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A comparison of foreign news coverage in the mercantile and popular press of the 1830s

Virgil Ian Stanford

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, vstanf1@tigers.lsu.edu

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A COMPARISON OF FOREIGN NEWS COVERAGE IN
THE MERCANTILE AND POPULAR
PRESS OF THE 1830S

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Virgil Ian Stanford
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ABSTRACT

The rise of the American penny press in the 1830s is thought of as a crucial moment in journalism history that precipitated changes in newspapers that are still evident today. Yet, many specific characteristics of the transition from a predominantly elite mercantile and partisan press to the popular penny press remain unknown, including the changes that occurred in foreign news coverage. This study will examine four newspapers, two mercantile and two penny, printed in New York City from 1830 to 1842. It will use quantitative content analysis of five variables – frequency, length, prominence, content, and presentation style – to compare foreign news coverage between the different newspapers and over time. Contrary to expectations, the newspapers exhibited only small differences in foreign news, indicating the limitation of the dichotomous distinction between the mercantile and penny press. Rather, the newspapers showed characteristics of more nuanced market segmentation, with each newspaper fitting a particular niche of news coverage. Most importantly, this study will attempt to establish a baseline for researching the historical nature of foreign news coverage.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to assess the current state of American journalism, media scholars often analyze the historical evolution of the enterprise in search of key moments where innovations became trends and eventually developed into accepted practice. One such key moment is the rise of the penny press in the early nineteenth century (Mott, 1962; Schudson, 1978; Baldasty, 1992; Mindich, 1998; Huntzicker 1999). Examining this time period is significant for multiple reasons. First and foremost, it marked a dramatic shift in the way that newspapers conducted business (Baldasty, 1992; J.T. Hamilton, 2004). In the early nineteenth century, newspapers funded themselves through a combination of patronage from the politicians or political parties that they supported and through expensive subscriptions that only elite members of society could afford to pay. When Benjamin Henry Day released the first copy of the New York Sun, though, he changed the way that young entrepreneurs thought about successfully entering the newspaper business (Huntzicker, 1999). Moreover, he changed what newspapermen considered the target audience for newspapers, favoring the average, middle-class worker rather than the elite businessman or politician. Economically, this shift came from Day lowering the price of his papers to 1 cent, from the 6-cent price common to most papers. Seeing the success of this model, many other young newsmen joined the fray (many of whom had learned the newspaper business from the very people they were trying to put out of business). Though the transformation did not occur overnight, by the end of the century, the business model of the penny press, or popular press, had overtaken the old ways of the mercantile and partisan press, as the dominant economic model for American newspapers.
Still, other historians point to a social shift that precipitated the change from a mercantile and partisan press to a popular press. This change, started in the Jacksonian era, sprang from a move to democratize many aspects in life from voting to education. The popular press capitalized on the sweeping social idea that news and information were useful for the masses, not just elite businessmen and politicians. In some respects, though, this social phenomenon changed not only the newspaper business, but also the definition of what news was. “In fact much of the content of the earliest issues [of the Sun] was not news at all in either the traditional or the modern sense” (Huntzicker, 1999; p. 3). The paper gained popularity for its narrative and conversational style rather than its coverage of particular social issues. For example, Huntzicker notes that the first issue of the Sun featured a story entitled “The Way The World Was Made,” that was more of a creative essay on that topic rather than an investigation of natural processes. Foreign news was not immune to this type of treatment in the penny press. Huntzicker provides two examples of stories where the Sun leaned away from content concerning international business and politics and towards more generally entertaining news from abroad. “Caution to Yawners” is one of the stories that made it into the early issues of the Sun from a London newspaper (Huntzicker, 1999). It is a warning against yawning so wide that one might injure the ligaments of his mouth. Another story told of the trial of a Paris man who insulted the King of France by making a pear-shaped, plaster caricature of him (Huntzicker, 1999). As with the changes seen in domestic coverage, these news stories appealed to a wide demographic of people by providing novel information and personal narratives about interesting individuals, yet the extent to which changes in foreign news coverage occurred in the penny press is currently unknown beyond the anecdotes provided by the purely qualitative investigations of researchers like Huntzicker.
While these few examples from the *Sun* provide a gateway into understanding how the coverage of news generally changed during the transition from the mercantile press to the popular press in the 1830s, exactly how and to what extent foreign news coverage differed between these two drastically different types of newspapers has not been investigated and is an important contribution to the scholarship of journalism for several reasons. First of all, there is the normative question about the role that an informed society plays in a democracy. The quality of a democratic society is often linked to how well-informed the society is. Unfortunately, not all information is created equal. In addition to serving the need of the polity to be well informed enough to assess whether the government is being responsive to its desires, the information provided by newspapers, particularly foreign news, influences the politicians who are crafting and executing the policy (Hachten, 2005). Therefore, if the rise of the penny press resulted in a concomitant decline in the quantity or quality of foreign news coverage, this trend would have severe implications for evaluating the quality of American democracy during this period.

Secondly, these questions shed light on the relationship between the economics of the media and news coverage. Until recently, the United States operated under a media system where the vast majority of people get relatively ubiquitous coverage of the same news issues. Some of the most extensive coverage of international business and political issues, on the other hand, comes from news services that charge a premium price for their content like *Bloomberg* or the *Dow Jones News Service*. Despite the democratization of information that occurred during the Jacksonian era, illustrating whether or not more expensive mercantile and partisan papers actually provided more information about foreign affairs to their readers could shed light on a more substantial relationship between economics and information.
Lastly, the question of how economic issues affect the coverage of foreign news could shed light on the current trend of decreasing international coverage in the American media. Hachten claims that the high expense and low profitability of foreign news coverage has resulted in American media companies from television to print shutting down foreign bureaus and covering more domestic issues. Examining the initial challenges and motivations of the newspapers that spawned the economic model by which most modern media organizations operate will be useful in the further study of the challenges that media currently face.

This study will attempt to shed light on the above broad questions and further the understanding of how foreign news coverage fared in the transition from the mercantile press to the penny press during the 1830s. Chapter two will begin by laying down a firm theoretical foundation by examining the relationship between the news media and democratic governance, which have shared a strong relationship since the inception of the United States of America. Moreover, this chapter will address theoretical factors that guide the decisions behind what becomes news, not the least of which is the economic motivations at the heart of media businesses including newspapers.

Chapter three will continue by describing the historical context of American media leading up to the 1830s. Scholars have identified several different press systems that existed at different times during the development of the United States. Throughout time, the norms of these different press systems have changed. In a wide array of characteristics, newspapers of the 1830s would differ dramatically from the newspapers we know today. Applying historical context will allow this study to judge the papers in their own time, rather than applying standards to which they were never intended to achieve.
Next, chapters four, five, and six will discuss the specifics of the research design, including the questions to be investigated, the results of previous quantitative historical studies of American newspapers, and the description of the data and methodology involved in this study. Chapter seven will report the results of the quantitative analysis while chapter eight will reassess the various normative and empirical questions about foreign news coverage discussed previously in the introduction and throughout the earlier chapters. This study will end with a section that distills the results and implications of this research into conclusions that can provide a continuing point for further research into the historical nature of foreign news coverage by the American media.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Background

The idea that information plays a pivotal role in democratic governance originated in the Enlightenment and still carries weight today. However, information is more than simply one of many necessary conditions for democracy; rather, it is fundamental to democratic theory. “The underlying assumption of democracy,” Georg Lutz (2006) wrote, “is collective decision-making based on a sufficient amount of knowledge about a political system and on information about specific issues or parties” (p. 24). As a result, democratic theorists often view those things that increase citizen information as inherently beneficial while those that censor information are inherently harmful. The foundation for this critical assumption is supported by the writing of John Milton whose *marketplace of ideas* provided citizens with a multiplicity of viewpoints from which the truth would ultimately arise and positively influence people’s decision making (Hachten, 2005; Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956).

This theory marks the foundational assumption of the American system of the press (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Throughout the history of the United States, the press has been the organ of society whose role was to check the power of government by preserving the marketplace of ideas and initiating public discourse. In his now famous quote about the role of the press, Thomas Jefferson, architect of American democracy, said, “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter” (cited in Mott, 1962; p. 170). Despite his unequivocal approbation of newspapers early in his career, Jefferson’s relationship with the press was tenuous at times, especially during his presidency when he actually sued the New York
paper, the *Wasp*, for libel (Hachten, 2005; Mott, 1962). Still, the press, primarily in the form of the newspaper, attained a privileged position in early American society not realized in any other western democracy (Hachten, 2005). First, as Hachten notes, the freedom of the press in the United States gained protection in the constitution through the First Amendment. This type of legal protection, going above and beyond simple legislative protection, placed the press in a privileged position within the supreme law of the land. Moreover, the government provided financial support to the press through lucrative printing contracts and special postage rates, both of which played a substantial role in making newspapers an economically viable industry (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Baldasty, 1992; Cook, 1998).

When it comes to press coverage of foreign news, the press’s role of providing information for better governance is even more essential. In his seminal work on the nature of public opinion, Walter Lippmann (1922) argued that the media provides much of what people know of the world beyond their immediate experience. Although he looks on this in a negative light, saying that the conclusions that people draw about the world from media coverage are imprecise at best and flat out wrong at worst, a conclusion that can be properly inferred from this work is that the media play a powerful role in shaping how people see the world. For this reason, Lippmann and Merz (1989) declare that truthful and accurate news reporting is an obligation of the press in a democracy. “That is the indispensable preliminary to a fundamental task of the twentieth century: the insurance to a free people of such a supply of news that a free government can successfully be administered” (p. 158).

People are more reliant on the media to inform them about foreign issues because they rarely experience them on a daily basis, at least less so than domestic issues. This also applies to leaders and decision makers who must address threats and challenges from abroad (Hachten,
In the end, the information theory of democracy concludes that a well-informed society is the highest ideal for citizens and that avenues for uncovering and transmitting information to the people, namely the press, should be free from government control.

While the Information Theory of democracy goes a long way to explaining the benefits of having a free media and a well-informed polity, the theory does little to explain the motivations that cause newspapers to favor the coverage of some issues over others and people to pick up a newspaper, or other medium, in the first place. For the latter motivation, Hamilton (2000) and Bimber (2003) explain that becoming informed specifically to enhance the quality of voting is irrational. Hamilton even offers the following equation to explain irrationality of this behavior.

\[
\text{(Benefit of Candidate A vs. Candidate B) } \times \text{(Increase in probability that voter makes the right decision)} \times \text{(Probability vote is decisive in the election)} - \text{(Costs of becoming informed)}
\]

Hamilton (2000; p. 11)

Hamilton, advancing the theory of *rational ignorance* originally proposed by Anthony Downs in 1957, says that because the chance for any individual to impact an election is infinitesimally small, the equation above will always result in a negative cost, prompting the rational individual to eschew the responsibility to become an informed citizen. Only a minority of individuals who have some other reason to learn political information, such as enjoying politics, feeling a strong sense of duty, or being a politician, will inform themselves based exclusively on Information Theory alone. Schudson (1998) also notes that prior to the twentieth century, the ideal of the fully informed citizen was not a laudable goal in American politics. Instead, citizens were expected to exhibit deference to elites or strictly follow party platforms.
rather than seek out information on issues of public concern. Hamilton’s assault on the rational, informed citizen, as well as others’ indictment of this idea (Schudson, 1998; Bimber, 2003), leads to the conclusion that additional factors must be at play when determining how newspapers decide what news to cover and how individuals select what news to read, beyond simply a duty to provide information or be informed citizens.

Factors that Shape the News

Gatekeeping Theory – David Manning White was the first media scholar to write about the media’s role as information gatekeepers. His basic premise was that too many events occurred in a day to all be reported in the newspaper and that media editors must have some system by which they select what becomes news and what does not (Severin & Tankard, 2001). In the end, White discovered that a common set of factors influenced editors’ decisions including commonly held news values, organizational factors, and personal preference of the editor among others. Severin and Tankard suggest that a major factor influencing media organizations’ gatekeeping behavior is economics. They say, “Media organizations have goals, with making money being one of those most widely shared. These goals of the media organization can have an impact on content in numerous ways” (p. 233). Although money is a common factor, Severin and Tankard note that it is one of many factors constantly and simultaneously shaping the news gathering function. White also notes that the factors that influence gatekeeping can vary from newspaper to newspaper, or even editor to editor. Still, the most central things to recognize are that gatekeeping is a standard function of the news gathering process and that in any situation where it happens, it is based on a set of guidelines rather than being purely arbitrary.

Economics of Information – Further evidence exists that economic models drive the coverage of news (Hamilton, 2000). Specifically, consumer desires determine what is
considered to be valuable news. Therefore, if one finds different newspapers covering different types of stories, Hamilton would argue that there is a specific, consumer generated reason for that difference in coverage.

Take for instance, the very general example for foreign news coverage. Foreign news has always been expensive to cover. Even in the early 1800s, before the common foreign news bureau, newspapers competed heavily to retrieve the news from European trading ships first. This led many of them to incur major expenses, such as purchasing fast, high-tech boats to beat their competition. However, the need of a well-informed electorate to strengthen democracy was not the prime motivating factor for these “fast boats.” Instead, businessmen, merchants, and politicians, all large groups of newspaper consumers at this time, paid the expensive 6-cent cover price to the paper who could retrieve this information the quickest. During the transition from the mercantile press to the popular press (discussed in more detail in the next chapter), if substantial differences existed in the coverage of news between these types of papers, there should exist a legitimate economic reason for this difference, most probably in the audience that these papers considered to be their consumers, but also potentially for other reasons such as the relatively high cost of obtaining foreign news.

The benefits to using economic models to explain the gatekeeping function are that it is predictive (Hamilton, 2000), ubiquitous (Severin and Tankard, 2001), and retrospective. Hamilton explains that knowing the economic situation of a particular media organization will allow a researcher to predict elements of its operating behavior. Hamilton says, “we should be able to use our understanding of markets to analyze and even predict the media content in the United States across time, media, and geography” (p. 7). Market factors influencing newspaper content include audience demographics, circulation, and expenses. Moreover, monetary
concerns are common to all media organizations, particularly in America where the media are privately owned. While economics is certainly not the only concern for the media, the fact that it is somewhere in the list of concerns for the majority makes it a reference point for comparison between different media organizations. Finally, historical research requires a framework that is knowable in retrospect. While contemporary studies might find great value in qualitative interviews with editors performing the gatekeeping function, this type of research is difficult, if not impossible for media historians. Researchers need a framework for analyzing media behavior that is concrete and discoverable, and the economic conditions at the time are easily discernable.

As a result, media historians stand to profit, in terms of knowledge, by differentiating media outlets by the type of business model that they adopt, and this type of differentiation has been widely done by media historians examining the rise of the penny press during the 1830s, when the business model for newspapers shifted from a heavy reliance on elite patronage to a commercial model centered around collecting advertising revenue.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Age of the Mercantile and Partisan Press

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, newspapers were highly connected to the monetary and political fortune of the new American state. Even before the American Revolution, the colonial press served as a public critic of British policies, though this criticism was rare because it could easily result in the offending newspaper being shut down or its owner spending time in prison. The first newspaper printed in the colonies, Benjamin Harris’s *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick*, was shut down by the New England government immediately after the release of its first issue on September 25, 1690. The reason given by the government for shutting the newspaper down was that Harris was printing without a license granted by the king. However, the order to cease printing also included the phrase, “that therein contained Reflections of a very high nature: as also sundry doubtful and uncertain Reports” (reprinted in Mott, 1962; p. 9). One of the reports of “high nature,” Mott suggests, is a criticism of the English alliance with certain Indian tribes during King William’s War (1689 – 1697). Also, James Franklin, editor of the *New England Courant* and older brother of Benjamin Franklin, was imprisoned in 1722 for a month because of his paper’s criticism of the governor of Massachusetts.

In the time leading up to the American Revolution, newspapers’ political role intensified. The October 31, 1765 edition of the *Pennsylvania Journal* was made to resemble a tombstone in protest of the passage of the Stamp Act. Colonial newspapers printed such rebel-rousing literature as John Dickenson’s “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the
British Colonies” and Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense,” though the latter was originally printed as an independent pamphlet.

As arguments about the political direction of the nation ensued after the American Revolution, famously among the Federalists and Anti-Federalists during the Constitutional Convention, politicians realized that newspapers made effective pulpits for espousing their political positions (Mott, 1962; Baldasty, 1992; Nord, 2001). Thus began the era of the partisan press according to Mott. Party papers quickly began to crop up everywhere, often two-by-two, each representing the different parties. Mott notes that where an Anti-federalist paper began, a Federalist one was sure to follow. This was the beginning of a time of great divisiveness in American politics, as eventually anyone with a political message to espouse would start their own newspaper to do so including political parties, religious zealots, and abolitionists (Nord, 2001). As the nineteenth century progressed political partisanship in newspapers expanded beyond simply party affiliation to the championing of a particular politician (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). “One newspaper, sensibly, would proclaim itself the Jackson newspaper, leaving the others to champion Clay or Adams” (p. 59).

Still, scholars consider these newspapers partisan for more than just their support of particular parties in their headlines. Baldasty notes that they were often funded by subsidies from the parties they represented. The existence of federal printing subsidies for newspapers came from the fact that “governments, at both the national and local level, were required by statute to publish laws…Because elected officials decided where to spend money budgeted for publishing laws, printers had an incentive to align themselves with the political parties” (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; p. 60). Furthermore, when new administrations entered office, they would often appoint loyal party editors to important political positions, none more coveted than
the illustrious post of Postmaster General. What other money they took in came from expensive subscriptions, as much as $10.00 per year (Mott, 1962), some classified advertising sales, and a six-cent cover price. Both Mott and Baldasty note that especially in smaller towns, the exorbitantly priced subscriptions often went unpaid, making party patronage all that more crucial. What becomes clear from careful analysis is that partisanship in the press was sustained, and even flourished, because of specific economic motivations.

During this time period, the majority of newspapers in the United States were printed weekly or semi-weekly (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). However, the expanding business in the ports of this rapidly developing nation warranted a mechanism for quickly selling goods and making way for new shipments. One way this goal was accomplished was by newspapers beginning daily editions that printed as news the daily port arrivals, as well as the information they brought from foreign ports. These newspapers also sold advertisements for the goods arriving in port and the packet and passenger ships leaving the ports. Papers like the Commercial Advertiser and the Mercantile Advertiser provided the merchants of the large cities with market and commodity information, leading Mott to characterize them as the mercantile press. Kobre (1969) sums up the primary purpose of these newspapers when he says,

The press helped promote the commerce and prosperity of the new Americans. Through its news columns, its list of ships clearing and entering and its notes about the West Indies, colonial newspapers acquainted with facts and information pertinent and valuable to their commercial enterprises. As part of the machinery of economic distribution, newspaper advertisements helped sell farm products as well as merchandise of retail stores” (p. 56).
These daily mercantile newspapers were much different from the modern newspaper and bore more of a resemblance to a modern trade journal (Bimber, 2003). Schudson (1978) even characterized them as “bulletin boards for the business community” (p. 16).

As the number of newspapers, both mercantile and partisan, began to increase during the early 1800s, the line of demarcation between mercantile and partisan papers started to blur. The mercantile papers and the partisan papers of this era had several similarities. The typical newspapers of this time were approximately four pages long (Schudson, 1978), and issues were sold either by subscription or for six cents per issue, an expensive price at the time (Mott, 1962; Kobre, 1969). In terms of content, the papers were also difficult to distinguish from one another. Often, mercantile papers included biting political commentary, the New York Journal of Commerce, for instance, began as a strictly mercantile newspaper, but became highly “Democratic and pro-slavery” (Mott, 1962; p. 182). James Watson Webb’s mercantile Morning Courier bought out the Jacksonian New York Enquirer in 1830, further blurring the line between mercantile and partisan newspapers. Likewise, many partisan papers made sure the latest economic information was incorporated into a special section called “Marine Intelligence.”

In either case, the newspapers depended on political party printing contracts for their economic survival. During the presidential election of 1828, all three papers mentioned above came out in support of Andrew Jackson and New York Democratic Gubernatorial candidate Martin Van Buren. The victory of both candidates insured the continued revenues from printing contracts and political advertising (less so for Webb who came out against Mordecai M Noah, the owner of the Enquirer and Democratic candidate for New York City sheriff).
Both the mercantile papers and the partisan papers “dealt with a world of relatively elite men” (Baldasty, 1992; p. 29). This contention was supported by Bimber (2003) who said, “What papers existed had been a mix of mercantile and political papers, but most catered chiefly to the interests of merchants and other elites” (Bimber, 2003, p. 51). This fact was reflected by the information found in its pages. Baldasty’s research indicates that political and business news, often considered “hard” news (Scott and Gobetz, 1992), made up 73.4% of the coverage of metropolitan daily newspapers in 1831. Conversely, crime, leisure, and religion constituted 5.9% of coverage in the same papers combined. For matters of parsimony, given the convergence of the mercantile and partisan papers into a single form, this study will refer to this type of newspapers as the Mercantile Press. Moreover, this study will focus on the popular mercantile dailies of New York City, namely the Journal of Commerce and the Courier and Enquirer, as prime examples of these types of newspapers (a full explanation of this decision can be found in chapter six.).

Another significant characteristic of American papers at this time was expansion. It was at this time that America saw an expeditious and massive proliferation of newspapers that mirrored the expansion of the nation in terms of population and land area. Mott notes, “Expansion, indeed, was the chief characteristic of the journalism of this period” (p. 167). From 1801 to 1835, the total number of newspapers in the United States exploded from 200 to 1200 (p. 167). The overall number of papers in large metropolitan areas increased, as did the coverage of papers beyond the localities of where they were printed due to innovations in transportation and distribution (Mott, 1962). For instance, an express postal route between New York City and New Orleans reduced the time of mail delivery from 16 days to seven. The Journal of Commerce printed news from southern and western cities like New Orleans, St. Louis, Baltimore, and
Charleston and papers from these cities reprinted news from copies of the New York newspapers, which began arriving in a much more timely fashion. Increased competition in the metropolitan areas inspired innovations in news-gathering. For instance, Webb’s Courier and Enquirer developed an overnight express mail service between Washington, DC and New York City. This service allowed him to place a permanent correspondent in Washington, which for a time was James Gordon Bennett, and brought him news from the capitol faster than many of his competitors. These types of expansion created the possibility for a newspaper that sought an audience beyond the traditional political and business elite.

Rise of the Penny Press

The 1830s, often referred to as the Jacksonian Era, saw the beginning of a fundamental change in American journalism facilitated by the rise of the penny press. In 1833, Benjamin Day published the first edition of the New York Sun and sold it on the street for one cent per copy. While this act is unmistakably the beginning of a period of change, many media scholars argue that the rise of the penny press was a result of larger changes occurring simultaneously throughout society (Kobre, 1969; Schudson, 1978; Baldasty, 1992; Mindich, 1998). These social trends include rising literacy levels, industrialization, universal white male suffrage, and expanding transportation just to name a few. As a result, the full evolution from the mercantile press to the penny press occurred relatively slowly. Other scholars present the point of view that the transition resembled a punctuated equilibrium, with a longstanding communication regime quickly toppled by an immediate communication revolution (Bimber, 2003). The speed with which Day realized his success, expanding circulation to 10,000 in 1834, bolsters this point of view (Mott, 1962).
Furthering the case that certain social trends in American society created the opportunity for the penny press to begin and thrive at this particular time, Lehuu (2000) suggests that unique characteristics of American society during the antebellum period led to the proliferation of the penny newspapers. “The American devotion to print resulted from a perennial Protestant commitment to the written word and a republican ideology of virtuous knowledge and educated citizens,” she wrote (p. 20). This cultural commitment to print, as well as higher adult male literacy rates throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, synergized with the increased urbanization caused by the industrial revolution to create a large, hard-working, and moderately educated class of city dwellers that craved newspapers both to inform and to entertain. While the mercantile dailies, most popular in the urban areas during the early nineteenth century, were filled with information for business elites and political aficionados, they did not completely fulfill the entertainment needs of a growing segment of the city populations. Therefore, as Lehuu goes on to state, it is useful to think of the rise of the penny press, and other popular media, in terms of two specific dimensions. She wrote,

The concept of a publishing revolution thus indicates radical changes both in volume and in character. Cheap books and periodicals were flooding the country in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Whereas the eighteenth century print culture had been the province of gentlemen and clergymen, new printed matter had now begun to appeal to the masses, men and women. […] Because these popular periodicals might have provided ephemeral entertainment rather than sound knowledge, nineteenth-century Americans perceived the cultural turmoil of the 1830s and 1840s as a mixed blessing” (p. 17).
The limitation to this line of thinking for fully understanding the rise of the penny press is that it characterizes the growth of urban metropolises as the prime factor influencing the change in newspapers while ignoring the impact that the newspapers had on the growth of the cities. Henkin (1998) notes, “Cities, after all, were not simply the contingent sites of newspaper production; they were the primary and novel subject of the new dailies” (p. 103). Just as the mercantile papers served as movable bulletin boards for business and shipping information, the penny papers served as guides to the growing city, a public space for local information and entertainment that facilitated the further growth of the cities themselves.

Still, other media historians contend that the large amount of scholarship about this period of American journalism has successfully mythologized the penny press, giving it more credit for changing the newspaper business than it deserves (Nerone, 1987). Nerone summarized this mythology when he wrote,

The gist of the mythology is that a small number of daring innovators, working especially in New York City, revolutionized the content and style of American journalism by creating what essentially was the modern commercial newspaper. These penny papers were the first commercial papers, the first politically independent papers, and the first ‘news’ papers. They were the ancestors of the contemporary U.S. newspapers” (p. 376).

Nerone’s argument rests on two key points. First, the change of business practices between the 6-cent papers and the penny papers is not as drastic as many scholars presume. Second, metropolitan dailies, the source of most of the evidence we have to date about the penny press era, were not indicative of the style and practices of the bulk of American journalism.
“Describing this set of beliefs as mythology does not necessarily mean that it is factually false,” wrote Nerone, qualifying his critique (p. 377). His main argument is against historical writings that overemphasize the “heroic narrative” of the emergence of the penny press rather than backing up these assumptions with empirical observation. In a later work, Nerone says that the business model of the American newspaper changed in the early nineteenth century from an individual editor-controlled to a large-scale commercial publication, where the decisions about newspaper content were controlled by publishers with little experience in the newsroom (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Despite the fact that this transition occurred slowly and non-uniformly throughout the country, the New York penny metropolitan dailies were the first group of papers to abandon political patronage to pursue the possibility of more lucrative profits from advertising, which paved the way for a commercial, publisher-controlled business model.

In the case of economics, the newspapers of the penny press demonstrated drastic differences from their mercantile and partisan predecessors (Baldasty, 1992; Hamilton, 2004). While these earlier press models relied primarily on political patronage to achieve profitability due to the high level of delinquent subscriptions, the economic model of the penny press sought the money of advertisers who would pay to reach as large an audience as possible. This tactic required the two-fold strategy of increasing the newspaper’s availability, primarily by using news boys to sell them on the streets, and expanding the number of subscriptions sold by offering content that appealed to the classic newspaper audiences, like business elites, as well as the new, growing population of blue collar workers brought to the cities by the industrial revolution. While the mercantile and partisan papers catered to a small audience of political and business elites for their economic survival, the penny press appealed to a large, diverse audience to attract advertisers and their monetary support. This economic change influenced a change in
overall news values and what items constituted a newsworthy event (Hamilton, 2004; Baldasty, 1992; Huntzicker, 1999). For example, one of the first changes in content demonstrated by the penny papers was the inclusion of daily court reports, replete with tabloid-like gossip and sensationalism (Mott, 1962). Mott wrote,

In short, the *Sun* broke sharply with the traditional American news concept, and began to print whatever was interesting and readable regardless of significance or recognized importance. This does not mean that the paper did not treat serious subjects, but even these were not allowed the great length and heaviness which they were likely to have in the six-cent papers” (p. 224).

As the cost of newsgathering (technology, materials, professional labor) began to rise in the mid-nineteenth century, the penny press, through its high circulation, and thus higher ad revenues, proved to be more adapted to survival in those conditions and came to dominate the latter half of the century.

**Impact on Foreign News**

In the early American press, much of the foreign news printed in American newspapers was taken directly from European newspapers that arrived in the harbors of the large, coastal cities (Mott, 1962). Many top mercantile papers made a competition out of being the first to procure and print the latest news from abroad. For instance, the *Courier and Enquirer* and the *Journal of Commerce* each bought their own schooners, often called “fast boats,” and raced to be the first to meet ships as they entered the harbor. In various qualitative comparisons of papers in this era, several scholars have noticed striking differences in foreign news coverage. Huntzicker
(1999) observed that the trend among penny papers of covering “human interest” stories spilled over into foreign news. While he does not identify a decrease in foreign coverage, Huntzicker notes that the content changes from coverage of international markets, politics, and war to stories about interesting people from abroad. Furthermore, Mott points out that, although they remained the same 4-sheet length as the mercantile papers, the penny press devoted substantially more space to covering local, domestic issues as opposed to redistributing the news from Europe. This favoritism for local issues could have cost space in the paper that was once devoted to foreign news. Although it is apparent that isolated change in newspaper content occurred during this transitional period, no scholar has yet extensively documented the quantity or magnitude of this trend.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While many scholars would contend that the transition from the mercantile press to the penny press changed journalism in America in many beneficial ways, for instance leading the way toward objectivity as a news value, expanding local coverage, and democratizing the news, initial qualitative studies indicate that this may have come at a high price for foreign news coverage. Though the mercantile press is much maligned in the historical literature for its partisanship, bellicosity, and elitism, its economic reliance on business and political elites could have provided opportunity and incentive to include more foreign news, particularly international business news, in its pages. To investigate this proposition, the following research questions were proposed.

RQ1: In what aspects did the coverage of foreign news by the mercantile press differ significantly from the coverage of foreign news by the penny press?

RQ1a. How did the mercantile press cover foreign news in terms of frequency, prominence, length, content, and style?

RQ1b. How did the penny press cover foreign news in terms of frequency, prominence, length, content, and style?

RQ2: In what ways, if any, was the coverage of foreign news by the mercantile press superior to the coverage of foreign news by the penny press?
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

Extant historical research about newspapers tends to be qualitative in nature. In fact, Jurgen Wilke noted in 1987 that little historical study of newspapers before the 1950s existed at all. While this has changed somewhat in the last two decades, there remains a dearth of quantitative analysis to supplement the vast amount of qualitative studies. Quantitative analysis of newspapers is a vital piece of the puzzle for more fully understanding changes that occurred during a particular period of journalism history. Take for example the observations of Huntzicker about the changes in content of foreign news coverage in the penny papers. While his analysis about why this particular story existed is plausible given the context of the time, he fails to illustrate with any certainty 1) that this change occurred over time and represented more than an isolated example and 2) if this contextual change was accompanied by other factors, including decreasing prominence or length of coverage, indicating an overall devaluation of foreign news gathering. It is in this realm that quantitative historical analysis, typically as part of a mixed methods research design, can add to the body of knowledge about a specific period of journalism history.

Quantitative techniques have long been used to tell people about trends occurring in newspapers. Since John G. Speed conducted his first quantitative content analysis of the four New York dailies in 1893, scholars have used the technique to note trends in newspapers (Sumpter, 2001). Speed’s study represented a departure from using anecdotes to prove an assertion and instead demonstrated a reliance on numbers and showed that between 1881 and 1893, popular New York papers saw a decrease in high-minded editorial content and literary reviews and a concomitant increase in gossip and sensationalism. In his analysis, Speed
suggested that newspapers “becoming broader in tone and generally more comprehensive” resulted in a “‘cheapening process’ that began to influence the content” by the end of the nineteenth century (p. 69).

Soon after, these techniques were expanded to examine the coverage of foreign news. Woodward (1930) was the first to quantitatively document the amount of space that papers devoted to foreign news. He looked at 40 high circulation American papers. He concluded that American newspapers underperformed their European counterparts in coverage of foreign news. Kayser’s (1953) content analysis of 17 papers on five continents revealed that Western papers devoted more focus to the Western world than to the developing world. The study examined the proportion of foreign coverage to total coverage but did not exclude advertising making it difficult to compare between countries and underestimating the total amount of “news space” devoted to foreign coverage. Also, it did not take advantage of sampling techniques, requiring Kayser to examine his entire population and limiting the amount of data he could collect over a given period of time.

Relatively recently, scholars have combined quantitative methodologies with historical analysis of newspapers. Hester, Humes, and Bickers (1980) conducted one of the first quantitative historical studies of newspapers including average numbers of stories and proportions of content devoted to news and advertising. Their results revealed general characteristics about the newspapers during the American colonial period. Their sample compared coverage from three papers. Building on this research, Wilke (1987) performed a quantitative content analysis of three centuries worth of foreign news stories from newspapers in 4 countries (England, US, France, Germany). The 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s were analyzed. This study created a functional example of a study that was longitudinal, historical, and quantitative.
Wilke found that overall, foreign news coverage increased with time except in the United States where it showed a slight decrease. Still, Wilke’s methodology had certain limitations. For instance, he uses Boston papers in his analysis, which would have been proper in the colonial period, but throughout the 19th century, New York papers would have represented the cream of the crop of American journalism (Mott, 1962). This fact could have skewed his results. Nevertheless, Wilke’s study provides a useful operational definition for foreign news. He defines a foreign news story as a story where “the event described in the story occurred outside the country where the newspaper is located.”

Several recent studies have built on this research. Cole and Hamilton (2007) conducted a mixed methods study using quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine twenty years of foreign stories from Chicago Daily News (1901 – 1921). They tracked the evolution of Chicago Daily News’s foreign news service based on 5 quantitative variables: frequency, prominence, length, content, and style. The study shows that newspaper coverage changes over time and is influenced by multiple factors both internal (i.e. ownership) and external (i.e. differentiation from the AP) to the paper. Hamilton, Coleman, Grable, and Cole (2006) performed a study of the frames used by American newspapers leading up to the Spanish American War. They conducted a quantitative content analysis of news stories in 10 American newspapers published right before the war. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, picking 10 papers that fit three categories: yellow, conservative, and mixed. This methodology allowed them to differentiate between different types of papers in the same time period and predict what type of coverage will be found in each. Both of these studies made use of a constructed week sampling methodology. The contribution of each of these studies provides a necessary framework for the quantitative historical study of newspapers.
The first task in developing a research design is to establish and operational definition of foreign news. Just because a foreign country is mentioned in the body of the story does not mean that it is actually news about a foreign place. Cole and Hamilton (2007) define foreign news as, “any news with a foreign dateline or otherwise identified as coming from a foreign source” (p. 154). While this definition is a good start, it does not take into account that many stories printed during this time period did not have datelines and that a foreign source might just as well be describing an event occurring in the United States. For this study, a combination of Cole and Hamilton’s and Wilke’s (mentioned above) definitions will be appropriate for coders identifying foreign news. Therefore, this study will operationalize foreign news as follows.

Foreign News - Any news with a foreign dateline or otherwise identified as coming from a foreign source describing an event occurring primarily outside of the nation where the newspaper is printed.

Cole and Hamilton (2007) and Hamilton et al. (2006) illustrate the use of random constructed week sampling to draw inferences from a population of newspaper stories. This procedure is similar to stratified random sampling, using days of the week as strata and randomly selecting one or two weeks worth of newspapers over the course of the each year. Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (1993) investigated the effectiveness of this method in comparison to other common newspaper sampling techniques, simple random sampling and random consecutive day sampling. For both cases, random constructed week sampling was a far superior technique. Results for 14 day random constructed week samples had 100% of sample means fall within two standard errors of population means while simple random sampling and random consecutive day sampling
scored 85% and 80% respectively. When the measurement was decreased to within one standard error, constructed week sample means retained 90% within 1 standard error, while simple random and consecutive day dropped to 60% and 40% respectively. Therefore, this study will employ two random constructed week samples to examine a year’s worth of stories from each newspaper under investigation.

When picking variables for a historical newspaper study, the researcher must keep in mind the historical context in which the newspapers existed. As Mindich (1998) clearly notes, newspaper norms and values were very different in the early 1800s than they are today. Standards like objectivity were not valued in that time, as the existence of the “partisan” press in the first place clearly indicates. Therefore, researchers must find variables to measure that transcend historical context when trying to accurately determine what constitutes “better” coverage. Cole and Hamilton (2007), present five dimensions that succeed at that endeavor. They measured the coverage of early twentieth century newspapers on the basis of frequency, prominence, length, content, and style. Historical context is also valuable for judging superiority of coverage in the context of the news norms of the Nineteenth Century. As each variable is described below, they will be accompanied by an explanation of their historical context.

The first three variables will be the simplest to measure. Frequency will be measured by counting the total number of stories in the paper, excluding advertisements and classifieds, and comparing it to the total number of foreign news stories. The page number on which a story appeared and which column it appeared in will be a measure of its prominence. The number of paragraphs devoted to each story will indicate its length. Still, the importance of these aspects of news coverage was different in the 1830s than it is in contemporary newspapers, or even newspapers in the latter half of the century. For instance, news did not necessarily occupy a
significant amount of space in early newspapers. On any given day, a newspaper, even of the elite press, could be 75% filled with advertising and classifieds (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). For a paper that was four pages long, that is not much news content. Additionally, editors of both types of newspapers were reliant on ships from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean to bring them foreign news. If no ships brought news, then little or no foreign news was printed in the papers. Sometimes, though, bits of foreign news might arrive from Canada, Mexico, or Central America over land, but the bulk came on the ships. While the sampling procedure should diminish the impact of low-to-no news days by aggregating news frequencies from across a calendar year, focusing on any one measure of news frequency could give the misleading impression that a particular newspaper’s foreign coverage was lacking. Finally, news stories in general during the 1830s were very short. A paragraph could consist of anywhere from one to four sentences (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). When it comes to judging superiority of coverage in terms of quantity of coverage measurements (frequency and length), the two variables must be examined together and in aggregate over an entire year. Only if the average number of foreign news stories compared to overall news stories and the average number of paragraphs per story are larger in one type of newspaper will it be judged as superior in coverage to the other.

In evaluating prominence, the custom in the 1830s was to put the most important news on the second and third pages (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Therefore, prominence of coverage will be highest for foreign news stories appearing on the inside of the news sheet and lowest for stories on the outside, despite the fact that this eschews the modern convention of the front page story.

The next two variables, content and style, require further explanation. Both will follow examples set in Cole and Hamilton (2007). First, the measure of content will use a typology
established by Scott and Gobetz (1992), which defines news coverage as either hard or soft. According to Cole and Hamilton’s explanation, “Hard news refers to stories that focus on issues of ongoing policy consideration, factual accounting of current public events, or social issues and controversies that concern readers. Soft news refers to stories that focus on human-interest topics or non-policy issues” (pp. 154 – 155). Expanding upon these definitions, this researcher will code the story content as one of the following categories: Business/Trade/Shipping, Politics/Public Policy, War/Military, Crime/Health, Novelty, Culture/Travel/Exploration, Gossip, Personal Profile, and Other. The first four will represent hard news while the last four will be soft news. Any news story coded as “Other” will be excluded from this analysis because it is not correct to assume from that designation whether or not the story is hard or soft. It would be a fallacy to assume that because a story did not fall into the most common categories of hard and soft news that it was by default soft. Below, each category is more specifically defined.

1) Business/Trade/Shipping – any news story that has as its central topic any business transaction including trade in goods, services, money, or capital products (stocks, bonds, etc…) between individuals, businesses, and governments or information pertaining to the transport of people or products by sea.

2) Political/Public Policy – any news story that has as its central them the actions of government toward the people by legislative, executive, or judicial process or interactions between governments, excluding business transaction (defined above) or military actions (defined below).
3) War/Military – any news story that has as its central theme the actions of any branch of the United States military toward a foreign nation or the militaries of foreign nations inn general.

4) Crime or Health – any news story that has as its central theme the description of any crime committed by a person, group, or business or trial of such a crime in progress. Also, any news story describes a disease, ailment, cure, or pandemic outbreak.

5) Novelty – any news story that has as its central theme anything that could be considered bizarre or weird in the nature of “man bites dog” stories or stories of freak occurrences such as natural disasters or religious miracles.

6) Culture/Travel/Exploration – any news story that has as its central theme the description of a foreign culture, history, or custom; an experience traveling to one or more countries outside of the United States for pleasure; or the discovery of a new land for a purpose unrelated to business, imperialism, or war.

7) Gossip – any news story that has as its central theme something that is unsubstantiated or unprovable, i.e. rumor or hearsay. This could include direct ad hominem attacks on foreign politicians, celebrities, or newspapers themselves as well as any general rumor mongering.

8) Personal Profile – any news story that has as its central theme the exploits of any single individual who has achieved celebrity status, particularly information that is personal or entertaining in nature.

The designation of news as hard or soft also brings up a question of bias within the
journalistic community towards foreign news. Describing the state of the modern news industry, Hachten (2005) characterizes the diminishing quality and prominence of foreign news as inherently negative. This seems to be a common assessment among media scholars who see reductions in foreign news coverage by the American media as a problem. The primary issue with this characterization is that it may lead to the assumption that all foreign news is of more public relevance, and therefore more hard, than domestic news. This researcher rejects this assumption, especially when characterizing foreign news in the nineteenth century. Stowe (1994) points out that Americans traveling to Europe and sending back correspondence intended for publication was a long-standing tradition of the American intellectual and business elite; however, these writings covered a multitude of topics. For instance, many of the great fiction writers of the time, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Wadsworth Longfellow, wrote letters from Europe that found their way into publication. These letters were published for their beautiful writing style and their ability to capture more esoteric historical, class, race, and gender issues with which American society had normative struggles, rather than their reporting of relevant commercial or political intelligence. As such, European travel became a right of passage for the non-productive classes and a form of leisure and enjoyment for wealthier Americans, two groups that expanded during the prosperity created by the Industrial Revolution in America. Given the context of the times, this researcher has no preconceived expectation that the presence of more foreign news stories in one type of paper or the other will mean more hard news coverage. Still, hard news, as it has been defined above, is information that is more relevant, and even vital, to the political and economic affairs of individuals and society as a whole. This public affairs role is considered to be foundational to the establishment of the press and its favored position in American jurisprudence (Nord, 2001). As a result, this
researcher will consider newspapers that have, on balance, more hard news foreign stories as a proportion of their total number of foreign stories to have superior coverage in the aspect of content.

Finally, the last variable considered for this study is presentation style. Again, Cole and Hamilton provide the definition for this aspect of news. They separate news style into three categories, “straight news; news analysis; and reproduction of documents, speeches, or lists.” Although the definition of the third style type here should be self-evident, Straight News is news presented as nothing more than a run down of material facts, while News Analysis/Feature Stories require the interjection of opinion and commentary, which offer perspective and analysis to the facts of the story. When evaluating an individual foreign news story, it is possible that these categories will not be mutually exclusive. News coverage might offer a summary of the facts surrounding a new British tariff against products from the United States, followed by a reproduction of the King of England’s speech in favor of this policy. Therefore, this foreign news story would be a combination of straight news and reproduction. Because of the possibility of this situation, the presentation style variable will have five ways that it can be coded: Straight News Only, Reproduction of Documents Only, Straight News and Reproduction of Documents, Straight News and Analysis, and Straight News/Reproduction/Analysis. This researcher believes that it would be impossible to offer news analysis of a story for which no facts were given. Thus, no category for “news analysis only” will be included in the codebook. This variable will indicate much about the quality of foreign news coverage, including whether or not it is diverse or the simple reproduction of speeches or documents. In the end, the more elements of presentation style involved in a single news story, the more superior the news coverage of that particular issue.
CHAPTER 6
DATA

Newspaper issues were randomly selected from four newspapers published during the 1830s in New York City, two each from a purposive sample of mercantile and penny newspapers. This purposive sampling procedure is common in historical newspaper research (Wilke, 1987; Hamilton et al., 2006). While it creates the initial limitation of not allowing the researcher to infer results to the entire population of newspapers, drawing conclusions about specifically selected prominent members of a population can serve to provide boundaries and expectations for future research. Papers from New York City were chosen because they represented the best of American journalism at the time (Mott, 1962) and because New York was the birthplace of the penny press (Huntzicker, 1999). The Journal of Commerce and the New York Courier and Enquirer represent the mercantile press while the New York Sun and the New York Herald represent the penny press.

In order to observe changes over the course of the entire decade of the 1830s, the time period considered to be the birth of the penny press and the beginning of the transition to the commercial business model for newspapers (Mott, 1962; Baldasty, 1992; Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001), three years were selected separated by six-year intervals including 1830, 1836, and 1842. Because the Sun and the Herald did not begin publication until 1833 and 1835, respectively, the year 1830 will establish a baseline of comparison for the elite press. Calendars for each year were found on the Internet at the website http://www.hf.rim.or.jp/~kaji/cal/index.html. Each week was assigned a number from 1 to 52, and for each newspaper, a random number generator was used to pick the sample for the year. The random number generator was found at the website www.random.org and sampled from the interval with replacement. The numbers were
then assigned to days of the week, beginning with Monday and ending with Saturday and then repeating the procedure to sample the second week. The six-day week was used because daily editions of both the *Journal of Commerce* and the *New York Herald* were not printed on Sundays. Table 6.1 serves as an example of how the procedure worked for the *New York Herald* issues in 1836.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Random Week Number</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mon., May 16, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Tue., Oct. 11, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wed., Feb. 17, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Thur., June 16, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fri., Feb. 12, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Sat., Dec. 17, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Mon., Oct. 3, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Tue., Nov. 15, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Wed., Oct. 19, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Thur., Oct. 6, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Fri., Apr. 29, 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sat., Feb. 13, 1836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Journal of Commerce and the Courier and Enquirer were two prominent examples of mercantile papers in New York during the early 1800s. The Courier and Enquirer was formed from the merger of two previously independent papers in 1829 and had the largest circulation of any newspaper in New York during that time, approximately 4,000 (Mott, 1962). The editor and chief of the newspaper was James Watson Webb. During the election of 1827, Webb, then at the Morning Courier made his paper “staunchly Jacksonian” (Crouthamel, 1969). After triumphing in both the national and New York state elections of 1827, Webb’s Morning Courier gained enough money and prominence to purchase one of its chief rivals, the New York Enquirer. Webb’s paper conformed to most of the printing standards of the day, including printing a Daily, Weekly, and Semiweekly paper. The paper’s success was partly due to Webb’s tenacity at being the first to print breaking commercial or political intelligence. Crouthamel recounts how Webb established an express service from Washington, DC that could deliver news to New York in twenty-seven and one-half hours through a combination of steam ships and Pony Express. Webb’s paper was highly loyal to the party it chose to support, even though that party changed in 1833, making the paper indicative of this highly partisan era in American Journalism. In 1829, Webb wrote in his paper, “‘Principles, not men,’ shall be our motto, and we will never consent to recognize the assumption by a few individuals of that power which properly belongs to the party […].” (Reprinted in Crouthamel, 1969; p. 30).

The Journal of Commerce was the Courier and Enquirer’s toughest competitor (Mott, 1962; Crouthamel, 1969), especially in the arena of foreign news. The competition between these two papers ignited the harbor races to seize news from incoming ships at great expense to
both papers. At one point, both newspapers purchased their own schooners to race into New York harbor, though Webb won the race for news more often than not (Crouthamel, 1969). The paper was purchased in 1829 by David Hale and Gerald Hallock from Arthur and Lewis Tappin. The Tappins, being devoutly religious, gave the *Journal of Commerce* overt religious overtones. After the sale of the paper, Hale and Hallock transformed it into a typical mercantile newspaper (Crouthamel, 1969). The *Journal of Commerce* remained a Sabbatarian newspaper, and therefore, the paper will not be sampled on Sundays, as it was not printed, resulting in a six-day constructed week sample. Still, Crouthamel notes religion often took a back seat to gathering breaking news, even on the Sabbath.

Benjamin Henry Day founded the *New York Sun* on September 3, 1833. It was the first “successful” daily penny newspaper printed in New York City and as a result, should be highly indicative of the changes that the medium experienced at the time (Huntzicker, 1999). Day had extensive experience as a newspaper printer, working at the print house for the *Evening Post*, the *Commercial Advertiser*, and the *Journal of Commerce* before founding the *Sun* as Huntzicker claims, to “boost his printing trade” (p. 2).

The *Herald*, founded soon after in 1835, is also considered a prime example of the penny press (Mott, 1962; Mindich, 1998). The *Herald*’s owner and editor James Gordon Bennett was a Scottish immigrant worked at several newspapers throughout the colonies before deciding to start one of his own. He was an associate editor for the *New York Enquirer* before the paper was purchased by James Watson Webb’s *Morning Courier* in 1830, and Bennett continued working at the new paper under Webb (Crouthamel, 1969). Even while at the *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, Bennett and Webb had a somewhat adversarial relationship that evolved into a bitter rivalry when Bennett left to form his own competing newspaper. According to Mott,
(1962), Bennett, who came from abroad and worked many years in partisan newspapers, placed a higher value than most penny papers on printing foreign news. As a result, the *Herald* should be a good representation of the upper limit of penny press foreign coverage.
CHAPTER 7

RESULTS

This study yielded a sample of 932 foreign news stories in 110 individual newspapers. Each newspaper was coded in three-year intervals spanning 12 years from 1830 to 1842. Most of the newspapers were contained on microfilm rolls. When microfilm was not available, the original documents were obtained at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Although the original research design called for newspapers from 1836, the Journal of Commerce and the Courier and Enquirer were not available for that year, so surrounding years were selected. The year 1837 was coded for the Journal of Commerce while the year 1835 was coded for the Courier and Enquirer. Upon analysis, these issues were combined with the data from the Sun and the Herald from 1836 and relabeled 1835-1837.

The number of foreign news stories contained in each of the four newspapers varied widely. For the Journal of Commerce, 399 foreign news stories were coded with 138 coming from 1830, 97 coming from 1837, and 164 coming from 1842. This was by far the largest total number of foreign stories coded for any single newspaper. For the Courier and Enquirer, 191 foreign news stories were coded with 75 coming from 1830, 27 coming from 1835, and 89 coming from 1842. The 27 stories found in the 1835 papers represented the lowest of any single year from any newspaper. This finding may mean that this particular year was an outlier, or it may indicate that the Courier and Enquirer displays a wide variance in the amount of foreign news stories per year. Unfortunately there was not enough evidence in this study to definitively make this determination. For the Herald, 158 foreign news stories were coded with 33 coming from 1836 and 151 coming from 1842. For the Sun, 158 foreign stories were coded with 84 coming from 1836 and 74 coming from 1842. Again, the wide variation in the number of stories
in the *Herald* compared with the relatively stable number of stories in the *Sun* indicates, at first 
glance, that either this study includes an outlier year or that for some papers, the number of 
foreign stories per year varies wildly over time. While additional comparisons will have to be 
investigated, this initial comparison of total numbers of stories calls into question the notion that 
the newspapers of this era can easily be grouped into two distinct groups, namely mercantile and 
penny newspapers.

**Frequency**

In contrast with the data gathered from the total number of foreign news stories, 
measurement of the frequency of foreign news coverage yielded results consistent with the 
literature on the expected differences between newspapers in this era. To determine the 
frequency variable for each newspaper in the sample (N=110), the total number of foreign news 
stories in each paper was divided by the total number of all news stories to create a percentage of 
foreign stories in the newspaper. The reason why percentages were used instead of raw numbers 
of foreign stories is because only 8 issues were available and readable for the *Courier and 
Enquirer* from the year 1842 at the time of coding, rather than the 12 issues in the sample for the 
other three newspapers. Still, considering that the issues of each newspaper were randomly 
selected, the percentage of foreign news stories should be reflective of the population of the 
particular newspapers, allowing the data to be comparable despite slight differences in sample 
size. The valid percentages were grouped by newspaper and year to determine mean percentages 
of foreign coverage to total news coverage. The average percentage of foreign stories across the 
entire sample was 16.75% of total news coverage (M=0.1675, SD=0.12139).
Investigating by year, 1830, which consisted only of data gathered from the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Courier and Enquirer*, had a higher average percentage of foreign news stories than either of the later years as indicated in Table 7.1. This finding is consistent with the qualitative literature, Huntzicker and others, who claim changes in news coverage beginning with the advent of the penny press in 1833. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that when the penny papers were included in the sample, the overall frequency of foreign news decreased but remained consistent between 1835-1837 and 1842. However, when independent sample t-tests were run between years to determine if 1830 showed a significant difference from either 1835-1837 or 1842, neither test indicated a significant difference in the means.

**Table 7.1: Percentage of Foreign News Coverage in All Newspapers Grouped by Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean Percentage (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>22.05</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.15076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835-1837</td>
<td>15.16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>.11342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>15.37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>.10449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>.12139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next analysis of frequency attempted to differentiate the percentage of foreign news stories by individual newspaper. As indicated in Table 7.2, the mean percentage of foreign news stories in the *Journal of Commerce*, 20.77% (M=0.2077, SD=0.13479), was higher than any of the other newspapers. An independent samples t-test (see Table 7.3) comparing the means of each newspaper indicates that a significant difference exists between the *Journal of Commerce* and the remainder of the sample at a 95% confidence level (t=2.312, p<0.05).
Table 7.2: Percentage of Foreign News Coverage Spanning 3 Non-consecutive Years* Grouped by Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Mean Percentage (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce</td>
<td>20.77</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.13479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier and Enquirer</td>
<td>15.13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.12447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald**</td>
<td>14.90</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.12332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun**</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.07960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>.12139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Years include 1830, one year selected between 1835-1837, and 1842

** No data collected for 1830 because the Sun and the Herald were not yet in publication

Table 7.3: Results of an Independent Sample T-test Comparing Mean Foreign News Frequency in the Journal of Commerce to the Combined Mean of All Other Newspapers in the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Mean</th>
<th>T-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce</td>
<td>.2077</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.13479</td>
<td>.02246</td>
<td>2.312</td>
<td>58.425</td>
<td>.024**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Others*</td>
<td>.1479</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>.11003</td>
<td>.01279</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Combined average of Courier and Enquirer, New York Sun, and New York Herald.

** p<0.05

*** Equal variances not assumed

These data are useful in distinguishing the coverage of the Journal of Commerce from the coverage of its peers as the newspaper likely to have more foreign news in its overall news mix, but to make a valid comparison between the papers from the mercantile press era and those from the penny press era, one more test was run to determine if the percentage values from the Journal of Commerce and the Courier and Enquirer (M=0.1513, SD=0.12447) could have come from the same population. Using another t-test to compare means between these two newspapers, Table 7.4 shows that their respective coverage of foreign news was similar enough to be grouped in the same population, as there was no significant difference between the samples.
Table 7.4: Results of an Independent Sample T-test Comparing the Mean Frequency of Foreign News Coverage between the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Courier and Enquirer* *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Mean</th>
<th>T-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce</td>
<td>.2077</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.13479</td>
<td>.02246</td>
<td>1.700</td>
<td>56.388</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier and Enquirer</td>
<td>.1513</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.12447</td>
<td>.02441</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Equal Variances Not Assumed

As a result, the percentages for mercantile publications and penny papers were grouped into two new variables, *Mercantile/Partisan* (M=0.1840, SD=0.13252) and *Penny Press* (M=0.1461, SD=0.10272). A final t-test failed to yield significant results for this comparison, indicating that the *Journal of Commerce* is the lone standout among this sample when examining foreign news coverage by frequency. Still the general direction of the data, with the mercantile papers including nearly 4% more of their news mix as foreign news content, lends qualified support to the conclusion that readers more interested in foreign stories would find more of what they were looking for in the mercantile papers.

Length

The length of foreign news stories, evaluated by comparing the average number of paragraphs, yielded surprisingly consistent results across the differing newspaper types. For the entire sample, the mean foreign story length was 2.72 paragraphs with a standard deviation of 3.27065, yet the range of data collected stretched from 1 to 31 paragraphs, indicating a data distribution that is highly positively skewed with the vast majority of paragraphs being clustered between 1 and 4 paragraphs in length. This finding indicates the possibility for a standard of coverage that was ubiquitous among the four newspapers that were examined. By breaking the data down by year and newspaper, the possibility for subtle differences over time and by publication can be more closely examined.
When the data are broken down by year, we see that the number of paragraphs shows a nominal decrease from 1830 to 1835-1837 when the penny papers are added to the sample, but in 1842, the mean number of paragraphs shows an overall increase, approaching 3 paragraphs per foreign news story, as displayed in Table 7.5. Comparing these means with a t-test, the data approach significance at a 95% confidence level (p=0.52). Although technically this finding falls just short of achieving statistical significance, the result is close enough to conclude that over time the average foreign news story appeared to be increasing in length. The implication of this finding is that this particular historical moment could be the beginning of the transition to longer, more in depth news stories indicative of modern newspapers. Still, much more investigation is required to fully substantiate this claim.

Table 7.5: Average Number of Paragraphs per Foreign News Story Grouped by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>2.5869</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>2.94577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835-1837</td>
<td>2.4191</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>2.85677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>2.9351</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>3.57987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.7221</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>3.27065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the data from the individual publications were examined. The first thing that stood out was the high average length of foreign news stories in the *Courier and Enquirer* (M=3.59, SD 4.26511) and the low average length for the *Sun* (M=2.03, SD=2.53372) compared with the average for the entire sample and compared to the other two papers, which hovered around the total sample mean, as indicated in Table 7.6.
### Table 7.6: Average Number of Paragraphs per Foreign News Story Grouped by Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce</td>
<td>2.5890</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>3.01528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier and Enquirer</td>
<td>3.5864</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>4.26511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>2.7120</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>3.00249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>2.0253</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>2.53372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.7221</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>3.27065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the *Courier and Enquirer* to the *Journal of Commerce*, the difference in these two papers in terms of foreign story length was significant at the 99% confidence level ($t=3.265$, $p<0.01$). This statistical test provides a clear indication that the *Courier and Enquirer* was the newspaper to seek out for longer foreign news stories. Similarly, the *Sun* and the *Herald* were significantly different at the 95% confidence level ($t=2.264$, $p<0.05$) indicating that in terms of story length, the *Herald* and the *Sun*, come from different populations of newspapers. In fact, these two tests taken together strongly suggest that the *Sun* stands apart from all of the newspapers in this sample as offering significantly shorter foreign news stories. These tests indicate that it would not be possible in measures of length to group the newspapers by press type, mercantile and penny, for this data set. The results of the t-tests for the newspapers grouped by press type can be found in Table 7.7.
Table 7.7: Results of Independent Sample T-tests Comparing the Mean Number of Paragraphs per Foreign News Story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Mean</th>
<th>T-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce*</td>
<td>2.5890</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>3.01528</td>
<td>.15095</td>
<td>3.268</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier and Enquirer*</td>
<td>3.5864</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>4.26511</td>
<td>.30861</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald*</td>
<td>2.7120</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>3.00249</td>
<td>.22135</td>
<td>2.264</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>.024***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun*</td>
<td>2.0253</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>2.53372</td>
<td>.20157</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Equal Variances Assumed

**p<0.01

***p<0.05

Looking for other possible explanations for the higher average length in foreign news stories from the *Courier and Enquirer* compared to the *Journal of Commerce*, the data were divided by publication and year, and the frequencies of foreign news stories with different numbers of paragraphs were compared. These frequencies can be found in Figures 7.1 to 7.3. Despite the frequencies of foreign stories with paragraphs ranging from two to seven paragraphs being similar in each year for the two mercantile newspapers, each year also saw the *Journal of Commerce*, which also had a higher number of total foreign stories, far outpacing the *Courier and Enquirer* in the production of one-paragraph foreign news stories. The underrepresentation of one-paragraph news stories in the sample could have contributed to the higher average length for stories from the *Courier and Enquirer*. Yet, this possibility remains low because, as is evident in Figures 7.1 through 7.3, the low presence of one-paragraph stories is consistent in all three years, especially 1830 and 1835. This trend indicates that the conclusion that the *Courier and Enquirer* generally favored longer foreign news stories than the *Journal of Commerce* is a valid one. This conclusion shows a point of differentiation between these two mercantile newspapers that could be due to each finding a specific market niche, with the *Journal of*
Commerce’s competitive advantage as the higher number of foreign stories and the Courier and Enquirer’s specialization being the publication of longer foreign news stories.

Figure 7.1: Length of Foreign News Stories, Journal of Commerce and Courier and Enquirer, 1830
Figure 7.2: Length of Foreign News Stories, All Newspapers, 1835 to 1837
Figure 7.3: Length of Foreign News Stories, All Newspapers, 1842

In the case of the penny newspapers, the *Sun* had significantly shorter foreign news stories than the *Herald*. The shorter average story length in the *Sun* is consistent with the literature on the penny press, which claims that the penny papers scaled back news content to make way for more advertising (Mott, 1962; Kobre, 1969). However, the average length of foreign news stories in the *Herald* was similar to the average length of stories in the *Journal of Commerce*. This similarity indicates that in the length of its foreign news coverage, the *Herald* produced stories that more closely resembled the stories found in the mercantile press.
Prominence

The data collected on the prominent placement of foreign news during the 1830s were unexpectedly similar between the mercantile and penny presses. Foreign news generally was printed on the most prominent page of the paper in both the penny and the mercantile papers. Given the history of competition between newspapers over which ones could be the first to receive the foreign news from ships in the harbor, it is unsurprising that the highly coveted foreign reports would be the first thing offered to readers, other than the advertising contained on the front page. Still, the penny press’s shift in focus toward news that appealed to a mass audience left open the possibility that foreign news could have fallen out of favor with the penny editors. This does not appear to be the case.

Prominence was analyzed by creating a dummy variable using a combination of two coded variables indicating the page number and the column number of each foreign news story. As mentioned earlier, the most prominent news during this era was placed on the second page (Nerone, 1987). Therefore, the dummy variable was coded with all stories on page 2 considered “prominent” (1) while all others were coded as “not prominent” (0). Then cross tabs were used to examine this new variable by newspaper and year.

Looking at each individual newspaper, there seems to be little difference other than total amounts of foreign news covered, with the Journal of Commerce providing far more foreign coverage than any of the other publications (see Table 7.8). Still, each paper placed significantly more of its foreign news coverage in the most prominent area of the newspaper, while the remainder was scattered about the less prominent areas (see Figure 7.4).
Table 7.8: Total Number of Foreign Stories in High and Low Prominence Areas of the Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>399</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier and Enquirer</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>191</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>184</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>158</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>260</strong></td>
<td><strong>672</strong></td>
<td><strong>932</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.4: High and Low Prominence Foreign News Stories, All Years

When the data set was examined by year a trend of increasing low-prominence foreign news emerged. In 1830, when only the mercantile papers existed, the majority of foreign coverage, nearly 90%, was in the most prominent area of the newspaper. After adding the penny papers to the sample in 1835 to 1837, the percentages became significantly closer with 33% of the foreign news in the least prominent section. In 1842, however, the increase in foreign news
contained in the low-prominence sections was approaching 40%. This trend can be seen in Figure 7.5. These data seem to indicate a creeping trend of lessening prominence of foreign news stories over time, despite the fact that the data indicate a spike in the overall number of foreign stories during 1842.

![Figure 7.5: The Number of Foreign News Stories in Low Prominence and High Prominence Areas of All Newspapers over Time.](image)

Content

Examination of newspaper content again revealed stronger similarities across all newspapers than the qualitative literature on newspapers of this era would indicate. While this may mean that no sweeping conclusions can be made about the nature of the mercantile or penny papers, the individual newspapers, particularly the *Sun*, showed subtle differences in the type of foreign content that the paper covered. Recall from chapter 6 that eight different types of story content were coded for each foreign news story. In addition, newspapers with no foreign stories
(n=6) were coded as “Not Present” (0) while foreign stories that did not absolutely fit into one of the previously denoted categories was coded as “Other” (9). The frequencies of each content type, as well as the percentages of each, can be found in Table 7.9. Stories categorized as “Business” dominated the data collected with 38.1% of the stories falling into this category, almost twice the next highest percentage, “Politics,” with 19.2%. This indicates that newspapers in this era, regardless of press type, were particularly focused on reporting about business and politics.

Table 7.9: Frequency Table for Content Types Across All Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Foreign News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and Health</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>73.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novelty and Disaster</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Travel</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Profile</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>87.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossip</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining the data at the newspaper level (see Figure 7.6), the Journal of Commerce, the Courier and Enquirer, and the Herald have similar frequency distributions with “Business” news making up the highest number of stories, followed distantly by “Politics” news. The only notable point of comparison here is the large amount of “Novelty/Disaster” news present in the
Journal of Commerce while remaining a relatively low portion of the content mix in the other two newspapers. On the other hand, the frequency distribution for the Sun marks a dramatic departure from the other publications, with “Business” news making up only the sixth highest type of news content, preceded by “Other,” “Politics,” “War,” “Culture and Travel,” and “Crime and Health.”

* “Not Present” indicates that no foreign news stories were present in a particular issue of the newspaper.

Figure 7.6: Content Types in Each Newspaper, All Years

An examination of hard news coverage versus soft news coverage among foreign news stories produced results that were consistent with Baldasty’s data on overall news content in newspapers of this era. Not surprisingly, foreign news was dominated by hard news coverage, though the 68.2% of foreign hard news was slightly lower than the 73.4% hard news coverage
that Baldasty found in all news stories from 1831. Only 20.7% of the foreign news stories were
categorized as soft news (see Table 7.10 and Figure 7.7).

As a matter of procedure, a dummy variable called “Hard vs. Soft News” was created to
compare the total coverage of hard news compared to soft news. “Business,” “Politics,” and
“War” stories were grouped together as “Hard News” (1), and “Crime and Health,” “Novelty and
Disaster,” “Culture and Travel,” “Personal Profile,” and “Gossip” were grouped together as soft
news. All stories categorized as “Other” and “No Foreign News” were removed from this
analysis because it could not be determined to which group they belonged. This produced a new
number of stories in the sample (N=829).

Table 7.10: Frequency of Hard News vs. Soft News Coverage in among Foreign News
Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard News</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally as with the individual types of stories, the frequencies of hard news and soft news were compared for each individual newspaper. As with the previous data, the Journal of Commerce, the Courier and Enquirer, and the Herald looked similar with hard news coverage making up more than two-thirds of the foreign news coverage in each publication. Coverage in the Sun, though, was almost equal between hard news and soft news, as indicated in Figure 7.8. Again referring back to the literature on newspapers from this era, Huntzicker’s qualitative examination of penny papers, particularly the Sun, suggested that soft news made up a greater portion of the overall news mix in the penny press. This conclusion appears consistent for the Sun in the realm of foreign news coverage, while the Herald appears relatively unchanged from the foreign news standards of the mercantile press. Again as noted in the literature, James Gordon Bennett, editor of the Herald, showed a favorability toward foreign news coverage in
general, so of all the penny papers, the *Herald* was most likely to have covered hard foreign news.

Figure 7.8: Coverage of Hard News vs. Soft News for Individual Newspapers over Three Non-consecutive Years from 1830 to 1842.

Presentation Style

Examination of presentation style only led to the conclusion that newspapers of this era exhibited a relatively uniform presentation of the news. The frequency distribution for presentation style skewed heavily toward the *News Only* style with 78.4% of all foreign stories fitting into this group, as shown by Table 7.11. This number is far above the next closest type of presentation, *News and Analysis*, which made up 11.6% of the total number of foreign stories.
Table 7.11: Frequencies of Different Presentation Styles for Foreign News Stories in Three Non-consecutive Years from 1830 to 1842.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Foreign News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Only</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction Only</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Reproduction</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Analysis</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News, Analysis, and Reproduction</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breaking these numbers down by newspaper, the amount of each type of story presentation seems consistent across all publications (Table 7.12 and Figure 7.9), with the most basic *News Only* presentation style predominating in each case. While these data tell us nothing of how the mercantile and penny papers differed, it instead tells us at least one way in which they were definitively alike.
Table 7.12: Frequency of Presentation Style of Foreign News by Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Commerce</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier and Enquirer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>731</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>108</td>
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Figure 7.9: Types of Presentation Style of Foreign News, All Years
CHAPTER 8
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion and Implications

The first conclusion evident from this data set is that newspapers during the Jacksonian era are much more similar than many of the history books make them out to be, supporting the position of Nerone (1987) about the mythology of the penny press, as well as media scholars who support the theory of a long, slow development of the advertising-driven popular press. The newspapers examined in this study, two mercantile newspapers and two penny newspapers, exhibited similar characteristics in terms of both continuous and discrete sets of variables. Each of these four popular newspapers consisted of between 15% and 20% foreign news. The average length of these foreign news stories was between two and four paragraphs long and at least half of these foreign stories appeared on the newspaper’s most prominent page, where readers turned first to get their news. Generally, this news consisted of business, politics, and war news and appeared in the form of a basic rundown of the facts of the situation.

Nevertheless, some differences exist with regards to the individual newspapers over the course of the decade. For instance, the Journal of Commerce tended to have slightly more coverage of foreign news in every year of the study, enough to achieve statistically significance when compared to the other newspapers. Of the four newspapers in the New York market, it was the newspaper to buy for more foreign news coverage. In each of the three years covered, the Journal of Commerce covered significantly more foreign news stories, by both raw number and percentage. These foreign stories were typically in the paper’s most prominent news section and were of average length, though occasionally it contained longer treatments of foreign topics.
The subject matter of these stories was mostly hard news, especially business and politics that was presented in a straightforward, facts-only manner, though the large amount of space dedicated to foreign coverage resulted in occasionally presenting the news in alternative ways including incorporating analysis and fully reprinting laws and speeches, like those from the British Parliament or the French King for example. All in all, the Journal of Commerce represents the quintessential example of a pre-penny era mercantile newspaper described by most media historians.

Likewise, this data set was useful for telling us about the general characteristics of the Sun in comparison to its contemporary competitors. The data reveal that the Sun was slightly lower in the frequency of its foreign coverage, favoring domestic issues a little more than its rival papers. The foreign news stories in the Sun were significantly shorter than any of the other papers examined, but it still gave similar prominence as the other newspapers to foreign stories, indicating that Day still thought that foreign coverage was desirable to readers. In line with Huntzicker’s qualitative observations, the news in the Sun drastically tilted toward soft news in comparison to the other prominent New York papers of the decade. However, this trend cannot be applied to all penny papers because as the data indicate, the Herald’s coverage remains consistent in terms of content with the mercantile/partisan papers. This finding was not entirely unexpected, as my research anticipated more substantial foreign coverage from the Herald.

The final picture that becomes clear from this data set is that the Courier and Enquirer and the Herald exhibited foreign news coverage that was similar in terms of total number of foreign stories, frequency, prominence, content, and presentation style. The only significant difference between the two papers came in the area of average story length. For average foreign story length, the Courier and Enquirer tended to have longer foreign news stories in its pages,
although this difference could be due primarily to the underrepresentation of one paragraph stories in the *Courier and Enquirer*’s sample, a potential problem indicated during the description of the data in the previous chapter. This finding leads to the question of why these papers were so similar. We know that James Gordon Bennett and James Watson Webb had a strong rivalry going between their newspapers (Mindich, 1998; Crouthamel, 1969), a professional competition that eventually crossed the boundary into personal enmity. It is possible that this rivalry, much like the scooping rivalries that exist between news agencies today, resulted in the papers printing a similar mix of content. Moreover, the fact that Bennett had previously worked for Webb at the *Courier and Enquirer* (Crouthamel, 1969) means that the style of the paper probably served as a template for the production of the *Herald*. Further research should investigate the level of these similarities as well as how and when these papers begin to diverge from each other.

This data set also brings to light three time trends that become apparent when one aggregates the foreign story data across the different newspapers. First, the number of foreign news stories did not drastically decrease in any of the newspapers from 1835-1837 to 1842, in both total number and frequency, indicating that over time the amount of foreign news coverage as a percentage of total news coverage remained constant, if not even increasing slightly in certain publications. Additionally, the average length of the foreign stories increased almost to the point of significance, indicating that future work should be done to get a definitive answer to the question of how average story length changed during this period and whether or not this time period marks the beginning of a transition from short, fact-only stories to the larger, more in-depth news stories that we know today. Finally, as newspapers added more columns over time (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001), additional foreign news appears to be squeezed into the less
prominent sections of the newspaper. Future work should analyze whether foreign news stories are simply being added to an area of medium prominence, for instance spilling over onto the third page, or being pushed into other obscure areas of the paper like the first or fourth pages.

Unfortunately, this data set leaves this researcher incapable of making any generalizations based on the measured variables about the mercantile or penny press in general, as was initially proposed by research question one (RQ1, RQ1a, and RQ1b). In no situations did the data indicate that it was proper to infer that these newspapers belonged to samples of two significantly different groups. However, the quantitative descriptive data that this study has recorded, especially for the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Sun*, two prominent representatives of the divergence experienced in this decade, lend credence to much of the qualitative work that has been conducted about these two prominent papers and can serve as a jumping off point for future quantitative descriptions of newspapers in this and other eras. Before this study, there was a level of uncertainty about whether the qualitative observations by journalism historians were representative of larger trends among Jacksonian newspapers or simply described interesting but unique elements of particular newspapers. This study highlights places where newspapers fit those descriptions and other places, for instance in the level of segmentation, where they do not. This study of four highly prominent newspapers gives us a sketch by which to judge foreign news coverage by other newspapers in this time as well as other times by providing a baseline standard for foreign news coverage during this particular time period.

This uncertainty about the uniformity of changes from the mercantile press to the penny press also makes definitively answering research question two (RQ2) impossible, although some data-based observations can still be made. By the standards established in chapter three for “superior” foreign coverage, it can only be said that the *Journal of Commerce* provided foreign
news coverage that was superior to the Sun in terms of total number of foreign stories, frequency of foreign coverage, foreign story length, and hard news verses soft news content. In each of these categories the Journal of Commerce clearly outperforms the Sun, while the Sun does not offer superior coverage in either of the other two measured categories, prominence and presentation style. On the other hand, the aforementioned similarities between the Courier and Enquirer and the Herald precludes any such conclusion in their case and also prevents a definitive division between the penny papers and the six-centers.

Furthermore, this research still leaves open the question of exactly how the changes in the economic model of newspaper production directly precipitated changes in newspaper structure and content. Although the Sun, a quintessential model of a penny press paper, showed drastic changes from the other three newspapers, often as indicated by both Hamilton and Huntzicker, the absence of similar changes in the Herald does not allow extrapolation of these results beyond the Sun alone. Still, the embracing of more soft news content, shorter foreign news stories, and less frequent coverage of foreign events by the Sun, indicates the possibility of fruitful research should this study be expanded both in terms of the number of newspapers evaluated and the number of years examined.

Finally, the results of this study supply us with valuable information to use in our own time, as modern newspapers under strong economic pressure continue to close down foreign bureaus. The differing results in content for the Herald and the Sun illustrate that economics is not the exclusive determiner of foreign news content, but the drive to find a unique place in the market where the newspaper could be financially successful could have been responsible for the degree of segmentation observed for each newspaper. These two popular newspapers chose different roads when it came to providing coverage of foreign affairs, but both were
economically successful using the penny press model. By examining the raw number of foreign stories covered by both the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Courier and Enquirer* compared to the penny papers, we see a clear indication of more, if not better, coverage of foreign news. This was one of the many ways that these newspapers attempted to serve their relatively elite audience and justify maintaining a 6-cent cover price. It should come as no surprise to anyone that publications that, (1) focus on business and trade news and (2) charge more money for their news services, should have strong reputations for providing more foreign news coverage, even in the Internet age. As budgets for foreign news shrink across all media types and corporate media continue to close foreign bureaus (Hachten, 2005), media whose audiences consist of business and political elites and charge a premium price for their content stand a reasonable chance of being one of the few places where citizens can become informed about public affairs abroad and could create a constriction of information that is problematic for citizens of a democracy. Only by understanding how news coverage came to inhabit its existing form through changes over time and revealing what the factors are that cause media businesses to reduce or expand coverage of certain types of news can society head off future changes that could reduce the quality and quantity of information that citizens need to effectively govern themselves.

**Conclusion**

This study began with the expectation that the data would support the qualitative literature, which proposed drastic differences in news coverage between the mercantile and the penny press of the 1830s. In the case of foreign news coverage, it was surprising to find that these differences were much more muted and nuanced than the bulk of the literature about these newspapers initially indicated. Characteristics of these four newspapers were not uniform within each business model. Still, expectations from the qualitative literature cannot be entirely
dismissed. For three of the five variables examined in this study, frequency, length, and content, the newspapers from the mercantile group slightly outperformed newspapers from the penny press group, particularly the *Sun*, lending limited credence to the proposition that earnest foreign news coverage came primarily from the mercantile press. If anything, the penny newspapers saw a slight decrease in foreign coverage, even if this difference was much more minute than initially anticipated.

While important for adding fine distinction to historical theories about how the penny press changed newspaper journalism in the United States, the above finding was not the most significant result of this study. In contrast to expectations, this research has increased the knowledge of how these two newspaper models, the mercantile and penny press, varied within their own groups. In terms of foreign news coverage, not all penny papers could be expected to exhibit the same changes in coverage as the *Sun*. Foreign news remained an integral part of the *Herald*’s overall news mix. In the same way, coverage of foreign news by the mercantile press cannot be painted with the same brush, as the differences between the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Courier and Enquirer* illustrated. Instead, the data in this study point to the roots of market segmentation present in newspapers of this early era and eschews the dichotomous view of the nineteenth-century American press described by many media scholars. For instance, the high number and frequency of foreign news stories focused on business content in the *Journal of Commerce* places it in the niche of a specialized business publication like the *Bloomberg* news service. Though with substantially fewer foreign news stories, the greater length of coverage exhibited by the *Courier and Enquirer* might make it more reminiscent of an elite business journal like the *Wall Street Journal*. Likewise, the *Herald*, which was similar in foreign news coverage to the *Courier and Enquirer*, but embraced the moniker of the popular press, resembles
the *New York Times*, a member of the prestige press. And finally, the *Sun*, with its shift to soft content and fewer, shorter foreign news stories, is the equivalent of the modern popular press, such as the *New York Post*. While these comparisons are generalizations based on limited similarities, the notion of newspapers finding specific niches could be useful in providing contrast to future historical research pertaining to newspapers of this era beyond the dichotomous designation of mercantile press and penny press.

Additionally, the trends observed over time indicate that the number of foreign news stories was not substantially decreasing, and the length of those news stories was growing slightly longer. Still, much of this foreign coverage was being placed in less prominent areas of the newspaper. These three time trends suggest that the 1830s could have been the starting point for the transition to the modern newspaper format in several ways. First, modern newspapers provide stories much longer than the two or three paragraph stories that newspapers offered in the 1830s. As the data from 1842 showed, the length of foreign news stories was increasing. Secondly, though modern newspapers place the most timely and pertinent foreign news in the most prominent section of the newspaper (the front page), they also set aside a slightly less prominent section within the paper for less important foreign news. Again, the observations from this study reveal a “missing link” in the evolution of foreign news coverage in the modern newspaper.

Although these findings about foreign news coverage were not as clearly delineated along the lines of the mercantile press and the penny press as much of the literature would indicate, the study successfully achieves its primary objective, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how American newspapers in the Jacksonian era covered news from abroad.
REFERENCES


Begin with the first issue in your book. Before filling out the coding sheet, examine the newspaper from beginning to end, finding the headlines and corresponding news stories. Take note of the topics of each story. Next, answer the following questions.

Q1. What is the Title of the Newspaper?
   1) Journal of Commerce
   2) Courier and Enquirer
   3) NY Herald
   4) NY Sun

Q2. What is the Date, (a) year and (b) month and day, of Publication?

Q3. What is the Length of the Newspaper in Total Number of Pages?

Q4. What is the Total Number of News Stories in all Pages of the Paper?

Q5. What is the Total Number of Stories covering Foreign News?

Now that you have identified all of the foreign news coverage, the next set of questions should be answered for each foreign news story. Beginning at the top left-hand corner of page one, move down the column to the first news story covering a foreign issue. Read the story once in its entirety and pick the best answer to each of the following questions.

Q6. On which page does this story appear?
   a) 1
b) 2
c) 3
d) 4
e) 5

Q7. In which Column does the story begin?

a) 1  
b) 2  
c) 3  
d) 4  
e) 5  
f) 6  
g) 7  
h) 8  
i) 9

Q8. How many paragraphs are in the story

a) 1-3 paragraphs  
b) 4-6 paragraphs  
c) 7 to 10 paragraphs  
d) More than 10 paragraphs

Q9. What country/countries other than the United States are mentioned in this story?
_______________________________ (Free Response)

Q10. Which of the following best describes the content of the news story?

1) Business/Trade/Shipping
2) Politics/Policy
3) War
4) Crime/Health
5) Novelty/Disaster
6) Culture/Travel/Exploration
Q11. The next question deals with News Presentation Style. Examining the story, which of the following best describes how the story is presented?

a) Straight News Only
b) Reproduction Only
c) Straight News + Reproduction
d) Straight News + News Analysis
e) Straight News + News Analysis + Reproduction
VITA

Virgil Ian Stanford is a graduate student in mass communication at Louisiana State University. He is originally from Alexandria, Louisiana. He received a bachelor’s degree in mass communication from Louisiana State University in 2004.