



# Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Fathers and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism

*Eric Burns*

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*Infamous Scribblers* is a perceptive and witty exploration of the most volatile period in the history of the American press. News correspondent and renowned media historian Eric Burns tells of Ben Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and Sam Adams—the leading journalists among the Founding Fathers; of George Washington and John Adams, the leading disdainers of journalists; and Thomas Jefferson, the leading manipulator of journalists. These men and the writers who abused and praised them in print (there was, at the time, no job description of "journalist") included the incendiary James Franklin, Ben's brother and one of the first muckrakers; the high minded Thomas Paine; the hatchet man James Callender, and a rebellious crowd of propagandists, pamphleteers, and publishers. It was Washington who gave this book its title. He once wrote of his dismay at being "buffeted in the public prints by a set of infamous scribblers." The journalism of the era was often partisan, fabricated, overheated, scandalous, sensationalistic and sometimes stirring, brilliant, and indispensable. Despite its flaws—even because of some of them—the participants hashed out publicly the issues that would lead America to declare its independence and, after the war, to determine what sort of nation it would be.

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