

## Book Review

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

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DOI: 10.1177/0160449X221130254

Vincent DiGirolamo's *Crying the News* is a monumental achievement—a beautifully written, richly illustrated, exhaustively researched book that should stand as the definitive history of its subject for years to come. This volume covers the experiences of “newsies”: thousands of newsboys, and the small minority of newsgirls, throughout most of American history.

There was no commercial electronic media in the United States until about 1920, when radio broadcasts began to reach numerous listeners. Until then, most Americans received their information about war, peace, politics, economics, sports, and other entertainment from printed newspapers. DiGirolamo shows that over time, the country's newsies became the foundation upon which America's modern newspaper industry was built. Although he does not neglect the Early National Period, DiGirolamo focuses mainly on the years between the 1830s and the 1940s, when the newspaper business's street sales and home deliveries were at their height. Thus, his volume is divided into three main chronological sections: Children of the Penny, 1833–1865; Children of the Breach, 1866–1899; and Children of the State, 1900–1940.

DiGirolamo consistently uses stories about individuals to illuminate important topics, ranging from racial discrimination, sexism, crime, and violence to newsboys' living and working conditions. Thus, *Crying the News* is at once social, cultural, and labor history, as well as a children's history since most newsboys and newsgirls were between the ages of 5 and 16. Most were poor children of Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants; some were the descendants of former Black slaves. During the 19th century, these young workers developed their own youth culture as loud, brash, often bedraggled, sometimes rakish news criers.

Child labor reformers protested on behalf of young news peddlers, especially during the Progressive Era (1890–1917). The reformers' demands, usually offered from a middle-class perspective, did not always please the newsies themselves. In any case, through most of the years under study, reform efforts met with little long-term success.

Newspaper owners worked tirelessly throughout the 19th century to deny their news sellers any rights as workers by framing them as little entrepreneurs, incipient

capitalists, or independent contractors. Today this labor would be called “gig work.” Countless books and articles by popular writers such as Horatio Alger, Jr., aided the employer cause by touting the myth of the “self-made man” who had started life as a humble newsboy. DiGirolamo acknowledges that some successful people had once been newsboys, but he argues that this was hardly the norm.

Although not well-remembered today, young newspaper sellers frequently organized themselves into collective bargaining agencies such as the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor, the radical Industrial Workers of the World, and, in the mid-1930s, the Committee for Industrial Organization. In the early 1920s, there was even a short-lived Boston News Stand Girls’ Union. Newsie unions frequently struck, usually over what amounted to wage cuts or the termination of the right to return unsold papers. Occasionally these work stoppages turned violent. Sometimes newspaper owners or their agents employed heavy-handed adult enforcers to attack newsboy strikers and destroy their unions. Alternatively, around 1910, industry executives attempted to undermine newsie unionism by sponsoring “newsboy clubs” and “newsboy republics” that offered excursions, summer camps, lessons in “Americanization,” and other diversions.

Additional praiseworthy aspects of *Crying the News* are DiGirolamo’s use of illustrations and the impressive extent of his research. The book contains 178 images, 33 reproduced as color plates. DiGirolamo explicates each picture while skillfully integrating references to them into his text. His research is exhaustive. Some 106 of the 698 pages in the book are devoted to endnotes. DiGirolamo has examined hundreds of diaries, memoirs, novels, newspaper accounts, poems, paintings, posters, lithographs, photographs, films, and archival resources, as well as dissertations, books, and scholarly articles relevant to his work. *Crying the News* also has two helpful indexes, one for names and one for subjects.

This book should be consulted by all researchers, teachers, and students interested in labor studies, child labor, social and cultural history, and labor history and activism. Lay readers of American history will also enjoy this well-written and accessible narrative.