Arezzo is described, each time as if this is the first mention of the event) suggest that no one read through all the final drafts. The failure to encourage all participants to connect their papers, at least briefly, to some of the others also indicates a relatively lax editorial hand. A list of participants, providing their academic affiliation and a brief indication of their other research, is always useful in a collection like this. Its absence is one more mark of a book which, as a whole, offers less than it might, even as a number of the pieces present substantial information and analysis, and merit wide transmission.

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Against familiar claims about the nature and origin of the public sphere (*i.e.*, that it was a bourgeois, a Protestant, or an Enlightenment phenomenon), David Zaret proposes an empirically-grounded investigation of some of the earliest and clearest attempts to invoke and influence public opinion. He finds a literal paper mountain of evidence in the unprecedented output of printing shops during the English Revolution. (Over 2,000 items were published in 1642 alone.) In the broadsheets, newsbooks, and pamphlets, whose numbers between 1640 and 1660 surpassed all the publications that had appeared in England since the introduction of printing in about 1485, Zaret finds ample and convincing evidence to support his central contention: that both social and technical aspects of print culture promoted the invocation of nominal public opinion, as well as the beginnings of a real public sphere in the sense valued by liberal democrats, in which open debate influences and, ideally, sets the agenda for public policy.

Zaret first does an excellent job of outlining the normative political and communicative models which operated in pre-revolutionary England: political conflict and even debate as anathema to an organic body politic; political knowledge flowing through channels of patronage with strict rules about deference and secrecy. “Free speech” existed only where privileged political elites met in council, within Parliament for example. The “public” discussion of politics, however, in alehouses or churchyards, was sedition. Zaret convincingly shows that the ancient practice of subjects petitioning their rulers, which seems at first glance an exception, also conformed to political norms of secrecy and privilege. Petitions were never framed as criticisms of policy, but as spontaneous expressions of local “grievances,” which inferiors begged superiors to correct.

Of course, the norms were only imperfectly enforced, and Zaret shows how even deferentially framed petitions could serve as a disguise for outright rebellion. He also details the circulation of scribally produced newsletters and separates under the early Stuarts, which made secret Parliamentary proceedings relatively
accessible. The scribal practice of copying news, however, merely adumbrates what print culture will definitively introduce in the 1640s: the widespread availability of political documents like speeches, proclamations, and ordinances and, with this availability, a number of consequent effects which “produce” a political public sphere.

One of Zaret’s most original arguments is that print does not merely extend the scope of political communication (the usual argument that more and more literate people could read about political debates). Zaret emphasizes that print culture also changes the content of political communication. The general, often unlearned, readership imagined for a printed pamphlet leads almost inevitably to appeals to a nominal “public opinion” in discourse. But a real public opinion is also cultivated when printed pamphlets appeal to individual readers to decide for themselves. The promotion of the exercise of “reason” is brought about, according to Zaret, not by grand humanistic ideology, but rather by the technological potential and commercial imperatives of print. Print technology facilitated the unprecedented reproduction of accurate text in a way that encouraged the probative reading of texts. Readers were presented with the printed evidence — either in previously printed political documents or in excerpts from contesting arguments — and invited to judge the truth. In addition, the still-operative commercial rule that controversy sells led printers to produce large runs of texts that highlighted conflict. This, argues Zaret, imposed a “dialogic order” on the chaos of events, encouraging people to view political events as a contest or debate between sides or ideas.

The centrepiece to Zaret’s book is the fundamental change in petitioning which occurred in the 1640s. From deferential expressions of grievance, petitions increasingly expressed open political criticism and asserted the right of those on the periphery to influence the political centre. Zaret argues that this development was a direct consequence of the new practice of printing petitions, sometimes even before they were presented to their destined recipient. Levellers, arguably the most active framers of petitions, took the development towards liberal-democratic thinking one step further by questioning the adequacy of ad hoc (and often ignored) petitions for the accommodation of public opinion into political processes, proposing schemes of constitutional change which would institutionalize such an accommodation. Zaret’s chapter on petitions is the fullest and most convincing analysis of this subject for the revolutionary period. It is rich in the everyday, social details of how exactly petition campaigns were organized (potential supporters of a July 1643 petition campaign were invited to sign at the Merchant Tailors’ Hall from first light, 4 a.m.) and how the petitions themselves were presented, used, and viewed by contemporaries.

Zaret’s refreshing attention to primary documents and the conditions of their production sets his study apart both from the overgeneralizing work of theorists who attribute all change to the rise of capitalism, modern subjectivity, etc. — Zaret calls this “hedgehog” analysis, following Isaiah Berlin’s characterization of the hedgehog as the animal who survives by doing one thing well — and also from the
kind of intellectual history which fashions a “great chain of ideas” from links of loose analogy. But Zaret’s emphasis on the commercial and the material aspects of print culture as the motors of political change does sometimes leave one wondering about ideas. In those principled defences of public debate that did emerge, especially in Leveller writings, can we really attribute all to the exigencies and consequences of print? Zaret sees precedents in earlier religious, especially Puritan, writings that also encourage probative reading, but he downplays their importance for later developments. To classical republicanism, he allows no causal influence at all. In an epilogue, however, in order to explain later developments, particularly Locke’s seminal accommodation of public opinion into his theory of political authority, Zaret posits a sudden (disputable, I think) confidence in the reason of “the people,” attributable (also disputably) to the twin causes of the “rise of deism” and the “rise of science,” as exemplified by the foundation of the Royal Society. Here, I suggest, Zaret falls into hedgehog ways himself.

The one idea to which he himself is clearly committed is the normative status of liberal-democratic ideology. The teleological thrust of the book, even of the title, suggests this; the book is implicitly about how “our” democratic principles began, and mid-seventeenth century material is measured according to how close it is to “our” way of thinking. Thus, the tiny minority of Leveller writers represent, in a way familiar from the looser kind of intellectual history, a kind of heroic crest. To some extent, Zaret makes his one idea transparent: one of his explicit intentions in writing the book is to counter the pessimism of postmodernism and critical theory about the contemporary public sphere, by showing that the culprits so often cited in the “death” of the public sphere (commercialization and an unprecedented proliferation of text) were in fact the very phenomena which gave rise to the public sphere in the first place. Nonetheless, Zaret’s evident loyalty to liberal democracy leaves unquestioned the persistent power of this admittedly very useful political model, originating in seventeenth-century England, to uphold rather uneven standards of admission into the public sphere. Locke and the Levellers may have had more faith in the people’s input than their predecessors, but “the people” then, and still to some extent now, were normatively male, property-owning, European, and white.

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William Slights’ Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books offers a meditation on the power of the sidenote. Opening with spectacular examples of the margined book in Erasmus’ Moriae encomium, Spenser’s The Shepheardes Calender and Jonson’s Sejanus, Slights argues that the sophisticated