Antebellum literary culture and the evolution of American magazines

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Abstract

I chronicle the American magazine industry from its inception in 1741 to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 and explain how the industry came to take on a form that, in large part, persists to the present day. My analysis highlights the cultural factors that shaped magazines: on the supply side, the social construction of a market-based conception of authorship and a supporting legal framework that regulated literary property rights and, on the demand side, the growth of large, differentiated audiences for religious treatises and for many forms of secular literature. Finally, my analysis reveals how magazines influenced American society: magazines fostered religious pluralism and, indirectly, helped institutionalize sectarian divisions; they also supported American literature, providing visible outlets and economic security for many authors.

1. Introduction

Magazines are central to American society: to the diffusion of information necessary to support democratic politics, commerce, and education; to literary, religious, and social life; and to the development of scientific disciplines and specialized occupations. But when the American magazine industry was born in Philadelphia in 1741, it was a doubtful venture beset by seemingly intractable problems of supply and demand, most notably a scarcity of original material and a small and indifferent audience. During the next 120 years, these problems receded. On the supply side, the idea of what it meant to be an author took on a market-based logic and copyright law developed to support the management of literary property; these changes were accompanied by new norms concerning paying authors for their contributions and using copyright law to protect increasingly expensive prose and poetry. On the

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demand side, the American population boomed and became increasingly differentiated—creating a wide array of specialized audiences eager to read magazines that catered to their particular interests, especially in matters of religion and literature.

By the outbreak of the Civil War, the magazine industry had become a strong thread in the fabric of America social life and magazines had assumed approximately their modern form—as printed and bound booklets issued at regular intervals containing verbal and pictorial material that could be variously descriptive, narrative, or critical (Tebbel and Zuckerman, 1991; Wood, [1949] 1971). Like their contemporary counterparts, antebellum magazine editors identified and wooed authors and worked to improve their contributions; magazine publishers financed production, handled advertising, managed subscriptions and store sales, and oversaw distribution; printers created the physical products; readers paid in advance for subscriptions carried in the mail or purchased magazines when they appeared on newsstands; writers and illustrators often (but not always) were remunerated for their contributions; and advertisers paid publishers handsomely to promote their goods and services. My goal in this paper is to explain how, over 120 years, such structural elements became institutionalized.

Although social scientists have studied book and newspaper publishing, there has been little study of magazines, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, outside of the humanities. I address this oversight by analyzing the antebellum magazine industry. In this initial installment of my research, I take a demographic and ecological approach. My first concern—demographic—is to describe magazines' vital rates and the distribution of magazines along important dimensions of form. My second concern—ecological—is to describe magazines' social, cultural, and legal environments and to trace the mutual influences of magazines and their contexts. This demographic and ecological approach allows me to move beyond the rich but necessarily limited conclusions drawn from magazine histories covering short time periods or particular industry sectors and from criticism of particular literary movements or authorial communities. To conduct this analysis, I have gathered longitudinal data on 5,067 magazines—about one-half of the magazines published between 1741 and 1861, and virtually all that left any trace of their existence. My data include magazine contents, types, and formats; dates of founding, temporary suspension, merger, and dissolution; names of founders, editors, and publishers; and institutional affiliations. To trace changes in these 5,067 magazines, I updated data on magazine attributes annually and created a data set that includes 25,009 annual observations (see the Appendix for further details). These rich data allow me to show what types of magazines were published, where, by whom, and when. Augmented by an appreciation of the history of antebellum America, these data allow me to explain industry evolution by reference to magazine contributors, audiences, and ties to other organizations.

I show that there was considerable variation among antebellum American magazines, both cross-sectionally and over time and, therefore, speak to central questions in two dominant research traditions in organizational sociology. Organizational ecologists have pondered the question of why there are so many kinds of organizations (Hannan and Freeman, 1977); they have produced a plethora of

studies of organizational differentiation in the face of competition. In sharp contrast, institutionalists have asked why organizations look so much alike (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983); they have produced many studies of how institutional pressures increase organizational homogeneity. But few scholars in either camp have examined organizational variation *per se*. Instead, ecologists have focused primarily on explaining the selection and retention of organizational forms and have typically taken variation as given, while institutionalists have generally studied variation indirectly by focusing on the diffusion of organizational structures and practices, which tends to reduce the variety of organizations in a field. This paper fills a gap in our knowledge by offering a partial explanation for the evolving diversity of magazines in America, emphasizing solutions to problems of supply and demand.

By situating the American magazine industry firmly in time and place, I also hope to contribute to the recent historical turn in organizational sociology. The last three decades have witnessed a dramatic shift in our basic research questions. Where we once concentrated on explaining cross-sectional variation in organizational structure and performance, today we emphasize time and transformation. This shift in emphasis from statics to dynamics bespeaks a growing concern for how organizations function: how they come to be formed, how they behave, and how their lives end. Questions of how organizations are formed, behave, and die are necessarily grounded in longitudinal analysis, where time is used explicitly to model discrete events and continuous processes. These questions are also fundamentally grounded in context, as concern for appropriate comparison replaces simple assumptions of universal generalizability. It seems logical, perhaps even obvious, that attention to time and context in the quest for answers about organizational formation, functioning, and failure would lead researchers to consider the role of history. History, however, plays only a shadowy role in most studies of organizations: it is implicit in some theoretical formulations but too seldom explicitly recognized and explored in empirical work. In contrast, this article illuminates history by attending to both time and context, thereby expanding an emerging body of research in organizational sociology (for example, Clemens, 1997; Dobbin and Dowd, 2000; Fligstein, 1990; Schneiberg and Bartley, 2001).

2. Magazines in antebellum America

2.1. Magazine origins

The English word "magazine" is derived from the Arabic word "makazin," meaning "storehouse." At the end of the sixteenth century, this word was applied to warehouses of military ordnance. The first recorded use of the word "magazine" to describe a collection of printed material was in the title of *Gentleman's Magazine*, founded in London in 1731 as "a Monthly Collection, to treasure up, as in a Magazine, the most remarkable Pieces on the Subjects above-mentioned, or at least impartial Abridgements thereof" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 1 (1): 48, January 1731). Gradually, between their origins in Europe in the mid-seventeenth century and their

establishment in Europe and America in the mid-nineteenth century, magazines took on something very close to their contemporary form as repositories of a variety of written and pictorial material, with more than transient interest, published at regular intervals (Tebbel and Zuckerman, 1991; Wood, [1949] 1971). [For a discussion of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century magazines in Western Europe, see Johannes (2001).]

The first two magazines in America were founded within three days of each other in February 1741 by rival printers Andrew Bradford (*American Magazine, or a Monthly View of the Political State of the British Colonies*) and Benjamin Franklin (*The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle*).[1] These pioneering ventures were short-lived, producing only three and six monthly issues, respectively. Both magazines were nurtured by men who possessed considerable social, cultural, and economic capital: both were printers, newspaper publishers, and Philadelphia postmasters. Many of the men who followed in Bradford and Franklin's footsteps were equally prominent, including Isaiah Thomas (*Royal American Magazine*, 1774), Thomas Paine (*Pennsylvania Magazine*, 1775), and Noah Webster (*American Magazine*, 1787, and *American Minerva*, 1793). The prominence of the earliest magazine founders helped legitimate this new cultural product and so attract readers. The motivations of these institutional entrepreneurs were complex. Some had seen the success earned by English magazines and desired to emulate them; others wanted to show off American ingenuity and talent; still others sought to promote religious creeds or political principles (Mott, 1930, 1938a). Modeled after magazines in England, the earliest American magazines were written by the elite for the elite.

Antebellum American magazines had three things in common. First, because American copyright law was effectively nonexistent before 1790 and not applied to magazines until the 1820s (Charvat, 1968), magazines "extracted" much material from other publications—including books, other magazines, newspapers, and state assembly proceedings. Even after copyright law was developed and used, the reprinting of poems, essays, tales, and short articles continued among magazines. It took considerable time for regulative and normative restrictions on the appropriability of intellectual property to tighten.

Second, the contents of antebellum magazines comprised a wide array of literary forms and topics. For example, the *Literary Magazine & American Register* (1803–1807) emphasized literary criticism but also covered politics, law, social reform, fiction, poetry, medicine, agriculture, science, engineering, and travel. Even supposedly specialized medical, scientific, and legal journals included much miscellaneous material, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many antebellum magazines signalled their diversity by using terms such as "eclectic" or "miscellany" in their titles. Others used detailed subtitles; for example,

> *Cabinet of Literature, Instruction, & Amusement*: Containing Original Essays, Extracts from New Works, Historical Narratives, Biographical Memoirs,

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all historical information comes from the data set described in the Appendix. Direct quotations taken from magazines can be found by searching the American Periodical Series Online.

> Sketches of Society, Topographical Descriptions, Novels and Tales, Anecdotes, Poetry Original & Selected, the Spirit of Public Journals, Discoveries in the Arts and Sciences, Useful Domestic Hints, etc., etc. (Albaugh, 1994: 86)

Third, many antebellum magazines (more precisely, 38% of annual observations on magazines)[2] broadcast current events, which is today the domain of newspaper, radio, television, and internet reporting. This was particularly common among eighteenth-century magazines (69% of magazine-year observations up to 1800). There was a fine line between magazines and newspapers, especially in the early years of the industry's history (Kribbs, 1977; Wood, [1949] 1971). Industry participants recognized this ambiguity. John Inman, editor of *The Columbia Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* (1844–1849), wrote in his venture's first issue:

> All literature approximates to the magazine, either in form or character... [N]ewspapers, unable to emulate [magazines] in appearance, strive to do so in the variety and nature of their contents. In fact, the word *news*paper has come to be almost a misnomer, for the purveying of news has ceased to be their characteristic vocation and object. What is the "leading article" but an essay? What are nine-tenths of the narrative paragraphs but short tales, either of fact or fiction? (*The Columbia Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, 1 (1): xv, January 1844; emphasis in the original)

In the spectrum of publishing formats, then as now, magazines occupied a middle position: they were neither as permanent as books nor as ephemeral as newspapers. Although some of the periodicals I analyze published a heavy quotient of news, all contained a significant amount of less transient material.

2.2. Magazine evolution

The earliest magazines required considerable explanation and exhortation. Andrew Bradford's *American Magazine*, the first published in North America, began with eight pages detailing what it would and would not contain. Explanation was a simpler matter to resolve than exhortation, however. Because eighteenth-century Americans produced most of what they consumed and purchased little—certainly very little that was designed, like magazines, to be of temporary value—it was difficult to attract and keep subscribers. For example, the introduction to Samuel Eliot and Joshua Blanchard's *American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* (1743–1746) stated that the founders "have not as yet such a Number of Subscribers as are sufficient to support [the magazine]" but then declared optimistically that they were "not doubting that if the Design be well executed, further Encouragement will arise hereafter" (*American*

[2] Most descriptive statistics are given in terms of annual observations on magazines for two reasons: (1) using magazine-year observations weights long-lived magazines more than ephemeral ones and provides a better view of the central tendencies of the industry, and (2) because magazines sometimes changed format and contents, annual observations provide a more reasonable basis for summarizing magazines' natures than do observations taken at any single point in their lives.

Magazine and Historical Chronicle, 1 (1): i–ii, September 1743). In a crass attempt to demonstrate its legitimacy, Mathew Carey's *American Museum* (1787–1792) devoted twelve precious pages up front (even before the introduction for readers!) to a list of subscribers, highlighting George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. Carey's unsubtle plea for legitimacy worked: his venture was one of the most successful magazines of the eighteenth century (Charvat, 1968; Mott, 1930).

Fig. 1 illustrates the magazine industry's expansion, plotting the number of magazine foundings (Fig. 1a) and the number of magazines published (Fig. 1b) each year.[3]

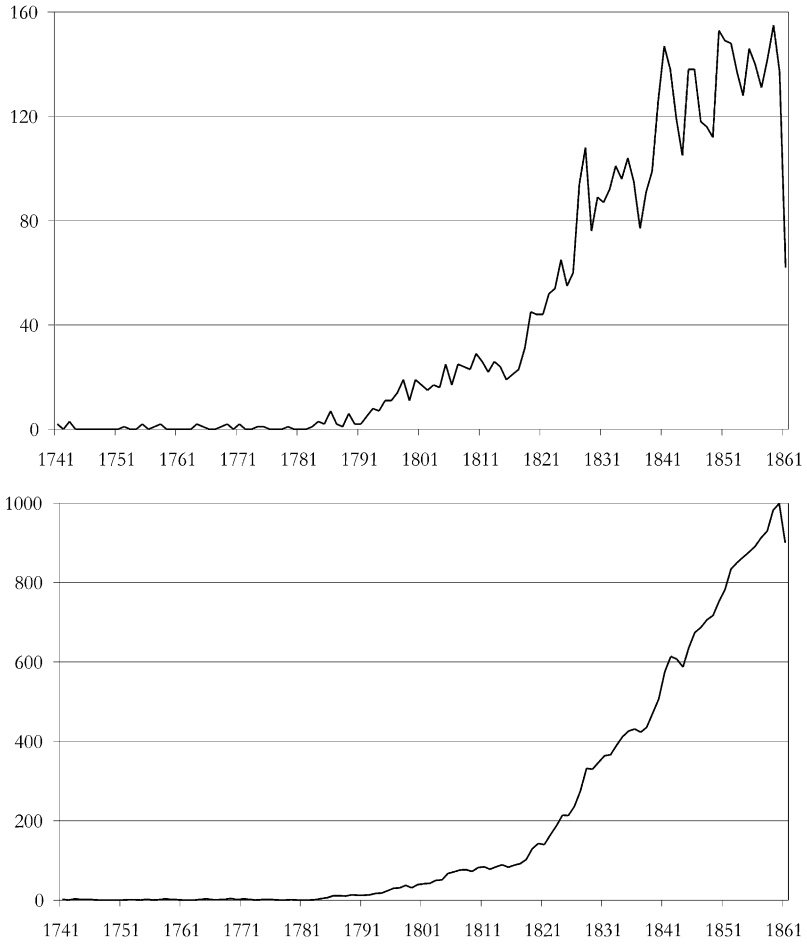

Fig. 1. (a) Number of magazines founded. (b) Number of magazines published.

[3] In Fig. 1b, I count *the number of magazines appearing in a year*, not the number alive at year-end. Many antebellum magazines lived less than six months; indeed, 160 (3.2% of the total) published only a single issue before folding. Given their ephemeral nature, this measure seems more appropriate than the usual "snapshot" taken at year-end.

The industry developed very slowly at first. Only twenty-three magazines were founded between 1741 and the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783. Not until peace was restored did the industry gain a foothold on American society: forty-five magazines were founded between 1784 and 1794, inclusive. In 1794, Congress established the Post Office as a permanent arm of the federal government, giving magazine publishers access to a reliable distribution channel (Wood, 1949 [1971]). This was an abrupt turnaround from the situation just two years earlier, when the 1792 Postal Act refused outright to carry magazines in the mail (Wood, 1949 [1971]), and six of the thirteen magazines then operating failed. After passage of the 1794 Postal Act, magazines gained slow acceptance from postal officials (Kielbowicz, 1989), and a steadily increasing number of magazines made their appearance: 844 were founded between 1795 and 1825, inclusive.

The quarter-century after 1825—a period labelled the first "golden age of magazines" by both contemporary observers and historians (Mott, 1930; Tebbel and Zuckerman, 1991)—saw 2,679 magazine foundings. This golden age was sustained by three trends: a general literary boom, rapid diffusion of the new practice of paying authors for their contributions, and expanding use of copyright law to defend publishers' exclusive rights to their magazines' contents (Charvat, 1968). Industry growth continued to accelerate through the last decade before the Civil War, during which 1,475 magazines were founded.

Along with increases in numbers, the industry's vitality improved, as evidenced by magazine life spans and regularity of publication schedules. I calculated magazine life spans by subtracting founding dates from failure (i.e., merger or disbanding) dates.[4] When I did not know founding or failure dates precisely (at least to the month), I rounded up by one-half year (see the Appendix). The mean life span of magazines founded in three periods defined by the inception of the industry, the passage of the Post Office Act, and the start of the first golden age of magazines (1741–1794, 1795–1825, 1826–1861) rose from 5.2 to 6.8 to 9.7 years, respectively. The distribution of life spans is highly skewed, so a better indicator of the central tendency is the median, which rose from 0.9 to 1.2 to 2.2 years, respectively.

Looking at temporary suspensions and erratic publication schedules is another way to assess magazine-industry vitality. Before 1795, just one magazine temporarily suspended publication, but 8.8% had irregular publication schedules—indicating that frail magazines went out of business forever, rather than briefly stopping operations. From 1795 to 1825, 4.4% of magazines temporarily suspended publication, while the proportion of magazines with irregular publication schedules dropped slightly to 6.5%. The suspension rate declined greatly after 1825, as did the proportion of magazines with irregular schedules, to 2.3% and 1.7%, respectively.

The most prevalent magazine types in antebellum America were (in descending order) religious, general, agricultural, medical, literary miscellany, and social-reform. Together, these six categories constituted 80% of the annual observations on magazines from 1741 to 1861. As Fig. 2a to c show, there were substantial

[4] Thirty-four magazines in my data set are still published today. For those magazines, I calculated life spans using 2003 as the end date.

differences in the distribution of magazines over time. Between 1741 and 1794, the most prevalent magazine types included general, political (comprising political miscellanies and pure political periodicals), and religious. In the three decades after the passage of the Post Office Act, the situation shifted dramatically. Religious magazines came to predominate, followed by general, literary miscellany, and medical.

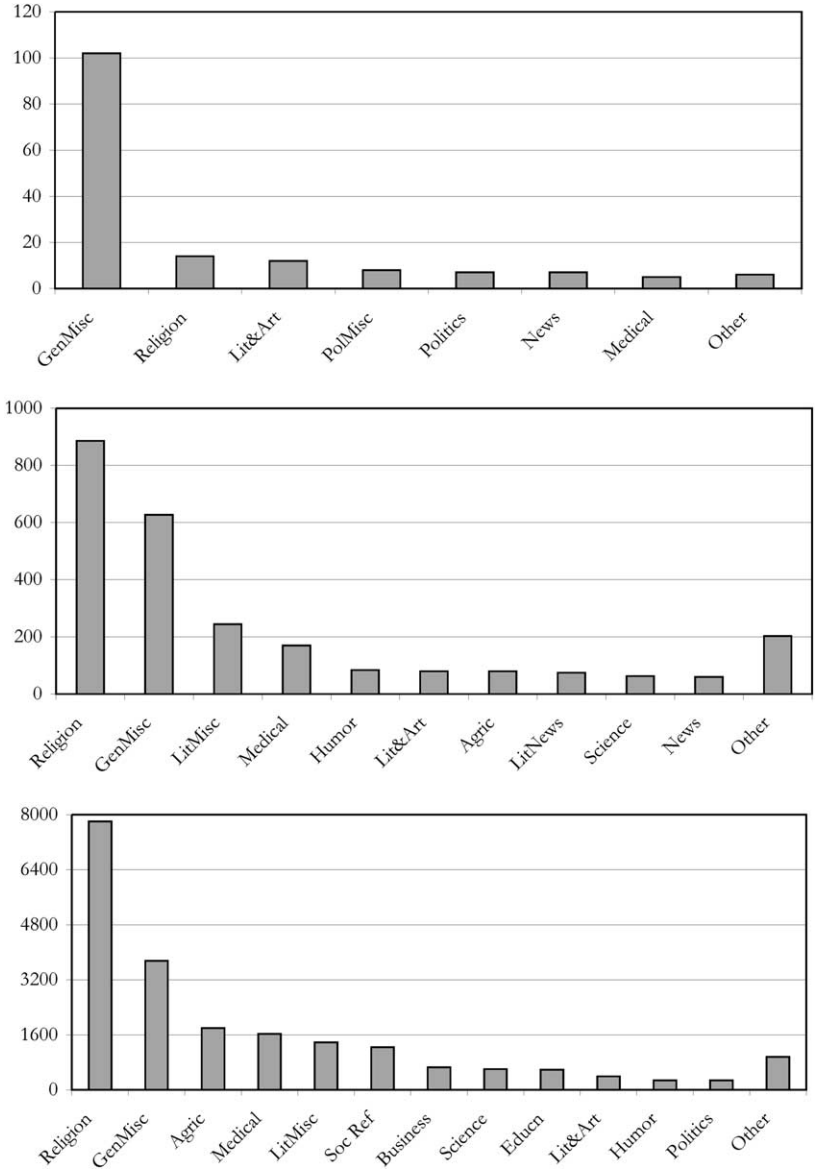

Fig. 2. (a) Magazine-year observations by type, 1741–1794. (b) Magazine-year observations by type, 1795–1825. (c) Magazine-year observations by type, 1926–1861.

The focus on religion continued after 1825, when the most prevalent magazine types were (in descending order) religious, general, agricultural, medical, literary miscellany, and social-reform.

In the next two sections, I explain how a hospitable environment for magazines developed, focusing on the related issues of supply and demand. I also show how the solutions to these problems created the kind of cultural good and productive organization that we observe today. My analysis reveals several ways in which American magazines influenced the society that fostered them.

3. Problems of production: Authors and literary property rights

The earliest American magazines were plagued by a dearth of original contributions, which was the result of two related facts: neither the profession of authorship nor literary property rights, as we know them today, existed in eighteenth-century America. Between 1741 and 1861, four institutional changes occurred that together created a ready supply of material to publish in magazines: a cognitive shift toward the idea of author as professional, a regulative change creating literary property rights, a normative shift toward paying authors for their contributions, and a second normative move toward using copyright law to protect exclusive rights to magazine contents.

3.1. Cultural conceptions of authorship

In colonial America, authors were gentlemen-scholars whose writings were a natural product of their learning. These patricians wrote to further personal political, artistic, religious, or scientific ends (Charvat, 1968). Given the limited number of gentlemen-scholars in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, it was not surprising that many magazines struggled to find contributors. When magazine editors were able to persuade patrician writers to publish prose or poetry in their fledgling ventures, these men refused payment and demanded anonymity so as to preserve their dignity and privacy (Charvat, 1968).

During the 1700s and early 1800s, a magazine's ability to procure original contributions depended on its nature. Specialty professional and scientific magazines could secure articles from lawyers, physicians, and professors. The many religious magazines found a ready source of articles in preachers and theologians. However, general-interest, literary, and political journals found it far more difficult to persuade writers to submit original material. These sorts of magazines reprinted articles from American and European sources or published state papers; for original material, they relied on their editors. For example, Charles Brockden Brown wrote almost everything original that appeared in his general miscellany, *Literary Magazine and American Register* (1803–1807), as did Joseph Tinker Buckingham for his theatrical and literary miscellany, *Polyanthos* (1805–1814). Other such magazines found willing contributors in the members of affiliated organizations, notably college literary clubs or gentlemen's societies; the *Monthly Magazine & American*

Review (1799–1800) and the *American Review & Literary Journal* (1801–1802), for example, were both affiliated with the New York Friendly Club.[5]

Conceptions of authorship changed in the first half of the nineteenth century, as a market-oriented society developed and as literature evolved to connote a commodity created by professional writers and traded in an open market for profit. This cognitive shift was impelled by and reflected in an economic innovation: in 1819, the *Christian Spectator* (1819–1838) pioneered the practice of paying contributors, offering the princely sum of one dollar per page. The first general magazine to pay contributors was *Atlantic Magazine* (1824–1825); over the next decade, many others followed suit, notably the large-circulation eclectic journals *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830–1898), *Knickerbocker, or New York Monthly Magazine* (1833–1865), and *Graham's Lady's & Gentleman's Magazine* (1841–1858). Magazines soon competed intensely for short essays, poems, and especially fiction; prices for short stories and serialized novels escalated between 1825 and 1850 (Charvat, 1968). Magazines also trumpeted their most popular authors, finally laying to rest the custom of literary anonymity. The editor of one prominent review commented on this nascent market:

> . . .literature begins to assume the aspect and undergo the mutations of trade. The author's profession is becoming as mechanical as that of the printer and the bookseller, being created by the same causes and subject to the same laws. . . The publisher, in the name of his customers, calls for a particular kind of authorship just as he would bespeak a dinner at a restaurant. . . (*North American Review*, 56 (118): 109–110, January 1843)

A new occupation—the *magazinist*, a term coined by Edgar Allan Poe[6]—emerged as the practice of paying writers spread and as the idea of author as professional displaced the earlier conception of author as gentleman-scholar. By the early 1840s, the magazinist occupation had achieved considerable acceptance. Its legitimacy is evident in Horace Greeley's advice in 1843 to Henry David Thoreau, urging him to publish his work in mass-market magazines rather than in small-circulation periodicals, such as the Transcendentalist organ *Dial* (1840–1844), that were read only in elite circles:

> This is the best kind of advertisement for you. Though you may write with an angel's pen yet your work will have no mercantile value unless you are known as an author. Emerson would be twice as well known if he had written for the magazines a little just to let common people know of his existence. (quoted in Wood, [1949] 1971: 60)

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[5] Note that many of the lawyers, physicians, professors, theologians, preachers, and literary society members who contributed to professional, scientific, religious, and literary magazines remained anonymous.

[6] Poe edited six magazines—*Broadway Journal*, 1845–1846; *Southern Literary Messenger*, 1834–1864 (his term ran 1835–1837); *[Burton's] Gentleman's Magazine*, 1837–1840 (his term ran 1839–1840); *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*, 1837–1848 (his term ran 1839–1840); and *Graham's Magazine*, 1841–1858 (his term ran 1841–1842) – and he sought unsuccessfully to launch another (*Stylus*). His writings appeared in scores of magazines, ranging from such mass-circulation weeklies as the *New York Mirror and Ladies' Literary Gazette*, 1823–1842, to such highly respected literary quarterlies as the *New York Review*, 1837–1842.

Following this prompting, Greeley helped Thoreau place essays in several large-circulation magazines, including *Graham's Lady's & Gentleman's Magazine* (1841–1858), *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* (1853–1857), and the *Union Magazine of Literature & Art* (1847–1852).

3.2. The development of copyright law

Deeply entwined with cultural conceptions of authorship were legal notions of literary property. Copyright law was non-existent in colonial America; only one copyright statute had ever been passed, and that statute pertained to a single book (Bugbee, 1967). For the emerging magazine industry, the initial lack of copyright law was both a benefit and a hindrance, both an enabling and a disabling social device. In the absence of law governing the ownership and use of literary property, magazine publishers could pirate material previously published in books, newspapers, and other magazines without fear of lawsuits. But this situation also deterred authors from contributing new material to magazines, as writers could not be sure they would reap the economic or reputational benefits of their efforts or maintain control over the integrity of their words.

After the Revolution, all states except Delaware passed copyright laws, but these were never operative—never tested or interpreted by the courts (Patterson, 1968). They were supplanted in 1790 by the first federal copyright act. Modelled on English copyright law, it defined copyright as a statutory privilege granted to authors for a limited time to prevent monopoly by authors and publishers, maintain order in the book trade, and promote learning (Patterson, 1968). American copyright law recognized that economic rights in literary property did not differ from rights in any other sort of property (Patterson, 1968; Rose, 1993). But for years after federal copyright was created, magazine publishers and writers neglected to use it; until well into the 1820s, they treated American literary property as having no commercial value (Charvat, 1968). Most magazine editors did not mind rivals lifting material from their pages because they did the same thing; both editors and contributors viewed this practice as existing outside of any market.

The norm of paying for contributions, initiated in 1819 and discussed above, compelled a dramatic shift in views about literature. Starting in the mid-1830s, large-circulation magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830–1898), *Graham's Lady's & Gentleman's Magazine* (1841–1858), and *Frank Leslie's New Family Magazine* (1857–1882) competed hotly over original poetry, sketches, short stories, and serialized novels. Prices for the work of established authors rose sharply. For example, in 1840, Longfellow was paid $15 to $20 for each poem purchased by *Graham's*; by 1843, his price per poem had risen to $50 (Charvat, 1968; Mott, 1930). *Graham's* prices for essays and fiction ranged from $4 to $20 per page over the same time period, which translated to $20 to $100 for a 5,000-word article. In order to defend such expensive property, magazines began to copyright their contents. And leading large-circulation magazines began to demand exclusive rights to "their" authors' works, such as *Graham's* demanded of Longfellow (Barnes, 1974; Charvat, 1968).

Copyright discouraged theft by direct rivals in the largest cities. But until the late 1840s, it curbed but did not end literary larceny among far-flung magazines, as small-circulation regional publications continued to reprint material from New York and Philadelphia's mass-market magazines. The panic of 1837 and the depression of 1840 to 1843 forced many book and magazine publishers out of business. During this period of flux and confusion, cheap weekly magazines—most notably the *New World* (1840–1845, 1847–1848) and *Brother Jonathon* (1839–1845)—found it easy to reprint material from books and other magazines without fear of lawsuit from authors or publishers (Barnes, 1974; Charvat, 1968). Not until after the depression ended did copyright offer magazine publishers leverage to punish effectively (or at least intimidate) thieving rivals.

Even after new publishing practices firmly enshrined copyright protection for magazine contents, one important limitation remained. The Copyright Act of 1790 explicitly sanctioned the pirating of foreign works—texts "by any person not a citizen of the United States, in foreign parts or places without the jurisdiction of the United States" (quoted in Patterson, 1968: 198). This situation, which was reinforced by the first general revision of copyright law in 1831, benefitted book and magazine publishers but harmed authors. English authors received no royalties and American authors could not compete on price with "free" English prose and poetry. American authors were forced to differentiate their work from the writings of Europeans, an effect that was visible as late as the 1890s (Griswold, 1981). Naturally, this legal loophole was contested on both sides of the Atlantic (Barnes, 1974). In 1837, a petition was presented to Congress for an Anglo-American copyright agreement, signed by sixty English authors (including William Wordsworth) and several luminaries in American publishing (including Washington Irving and John Quincy Adams). Charles Dickens visited America in 1842, urging the adoption of an international copyright law and payment of royalties closer to true market value. But these efforts, and others that followed, were to no avail. Not until 1891—30 years after the timeframe of this article—did U.S. law recognize the property rights of foreign authors.

Many magazines, most notably *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (1850–2004) and *Harper's Weekly* (1857–1916), took advantage of this loophole by printing English novels in serial form before publishers issued them as books. The firm of Harper and Brothers was singled out for scorn by those who sought to support native authors. The *American (Whig) Review* (1845–1852) claimed that the Harpers were "anti-American in feeling as concerns literary development," and George R. Graham of *Graham's Magazine* called *Harper's Monthly* "a good foreign magazine" and prophesied, "the veriest worshiper of the dust of Europe will tire of the dead level of silly praise of John Bull upon every page" (quoted in Chielens, 1986: 168).

3.3. Summary

Two related trends—increasingly professional and market-based conceptions of authorship and the development of copyright law—generated an expanded supply of original material for magazines. These changes were further fuelled by two new

industry norms—paying authors for their contributions and using copyright law to protect ever more expensive literary property. The growing supply of original material enabled magazine-industry expansion. But that is only half of the picture. Increasing demand, manifested in the emergence of an ever wider array of readers, also promoted industry growth. I analyze these phenomena in the next section.

4. Problems of demand: Religious and literary movements

Two sectors of the magazine-reading public constituted the most important audiences for antebellum magazines: adherents of contentious religious denominations and lovers of literature. As noted above, religious magazines dominated the industry before the Civil War, constituting over 35% of all magazine-year observations in my data set. Essays, poetry, and fiction were found in both literary magazines (a category that encompasses literary reviews, literary miscellanies, magazines devoted to fiction and poetry, and literary news journals) and general miscellanies. Together, these literary and general magazines made up 27% of magazine-year observations in my data set. My analysis focuses on these two large audience sectors and ignores other, smaller groups of readers, such as the members of specialized occupations and professions, the adherents of various social-reform movements, and those interested in politics.

4.1. Specialized audiences: Religion

The first magazine devoted to religious subjects—and the fourth magazine in America—was the austere *Christian History*, founded in 1743. It survived two full years, far longer than Bradford's *American Magazine* (six issues) or Franklin's *General Magazine* (three issues). Two more religious magazines were founded during the colonial era and four were launched between the end of the Revolution in 1783 and passage of the Post Office Act in 1794. The religious press did not take off until the end of the War of 1812. From 1794 to 1815, 90 religious magazines were founded (an average of four per year); from 1816 to 1825, 168 (17 per year); and from 1826 to 1861, 968 (27 per year).

The majority of religious magazines were written for the laity, while a minority sought an audience among well-educated ministers and college professors. Weekly and monthly publications for the laity reprinted sermons and published short articles to guide religious education; they were sprinkled liberally with social, religious, and political news. In contrast, scholarly religious journals were often dry quarterly reviews; they reprinted and critiqued sermons and published long theological, philosophical, and biographical essays.

Consider one magazine for the laity. The *Christian Advocate* (1826–1956)—a Methodist weekly founded by Reverend Nathan Bangs in New York—was one of the first religious periodicals to achieve a national circulation. His magazine ranged over moral and social reform, political and social news, short instructive tales, poetry, religious education, science, and biography. When it was first published, it

resembled a newspaper in contents and format, but over time it published less news and more theological essays and articles on religious instruction. Circulation reached 5,000 in 1826; it topped 28,000 by 1828. Although only a few religious magazines for the laity achieved such wide circulation, all had similarly varied contents.

By contrast, most scholarly religious magazines had sales of a few hundred and narrowly focused contents. Even the internationally renowned *Biblical Repertory* (later called *The Princeton Review*, 1825–1888)—founded by Professor Charles Hodge of the Princeton Theological Seminary—boasted fewer than 3,000 subscribers. This Presbyterian quarterly, like many of its peers, concentrated on scholarly studies of the Bible, mixing original essays with material reprinted from English and Scottish reviews. Starting in 1830, it added treatises on politics and social reform, as well as biographies and reviews of religious tomes and other forms of "polite literature."

The vigour of religious magazines is due to the proliferation of religious denominations, sects, and movements during the antebellum period, which created large and highly differentiated (indeed, often bitterly opposing) audiences for religious ideas. The gradual disestablishment of religion (i.e., the withdrawal of state patronage and control from particular denominations) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made it easier for a wide array of denominations to thrive (Ahlstrom, 1972). In the 1740s, the largest denominations in the British colonies were Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian; by the eve of the Civil War, these mainline churches had been joined by Methodists (by 1840, the largest denomination in America), Lutherans, Baptists, Quakers, Shakers, Unitarians, and Universalists. Waves of immigration from the 1830s onward—Irish and German Catholics, Lutherans, the Amish, Mennonites, and Moravians—further increased religious diversity (Ahlstrom, 1972; Marty, 1987).

Even more powerfully than disestablishment and immigration, the two Great Awakenings spawned scores of new sects and religious movements. These revivalistic episodes amplified the willingness of Americans in all walks of life to open religious debate and to question constituted church authorities (Ahlstrom, 1972; Hatch, 1989). The first Great Awakening began in 1738 in New England and continued through 1743; it spread to the South around 1754 and lasted until the eve of the Revolutionary War. The second Great Awakening started in the early 1790s and continued, in various locations, until the mid 1840s. Although historians do not agree on their causes (Ahlstrom, 1972), the consequences of the Great Awakenings were clear. Spurred by intense personal experiences of Christ and new interpretations of the Bible, thousands converted to evangelical Christianity. Revivalists clashed with mainline clerics and seceded from their churches to found myriad new sects and some dozen full-fledged denominations: evangelical variants of the Congregational, Methodist, and Baptist churches; Cumberland and New-School Presbyterian churches; the Mercersburg Lutheran theology; assorted Christian, Disciples of Christ, and Christian Connection churches; African Methodist Episcopal and Black Baptist churches; and the Mormon, Swedenborgian, and Millerite sects (Ahlstrom, 1972; Hatch, 1989).

Religious conflict and schism promoted vigorous theological debate. Escalating battles were fought in an ever-increasing number of scholarly theological reviews and news-laden magazines for the laity. By 1830, religious periodicals had become "the grand engine of a burgeoning religious culture, the primary means of promotion for, and bond of union within, competing religious groups" (Hatch, 1989: 125–126; see also Marty, 1963).

An excellent example of a revivalist sect is the Christians (also called the Disciples of Christ and the Christian Connection), a loose network of radicals who coalesced between 1790 and 1815. Denigrating hierarchy and authority, they demanded that people be free to interpret the Bible for themselves. This coalition had several geographically dispersed leaders: Elias Smith in New England, James O'Kelly in Virginia, Barton Stone in Kentucky, and Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania. Ironically, as the Disciples of Christ grew under Stone and Campbell, they developed the kind of hierarchy they had once hoped to stamp out (Hatch, 1989), demonstrating once more the ineluctability of Michels's iron law of oligarchy. The most notable of the thirty-three magazines published by this coalition were Elias Smith's *Christian's Magazine, Reviewer, & Religious Intelligencer* (1805–1808) and *Herald of Gospel Liberty* (1808–1817), their successor the *Christian Herald* (1818–1835), Alexander Campbell's *Christian Baptist* (1823–1830), and Abel Sargent's *Halcyon Itinerary and True Millennium Messenger* (1807–1808). These periodicals preached an egalitarian message that was popular among common folk, but considered vulgar by the refined stalwarts of the mainline churches.

Mainline churches countered popular radical appeals with their own evangelical movements and periodicals. Like their schismatic counterparts, revivalists within the mainline denominations were passionate about communicating their message (Hatch, 1989). Consider, for example, this 1823 editorial from *The Christian Herald* (1816–1824), an evangelical Presbyterian biweekly:

> The kingdom of God is a kingdom of means...Preaching of the gospel is a Divine institution—"printing" no less so...They are kindred offices. The PULPIT AND THE PRESS are inseparably connected...The Press, then, is to be regarded with a sacred veneration and supported with religious care. The press must be supported or the pulpit falls. (reprinted in *Christian Secretary*, 2 (71): 74–75, June 7 1823; emphasis in the original)

Because they were a staple of the many religious magazines, sermons became an important genre of polite literature. Nineteenth-century Anglican and Congregational preachers in New England, who catered to society's upper stratum, expounded their views in well-reasoned essays; in their concern for style and syntax, they emulated austere English essayists like Addison and Steele rather than the homiletic form of the colonial Puritans (Ahlstrom, 1972). These sermons were commonly reviewed in literary and scholarly religious magazines. In contrast, writers who preached to the modestly educated lower classes—particularly members of the Baptists, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Cumberland Presbyterians, and

Millerites—relied on passion and hyperbole rather than cool logic and their magazine contributions reflected this over-wrought emotional style (Hatch, 1989).

In addition to their impact on American literature through the proliferation of sermons, religious magazines shaped American social relations in profound ways. They reflected two opposing tendencies: toward religious sectarianism and national religious unity. On the side of national religious unity, Princeton theologian Charles Hodge claimed that America had overcome Europe's problem of disunity by "having one language, one literature, essentially one religion, and one common soul" (*Home Missionary Magazine*, 2 (1): 18, May 1829). In addition to Hodge, proponents of this homogenizing effort included Reverend Lyman Beecher and Professor Philip Schaff (Marty, 1987). All three men were active in the magazine industry: Hodge founded the aforementioned *Biblical Repertory*, Beecher the monthly *Spirit of the Pilgrims* (1828–1833), and Schaff the quarterly *Mercersburg Review* (later the *Reformed Church Review*, 1849–1926).

Despite holding prominent positions as preachers to large congregations and as college professors, those who believed in a common American religious identity were drowned out by the contentious tone of most religious journalism. Therefore, rather than engendering unity, the main effect of the exploding religious press was to institutionalize the fragmentation of religion, to render irreversible the shift from a relatively coherent Christian culture in the colonial era to a pluralistic religious culture by the middle of the nineteenth century (Hatch, 1989). Antebellum religious magazines vied to "sell" their ideas to the general public; in doing so, they were driven to differentiate themselves. An indirect and quite unexpected consequence was that the pluralistic, denomination-focused culture fostered by religious magazines shifted over the course of the nineteenth century from theological concerns to non-theological ones such as class and ethnicity (Hatch, 1989; Marty, 1987). During the century after the founding of the first American magazines and the start of the first Great Awakening, audiences for religious magazines in general expanded from the elite to the masses, and magazines for the laity targeted larger and increasingly ethnically and socio-economically homogenous audiences.

4.2. Specialized audiences: Literary movements

American literary periodicals were established more gradually and in smaller numbers than religious magazines. The first magazines devoted to literature were not founded until after the Revolution. Only after the turn of the nineteenth century did literary reviews, literary miscellanies, magazines devoted to fiction and poetry, and literary news journals begin to flourish. Foundings of all types of literary magazines rose from 11 in the eighteenth century to 136 between 1801 and 1825, and 457 between 1826 and 1861.

These bare statistics can be better understood by considering a few examples. *The Lady's Magazine & Repository of Entertaining Knowledge* (1792–1793) was a short-lived literary pioneer that offered a cornucopia of treatises on politics and religion, book reviews and literary essays, fiction, poetry, memoirs, travelogues, and society gossip. As its name suggests, this monthly was aimed at female readers. According

to Nathaniel Parker Willis, a nineteenth-century poet and essayist, frequent magazine contributor, and repeat magazine founder, women were a prime audience for "polite" literature:

> It is the women who read. It is the women who are the tribunal of any question aside from politics or business. It is the women who give or withhold a literary reputation. It is the women who regulate the style of living...It is the women who exercise the ultimate control over the Press. (Willis, 1855: 262)

Willis's opinion has been confirmed by later observers (Charvat, 1968; Douglas, 1977; Edgar, 1975).[7]

One of the most prominent literary reviews, both before and after the Civil War, was *The North American Review* (1815–1940, 1964–2003). This journal was intimately connected with Harvard: its founding editor was Harvard graduate William Tudor, Jr.; his antebellum successors included Professors Edward Tyrell Channing, Edward Everett, John Gorham Palfrey, Frances Bowen, and Andrew Preston Peabody. This quarterly published essays on politics, law, fine art, education, science, history, and travel, as well as literary criticism, poetry, and biography.

American literature found a home in more than just specialized literary reviews and literary miscellanies; it appeared in general-interest magazines as well. *(Godey's) Lady's Book* (1830–1898) and its imitator *Graham's American Monthly Magazine* (1841–1858), both women's miscellanies, were perhaps the most commercially successful antebellum periodicals. *Godey's* circulation topped 150,000 in the 1850s, while *Graham's* hit 25,000 by the end of its first year and peaked at well over 50,000 before 1845. Although both printed maudlin elegies to historical figures, gushingly romantic poems, sentimental short stories and anecdotes, breezy travelogues, and uncritical paeans to art, theatre, and music—they also published much that has stood the test of time. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe's "Cask of Amontillado" was first published in *Godey's* in 1846; his "Murders in the Rue Morgue" first appeared in *Graham's* in 1841.[8] *Godey's*, *Graham's*, and their imitators also transformed the culture and economics of American literature by having authors sign their articles, by aggressively protecting their copyrighted material, and by cultivating advertising (Douglas, 1977).

The distinction between specialized literary journals and general magazines corresponds roughly to their audiences' preferences for different forms of literature: the essay dominated the contents of "serious" literary publications, while fiction—novels, short stories, and sketches—were found more often in general magazines.

[7] But only 7% (42 out of 604) magazines devoted to literature targeted women readers; women's appetites for essays, anecdotes, stories, and poetry were more often satisfied by general women's magazines, which I discuss below.

[8] The latter is especially noteworthy because literary scholars identify it as the first detective story (Magistrale and Poger, 1999). As it was written before the word "detective" or "detection" were coined, Poe was forced to use the term "ratiocination" to describe his protagonist's efforts. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* online, the first use of the word "detective" is in Charles Dickens's novel *Household Worlds*, published in 1850.

Poetry was the only literary form that appeared with equal frequency in both types of periodicals. Because it was a staple of antebellum American literature, it is reasonable to ask how the evolution of the magazine industry shaped and was shaped by poetry.

In the colonial era, poets were esteemed for their contributions to political, religious, and social discourse (Charvat, 1968). After the Revolution, poets remained highly regarded and poetry continued to find avid readers. It is no surprise, therefore, that poets abounded and poetry filled the pages of eighteenth-century magazines. However, as norms about paying contributors developed after the 1820s and as competition among large-circulation magazines heated up, poetry became uneconomical, as the cost to fill a column with poetry was higher than the cost to fill it with a short story or essay. George R. Graham, editor of the large-circulation eclectic *Graham's Magazine* (1841–1858) paid $50 per poem to top-ranking writers in the late 1840s. When Longfellow submitted a sonnet, Graham complained that "in submitting sonnets at that price [Longfellow] was cheating, for fourteen lines did not fill up enough space for the money" (quoted in Charvat, 1968: 101). Partly for economic reasons, poetry lost ground in magazines. It appeared in 72% of annual observations on magazines from 1741 to 1794, 61% of observations from 1795 to 1825, and only 29% of observations from 1826 to 1861.

Literary magazines served as platforms for arguments about American literary nationalism and regionalism. The American literary world was divided, at times bitterly, between those who worshipped English and Continental literature and those who sought to nurture a uniquely American style of writing. Magazines were a prime battlefield for this debate (Kribbs, 1977). Literary nationalism in American magazines became especially fervent during the "second war of independence," more commonly known as the War of 1812. For example, Francis Scott Key first published "The Star Spangled Banner" in 1814 in the general-interest monthly *Analectic Magazine* (1813–1820), under the title "The Defense of Fort M'Henry."

Noah Webster stands foremost among those who agitated for the development of uniquely American traditions in language and literature. Even before his first dictionary was published in 1806, Webster advocated changes in spelling to demonstrate the independence of the "American" language (Unger, 1998). Webster founded and edited two general-interest magazines, titled appropriately *American Magazine* (1787–1788) and *American Minerva* (1793–1797), from which he broadcast his patriotic views. He also contributed to several magazines, most notably *New York Magazine* (1790–1797).

Webster was joined in his quest for an indigenous American literature by the members of Boston's Anthology Society, which was organized with the express intent of establishing a national literature and which supported David Phineas Adams's sounding board, the *Monthly Anthology* (1803–1811). Prominent members included Webster and Adams, plus William Ellery Channing Sr., Francis Dana Channing, Reverend William Emerson, William Tudor Jr. (founder of the *North American Review*), and Jedediah Morse. The founders of *Portico* (1816–1818) pushed the issue even further, holding that a national literature was essential for

maintaining a distinct national identity. As *Portico*'s editor, Tobias Watkins, wrote, "In ... reviewing our deficiency in polite learning, we wish to bring the importance of the subject, home to the bosom of every American!" or else citizens "...ought to relinquish [their] title to freedom, and forego [their] pretensions to valour" (*Portico*, 2 (2): 119, August 1816). Magazines founded after 1825 also evinced patriotic leanings; for example, the editors of the *Knickerbocker* (1833–1865) declared "The formation of a literature of our own—*a National American Literature*—is the dearest idol of our heart" (*Knickerbocker*, 2 (2): 7, July 1833; emphasis in the original). In sum, then, from the end of the eighteenth century onward, increasing numbers of magazines were founded with the intent to showcase American writers.

Countering this nascent nationalism were social conservatives who worshipped English and Continental literature. Catering to conservative tastes, some magazine editors, such as Samuel Ewing (*Select Reviews and the Spirit of the Foreign Magazines*, 1809–1812), "extracted" their contents verbatim from English magazines. Even when they printed work by Americans, many editors opted for the pale imitations of English prose and poetry from the pens of such writers as Mrs. Seba Smith, Alfred B. Street, and Catherine Maria Sedgwick. These conservative Americans were reinforced by European visitors who wrote scathingly about the primitive state of American culture. For example, Mrs. Frances Trollope blamed magazines for the unsophisticated tastes of American citizens: "The immense exhalation of periodical trash which penetrates into every cot and corner of the country, and which is greedily sucked up by all ranks, is unquestionably one great cause of its inferiority" (Trollope, [1832] 1974: 311). Attention to European literature and neglect of American authors was common even as late as the 1850s. Recall that because American copyright law did not protect works published in England, entrepreneurs like the Harpers were able to pirate English novels and poems.

4.3. Summary

Demand for magazines—evidenced by readers hungering for religious treatises and instruction or for thoughtful and entertaining essays, poems, and fiction—exploded from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. The magazine industry had strong effects on these two sectors of American letters and society. It supported many new religious communities and thereby helped create a pluralistic religious society. Despite the fact that copyright law promoted an emphasis on European literature, antebellum American magazines became increasingly important outlets for American authors. Thus, the industry greatly improved the incomes of many essayists, fiction writers, and poets. Finally, the industry's payment system came to favour prose over poetry.

5. Conclusions

This paper shows that there was considerable variation among antebellum American magazines, both cross-sectionally and over time and, therefore, speaks to two

research traditions in organizational sociology—organizational ecology and institutionalism. My analysis offers a partial explanation for the evolving mix of magazines in antebellum America: magazines of different types developed as solutions to problems of supply and to problems of demand. To solve the supply problem, early magazines depended on ties to literary societies, religious denominations, and colleges; later magazines used copyright law and generous payments to lock up the work of well-known authors. The demand problem was solved as the American population grew in size and diversity, and as religious and literary movements unfolded. My analysis shows increasing variation, which accords with Hannan and Freeman's (1977) prediction that an increasing heterogeneous resource base—in this case, heterogeneous readers and contributors—allows more kinds of organizations to flourish. These results also accord with DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) prediction that as interorganizational fields evolve, isomorphism develops within structurally equivalent sets of organizations; for example, as time passed, scholarly theological magazines came to be dry quarterlies, while religious magazines for the laity were mostly published weekly or monthly and filled with church news and educational articles.

Several caveats deserve mention. My analysis tends to read history backward, as it explains how a particular form of cultural good and a particular industry structure developed between 1741 and 1861. I realize that history is better read forward than backward, but I have insufficient space here to discuss in depth the many roads not taken by antebellum magazines, the many other trajectories that this industry could have followed instead of the one that led it to assume approximately its contemporary form by 1861. Another limitation of this analysis is that it examines only a subset of supply and demand factors. On the supply side, it ignores the shifting boundaries of the American nation, the expansion of the postal system and changing postal regulations, and technological innovation in printing and engraving. On the demand side, it ignores the emergence of specialized occupations and professions, movements to promote formal education and scientific agriculture, and social-reform movements (most notably, abolition, peace, and temperance). My conclusions from this first installment in a large research project are therefore tentative, awaiting consideration of the full sweep of causal forces.

Despite its limitations, my analysis hints at how the magazine industry helped foster a coherent, distinctively American society and, paradoxically, how the magazine industry supported the emergence of many divergent social orders. Thus this paper provides one answer to the often-neglected question of how formal organizations shape society (Perrow, 2002; Stern and Barley, 1996). The magazine industry is especially well suited to investigating centripetal and centrifugal forces in American society because the conventions of objectivity apply less strongly to magazines than to many other media. Helping readers interpret facts, rather than baldly presenting them, is a key function of magazines. Because the social significance of issues is central to magazines, subjectivity and partisan views are expected. Magazines promote discourses—principles, symbols, and ideas—that social groups use to deal with social problems.

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Appendix. Data sources and coding

ABI Inform's American Periodical Series Online is my main source of primary data. It contains digital images of over 1,000 magazines (for documentation, see Hoornstra and Heath, 1979). To augment these data, I searched the American Antiquarian Society's online catalogue, which provides bibliographical information on thousands of magazines, and I viewed microfilm archives covering scores of magazines in the Cornell, Columbia, and New York Public Libraries.

Alas, many magazines left no physical trace of their existence. For many others, only a partial record remains in the archives. Hence, I relied heavily on secondary sources.[9] Guided by two standard histories of the industry—an early three-volume analysis (Mott, 1930, 1938a, 1938b) and a recent comprehensive narrative (Tebbel and Zuckerman, 1991)—I searched the Columbia University Library, the New York Public Library, and the University of California library system for secondary sources. I used seventeen book-length histories of the industry; twenty-four check-lists and catalogues prepared by historians, bibliographers, and librarians; thirty-five book-length descriptions of specific types of magazines; and ten articles focusing on particular types of magazines. I also conducted internet searches on magazines with missing data on start or end dates, location, format, or contents; through these searches, data on over 300 magazines were improved and over 200 additional magazines were documented.

I constructed the life histories of 5,067 magazines published between 1741 and 1861, inclusive. This constitutes about half of all magazines ever published in America during that period, based on Mott's (1930, 1938a, 1938b) estimates, and virtually all magazines that left any trace of their existence. My data include magazine titles, contents (twenty-eight categories covering topics and modes of expression), types, and publication formats; dates of founding, merger, suspension, and dissolution; the names of founders, editors, and publishers; and institutional affiliations. For magazines with significant literary content, I also have data on contributors. I usually have exact founding dates—exact to the day for magazines that

[9] A complete list of secondary sources is available upon request. In the interests of space, only those sources that I cite explicitly are listed in the references.

published more often than once per month, exact to the month for magazines that published less often. I can generally pinpoint publication location (city and state) and format (publication frequency) with similar precision, and record exactly the timing of location or format changes. For this analysis, I aggregated temporal data to the calendar year. My data set includes 25,009 annual records on these 5,067 magazines—24,649 annual records after I eliminate records on magazines that temporarily suspended publication.

Although they are rich, my data have limitations because they are neither a census nor a random sample. Most likely to be missing are (a) short-lived and small-circulation magazines; (b) periodicals from the hinterlands and the South; (c) magazines published in languages other than English; (d) magazines published after 1825, when the industry boomed and my data sources were less likely to track all periodicals; and (e) publications that covered something other than "serious" literary, religious, scientific, or political topics. To overcome these biases, I searched especially hard for magazines from the South and West, those written in foreign languages, periodicals devoted to humour and sports, and magazines targeting women, children, and students. Nevertheless, any generalization from these data to the industry as a whole must recognize remaining biases in coverage.

My secondary data sources sometimes disagreed. Most of the time, I was able to resolve discrepancies by referring to primary data (when available), by taking as correct the majority opinion (when the magazines themselves were not in the archives and there were multiple secondary data sources), or by taking as correct the opinion of the secondary informant who offered the richest detail. Other times, the discrepancies were small (less than one year difference in failure date or date of move from one city to another, for example) and an arbitrary (coin-toss) decision did not generate much measurement error.

Records on some magazines are incomplete or imprecise. For 13% of magazines (658/5,067), data are missing on either founding or failure dates. I made judgement calls based on observed distributions of survival times for magazines that were founded during each of the three periods that marked this industry's history. I assumed magazines missing founding or failure dates were frailer than better-documented periodicals and so had shorter-than-average lives. More precisely, I assumed life spans of up to one year after the last known date of publication for magazines born before 1795, up to two years for those born between 1795 and 1825 inclusive, and up to five years for those born after 1825. For each founding or failure date estimated, I used a random draw from a uniform distribution. I eliminated eight magazines that were missing data on both founding and failure dates. Finally, I excluded from my analyses of magazine type 524 magazine-year observations (2.1% of the total) that are missing so much data on contents that I could not assess their nature with any precision.

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