This paper looks at the movement of newsprint across international borders in the Western Hemisphere, and it traces the twentieth-century supply chains connecting the products made from Canadian forests with newspaper publishers in the United States and Latin America.

Starting in the early 1910s, US policymakers made all newsprint imports from Canada duty-free, and producers in Canada subsequently developed ways of utilizing the country’s extensive spruce forests and hydroelectric power to make newsprint on a mass scale. By 1950, Canada had become by far the world’s leading producer of newsprint and accounted for some 54% of total global production. In comparison, the next two highest-producing nations, the United States and Great Britain (also the two greatest newsprint consumers in the world), accounted for merely 10.4% and 6.2% of global newsprint production, respectively, and the US imported some 80% of its newsprint from Canada.

While the production of Canadian newsprint and US newspapers was becoming increasingly interdependent in the first half of the twentieth century, the US was also increasingly intervening in the affairs of countries throughout Latin America. At mid-century, these two histories converged, as US policymakers took a strong role in directing Canadian newsprint to publishers in Latin American countries deemed “favorable” to American interests. Before World War II, countries in Latin America manufactured just 2.5% of domestic paper needs, and by 1950 this had increased to only 12.3%. During the war, US and Canadian policymakers brokered arrangements to ship Canadian paper to Latin America, and by mid-1943, some 85% of the newsprint being sent to Latin American came from Canadian sources, a ratio that stayed consistent until the end of the war. According to one 1944 estimate, Canada supplied 99% of newsprint exports to Brazil, 95% to Chile, 90% to Cuba, and 94% to Uruguay.

Ultimately, as this paper will show, arrangements between newsprint producers, policymakers, and government officials created the newsprint flows providing the material basis for the public sphere throughout the Western Hemisphere in the mid-twentieth century.