

### 3.

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## *Typographic America*

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In the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, there appears a remarkable quotation attributed to Michael Welfare, one of the founders of a religious sect known as the Dunkers and a long-time acquaintance of Franklin. The statement had its origins in Welfare's complaint to Franklin that zealots of other religious persuasions were spreading lies about the Dunkers, accusing them of abominable principles to which, in fact, they were utter strangers. Franklin suggested that such abuse might be diminished if the Dunkers published the articles of their belief and the rules of their discipline. Welfare replied that this course of action had been discussed among his co-religionists but had been rejected. He then explained their reasoning in the following words:

When we were first drawn together as a society, it had pleased God to enlighten our minds so far as to see that some doctrines, which we once esteemed truths, were errors, and that others, which we had esteemed errors, were real truths. From time to time He has been pleased to afford us farther light, and our principles have been improving, and our errors diminishing. Now we are not sure that we are arrived at the end of this progression, and at the perfection of spiritual or theological knowledge; and we fear that, if we should feel ourselves as if bound and confined by it, and perhaps be unwilling to receive further improvement, and our successors still more so, as conceiving what we their elders and founders had done, to be something sacred, never to be departed from.<sup>1</sup>

Franklin describes this sentiment as a singular instance in the history of mankind of modesty in a sect. Modesty is certainly the word for it, but the statement is extraordinary for other reasons, too. We have here a criticism of the epistemology of the written word worthy of Plato. Moses himself might be interested although he could hardly approve. The Dunkers came close here to formulating a commandment about religious discourse: Thou shalt not write down thy principles, still less print them, lest thou shall be entrapped by them for all time.

We may, in any case, consider it a significant loss that we have no record of the deliberations of the Dunkers. It would certainly shed light on the premise of this book, i.e., that the form in which ideas are expressed affects what those ideas will be. But more important, their deliberations were in all likelihood a singular instance in Colonial America of a distrust of the printed word. For the Americans among whom Franklin lived were as committed to the printed word as any group of people who have ever lived. Whatever else may be said of those immigrants who came to settle in New England, it is a paramount fact that they and their heirs were dedicated and skillful readers whose religious sensibilities, political ideas and social life were embedded in the medium of typography.

We know that on the *Mayflower* itself several books were included as cargo, most importantly, the Bible and Captain John Smith's *Description of New England*. (For immigrants headed toward a largely uncharted land, we may suppose that the latter book was as carefully read as the former.) We know, too, that in the very first days of colonization each minister was given ten pounds with which to start a religious library. And although literacy rates are notoriously difficult to assess, there is sufficient evidence (mostly drawn from signatures) that between 1640 and 1700, the literacy rate for men in Massachusetts and Connecticut was somewhere between 89 percent and 95 percent, quite probably the highest concentration of literate males to be found anywhere in the world at that time.<sup>2</sup> (The literacy rate for

women in those colonies is estimated to have run as high as 62 percent in the years 1681–1697.<sup>3</sup>)

It is to be understood that the Bible was the central reading matter in all households, for these people were Protestants who shared Luther's belief that printing was "God's highest and extremest act of Grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward." Of course, the business of the Gospel may be driven forward in books other than the Bible, as for example in the famous *Bay Psalm Book*, printed in 1640 and generally regarded as America's first best seller. But it is not to be assumed that these people confined their reading to religious matters. Probate records indicate that 60 percent of the estates in Middlesex County between the years 1654 and 1699 contained books, all but 8 percent of them including more than the Bible.<sup>4</sup> In fact, between 1682 and 1685, Boston's leading bookseller imported 3,421 books from *one* English dealer, most of these nonreligious books. The meaning of this fact may be appreciated when one adds that these books were intended for consumption by approximately 75,000 people then living in the northern colonies.<sup>5</sup> The modern equivalent would be ten million books.

Aside from the fact that the religion of these Calvinist Puritans demanded that they be literate, three other factors account for the colonists' preoccupation with the printed word. Since the male literacy rate in seventeenth-century England did not exceed 40 percent, we may assume, first of all, that the migrants to New England came from more literate areas of England or from more literate segments of the population, or both.<sup>6</sup> In other words, they came here as readers and were certain to believe that reading was as important in the New World as it was in the Old. Second, from 1650 onward almost all New England towns passed laws requiring the maintenance of a "reading and writing" school, the large communities being required to maintain a grammar school, as well.<sup>7</sup> In all such laws, reference is made to Satan, whose evil designs, it was supposed, could be

thwarted at every turn by education. But there were other reasons why education was required, as suggested by the following ditty, popular in the seventeenth century:

*From public schools shall general  
knowledge flow,  
For 'tis the people's sacred  
right to know.<sup>8</sup>*

These people, in other words, had more than the subjection of Satan on their minds. Beginning in the sixteenth century, a great epistemological shift had taken place in which knowledge of every kind was transferred to, and made manifest through, the printed page. "More than any other device," Lewis Mumford wrote of this shift, "the printed book released people from the domination of the immediate and the local; . . . print made a greater impression than actual events. . . . To exist was to exist in print: the rest of the world tended gradually to become more shadowy. Learning became book-learning."<sup>9</sup> In light of this, we may assume that the schooling of the young was understood by the colonists not only as a moral duty but as an intellectual imperative. (The England from which they came was an island of schools. By 1660, for example, there were 444 schools in England, one school approximately every twelve miles.<sup>10</sup>) And it is clear that growth in literacy was closely connected to schooling. Where schooling was not required (as in Rhode Island) or weak school laws prevailed (as in New Hampshire), literacy rates increased more slowly than elsewhere.

Finally, these displaced Englishmen did not need to print their own books or even nurture their own writers. They imported, whole, a sophisticated literary tradition from their Motherland. In 1736, booksellers advertised the availability of the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, and Steele's *Guardian*. In 1738, advertisements appeared for Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Pope's *Homer*, Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* and Dryden's

*Fables.*<sup>11</sup> Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University, described the American situation succinctly:

Books of almost every kind, on almost every subject, are already written to our hands. Our situation in this respect is singular. As we speak the same language with the people of Great Britain, and have usually been at peace with that country; our commerce with it brings to us, regularly, not a small part of the books with which it is deluged. In every art, science, and path of literature, we obtain those, which to a great extent supply our wants.<sup>12</sup>

One significant implication of this situation is that no literary aristocracy emerged in Colonial America. Reading was not regarded as an elitist activity, and printed matter was spread evenly among all kinds of people. A thriving, classless reading culture developed because, as Daniel Boorstin writes, "It was diffuse. Its center was everywhere because it was nowhere. Every man was close to what [printed matter] talked about. Everyone could speak the same language. It was the product of a busy, mobile, public society."<sup>13</sup> By 1772, Jacob Duché could write: "The poorest labourer upon the shore of the Delaware thinks himself entitled to deliver his sentiment in matters of religion or politics with as much freedom as the gentleman or scholar. . . . Such is the prevailing taste for books of every kind, that almost every man is a reader."<sup>14</sup>

Where such a keen taste for books prevailed among the general population, we need not be surprised that Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, published on January 10, 1776, sold more than 100,000 copies by March of the same year.<sup>15</sup> In 1985, a book would have to sell eight million copies (in two months) to match the proportion of the population Paine's book attracted. If we go beyond March, 1776, a more awesome set of figures is given by Howard Fast: "No one knows just how many copies were actually printed. The most conservative sources place the figure at something over 300,000 copies. Others place it just

under half a million. Taking a figure of 400,000 in a population of 3,000,000, a book published today would have to sell 24,000,000 copies to do as well."<sup>16</sup> The only communication event that could produce such collective attention in today's America is the Superbowl.

It is worth pausing here for a moment to say something of Thomas Paine, for in an important way he is a measure of the high and wide level of literacy that existed in his time. In particular, I want to note that in spite of his lowly origins, no question has ever been raised, as it has with Shakespeare, about whether or not Paine was, in fact, the author of the works attributed to him. It is true that we know more of Paine's life than Shakespeare's (although not more of Paine's early periods), but it is also true that Paine had less formal schooling than Shakespeare, and came from the lowest laboring class before he arrived in America. In spite of these disadvantages, Paine wrote political philosophy and polemics the equal in lucidity and vitality (although not quantity) of Voltaire's, Rousseau's, and contemporary English philosophers', including Edmund Burke. Yet no one asked the question, How could an unschooled stay-maker from England's impoverished class produce such stunning prose? From time to time Paine's lack of education was pointed out by his enemies (and he, himself, felt inferior because of this deficiency), but it was never doubted that such powers of written expression could originate from a common man.

It is also worth mentioning that the full title of Paine's most widely read book is *Common Sense, Written by an Englishman*. The tagline is important here because, as noted earlier, Americans did not write many books in the Colonial period, which Benjamin Franklin tried to explain by claiming that Americans were too busy doing other things. Perhaps so. But Americans were not too busy to make use of the printing press, even if not for books they themselves had written. The first printing press in America was established in 1638 as an adjunct of Harvard

University, which was two years old at the time.<sup>17</sup> Presses were established shortly thereafter in Boston and Philadelphia without resistance by the Crown, a curious fact since at this time presses were not permitted in Liverpool and Birmingham, among other English cities.<sup>18</sup> The earliest use of the press was for the printing of newsletters, mostly done on cheap paper. It may well be that the development of an American literature was retarded not by the industry of the people or the availability of English literature but by the scarcity of quality paper. As late as Revolutionary days, George Washington was forced to write to his generals on unsightly scraps of paper, and his dispatches were not enclosed in envelopes, paper being too scarce for such use.<sup>19</sup>

Yet by the late seventeenth century, there was a beginning to a native literature that turned out to have as much to do with the typographic bias of American culture as books. I refer, of course, to the newspaper, at which Americans first tried their hand on September 25, 1690, in Boston, when Benjamin Harris printed the first edition of a three-page paper he called *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick*. Before he came to America, Harris had played a role in "exposing" a nonexistent conspiracy of Catholics to slaughter Protestants and burn London. His London newspaper, *Domestick Intelligence*, revealed the "Popish plot," with the result that Catholics were harshly persecuted.<sup>20</sup> Harris, no stranger to mendacity, indicated in his prospectus for *Publick Occurrences* that a newspaper was necessary to combat the spirit of lying which then prevailed in Boston and, I am told, still does. He concluded his prospectus with the following sentence: "It is suppos'd that none will dislike this Proposal but such as intend to be guilty of so villainous a crime." Harris was right about who would dislike his proposal. The second issue of *Publick Occurrences* never appeared. The Governor and Council suppressed it, complaining that Harris had printed "reflections of a very high nature,"<sup>21</sup> by which they meant that they had no intention of admitting any impedi-

ments to whatever villainy they wished to pursue. Thus, in the New World began the struggle for freedom of information which, in the Old, had begun a century before.

Harris' abortive effort inspired other attempts at newspaper publication: for example, the *Boston News-Letter*, published in 1704, generally regarded as the first continuously published American newspaper. This was followed by the *Boston Gazette* (in 1719) and the *New-England Courant* (in 1721), whose editor, James Franklin, was the older brother of Benjamin. By 1730, there were seven newspapers published regularly in four colonies, and by 1800 there were more than 180. In 1770, the *New York Gazette* congratulated itself and other papers by writing (in part):

*'Tis truth (with deference to the college)  
Newspapers are the spring of Knowledge,  
The general source throughout the nation,  
Of every modern conversation.<sup>22</sup>*

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Reverend Samuel Miller boasted that the United States had more than two-thirds the number of newspapers available in England, and yet had only half the population of England.<sup>23</sup>

In 1786, Benjamin Franklin observed that Americans were so busy reading newspapers and pamphlets that they scarcely had time for books. (One book they apparently always had time for was Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book*, for it sold more than 24 million copies between 1783 and 1843.)<sup>24</sup> Franklin's reference to pamphlets ought not to go unnoticed. The proliferation of newspapers in all the Colonies was accompanied by the rapid diffusion of pamphlets and broadsides. Alexis de Tocqueville took note of this fact in his *Democracy in America*, published in 1835: "In America," he wrote, "parties do not write books to combat each other's opinions, but pamphlets, which are circulated for a day with incredible rapidity and then expire."<sup>25</sup> And



he referred to both newspapers and pamphlets when he observed, "the invention of firearms equalized the vassal and the noble on the field of battle; the art of printing opened the same resources to the minds of all classes; the post brought knowledge alike to the door of the cottage and to the gate of the palace."<sup>26</sup>

At the time Tocqueville was making his observations of America, printing had already spread to all the regions of the country. The South had lagged behind the North not only in the formation of schools (almost all of which were private rather than public) but in its uses of the printing press. Virginia, for example, did not get its first regularly published newspaper, the *Virginia Gazette*, until 1736. But toward the end of the eighteenth century, the movement of ideas via the printed word was relatively rapid, and something approximating a national conversation emerged. For example, the *Federalist Papers*, an outpouring of eighty-five essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay (all under the name of Publius) originally appeared in a New York newspaper during 1787 and 1788 but were read almost as widely in the South as the North.

As America moved into the nineteenth century, it did so as a fully print-based culture in all of its regions. Between 1825 and 1850, the number of subscription libraries trebled.<sup>27</sup> What were called "mechanics' and apprentices' libraries"—that is, libraries intended for the working class—also emerged as a force for literacy. In 1829, the New York Apprentices' Library housed ten thousand volumes, of which 1,600 apprentices drew books. By 1857, the same library served three-quarters of a million people.<sup>28</sup> Aided by Congress' lowering of the postal rates in 1851, the penny newspaper, the periodical, the Sunday school tract, and the cheaply bound book were abundantly available. Between 1836 and 1890, 107 million copies of the *McGuffey Reader* were distributed to the schools.<sup>29</sup> And although the reading of novels was not considered an altogether reputable use of time, Americans devoured them. Of Walter Scott's novels, published

between 1814 and 1832, Samuel Goodrich wrote: "The appearance of a new novel from his pen caused a greater sensation in the United States than did some of the battles of Napoleon. . . . Everybody read these works; everybody—the refined and the simple."<sup>30</sup> Publishers were so anxious to make prospective best sellers available, they would sometimes dispatch messengers to incoming packet boats and "within a single day set up, printed and bound in paper covers the most recent novel of Bulwer or Dickens."<sup>31</sup> There being no international copyright laws, "pirated" editions abounded, with no complaint from the public, or much from authors, who were lionized. When Charles Dickens visited America in 1842, his reception equaled the adulation we offer today to television stars, quarterbacks, and Michael Jackson. "I can give you no conception of my welcome," Dickens wrote to a friend. "There never was a King or Emperor upon earth so cheered and followed by the crowds, and entertained at splendid balls and dinners and waited upon by public bodies of all kinds. . . . If I go out in a carriage, the crowd surrounds it and escorts me home; if I go to the theater, the whole house . . . rises as one man and the timbers ring again."<sup>32</sup> A native daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe, was not offered the same kind of adoring attention—and, of course, in the South, had her carriage been surrounded, it would not have been for the purpose of escorting her home—but her *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold 305,000 copies in its first year, the equivalent of four million in today's America.

Alexis de Tocqueville was not the only foreign visitor to be impressed by the Americans' immersion in printed matter. During the nineteenth century, scores of Englishmen came to America to see for themselves what had become of the Colonies. All were impressed with the high level of literacy and in particular its extension to all classes.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, they were astounded by the near universality of lecture halls in which stylized oral performance provided a continuous reinforcement of the print tradition. Many of these lec-

ture halls originated as a result of the Lyceum Movement, a form of adult education. Usually associated with the efforts of Josiah Holbrook, a New England farmer, the Lyceum Movement had as its purpose the diffusion of knowledge, the promotion of common schools, the creation of libraries and, especially, the establishment of lecture halls. By 1835, there were more than three thousand Lyceums in fifteen states.<sup>34</sup> Most of these were located east of the Alleghenies, but by 1840, they were to be found at the edges of the frontier, as far west as Iowa and Minnesota. Alfred Bunn, an Englishman on an extensive tour through America, reported in 1853 that "practically every village had its lecture hall."<sup>35</sup> He added: "It is a matter of wonderment . . . to witness the youthful workmen, the overtired artisan, the worn-out factory girl . . . rushing . . . after the toil of the day is over, into the hot atmosphere of a crowded lecture room."<sup>36</sup> Bunn's countryman J. F. W. Johnston attended lectures at this time at the Smithsonian Institution and "found the lecture halls jammed with capacity audiences of 1200 and 1500 people."<sup>37</sup> Among the lecturers these audiences could hear were the leading intellectuals, writers and humorists (who were also writers) of their time, including Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Greeley, Louis Agassiz and Ralph Waldo Emerson (whose fee for a lecture was fifty dollars).<sup>38</sup> In his autobiography, Mark Twain devotes two chapters to his experiences as a lecturer on the Lyceum circuit. "I began as a lecturer in 1866 in California and Nevada," he wrote. "[I] lectured in New York once and in the Mississippi Valley a few times; in 1868 [I] made the whole Western circuit; and in the two or three following seasons added the Eastern circuit to my route."<sup>39</sup> Apparently, Emerson was underpaid since Twain remarks that some lecturers charged as much as \$250 when they spoke in towns and \$400 when they spoke in cities (which is almost as much, in today's terms, as the going price for a lecture by a retired television newscaster).

The point all this is leading to is that from its beginning until

well into the nineteenth century, America was as dominated by the printed word and an oratory based on the printed word as any society we know of. This situation was only in part a legacy of the Protestant tradition. As Richard Hofstadter reminds us, America was founded by intellectuals, a rare occurrence in the history of modern nations. "The Founding Fathers," he writes, "were sages, scientists, men of broad cultivation, many of them apt in classical learning, who used their wide reading in history, politics, and law to solve the exigent problems of their time."<sup>40</sup> A society shaped by such men does not easily move in contrary directions. We might even say that America was founded by intellectuals, from which it has taken us two centuries and a communications revolution to recover. Hofstadter has written convincingly of our efforts to "recover," that is to say, of the anti-intellectual strain in American public life, but he concedes that his focus distorts the general picture. It is akin to writing a history of American business by concentrating on the history of bankruptcies.<sup>41</sup>

The influence of the printed word in every arena of public discourse was insistent and powerful not merely because of the quantity of printed matter but because of its *monopoly*. This point cannot be stressed enough, especially for those who are reluctant to acknowledge profound differences in the media environments of then and now. One sometimes hears it said, for example, that there is more printed matter available today than ever before, which is undoubtedly true. But from the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century, printed matter was virtually *all* that was available. There were no movies to see, radio to hear, photographic displays to look at, records to play. There was no television. Public business was channeled into and expressed through print, which became the model, the metaphor and the measure of all discourse. The resonances of the lineal, analytical structure of print, and in particular, of expository prose, could be felt everywhere. For example, in how people talked. Tocqueville remarks on this in *Democracy in*

*America.* "An American," he wrote, "cannot converse, but he can discuss, and his talk falls into a dissertation. He speaks to you as if he was addressing a meeting; and if he should chance to become warm in the discussion, he will say 'Gentlemen' to the person with whom he is conversing."<sup>42</sup> This odd practice is less a reflection of an American's obstinacy than of his modeling his conversational style on the structure of the printed word. Since the printed word is impersonal and is addressed to an invisible audience, what Tocqueville is describing here is a kind of printed orality, which was observable in diverse forms of oral discourse. On the pulpit, for example, sermons were usually written speeches delivered in a stately, impersonal tone consisting "largely of an impassioned, coldly analytical cataloguing of the attributes of the Deity as revealed to man through Nature and Nature's Laws."<sup>43</sup> And even when The Great Awakening came—a revivalist movement that challenged the analytical, dispassionate spirit of Deism—its highly emotional preachers used an oratory that could be transformed easily to the printed page. The most charismatic of these men was the Reverend George Whitefield, who beginning in 1739 preached all over America to large crowds. In Philadelphia, he addressed an audience of ten thousand people, whom he deeply stirred and alarmed by assuring them of eternal hellfire if they refused to accept Christ. Benjamin Franklin witnessed one of Whitefield's performances and responded by offering to become his publisher. In due time, Whitefield's journals and sermons were published by B. Franklin of Philadelphia.<sup>44</sup>

But obviously I do not mean to say that print merely influenced the form of public discourse. That does not say much unless one connects it to the more important idea that form will determine the nature of content. For those readers who may believe that this idea is too "McLuhanesque" for their taste, I offer Karl Marx from *The German Ideology*. "Is the *Iliad* possible," he asks rhetorically, "when the printing press and even printing machines exist? Is it not inevitable that with the emer-

gence of the press, the singing and the telling and the muse cease; that is, the conditions necessary for epic poetry disappear?"<sup>45</sup> Marx understood well that the press was not merely a machine but a structure for discourse, which both rules out and insists upon certain kinds of content and, inevitably, a certain kind of audience. He did not, himself, fully explore the matter, and others have taken up the task. I too must try my hand at it—to explore how the press worked as a metaphor and an epistemology to create a serious and rational public conversation, from which we have now been so dramatically separated.

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## *The Typographic Mind*

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The first of the seven famous debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas took place on August 21, 1858, in Ottawa, Illinois. Their arrangement provided that Douglas would speak first, for one hour; Lincoln would take an hour and a half to reply; Douglas, a half hour to rebut Lincoln's reply. This debate was considerably shorter than those to which the two men were accustomed. In fact, they had tangled several times before, and all of their encounters had been much lengthier and more exhausting. For example, on October 16, 1854, in Peoria, Illinois, Douglas delivered a three-hour address to which Lincoln, by agreement, was to respond. When Lincoln's turn came, he reminded the audience that it was already 5 p.m., that he would probably require as much time as Douglas and that Douglas was still scheduled for a rebuttal. He proposed, therefore, that the audience go home, have dinner, and return refreshed for four more hours of talk.<sup>1</sup> The audience amiably agreed, and matters proceeded as Lincoln had outlined.

What kind of audience was this? Who were these people who could so cheerfully accommodate themselves to seven hours of oratory? It should be noted, by the way, that Lincoln and Douglas were not presidential candidates; at the time of their encounter in Peoria they were not even candidates for the United States Senate. But their audiences were not especially concerned with their official status. These were people who regarded such events as essential to their political education, who took them to be an integral part of their social lives, and who

were quite accustomed to extended oratorical performances. Typically at county or state fairs, programs included many speakers, most of whom were allotted three hours for their arguments. And since it was preferred that speakers not go unanswered, their opponents were allotted an equal length of time. (One might add that the speakers were not always men. At one fair lasting several days in Springfield, "Each evening a woman [lectured] in the courtroom on 'Woman's Influence in the Great Progressive Movements of the Day.'"<sup>2</sup>)

Moreover, these people did not rely on fairs or special events to get their fill of oratory. The tradition of the "stump" speaker was widely practiced, especially in the western states. By the stump of a felled tree or some equivalent open space, a speaker would gather an audience, and, as the saying had it, "take the stump" for two or three hours. Although audiences were mostly respectful and attentive, they were not quiet or unemotional. Throughout the Lincoln-Douglas debates, for example, people shouted encouragement to the speakers ("You tell 'em, Abe!") or voiced terse expressions of scorn ("Answer that one, if you can"). Applause was frequent, usually reserved for a humorous or elegant phrase or a cogent point. At the first debate in Ottawa, Douglas responded to lengthy applause with a remarkable and revealing statement. "My friends," he said, "silence will be more acceptable to me in the discussion of these questions than applause. I desire to address myself to your judgment, your understanding, and your consciences, and not to your passions or your enthusiasms."<sup>3</sup> As to the conscience of the audience, or even its judgment, it is difficult to say very much. But as to its understanding, a great deal can be assumed.

For one thing, its attention span would obviously have been extraordinary by current standards. Is there any audience of Americans today who could endure seven hours of talk? or five? or three? Especially without pictures of any kind? Second, these audiences must have had an equally extraordinary capacity to comprehend lengthy and complex sentences aurally. In



Douglas' Ottawa speech he included in his one-hour address three long, legally phrased resolutions of the Abolition platform. Lincoln, in his reply, read even longer passages from a published speech he had delivered on a previous occasion. For all of Lincoln's celebrated economy of style, his sentence structure in the debates was intricate and subtle, as was Douglas'. In the second debate, at Freeport, Illinois, Lincoln rose to answer Douglas in the following words:

It will readily occur to you that I cannot, in half an hour, notice all the things that so able a man as Judge Douglas can say in an hour and a half; and I hope, therefore, if there be anything that he has said upon which you would like to hear something from me, but which I omit to comment upon, you will bear in mind that it would be expecting an impossibility for me to cover his whole ground.<sup>4</sup>

It is hard to imagine the present occupant of the White House being capable of constructing such clauses in similar circumstances. And if he were, he would surely do so at the risk of burdening the comprehension or concentration of his audience. People of a television culture need "plain language" both aurally and visually, and will even go so far as to require it in some circumstances by law. The Gettysburg Address would probably have been largely incomprehensible to a 1985 audience.

The Lincoln-Douglas audience apparently had a considerable grasp of the issues being debated, including knowledge of historical events and complex political matters. At Ottawa, Douglas put seven interrogatives to Lincoln, all of which would have been rhetorically pointless unless the audience was familiar with the Dred Scott decision, the quarrel between Douglas and President Buchanan, the disaffection of some Democrats, the Abolition platform, and Lincoln's famous "House divided" speech at Cooper Union. Further, in answering Douglas' questions in a later debate, Lincoln made a subtle distinction be-

tween what he was, or was not, "pledged" to uphold and what he actually believed, which he surely would not have attempted unless he assumed the audience could grasp his point. Finally, while both speakers employed some of the more simple-minded weapons of argumentative language (e.g., name-calling and bombastic generalities), they consistently drew upon more complex rhetorical resources—sarcasm, irony, paradox, elaborated metaphors, fine distinctions and the exposure of contradiction, none of which would have advanced their respective causes unless the audience was fully aware of the means being employed.

It would be false, however, to give the impression that these 1858 audiences were models of intellectual propriety. All of the Lincoln-Douglas debates were conducted amid a carnival-like atmosphere. Bands played (although not during the debates), hawkers sold their wares, children romped, liquor was available. These were important social events as well as rhetorical performances, but this did not trivialize them. As I have indicated, these audiences were made up of people whose intellectual lives and public business were fully integrated into their social world. As Winthrop Hudson has pointed out, even Methodist camp meetings combined picnics with opportunities to listen to oratory.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, most of the camp grounds originally established for religious inspiration—Chautauqua, New York; Ocean Grove, New Jersey; Bayview, Michigan; Junaluska, North Carolina—were eventually transformed into conference centers, serving educational and intellectual functions. In other words, the use of language as a means of complex argument was an important, pleasurable and common form of discourse in almost every public arena.

To understand the audience to whom Lincoln and Douglas directed their memorable language, we must remember that these people were the grandsons and granddaughters of the Enlightenment (American version). They were the progeny of Franklin, Jefferson, Madison and Tom Paine, the inheritors of

the Empire of Reason, as Henry Steele Commager has called eighteenth-century America. It is true that among their number were frontiersmen, some of whom were barely literate, and immigrants to whom English was still strange. It is also true that by 1858, the photograph and telegraph had been invented, the advance guard of a new epistemology that would put an end to the Empire of Reason. But this would not become evident until the twentieth century. At the time of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, America was in the middle years of its most glorious literary outpouring. In 1858, Edwin Markham was six years old; Mark Twain was twenty-three; Emily Dickinson, twenty-eight; Whitman and James Russell Lowell, thirty-nine; Thoreau, forty-one; Melville, forty-five; Whittier and Longfellow, fifty-one; Hawthorne and Emerson, fifty-four and fifty-five; Poe had died nine years before.

I choose the Lincoln-Douglas debates as a starting point for this chapter not only because they were the preeminent example of political discourse in the mid-nineteenth century but also because they illustrate the power of typography to control the character of that discourse. Both the speakers and their audience were habituated to a kind of oratory that may be described as literary. For all of the hoopla and socializing surrounding the event, the speakers had little to offer, and audiences little to expect, but language. And the language that was offered was clearly modeled on the style of the written word. To anyone who has read what Lincoln and Douglas said, this is obvious from beginning to end. The debates opened, in fact, with Douglas making the following introduction, highly characteristic of everything that was said afterward:

Ladies and Gentlemen: I appear before you today for the purpose of discussing the leading political topics which now agitate the public mind. By an arrangement between Mr. Lincoln and myself, we are present here today for the purpose of having a joint discussion, as the representatives of the two great political parties of the

State and Union, upon the principles in issue between those parties, and this vast concourse of people shows the deep feeling which pervades the public mind in regard to the questions dividing us.<sup>6</sup>

This language is pure print. That the occasion required it to be spoken aloud cannot obscure that fact. And that the audience was able to process it through the ear is remarkable only to people whose culture no longer resonates powerfully with the printed word. Not only did Lincoln and Douglas write all their speeches in advance, but they also planned their rebuttals in writing. Even the spontaneous interactions between the speakers were expressed in a sentence structure, sentence length and rhetorical organization which took their form from writing. To be sure, there were elements of pure orality in their presentations. After all, neither speaker was indifferent to the moods of the audiences. Nonetheless, the resonance of typography was ever-present. Here was argument and counterargument, claim and counterclaim, criticism of relevant texts, the most careful scrutiny of the previously uttered sentences of one's opponent. In short, the Lincoln-Douglas debates may be described as expository prose lifted whole from the printed page. That is the meaning of Douglas' reproach to the audience. He claimed that his appeal was to understanding and not to passion, as if the audience were to be silent, reflective readers, and his language the text which they must ponder. Which brings us, of course, to the questions, What are the implications for public discourse of a written, or typographic, metaphor? What is the character of its content? What does it demand of the public? What uses of the mind does it favor?

One must begin, I think, by pointing to the obvious fact that the written word, and an oratory based upon it, *has a content*: a semantic, paraphrasable, propositional content. This may sound odd, but since I shall be arguing soon enough that much of our discourse today has only a marginal propositional con-

tent, I must stress the point here. Whenever language is the principal medium of communication—especially language controlled by the rigors of print—an idea, a fact, a claim is the inevitable result. The idea may be banal, the fact irrelevant, the claim false, but there is no escape from meaning when language is the instrument guiding one's thought. Though one may accomplish it from time to time, it is very hard to say nothing when employing a written English sentence. What else is exposition good for? Words have very little to recommend them except as carriers of meaning. The shapes of written words are not especially interesting to look at. Even the sounds of sentences of spoken words are rarely engaging except when composed by those with extraordinary poetic gifts. If a sentence refuses to issue forth a fact, a request, a question, an assertion, an explanation, it is nonsense, a mere grammatical shell. As a consequence a language-centered discourse such as was characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America tends to be both content-laden and serious, all the more so when it takes its form from print.

It is serious because meaning demands to be understood. A written sentence calls upon its author to say something, upon its reader to know the import of what is said. And when an author and reader are struggling with semantic meaning, they are engaged in the most serious challenge to the intellect. This is especially the case with the act of reading, for authors are not always trustworthy. They lie, they become confused, they overgeneralize, they abuse logic and, sometimes, common sense. The reader must come armed, in a serious state of intellectual readiness. This is not easy because he comes to the text alone. In reading, one's responses are isolated, one's intellect thrown back on its own resources. To be confronted by the cold abstractions of printed sentences is to look upon language bare, without the assistance of either beauty or community. Thus, reading is by its nature a serious business. It is also, of course, an essentially rational activity.

From Erasmus in the sixteenth century to Elizabeth Eisenstein in the twentieth, almost every scholar who has grappled with the question of what reading does to one's habits of mind has concluded that the process encourages rationality; that the sequential, propositional character of the written word fosters what Walter Ong calls the "analytic management of knowledge." To engage the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning. It means to uncover lies, confusions, and overgeneralizations, to detect abuses of logic and common sense. It also means to weigh ideas, to compare and contrast assertions, to connect one generalization to another. To accomplish this, one must achieve a certain distance from the words themselves, which is, in fact, encouraged by the isolated and impersonal text. That is why a good reader does not cheer an apt sentence or pause to applaud even an inspired paragraph. Analytic thought is too busy for that, and too detached.

I do not mean to imply that prior to the written word analytic thought was not possible. I am referring here not to the potentialities of the individual mind but to the predispositions of a cultural mind-set. In a culture dominated by print, public discourse tends to be characterized by a coherent, orderly arrangement of facts and ideas. The public for whom it is intended is generally competent to manage such discourse. In a print culture, writers make mistakes when they lie, contradict themselves, fail to support their generalizations, try to enforce illogical connections. In a print culture, readers make mistakes when they don't notice, or even worse, don't care.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, print put forward a definition of intelligence that gave priority to the objective, rational use of the mind and at the same time encouraged forms of public discourse with serious, logically ordered content. It is no accident that the Age of Reason was coexistent with the growth of a print culture, first in Europe and then in America. The spread of typography kindled the hope that the world and

its manifold mysteries could at least be comprehended, predicted, controlled. It is in the eighteenth century that science—the preeminent example of the analytic management of knowledge—begins its refashioning of the world. It is in the eighteenth century that capitalism is demonstrated to be a rational and liberal system of economic life, that religious superstition comes under furious attack, that the divine right of kings is shown to be a mere prejudice, that the idea of continuous progress takes hold, and that the necessity of universal literacy through education becomes apparent.

Perhaps the most optimistic expression of everything that typography implied is contained in the following paragraph from John Stuart Mill's autobiography:

So complete was my father's reliance on the influence of mankind, wherever [literacy] is allowed to reach them, that he felt as if all would be gained if the whole population were taught to read, if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them by word and in writing, and if, by means of the suffrage, they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinion they adopted.<sup>7</sup>

This was, of course, a hope never quite realized. At no point in the history of England or America (or anyplace else) has the dominion of reason been so total as the elder Mill imagined typography would allow. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to demonstrate that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American public discourse, being rooted in the bias of the printed word, was serious, inclined toward rational argument and presentation, and, therefore, made up of meaningful content.

Let us take religious discourse as an illustration of this point. In the eighteenth century believers were as much influenced by the rationalist tradition as anyone else. The New World offered freedom of religion to all, which implied that no force other than reason itself could be employed to bring light to the unbeliever. "Here Deism will have its full chance," said Ezra Stiles

in one of his famous sermons in 1783. "Nor need libertines [any] more to complain of being overcome by any weapons but the gentle, the powerful ones of argument and truth."<sup>8</sup>

Leaving aside the libertines, we know that the Deists were certainly given their full chance. It is quite probable, in fact, that the first four presidents of the United States were Deists. Jefferson, certainly, did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and, while he was President, wrote a version of the Four Gospels from which he removed all references to "fantastic" events, retaining only the ethical content of Jesus' teaching. Legend has it that when Jefferson was elected President, old women hid their Bibles and shed tears. What they might have done had Tom Paine become President or been offered some high post in the government is hard to imagine. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine attacked the Bible and all subsequent Christian theology. Of Jesus Christ, Paine allowed that he was a virtuous and amiable man but charged that the stories of his divinity were absurd and profane, which, in the way of the rationalist, he tried to prove by a close textual analysis of the Bible. "All national institutions of churches," he wrote, "whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit."<sup>9</sup> Because of *The Age of Reason*, Paine lost his standing among the pantheon of Founding Fathers (and to this day is treated ambiguously in American history textbooks). But Ezra Stiles did not say that libertines and Deists would be *loved*: only that with reason as their jury, they would have their say in an open court. As indeed they did. Assisted by the initial enthusiasms evoked by the French Revolution, the Deist attack on churches as enemies of progress and on religious superstition as enemy of rationality became a popular movement.<sup>10</sup> The churches fought back, of course, and when Deism ceased to attract interest, they fought among themselves. Toward the mid-eighteenth century, Theodore Frelinghuysen and William Tennent led a revivalist movement among Presbyterians. They were followed by the



three great figures associated with religious "awakenings" in America—Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and, later in the nineteenth century, Charles Finney.

These men were spectacularly successful preachers, whose appeal reached regions of consciousness far beyond where reason rules. Of Whitefield, it was said that by merely pronouncing the word "Mesopotamia," he evoked tears in his audience. Perhaps that is why Henry Coswell remarked in 1839 that "religious mania is said to be the prevailing form of insanity in the United States."<sup>11</sup> Yet it is essential to bear in mind that quarrels over doctrine between the revivalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the established churches fiercely opposed to them were argued in pamphlets and books in largely rational, logically ordered language. It would be a serious mistake to think of Billy Graham or any other television revivalist as a latter-day Jonathan Edwards or Charles Finney. Edwards was one of the most brilliant and creative minds ever produced by America. His contribution to aesthetic theory was almost as important as his contribution to theology. His interests were mostly academic; he spent long hours each day in his study. He did not speak to his audiences extemporaneously. He *read* his sermons, which were tightly knit and closely reasoned expositions of theological doctrine.<sup>12</sup> Audiences may have been moved emotionally by Edwards' language, but they were, first and foremost, required to understand it. Indeed Edwards' fame was largely a result of a book, *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, published in 1737. A later book, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, published in 1746, is considered to be among the most remarkable psychological studies ever produced in America.

Unlike the principal figures in today's "great awakening"—Oral Roberts, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, et al.—yesterday's leaders of revivalist movements in America were men of learning, faith in reason, and generous expository gifts. Their

disputes with the religious establishments were as much about theology and the nature of consciousness as they were about religious inspiration. Finney, for example, was no "backcountry rustic," as he was sometimes characterized by his doctrinal opponents.<sup>13</sup> He had been trained as a lawyer, wrote an important book on systematic theology, and ended his career as a professor at and then president of Oberlin College.

The doctrinal disputes among religionists not only were argued in carefully drawn exposition in the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth century were settled by the extraordinary expedient of founding colleges. It is sometimes forgotten that the churches in America laid the foundation of our system of higher education. Harvard, of course, was established early—in 1636—for the purpose of providing learned ministers to the Congregational Church. And, sixty-five years later, when Congregationalists quarreled among themselves over doctrine, Yale College was founded to correct the lax influences of Harvard (and, to this day, claims it has the same burden). The strong intellectual strain of the Congregationalists was matched by other denominations, certainly in their passion for starting colleges. The Presbyterians founded, among other schools, the University of Tennessee in 1784, Washington and Jefferson in 1802 and Lafayette in 1826. The Baptists founded, among others, Colgate (1817), George Washington (1821), Furman (1826), Denison (1832) and Wake Forest (1834). The Episcopalians founded Hobart (1822), Trinity (1823) and Kenyon (1824). The Methodists founded eight colleges between 1830 and 1851, including Wesleyan, Emory, and Depauw. In addition to Harvard and Yale, the Congregationalists founded Williams (1793), Middlebury (1800), Amherst (1821) and Oberlin (1833).

If this preoccupation with literacy and learning be a "form of insanity," as Coswell said of religious life in America, then let there be more of it. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, religious thought and institutions in America were dominated

by an austere, learned, and intellectual form of discourse that is largely absent from religious life today. No clearer example of the difference between earlier and modern forms of public discourse can be found than in the contrast between the theological arguments of Jonathan Edwards and those of, say, Jerry Falwell, or Billy Graham, or Oral Roberts. The formidable content to Edwards' theology must inevitably engage the intellect; if there is such a content to the theology of the television evangelicals, they have not yet made it known.

The differences between the character of discourse in a print-based culture and the character of discourse in a television-based culture are also evident if one looks at the legal system.

In a print-based culture, lawyers tended to be well educated, devoted to reason, and capable of impressive expository argument. It is a matter frequently overlooked in histories of America that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the legal profession represented "a sort of privileged body in the scale of intellect," as Tocqueville remarked. Folk heroes were made of some of those lawyers, like Sergeant Prentiss of Alabama, or "Honest" Abe Lincoln of Illinois, whose craftiness in manipulating juries was highly theatrical, not unlike television's version of a trial lawyer. But the great figures of American jurisprudence—John Marshall, Joseph Story, James Kent, David Hoffman, William Wirt and Daniel Webster—were models of intellectual elegance and devotion to rationality and scholarship. They believed that democracy, for all of its obvious virtues, posed the danger of releasing an undisciplined individualism. Their aspiration was to save civilization in America by "creating a rationality for the law."<sup>14</sup> As a consequence of this exalted view, they believed that law must not be merely a learned profession but a liberal one. The famous law professor Job Tyson argued that a lawyer must be familiar with the works of Seneca, Cicero, and Plato.<sup>15</sup> George Sharswood, perhaps envisioning the degraded state of legal education in the twentieth century, remarked in 1854 that to read law exclusively will damage the

mind, "shackle it to the technicalities with which it has become so familiar, and disable it from taking enlarged and comprehensive views even of topics falling within its compass."<sup>16</sup>

The insistence on a liberal, rational and articulate legal mind was reinforced by the fact that America had a written constitution, as did all of its component states, and that law did not grow by chance but was explicitly formulated. A lawyer needed to be a writing and reading man par excellence, for reason was the principal authority upon which legal questions were to be decided. John Marshall was, of course, the great "paragon of reason, as vivid a symbol to the American imagination as Natty Bumppo."<sup>17</sup> He was the preeminent example of Typographic Man—detached, analytical, devoted to logic, abhorring contradiction. It was said of him that he never used analogy as a principal support of his arguments. Rather, he introduced most of his decisions with the phrase "It is admitted. . . ." Once one admitted his premises, one was usually forced to accept his conclusion.

To an extent difficult to imagine today, earlier Americans were familiar not only with the great legal issues of their time but even with the language famous lawyers had used to argue their cases. This was especially true of Daniel Webster, and it was only natural that Stephen Vincent Benét in his famous short story would have chosen Daniel Webster to contend with the Devil. How could the Devil triumph over a man whose language, described by Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, had the following characteristics?

. . . his clearness and downright simplicity of statement, his vast comprehensiveness of topics, his fertility in illustrations drawn from practical sources; his keen analysis, and suggestion of difficulties; his power of disentangling a complicated proposition, and resolving it in elements so plain as to reach the most common minds; his vigor in generalizations; planting his own arguments behind the whole battery of his opponents; his wariness and cau-

tion not to betray himself by heat into untenable positions, or to spread his forces over useless ground.<sup>18</sup>

I quote this in full because it is the best nineteenth-century description I know of the character of discourse expected of one whose mind is formed by the printed word. It is exactly the ideal and model James Mill had in mind in prophesying about the wonders of typography. And if the model was somewhat unreachable, it stood nonetheless as an ideal to which every lawyer aspired.

Such an ideal went far beyond the legal profession or the ministry in its influence. Even in the everyday world of commerce, the resonances of rational, typographic discourse were to be found. If we may take advertising to be the voice of commerce, then its history tells very clearly that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries those with products to sell took their customers to be not unlike Daniel Webster: they assumed that potential buyers were literate, rational, analytical. Indeed, the history of newspaper advertising in America may be considered, all by itself, as a metaphor of the descent of the typographic mind, beginning, as it does, with reason, and ending, as it does, with entertainment. In Frank Presbrey's classic study *The History and Development of Advertising*, he discusses the decline of typography, dating its demise in the late 1860's and early 1870's. He refers to the period before then as the "dark ages" of typographical display.<sup>19</sup> The dark ages to which he refers began in 1704 when the first paid advertisements appeared in an American newspaper, *The Boston News-Letter*. These were three in number, occupying altogether four inches of single-column space. One of them offered a reward for the capture of a thief; another offered a reward for the return of an anvil that was "taken up" by some unknown party. The third actually offered something for sale, and, in fact, is not unlike real estate advertisements one might see in today's *New York Times*:

At Oysterbay, on *Long Island* in the Province of N. York. There is a very good Fulling-Mill, to be Let or Sold, as also a Plantation, having on it a large new Brick house, and another good house by it for a Kitchen & workhouse, with a Barn, Stable &c. a young Orchard and 20 acres clear land. The Mill is to be Let with or without the Plantation; Enquire of Mr. William *Bradford* Printer in N. York, and know further.<sup>20</sup>

For more than a century and a half afterward, advertisements took this form with minor alterations. For example, sixty-four years after Mr. Bradford advertised an estate in Oyster Bay, the legendary Paul Revere placed the following advertisement in the *Boston Gazette*:

Whereas many persons are so unfortunate as to lose their Fore-Teeth by Accident, and otherways, to their great Detriment, not only in Looks, but Speaking both in Public and Private:—This is to inform all such, that they may have them re-placed with false Ones, that look as well as the Natural, and Answers the End of Speaking to all Intents, by PAUL REVERE, Goldsmith, near the Head of Dr. Clarke's Wharf, Boston.<sup>21</sup>

Revere went on to explain in another paragraph that those whose false teeth had been fitted by John Baker, and who had suffered the indignity of having them loosen, might come to Revere to have them tightened. He indicated that he had learned how to do this from John Baker himself.

Not until almost a hundred years after Revere's announcement were there any serious attempts by advertisers to overcome the lineal, typographic form demanded by publishers.<sup>22</sup> And not until the end of the nineteenth century did advertising move fully into its modern mode of discourse. As late as 1890, advertising, still understood to consist of words, was regarded as an essentially serious and rational enterprise whose purpose was to convey information and make claims in propositional

form. Advertising was, as Stephen Douglas said in another context, intended to appeal to understanding, not to passions. This is not to say that during the period of typographic display, the claims that were put forward were true. Words cannot guarantee their truth content. Rather, they assemble a context in which the question, *Is this true or false?* is relevant. In the 1890's that context was shattered, first by the massive intrusion of illustrations and photographs, then by the nonpropositional use of language. For example, in the 1890's advertisers adopted the technique of using slogans. Presbrey contends that modern advertising can be said to begin with the use of two such slogans: "You press the button; we do the rest" and "See that hump?" At about the same time, jingles started to be used, and in 1892, Procter and Gamble invited the public to submit rhymes to advertise Ivory Soap. In 1896, H-O employed, for the first time, a picture of a baby in a high chair, the bowl of cereal before him, his spoon in hand, his face ecstatic. By the turn of the century, advertisers no longer assumed rationality on the part of their potential customers. Advertising became one part depth psychology, one part aesthetic theory. Reason had to move itself to other arenas.

To understand the role that the printed word played in providing an earlier America with its assumptions about intelligence, truth and the nature of discourse, one must keep in view that the act of reading in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had an entirely different quality to it than the act of reading does today. For one thing, as I have said, the printed word had a monopoly on both attention and intellect, there being no other means, besides the oral tradition, to have access to public knowledge. Public figures were known largely by their written words, for example, not by their looks or even their oratory. It is quite likely that most of the first fifteen presidents of the United States would not have been recognized had they passed the average citizen in the street. This would have been the case as well of the great lawyers, ministers and scientists of that era. To

think about those men was to think about what they had written, to judge them by their public positions, their arguments, their knowledge as codified in the printed word. You may get some sense of how we are separated from this kind of consciousness by thinking about any of our recent presidents; or even preachers, lawyers and scientists who are or who have recently been public figures. Think of Richard Nixon or Jimmy Carter or Billy Graham, or even Albert Einstein, and what will come to your mind is an image, a picture of a face, most likely a face on a television screen (in Einstein's case, a photograph of a face). Of words, almost nothing will come to mind. This is the difference between thinking in a word-centered culture and thinking in an image-centered culture.

It is also the difference between living in a culture that provides little opportunity for leisure, and one that provides much. The farm boy following the plow with book in hand, the mother reading aloud to her family on a Sunday afternoon, the merchant reading announcements of the latest clipper arrivals—these were different kinds of readers from those of today. There would have been little casual reading, for there was not a great deal of time for that. Reading would have had a sacred element in it, or if not that, would have at least occurred as a daily or weekly ritual invested with special meaning. For we must also remember that this was a culture without electricity. It would not have been easy to read by either candlelight or, later, gaslight. Doubtless, much reading was done between dawn and the start of the day's business. What reading would have been done was done seriously, intensely, and with steadfast purpose. The modern idea of testing a reader's "comprehension," as distinct from something else a reader may be doing, would have seemed an absurdity in 1790 or 1830 or 1860. What else was reading but comprehending? As far as we know, there did not exist such a thing as a "reading problem," except, of course, for those who could not attend school. To attend school meant to learn to read, for without that capacity,



one could not participate in the culture's conversations. But most people could read and did participate. To these people, reading was both their connection to and their model of the world. The printed page revealed the world, line by line, page by page, to be a serious, coherent place, capable of management by reason, and of improvement by logical and relevant criticism.

Almost anywhere one looks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then, one finds the resonances of the printed word and, in particular, its inextricable relationship to all forms of public expression. It may be true, as Charles Beard wrote, that the primary motivation of the writers of the United States Constitution was the protection of their economic interests. But it is also true that they assumed that participation in public life required the capacity to negotiate the printed word. To them, mature citizenship was not conceivable without sophisticated literacy, which is why the voting age in most states was set at twenty-one, and why Jefferson saw in universal education America's best hope. And that is also why, as Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager have pointed out, the voting restrictions against those who owned no property were frequently overlooked, but not one's inability to read.

It may be true, as Frederick Jackson Turner wrote, that the spirit that fired the American mind was the fact of an ever-expanding frontier. But it is also true, as Paul Anderson has written, that "it is no mere figure of speech to say that farm boys followed the plow with book in hand, be it Shakespeare, Emerson, or Thoreau."<sup>23</sup> For it was not only a frontier mentality that led Kansas to be the first state to permit women to vote in school elections, or Wyoming the first state to grant complete equality in the franchise. Women were probably more adept readers than men, and even in the frontier states the principal means of public discourse issued from the printed word. Those who could read had, inevitably, to become part of the conversation.

It may also be true, as Perry Miller has suggested, that the religious fervor of Americans provided much of their energy; or, as earlier historians told it, that America was created by an idea whose time had come. I quarrel with none of these explanations. I merely observe that the America they try to explain was dominated by a public discourse which took its form from the products of the printing press. For two centuries, America declared its intentions, expressed its ideology, designed its laws, sold its products, created its literature and addressed its deities with black squiggles on white paper. It did its talking in typography, and with that as the main feature of its symbolic environment rose to prominence in world civilization.

The name I give to that period of time during which the American mind submitted itself to the sovereignty of the printing press is the Age of Exposition. Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. Almost all of the characteristics we associate with mature discourse were amplified by typography, which has the strongest possible bias toward exposition: a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for delayed response. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, for reasons I am most anxious to explain, the Age of Exposition began to pass, and the early signs of its replacement could be discerned. Its replacement was to be the Age of Show Business.