

CONCEALED AUTHORSHIP ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION:  
PSEUDONYMITY AND THE AMERICAN PERIODICAL PUBLIC SPHERE,  
1766-1776

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ABSTRACT

Concealed authorship played a vital role in the critical ten years prior to American independence. Authors utilized printers as cover to publish political essays seditious and disruptive to British authority. Pseudonymity, in particular, was useful to Colonial Americans as it allowed them to identify one another in public space as cohorts, and allowed their enemies to do the same.

A comprehensive study of concealed authorship in three newspapers: Benjamin Edes' *Boston Gazette*, Alexander Purdie's *Virginia Gazette*, and John Holt's *New York Journal*, reveals the dynamic and surprisingly local characteristic of public sphere authorship during this period. Far from an inert phenomenon, pseudonymity was used creatively by Colonial Americans in each colony toward a number of ends. It was used, particularly by Boston, to rally diverse colonial interests around the symbol of an America which did not yet exist. It was used everywhere by local leaders to appear in public as the omnipresent community, whose eyes were everywhere, and whose interest was the regulation of buyers, sellers, and public loyalty to the patriot cause. Pseudonymity was creatively employed by planters to organize their interests outside of government, or by local elites to reduce the class divide between themselves and those they sought to persuade. Finally, inventively, it was used by both men and women to appear in the newspapers as women, and in some special cases it was used as a tool to maneuver public debate and to volley liberal possibilities into public discourse.