

## BOOK REVIEW

*Crying the News: A History of America's Newsboys.* By Vincent DiGirolamo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xii plus 698 pp. \$36.95).

Vincent DiGirolamo has written a richly detailed account of the American newsboy that is filled with anecdotes bringing to life the boys, men, and sometimes girls and women, who were responsible for distributing the nation's thriving urban press from 1830 to 1940. *Crying the News: A History of America's Newsboys* is based on memoirs, contemporary accounts in the newspaper and trade press of the day, and government documents. DiGirolamo demonstrates the importance of this labor force in the commercial success of the newspaper industry and in the delivery of news to America's growing reading public. He also situates the newsboys' work in the struggle of workers to be represented by unions, and in the evolution of social thought about child labor and juvenile well-being, though "newsboy" is a catch-all term that refers to adults and children. Some were wandering street hawkers, some had permanent newsstand locations on street corners and in rail stations, others sold papers on trains with regular routes, and still others operated fixed delivery routes.

*Crying the News* begins in the days of printer and entrepreneur Benjamin Franklin and reaches into the post-war years of the twentieth century, but the heart of the work covers the period from the birth of the penny press in the 1830s to the New Deal era of the 1930s. "The American newsboy," DiGirolamo writes, "represents a bundle of contradictions. He was at once an exploited worker and an independent merchant, a spreader of truths and a traf-ficker in lies" (4).

DiGirolamo's book is packed with the names of long dead street peddlers whose lives are animated by crisp snapshots of incidents across the nation and by extensive quotes from the newsboys themselves, who despite their relative anonymity seemed to have been frequent subjects of news stories and government investigations. Publishers and social activists vied to act in the interest of newsboys. Newspaper operators, DiGirolamo notes, wanted to maintain ready and frequent access to the inexpensive and easily exploited workforce. To do so, publishers and their agents provided shelter, in lodging houses and even on the floor in the newspaper building, and offered other amenities such as banquets and organized activities, including equipment for marching bands and sports. In the nineteenth century, activists worried about juvenile delinquency, the bad habits that could be learned as a street peddler, and the effect of early and late

work on the schooling of children. Eventually, in the twentieth century, the newsboy was viewed as a problem of child labor, an issue addressed through Progressive reform efforts that included other areas of employment, such as textile mills. Many worried that newsboys were homeless waifs who squandered their paltry earnings on tobacco, gambling, and the theater, but in fact, many had homes and some were an important source of household income.

*Crying the News* notes that many of the illustrious politicians, business leaders, and entertainers of the nineteenth and twentieth century recalled their days as a news peddler. To name just a few these include inventor Thomas Edison, comedian W.C. Fields, President Grover Cleveland, writer Jack London, film director Frank Capra, composer Irving Berlin, broadcast pioneer David Sarnoff, WWI pilot Eddie Rickenbacker, gossip columnist Walter Winchell, boxer Jack Dempsey, Socialist Norman Thomas, New York governor and presidential candidate Al Smith, labor advocate U.S. Representative Robert F. Wagner, authors Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, jazz vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

Still, the book focused most of the time on the lesser-known individuals who plied the trade, their efforts to control their destiny, often through organizing, and the rough and tumble nature of the work, where newsboys might use fists and clubs to protect their sales turf and where publishers, such as William Randolph Hearst in turn of the century Chicago, might employ thugs to gain circulation by controlling what papers were sold.

DiGirolamo notes that newsboys were intensely engaged purveyors of news, especially during times of crisis, such as the Civil War and World War I, though they were often criticized for exaggerating or even creating news when there was none since their livelihood depended on a selling a paper regardless of what was in it. Although newsboys primarily worked for the commercial press, they were also key distributors of the socialist, Jewish, and Black press. Newsboys handled papers that were partisan organs, and they were instrumental in the sale of frontier papers intended to boost the reputation of distant settlements. DiGirolamo notes that the history of newsboys from 1830 to 1940 is at once a history of labor, of childhood, and of journalism.

DiGirolamo has greatly expanded on the work of previous authors such as Thomas Leonard, David Nasaw, and Jon Bekken. DiGirolamo supplements the text with 33 beautifully presented color plates and 146 black-and-white illustrations, cartoons, and photographs across 14 chapters, using art to explore the cultural history of newsboys and the attitudes of others toward them. The book is divided into three broad sections covering 1833 to 1865, the last half of the nineteenth century, and the first four decades of the twentieth century. This book would be an excellent resource for anyone interested child welfare in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the work of the unorganized to advocate for their interests through collective action, or the business of the newspaper industry from 1830 to 1940.

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