret Cabals, and their buying up of Arms and Ammunition, wherever they can find them.

To this he adds the late Writings and Actions of some disaffected persons, many of whom are for the Pretender, that several of them have declared they had rather embrace Popery than conform to the present Government; that they refuse to pray for the Queen, but use the ambiguous word Sovereign, and some of them pray in exprefs Words for

From all this he infers, That they have hopes of Assistance from France, otherwise they would never be so impudent; and he gives Reasons for his Apprehensions that the French King may send Troops thither this Winter, 1. Because the English & Dutch will not then be at Sea to oppose them. 2. He can then best spare them, the Season of Action beyond Sea being over. 3. The Expectation given him of a considerable number to joyn them, may encourage him to the undertaking with fewer Men if he can but send over a sufficient number of Officers with Arms and Ammunition.

He endeavours in the rest of his Letters to answer the foolish Pretences of the Pretender's being a Protestant, and that he will govern us according to Law. He says, that being bred up in the Religion and Politicks of France, he is by Education a stated Enemy to our Liberty and Religion. That the Obligations which he and his Family owe to the French King, must necessarily make him to be wholly at his Devotion, and to follow his Example; that if he sit upon the Throne, the three Nations, must be oblig'd to pay the Debt which he owes the French King for the Education of himself, and for Entertaining his supposed Father and his Family. And since the King must restore him by his Troops, if ever he be restored, he will see to secure his own Debt before those Troops leave Britain. The Pretender being a good Proficient in the French and Romish Schools, he will never think himself sufficiently aveng'd, but by the utter Ruine of his Protestant Subjects, both as Hereticks and Traitors. The late Queen, his pretended Mother, who in cold Blood when she was Queen of Britain, advised

Source

Growing Independence

THE
New-England Courant.

M O N D A Y August 7. 1721.

Homo non unius Negotii: Or, Jack of all Trades.

M^r John Checkley

IT'S an hard Case, that a Man can't appear in Print now a Days, unless he'll undergo the Mortification of Answering to ten thousand senseless and Impertinent Questions like these, Pray Sir, from whence came you? And what Age may you be of, may I be so bold? Was you bred at Colledge Sir? And can you (like some of them) square the Circle, and cypher as far as the Black Art? &c. Now, tho' I must confess it's something some to a Man in haste, thus to be stop'd at his first setting-out, yet in Compliance to the Custom of the Country where I now set up for an Author, I'll immediately stop short, and give my gentle Reader some Account of my Person and my rare Endowments.

As for my Age, I'm some odd Years and a few Days under twice twenty and three, therefore I hope no One will hereafter object against my soaring now and then with the grave Wits of the Age, since I have dropt my collow Feathers, and am pretty well fledg'd: but if they should tell me that I am not yet fit nor worthy to keep Company with such Illustrious Sages, for my Beard do's n't yet reach down to my Girdle, I shall make them no other Answer than this, Barba non facit Philosophum.

I make no Question my gentle Readers, but that you're very Impatient to see me intirely dissected, and to have a full View of my outward as well as inward Man, but as I stop short just now, meerly to oblige you, so I shall stop as short here, and give no farther Account of my self until this Day fortnight, when you shall have

Dr Douglass
abnormis sapiens.— Hor.

At the Request of several Gentlemen in Town:
A Continuation of the History of Inoculation in Boston,
by a Society of the Practitioners in Physick.

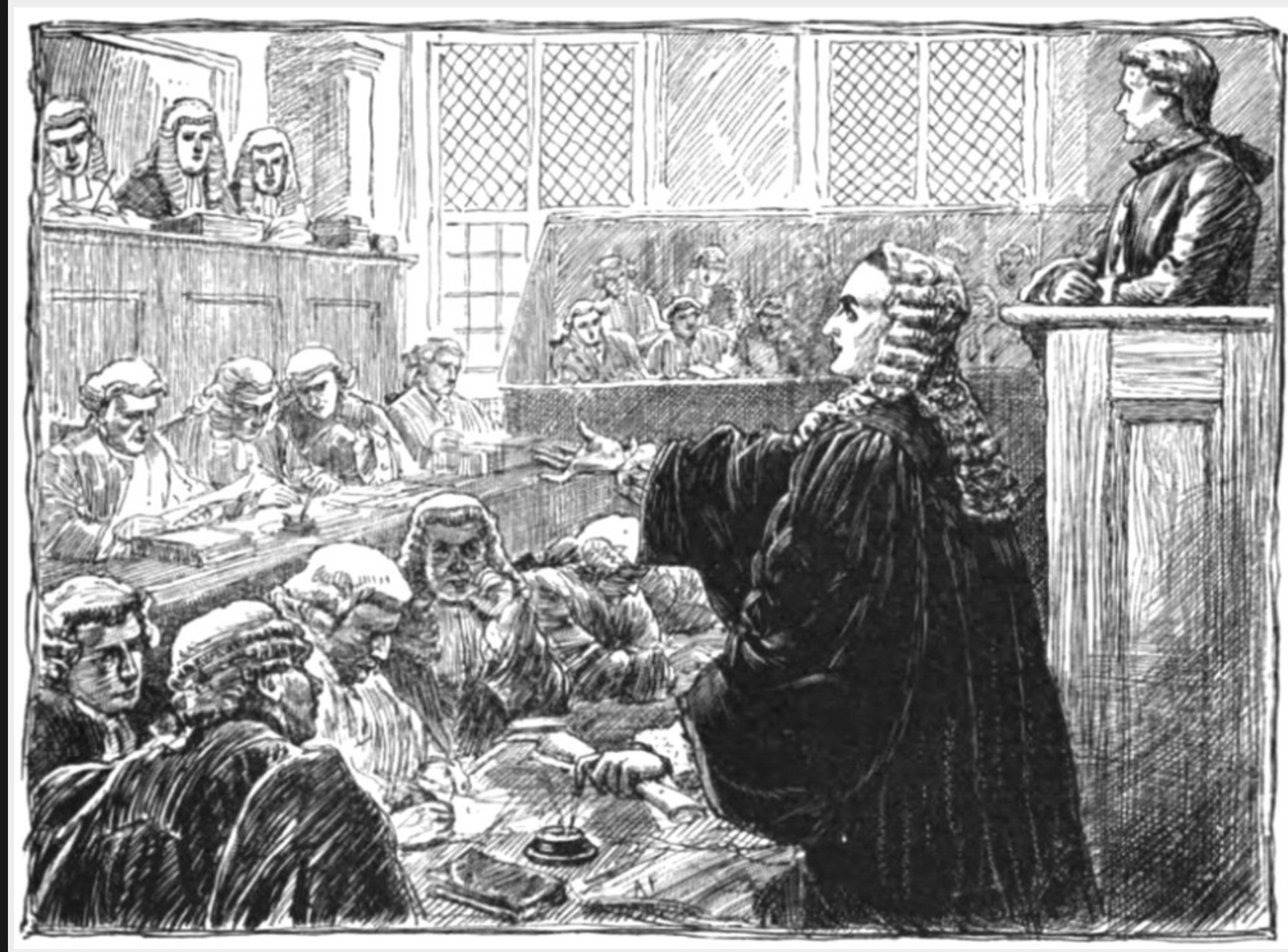
THe bold undertaker of the Practice of the Greek old Women, notwithstanding the Terror and Confusion from his Son's Inoculation-Fever, proceeds to inoculate Persons from Seventy Years of Age and downwards. The Select Men (or Managers of the Town Affairs) in duty bound to take Cognizance of the Matter, desire a Meeting of all the Practitioners in Town, to have their Opinion whether the Practice ought to be allowed or not; they unanimously agreed that it was rash and dubious, being entirely new, not in the least vouch'd or recommended (being meerly published, in the Philosophick Transactions by way of Amusement) from Britain, tho' it came to us via London from the Turks, and by a strong viva voce Evidence, was proved to be of fatal & dangerous Consequence. B—— is desired by the Select Men to desist.

Notwithstanding the general Aversion of the Town, in Contradiction to the declared Opinion of the Practitioners, in Opposition to the Selectmen, and in Spite of the discouraging Evidences relating to this Practice, Six Gentlemen of Piety and Learning, profoundly ignorant of the Matter, after serious Consideration of a Disease one of the most intricate practical Cases in Physick, do on the Merits of their Characters, and for no other reason, with a Vox prateriag; nihil, assert, &c. If this Argument, viz. their Character, should prevail with the People (tho' here I think they

Growing Independence

- This was a crucial period as it helped **loosen early governmental restrictions on speech and publication**
 - This was very different from Europe, where there were considerable restrictions
- Journalism became a vehicle for **capturing and consolidating public opinion**
 - It became harder for officials to pretend to be unaware of citizens' concerns
 - Officials began to work with the press instead of against it

Truth as a Defense



Source

The Stamp Act of 1765



The Press in a New Nation

- Great emphasis on preserving the freedom of the press after independence
 - Nine of the 11 revolutionary-era state constitutions: liberty of the press ought to be “inviolably” preserved or “never” restrained
 - First Amendment: Congress shall make “no law” abridging freedom of the press
- But during times of hysteria and partisan animosity, such principles have been violated
 - Sedition Act of 1798 led to prosecution and conviction of newspaper owners who disagreed with the government)

Key Takeaways

- Journalism during the colonial period was vastly different from journalism today
- It was not until the 1730s that truth became a successful defense against charges of libel and defamation
- The colonial press was crucial in mobilization efforts toward independence from the British government
- The freedom of the press is codified in the founding documents of the United States