

## **Creation of the United States of America – the first media aided political campaign**

**Abstract:** The author analyzes the use of media in the period of American Revolution as a first serious political campaign in modern history. Link between US itself and image, media presentation of the country as two parallel realities and the gap between those two as a problem in modern, XXI century US position in global community

**Key Words:** media, press, American Revolution, political system, presentation

No matter how we try to analyze and reflect on the American war for independence and creation of the United States, we cannot ignore the media context in which the political process was evolving. Not a single perspective from which we might look at the event – philosophical, economical, social or ideological – gives us the right not to *seriously* take into consideration the political role played by the press in 13 colonies that rose against the power of the English Parliament and king George III. Political mobilization of the American population toward independence was carried out by several-year long influence of the press.

American colonial printers held a unique position in the colonies. Since their British colleagues had a monopoly of printing the books and the Holy Bible, they were limited to creating and printing the local newspapers and almanacs, publishing of ecclesiastical sermons, prayer books and pamphlets. At the same time, they would deal with other types of work, run bookshops and pharmacies, and many were postmasters.<sup>1</sup> Printers were, as a general rule, also editors, publishers and distributors of their newspapers. Acting in such roles, they were influential individuals in their local communities and colonies in which they lived.

The colonies had a multitude of local publications. The mode of living and social-political organization in colonial America created a unique, practical attitude vis-à-vis

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<sup>1</sup> The most famous is, no doubt, Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), one of the Founding Fathers, inventor, scientist, diplomat, soldier. He was a master of the US Post in the 1785-1788 period.

day-to-day experience. Apparent, applicable knowledge was desirable and highly valued. To the spreading of such knowledge also contributed various types of newspapers, brochures and almanacs, such as *Poor Richard Almanac*<sup>2</sup>. Newspapers and magazines were not of informative nature only. In the absence of educational institutions and systematic education, in the country where the strength, endurance, inventiveness and faith were tested on a daily basis, colonial press was a source of a great many useful instructions, advices, narratives; it was a collage of the knowledge from different areas of life.

In the period after 1763<sup>3</sup> Britain started applying rigidly the old laws and adopting the new ones that were contrary to the constituent charters, rights and freedoms of the colonists, triggering off displeasure and resistance. Straining of the relations between London and colonies culminated in the war ten years later, and in creation of the USA. In the pre-revolutionary period, the press in America launched an active political action by publishing the texts of both the patriots (the faction advocating independence) and the loyalists (those who were still loyal to the Crown). Newspapers, collections, almanacs, brochures, pamphlets and many other publications sowed the seeds of political awareness many years ahead of the Boston Tea Party, Lexington and Concord. One must not ignore the fact that in question is the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The large choice of the press, its spread-out and consummation in colonial America in relation to Europe of the time is more than impressive. Such a situation was also due to the enviable degree of literacy among colonists and to their culture of reading the press<sup>4</sup>.

Pamphlets were the most widespread printed form of political discourse in the time prior to and in the course of the Revolution, affordable and accessible. That form was perfectly appropriate for American revolutionary writers because the volume and the space<sup>5</sup> enabled making broad argumentation, a polemic tone, research into premises,

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<sup>2</sup> Again is involved B. Franklin as its conceptual creator and writer. The Almanack was published once a year in the period between 1732 and 1758, and its circulation was up to 10 000 copies.

<sup>3</sup> The end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 resulted in Britain's supremacy over the seas of the world, power in India and the position of the greatest European power. The monarchy was economically exhausted by the war. It was believed that the colonies which had also benefited from the new victories won by the Crown had also to participate in the replenishment of the state's treasury. Introduction of new imposts and taxes was generally a consequence of the post-war economic situation.

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans. Colonial Experience*

<sup>5</sup> Pamphlets could be bought for several shillings, and would have from several sheets to as many as 70 pages, while the number of words ranged from 5 000 to 25 000. (Source: Bernard Baylin, *Ideological*

logic, and making of conclusions. Most pamphlets were a reaction to the concrete political events – introduction of new taxes and repressive laws that jeopardized the economic and political freedoms of colonists. Authors were generally deeply rational and practical people – merchants, lawyers, landowners. Their texts are explanatory, didactic, systematic and direct. Authors of moral tractates and sermons favored more the imagination, parabola and metaphor<sup>6</sup>. Pamphlets are full of descriptions, explanations, and their basic objective was to convince the reader by arguments. Only in 1776 about 400 pamphlets were printed.

It is not just their number that is impressive. Impressive were also the topics they covered. One finds among them the tractates on political theory, historical essays, political arguments, poems, sermons, correspondence – but their joint characteristic is that they are all explanatory. It is not just the standpoints that they reflect; they involve arguments which explain and this is where their hidden mobilizing force lies.

The most famous representative of this media form is *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine. There is no other political text that exerted such a radical, instantaneous and manifold influence as had done this not too long article of this radical English thinker. It was published anonymously in January 1776, six months ahead of the *Declaration of Independence*. It spread like wildfire across colonies, becoming instantaneously a manifest of the American Revolution. *Common sense* is the culmination of the political discourse of the entire pre-revolution era. Paine had at the same time prepared the ground for a perfectly smooth adoption of the *Declaration of Independence* which had politically legitimated the rebellion of the colonies against sovereign power of the English Crown.

Jefferson's text<sup>7</sup> represented the climax of the American liberal thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He stored the tradition of the liberal colonial opinion in only a few items. Revolutionary in the *Declaration* is the fact that a dozen or so introductory sentences established a new concept of the man and power, which holds true for all people to come and who will invoke it. The *Declaration of Independence* is not a particular text that

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*Origins of the American Revolution, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1992)*

<sup>6</sup> The role of Protestant sermons as a political discourse of the pre-Revolution era is also of great relevance for the development of ideological premises of the American Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Jefferson is taken as the writer of the Declaration of Independence; however, a 4-member commission had been initially assigned the task for its draw-up.

simply records an individual event and nothing more than that. Quite to the contrary, by pronouncing the life, freedom and the right to pursuit of happiness as self – evident truths, it advocates establishment of each and every future political system upon the laws of nature and, accordingly, relevant for each and every individual human being.

Immediately upon adoption of the text of the *Declaration* by the Continental Congress, the very same political body ordered its printing and distribution across the colonies. In the evening hours of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1776, John Dunlap, a Philadelphia printer, printed a copy of the *Declaration* manuscript in the form of a broadside. Two days later, Benjamin Town printed it for the first time in the newspapers.<sup>8</sup> Only a couple of days later, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, the text was published in the most influential colonial newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*<sup>9</sup>. It was on the same day also published in *The Pennsylvania Journal*, the chief competitor of Franklin’s newspapers. Their owner and editor was William Bradford, a prominent patriot, a soldier-editor at the time of the Revolution whose biography is an excellent illustration of the link existing between politics and journalism in the American Revolution epoch. One day later, *The New York Packet*, founded in January of the same year, printed the *Declaration* on the second page of the issue.<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, the writing of the *Declaration of Independence* was not only an ideological motive of the *Founding Fathers* and political legitimation of the usurpation of power before the broader, international public opinion. It was also an advertising mechanism intended to be massively distributed among colonists in order that the winning of the power and freedom receive a broader support. Thirty newspapers of the time printed the *Declaration of Independence* on their respective pages<sup>11</sup>.

Adoption of the *Federal Constitution* in 1787 marked the rounding-off of the political process called the creation of the United States of America. The state founders

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<sup>8</sup> *The Pennsylvania Evening Post*, which came out on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, printed the *Declaration* on the front page.

<sup>9</sup> This newspaper owes its success and influence to Franklin. It is precisely in this newspaper where he introduced editor’s column, humor, as well as the first weather report.

<sup>10</sup> On the first page of that issue was published the speech of the Duke of Richmond delivered in the House of Lords of the English Parliament. The Duke discusses justification of the war against the rebellious colonies, expressing doubts with respect to London’s ability to carry it out. Reading the *Declaration* after that is a brilliant editor’s intervention – a master piece of propaganda worded journalism.

<sup>11</sup> The Congress Library has about fifteen original copies of those printed issues.

assembled in an attempt to resolve the problems of inefficiency of the then confederated system. The gathering transformed, however, into historical *Constitutional Convention* in which was created the oldest written federal Constitution which is still in force. In order for the new Constitution to become effective, it had to be ratified by member states' representative bodies on which sat the representatives of the will of citizens. That task was not easy at all. The dead heat of the two main factions in the country<sup>12</sup> forced Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison<sup>13</sup> to start a serious media campaign so as to exert impact on the public opinion and political elites to adopt the new Constitution. Their newspaper articles, subsequently compiled in a collection of texts presently known as *The Federalist Papers*, were published in New York magazines under joint pseudonym *Publius*.

The texts, 85 in total, which in their title addressed *the people of the state of New York*, and actually the public of the member states, represented propaganda in favor of the federal Constitution. That new *supreme law of the country* was created in order to rearrange the political system and make radical changes within the organization of the state. Publication of the letters started on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1787 in *The Independent Journal, or the General Advertiser*, arousing a great interest of the American public and stirring violent public polemics.

The seriousness, analytical quality and style of those articles speak of the impressive political culture of the authors, and no less of their readers. The unquestionable reputation of the those three *Founding Fathers*, their marked preference for federal government and the USA interests, had guaranteed a large reading audience. The purpose of the texts was purely advertising in order to attract the citizens and political elites indecisive with respect to the proposed changes, be it for insufficient

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<sup>12</sup> Federalists, who were advocating creation of a strong central government and anti-federalists, who were advocating a strong sovereignty of the member states and weak confederate government.

<sup>13</sup> All the three belong to American *Founding Fathers* – political leaders of the colonies, who participated in the signing of the *Declaration, Articles of Confederation, US Constitution* or in war operations, holding the essential political or military positions. Historiography includes more than 200 persons, but among the most renowned ones - apart from the three mentioned, are George Washington, John and Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, James Madison, Paul Revere, Robert Livingston...

understanding or unattractiveness of the idea of a strong federal government<sup>14</sup>, to more strongly support the idea they were advocating.

The goal of the three authors was not to create a philosophical tractate or a political theory. Hamilton, Madison and Jay were practitioners of politics rather than philosophers, who had the privilege of creating a new political system, non-existent by that time. Their area of interest was not the idea of the state, government authority and power, but the embodiment of those categories in the American conditions. The reflective-theoretical discourse of *Federalist Papers* is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool in an attempt of finding out a most acceptable and a least harmful model of the state and government authority that would offer to the USA people optimal conditions for work, progress, security and happiness. However, although the function of the articles was propaganda worded and the method polemic-analytical, their theoretical and philosophical discourse is at enviable level. Even more impressive was how largely they were read at the time in which the events were unfolding<sup>15</sup>. The result of these texts, in conjunction with other means and mechanisms, was the creation of the federal state with a stronger central government, which was a prerequisite of a robust economic and political development of the United States.

American struggle for independence and creation of the state represents, in terms of time and concept, a temporally broad political process that had commenced before 1776. Political propaganda by way of the press was an important means in that process. We could say that the political marketing and use of the media for political purposes is the invention of the pre-revolutionary era in America. The Constitutional Convention of 1787 is the final political-legal phase of the Revolution. Written for the purpose of propagating the new Constitution, *Federalist Papers* are a part of that phase, they are its hermeneutic conceptualization. When the *Declaration of Independence* is compared with

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<sup>14</sup> A usual and widespread opinion in the period of Confederacy was that any government is bad by its nature. Therefore, strengthening of the central government was viewed negatively, as a return to the old times before the independence, as re-establishment of the old British system.

<sup>15</sup> If we know that *Federalist Papers* are considered as the culmination of the American political-theoretical tractate, we have then to seriously think about the political culture of the broader strata of the population who were able to read them. Because, they were not forwarded to the Congress members, their purpose was not to convince the elite only. Publication of such a type of texts implied broad, massive consumption and at least possible understanding of the theses and issues raised in them.

the basic ideas about the man found in *Federalist Papers*, the differences that appear are significant; however, but the issue of the rights and freedoms remains fundamental.

The difference lies in the purpose of these texts. As political documents, the *Declaration* and *Papers* may be taken as borderlines which define the theoretical discourse of the creation of the USA. And while the pre-revolutionary pamphlet had been an introduction to the Revolution in the minds of the people<sup>16</sup>, the *Declaration* discusses at a general, abstract level the issue of the man's freedom of the right to rebel against an oppressive regime. *Federalist Papers* are, on the other hand, the arguments of the newly established reality. They do not deal with abstract ideas. They deal with the concrete issues concerning the state order, implementation of laws and sustainability of institutions, advocating at the same time the preservation of individual freedom.

The role of the press in all three steps is of extraordinary relevance. Without the multiyear presence of public mass media and their massive distribution the experiment called the creation of the USA would certainly be different in a historical sense. This is not to say that final outcome would not be the same. However, it is believed that the social-political education by way of colonial newspapers and other printed forms had strengthened the political culture having created among the population the awareness of the nature of political problems between London and 13 American colonies<sup>17</sup>. The role of the press and journalism in the process of creating the United States is extraordinary, and in historical sense is the first modern and relevant lesson of the socio-political influence of the media.

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<sup>16</sup> John Adams, the second president of the United States and, perhaps, the most important political thinker of the pre-Revolution and Revolution era, summarized in the letter to H. Niles, of 13.2.1818, the ideological discourse of the Revolution: *Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.*

<sup>17</sup> The main problem was the question of right of English Parliament to tax colonies. According to charters, colonists were directly subordinate only to the king, not to a legislative body of the monarchy. Sovereignty was not transferable. Here is the root of a well-known phrase of the revolution, *No taxation without representation*, since the Parliament was not representative of the colonial population.

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Looking from this perspective, thesis about marketing and presentation as modern phenomena is not quite precise. As a civilization we live in feigned reality of mass media and notion. That fact led to the situation in which large part of our day life has been generated in binary codes. Historicity of events is not possible without its electronic image. In that precise situation, experience of American society is the richest and most profound one. Propagating political goals and mobilizing public opinion through media had been one of the mechanisms that had made this country.

America's media presentation was born together with the country itself. Its creation had the full media coverage from the very beginning and today we have USA as the most experienced player at the global scene. Therefore, America *per se* and its media picture cannot be divided – those are two sides of Janus coin, they have been together much before technology exploded in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Doubleness of America's image is the cultural fact older than any mass media.

Whole our reality is defined by media. We exist in global communication and events are served to us as 'breaking news' from the spot. McLuhan's thesis about global village has come to its realization. Thanks to the globalization of media we all watched 9/11 terrorist attack almost in a real time. That was more than a decade ago and that tragedy marked the beginning of a new political era in which we entered as TV viewers and American citizens as a target. Most recent events - WikiLeaks affair, earthquake and nuclear disaster in Japan, political changes in Arab world together with Osama Bin Laden assassination - has changed the world we know and announced the frame of quite new global picture that we do not see yet clearly. All those events has been presented through media in order to support current political interests and intentions, and not only of USA. Nothing has been controversial about that fact, since the boundaries of correct and acceptable behavior in politics are rather elastic.

But, the main question today about US is something else - how that country will cope in a complex global network of political processes? As the leading and still most powerfull country in the world, US takes huge part and brings solutions to the most world's problems today, no matter how much all the rest of the world looks at the outcomes. Will USA find enough power to manage all those complex political processes



in future? Serious communication problem with USA today is the everyday huge gap between the America itself and the media presentation has been sent to us, especially if we are watching mainstream media news coverage.

The biggest cultural values of American society are in the field of political discourse. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, International Community - in which in a way we all, as individuals, feel impacts of the USA foreign policy - do not approve most of the moves of the American administration. But, the fact is that USA brought the ideas of diversity in the modern political culture, together with *e pluribus unum*, In God We Trust without official state religion, idea of written constitution, idea of universal human rights etc.

Therefore, in 21<sup>st</sup> century, because of the legacy of the American Revolution and history, the problematic and lonely position of the power in declining is evident. USA today, in era of NGO's, small independent media houses, broader civil initiative, is in the similar position as Britain once was, in time of a conflict with American colonists. Imperial force acts imperial – consciously making the moves which are not allowed for ones who are not the part of its system. And, how that once was, when American colonists questioned who had legitimized British Government to challenge their rights as British subjects as well as human beings, today we have the situation in which international public doubts in veracity and legitimacy of media messages US mainstream media sends to the world. Even the official ones are suspicious. Independent media, intellectuals and NGO sector are becoming stronger everyday and they march as controllers for media manipulation.

Great Britain had a problem of economic dominance. USA in 21<sup>st</sup> century has political issues caused mostly by huge gap between reality and media image of the international political situation itself. Legitimacy is the part that lacks in the field of foreign affairs - the ability to impose action plan and strategy in a such way to satisfy interests and goals of the Others to some extent - what is the main quality of good manager. Even Fareed Zakaria thinks that Washington must realize that coaxing support of international community for its world vision is the key element of power, and not just exercise in PR.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Post – American World*, Helix, Smederevo, Serbia, 2009. Translated by Ana Ješić

In a position of permanent multilateral policy with all international political factors, USA has got also the negative picture of its culture as one of collateral boomerangs of its dominant position. That can seriously damage American political and economic goals. Maybe the turn back to its revolutionary roots and historical experience from the beginnings can be the useful exercise in some different media approach and therefore in political presentation of America's role in new circumstances of global political agenda. USA should accept reality that collaboration and consensus about elemental principles are imposed as a must in future which is coming. And, when it's known that America lays on universal principles than it is obvious that the problem is not the choice but the way of imposing those values and ideas.

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