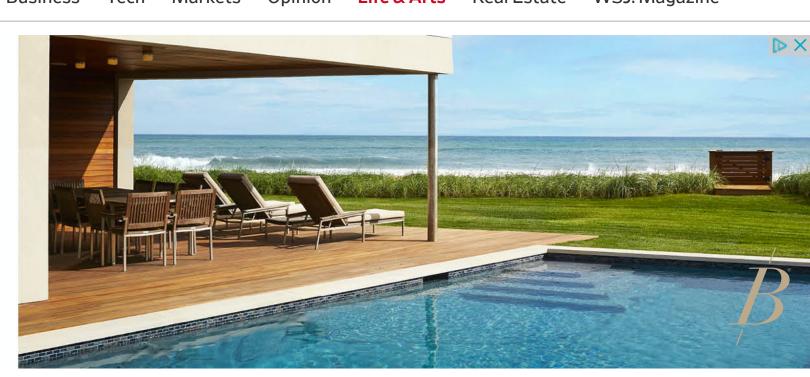
John Kosner ▼

Search Q

Podcasts

U.S. Politics Economy Business Tech Markets Opinion Life & Arts Real Estate WSJ. Magazine





9 🖵

BOOKS | BOOKSHELF SHARE

 $\succ\!\!\!<$

(1)

'Crying the News' Review: Street-Corner Capitalists The newsboy doggedly hawking papers for pennies on city streets was once a staple of American life, an icon of unflagging industry.





SHOP NOW

By Edward Kosner

Oct. 6, 2019 4:26 pm ET SAVE PRINT A TEXT

Benjamin Franklin, Jackie Robinson, Walter Winchell, Thomas Wolfe, Jack London, Knute Rockne, Harry Truman, John Wayne, Warren Buffett and many more familiar names. Besides being illustrious Americans, these men shared a calling—growing up, they were newsboys, delivering newspapers to subscribers or, more colorfully, hawking them on the streets for a couple of pennies, real money in those days.

In their time, newsboys (girls were rare) were American icons—symbols of unflagging

industry and tattered, barefoot, shivering objects of pity. They had their own argot and

better news judgment than many editors, because they had to size up the appeal of every

edition to determine how many copies to buy from the publisher. Some used hawking as a

Thomas Edison was one. So were Harry Houdini, Herbert Hoover, W.C. Fields, Walt Disney,

cover for picking pockets, but most were as honest as they could afford to be. Even the most scrupulous could goose trade by juicing the news they peddled: "McKinley dead!" (not just shot). These waifs, urchins, street Arabs, ragamuffins, gamins, juvenile delinquents and guttersnipes, as they were called, now have their Boswell in Vincent DiGirolamo, a former reporter and documentary filmmaker who teaches history at the City University of New York. His "Crying the News: A History of America's Newsboys" is an encyclopedic account of these heralds of the golden age of newspapers in America. They were essential

The author has done prodigious research, and it's hard to imagine what, if any of it, he has left out. Did you know that Sandy Fowler, a 9-year-old newsboy, was run over in Salt Lake City in June 1904? You do now. Mr. DiGirolamo is a fluent writer, however, and "Crying the News" is really a social history of the American press from the 19th century to World War II. Its 566 pages have their share of interesting nuggets and observations.

contributors to the newspaper economy and ink-smudged secondhand witnesses to

news that would become America's history."

CRYING THE NEWS

PHOTO: WSJ

history.

By Vincent DiGirolamo Oxford, 698 pages, \$35

today's accounts about the economically deprived read like fairy tales. Newsboys rose long before dawn to fetch their papers from the press, then trudged the icy or steaming streets for 10 or 12 hours to bring home bags of change, the equivalent today of \$40 or \$50 a week. They were often the main support for widowed or sick mothers and siblings and drunken or disabled fathers. Many essentially lived on the streets, curling up to sleep on steam grates or boxes near the hot presses of the papers they sold. They were beaten up, robbed of their coppers and preyed on by perverts. Ever resourceful, they rode the expanding railroads to flog papers. During the Civil War,

The book also draws a compelling picture of the

squalid lives of the American poor in the 19th

and early 20th centuries—stories that make

lines selling papers to news-starved soldiers. Their street names told their stories -"Rockaway," "Memphis Kid," "Jimmie Runaway"—and sometimes their disabilities:

daredevil newsboys skittered around the battle

"Leggy," "Handy." One wore a hat reading "The Dumb News Boy." The early newsboys as we now think of them appeared on the streets of lower Manhattan in

crime and popular entertainment—the first paper aimed at the working class. It was promptly joined by James Gordon Bennett's rambunctious Herald and more. Soon, New York and other growing cities teemed with flamboyant dailies and Sunday papers and tens of thousands of clamorous children competing with one another to sell them. "They carried vital intelligence to a young nation of readers," Mr. DiGirolamo writes, "bamboozled them if opportunity arose, received unwanted attention from authorities, and met violent rebuke from those who disliked their message . . . retailing the breaking

The early patterns recurred over the decades. Most of the newsboys were immigrants or

children of immigrants-first Irish and German, later Italians and Eastern European Jews.

Girls and African-Americans were generally driven off the corners. Newsboys were hailed

September 1833, when 23-year-old Benjamin Day hired them to hawk his revolutionary new

paper, the Sun, whose motto was "It Shines for All." It was priced at a penny and covered

by the newspapers they sold as model young capitalists-in-training and beatified by reformers as viciously exploited child labor. Do-gooder groups like the Children's Aid Society looked out for them, and newsboy refuges with dormitories and hot meals were established all over the country. Still, time and again, municipal authorities and church groups harassed them over their "vices"—truancy, smoking, drinking, gambling, swearing, taking discounts from prostitutes, even spitting. They were hostages and sometimes casualties in newspaper circulation wars. Cities tried to license them with badges, and circulation managers constantly squeezed them by raising the wholesale price of the papers they peddled by half a cent, enough to undercut their meager profits. This, in turn, provoked incessant newsboy strikes and fruitless efforts to unionize them. Mr. DiGirolamo has chosen to tell his story chronologically, and his penchant for excruciating detail results in repetition of the same sort of material with different names and dates. Still, the gray text is punctuated with dozens of vintage cartoons and

photographs that reanimate the times often better than his facts. Newsboys, as it happened, were early adopters of fake news, not only with their own embellished cries of "Assassination of President Johnson!" and "Murder of General Grant!" around the Civil War but also with the doozies published by their papers. As street sales

of the Spanish-American War, Pulitzer's New York World and its competitors splashed "Havana Shelled" across the front page. Only readers with eagle eyes noticed the words "to be" in tiny type in between. Mr. Kosner is the former editor of Newsweek, New York, Esquire and the New York Daily News.

drove profits, editors and publishers came up with fresh tricks to lure readers. At the height

SHOW CONVERSATION (9) ✓

Details of George Floyd Killing

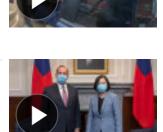
Beijing

Police Body-Camera

Footage Reveals New

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

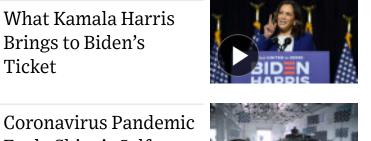
Why the U.S. Trip to Taiwan Bothers



Launch Presidential Ticket What Kamala Harris Brings to Biden's Ticket

Joe Biden and Kamala

Harris Officially





Street Journal.



included with your membership to The Wall

EXPLORE NOW

KOHL'S:

20% off your entire order with

EBAY: Up to 15% off branded

Walmart coupon: \$10 off all

SPONSORED OFFERS

WALMART:

departments

sneakers & more with eBay coupon

HOME DEPOT: 10% off furniture using Home Depot coupon code

Kohl's coupon

sitewide + \$80 of coupons

EXPEDIA:

TARGET:

Expedia promo: 50% off fully-

Target baby registry - 15% off

refundable hotel bookings

Claims Drop Below One Million for First Time Since March

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Joe Biden-Kamala Harris Ticket Makes Debut After Historic VP Pick

Relive the Flying

Experience

Hard That Is

Weekly Unemployment

Stir-Crazy Travelers Are Ordering Airline Food to Young Wuhan Evacuee

Finds No Refuge From Coronavirus in U.S. Cities Weigh Cutting Police

Budgets and Discover How



What Happens to All of the **Unsold Clothes?**

Suburban Home Prices Are

Rising. But So Are Most

Urban Home Prices



Admit It, You Do Laundry During Work Video Calls



TikTok Tracked User Data Using Tactic Banned by Google

'The Gold Standard': Why Chinese Startups Still Flock

to the U.S. for IPOs

WSJ News Exclusive



More

About the Newsroom



Sign Out

Subscription Options Contact Us Why Subscribe?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Corporate Subscriptions Professor Journal Student Journal WSJ High School Program **WSJ Amenity Program WSJ Live**

WSJ Membership

WSJ+ Membership Benefits

English Edition ▼

Customer Service

Customer Center

Tools & Features Emails & Alerts Video Center

Guides

My News

RSS Feeds

Watchlist

Podcasts

Ads Advertise Commercial Real Estate Ads Place a Classified Ad **Sell Your Business** Sell Your Home Recruitment & Career Ads Coupons

Content Partnerships Corrections Jobs at WSJ Masthead **News Archive** Register for Free Reprints

Buy Issues