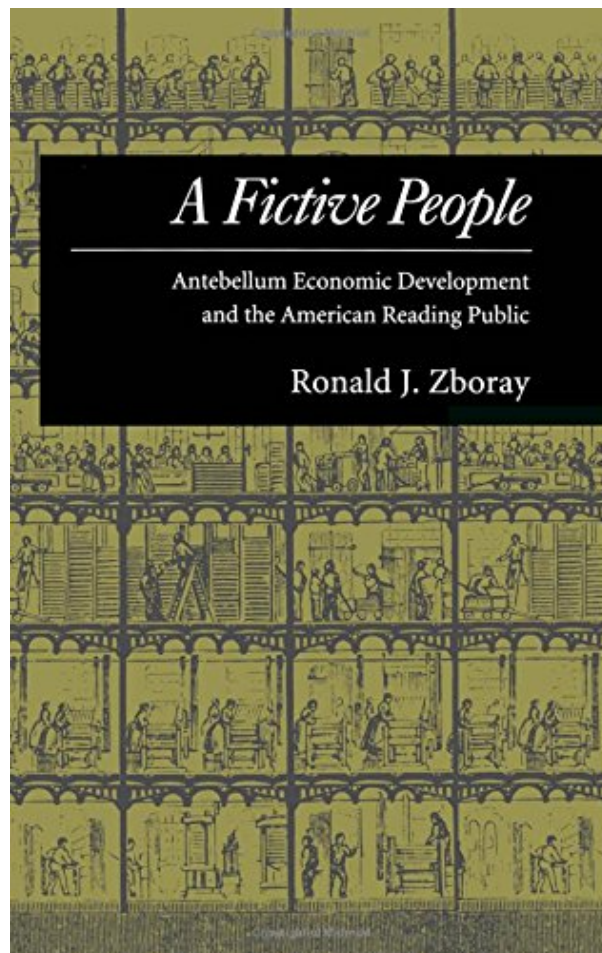
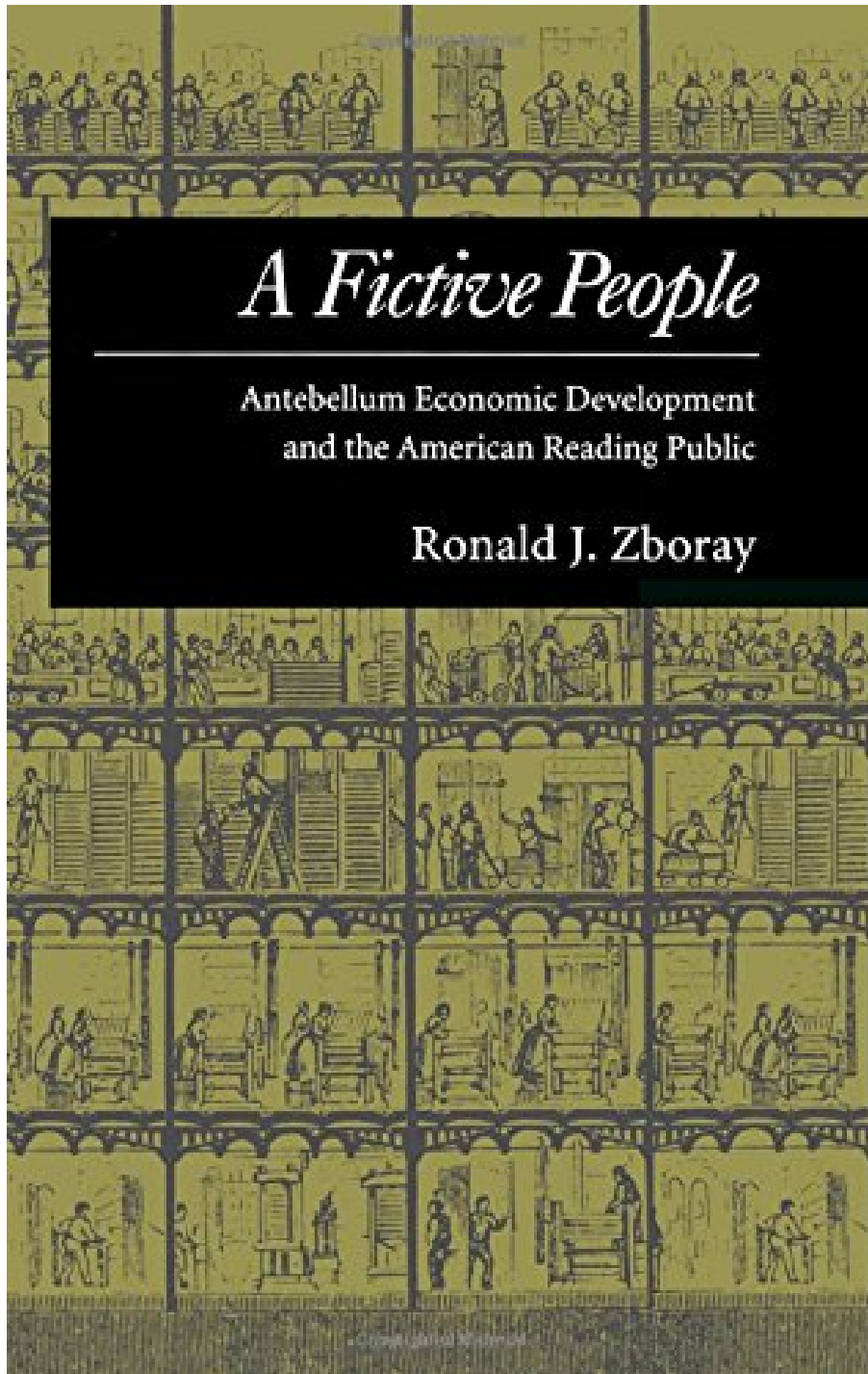


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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE
AMERICAN READING PUBLIC BY RONALD
J. ZBORAY**



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Review

"An entertaining and thoughtful work which demonstrates that literacy and reading in the early national period involved a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and technological forces and affected Americans at many different levels in their public and private lives."--Labor History

"An indispensable work for nineteenth-century Americanists."--Studies in Popular Culture

"So often books written about reading could make one swear off reading altogether...But Mr. Zboray's prose is a pleasure to read....A readable and thought-provoking study."--New York History

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"A comprehensive, innovative, and timely study, Ronald J. Zboray's impressive book sets a new standard for *histoire du livre* explorations in the American context....Zboray's book establishes itself as an authoritative account of a decidedly segmented reading populace."--American Historical Review

From the Back Cover

This book explores the various ways in which antebellum socio-economic change influenced the readership for American literature.

About the Author

Ronald and Mary Zboray are the authors of *A Handbook for the Study of Book History in the United States* and *Literary Dollars and Social Sense: A People's History of the Mass Market Book*. They have written articles for *Journalism History*, *American Quarterly*, *Journal of the Early Republic*, *Libraries and Culture*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, and *American Studies*.

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This book explores an important boundary between history and literature: the antebellum reading public for books written by Americans. Zboray describes how fiction took root in the United States and what literature contributed to the readers' sense of themselves. He traces the rise of fiction as a social history centered on the book trade and chronicles the large societal changes shaping, circumscribing, and sometimes defining the limits of the antebellum reading public. *A Fictive People* explodes two notions that are commonplace in cultural histories of the nineteenth century: first, that the spread of literature was a simple force for the democratization of taste, and, second, that there was a body of nineteenth-century literature that reflected a "nation of readers." Zboray shows that the output of the press was so diverse and the public so indiscriminate in what it would read that we must rethink these conclusions. The essential elements for the rise of publishing turn out not to be the usual suspects of rising literacy and increased schooling. Zboray turns our attention to the railroad as well as private letter writing to see the creation of a national taste for literature. He points out the ambiguous role of the nineteenth-century school in encouraging reading and convincingly demonstrates that we must look more deeply to see why the nation turned to literature. He uses such data as sales figures and library borrowing to reveal that women read as widely as men and that the regional breakdown of sales focused the power of print.

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- Dimensions: 9.56" h x 1.22" w x 6.38" l, 1.60 pounds
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- 352 pages

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