


THE LEWISTOWN RIOTS, 1791-1793:
A MICRO-ANALYTIC APPROACH

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n September 21, 1791, Governor Thomas Mifflin notified the Pennsylvania Assembly of riots in the center of the state so serious that he intended to “exert the Constitutional powers of the Executive” to bring the riots “*against the government*” [emphasis added] to an end.¹ Indicating his belief that he might have to use the force of arms to stop the riots, he also told the legislature that he was “confident . . . that any legislative aid [that] may be wanting . . . you will cheerfully and liberally afford.” Mifflin’s address to the legislature reflected his response to communications received from Judge Thomas Smith of Carlisle (presiding judge of the Fourth Judicial District) regarding a riot against the courts of Mifflin County. These communications apparently were based on a report from Mifflin County’s State Attorney, John Clark.² Clark had reported to Smith that over the course of three days, at least three of the official militias of the county, led by their elected colonels and perhaps a state judge, had attacked the courthouse, harassed officials, attempted a jailbreak, and

eventually brought court proceedings to a halt. Another county militia had, on the second day of the riots, marched into Lewistown (the county seat) with the intention of defending the government and its officials against the other militias. In short, with three or more state militias at bayonet point with each other and with state officials, the governor had every reason to believe that the center of the state was dissolving in chaos and violence. Moreover, the riots posed perhaps the first major test of the 1790 state constitution's effectiveness in providing safety and order.

Yet, despite the actual conflict and its potential for interpretation, the Lewistown riots have never entered into recorded history above the regional level. A few nineteenth-century publications, intended mostly for local consumption, repeated Clark's version of the story, but by the twentieth century, even local historians had all but forgotten it. Given the scholarly attention paid to other instances of civil discord in Pennsylvania's fractious history, the Lewistown riots' disappearance from history could be considered unusual. These were riots in which state militias, led by state officers, attacked other state officers and a county court house; riots in which at least one state militia turned out to do battle with other state militias; riots that seemed so serious that Governor Mifflin alerted the legislature that extraordinary measures might be needed. The riots provide valuable insights into tensions among individuals, among groups within the rural hinterland, and between the rural hinterland and the urban core.

From this position outside the historical lexicon, the riots seem tailor-made for micro-analysis. As Richard Brown has suggested, analysis of a singular series of small events may be more revealing than broader studies:

The glory of microhistory . . . lies in its power to recover and reconstruct past events by exploring and connecting a wide range of data sources so as to produce a contextual, three-dimensional, analytic narrative in which actual people as well as abstract forces shape events.³

The riots allow us to chart, in considerable detail, the resolution (or lack thereof) of conflicts between individuals with differing psychologies, viewpoints, home regions, politics, traditions, and experiences. A micro-analytic approach to the riots permits us to invert the perspectives of certain questions asked of other "name" conflicts. We can ask what leaders did right, as well as what they did wrong. We are not hoisted on the false dichotomy implicit in determining whether salient acts of discord

illustrate broad trends or whether they arise from idiosyncratic situations. We can do away with the need to have groups (various elites, rural residents, urbanites, Federalists, Anti-Federalists, or whatever) determined in *a priori* fashion, thereby leaving the evidence to dictate whether explanations focused on groups are necessary and what the composition of those groups should be. Having slipped the imperative of dealing with group behaviors, we can more firmly grapple with the impact of the individual psyche. And, finally, by concentrating on a single incident, we can escape, if we need to, the dead hand of analogy and find the riots similar to other incidents only if they deserve to be so classified.⁴ The opportunity to study, in detail, a small confrontation *de novo* allows the pursuit of a broad variety of solutions.

The Lewistown Riots

While the Lewistown riots began on September 13, 1791, tensions started to affect the county seat sometime during the morning of the twelfth. John Clark's report was published in *The Federal Gazetteer and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* [Philadelphia] and detailed the events of September 12, noting that "the hon. W. Brown, James Bryson & James Armstrong, esquires, met in the forenoon, in order to open the court and proceed to business." A fourth judge, Thomas Beale, failed to attend. They waited until three o'clock and then continued without him. Clark explained:

About nine o'clock [a.m. on September 13, 1791], I received information that a large body of men were assembled below the Long Narrows, at David Jordan's tavern . . . and were armed with guns, swords, and pistols, with an avowed intention to proceed on Lewistown, and seize judge Bryson . . . and drag him from his seat, and march [him] off before them and otherwise ill-treat him. This information was instantly communicated to Messrs. Brown, Bryson, and Armstrong, the judges, who agreed . . . that Samuel Edminton, Esq. the prothonatary, judge Beale. — Stewart, Esq. — Bell, Esq. should, with George Wilson, Esq. the sheriff of Mifflin County, proceed and meet the rioters; the sheriff was commanded to enquire of them their object and intention, and if hostile, to order them to disperse.⁵

The group that gathered below the Long Narrows (south of Lewistown) must have collected near or before sunrise for information to arrive in Lewistown by nine o'clock.⁶ The presence of at least three militias indicates broad support for the uprising. One militia, led by William Wilson (brother of the sheriff), probably came from immediately below the Long Narrows; another, led by David Walker, probably came from two days' ride down the Tuscarora Valley (that part of Mifflin County south and west of the Long Narrows), and a third, led by William Holt, probably came from above the Kishacoquillas Narrows (north of Lewistown).⁷ Three of the four militia companies in Mifflin County had risen against Judge Bryson by September 13 and the fourth (from many miles away) would arrive on the evening of September 14.⁸

A second account, written in Carlisle and published on September 26, 1791, in *The Federal Gazetteer and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* (hereafter called the Carlisle account), verified State Attorney Clark's statement that he did not expect the movement upon Lewistown: "Secrecy marked this unexampled Treasonable Riot. It was not known at Lewistown until about an hour before the insurgents appeared. Justice Stuart . . . had been imprisoned in the morning by four men who belonged to the party of the rioters."⁹ Clark noted that within two hours of the warning, he spotted the approaching "mob," preceded by a fifer, gunshots, and three men on horseback. At that point, the judges sent Clark out to meet the mob and to "remonstrate against their proceedings, and warn them of their dangers." Not too surprisingly one lone state attorney had little success with a large group who had already left their farms at harvest time, joined in an extra-legal conspiracy, and spent a good part of the day winding their way, under arms, through the Long Narrows.¹⁰ The mob, shouting violent threats and led by William Wilson, "well-dressed with a sword and . . . two pistols belted around him, a cocked hat and one or two feathers in it," demanded that Judge Bryson be removed from the bench and taken down the Long Narrows, where, according to Clark, the militias intended to have Bryson sign a paper "that he would never sit as a judge again."

Clark stated that he had grabbed William Wilson's bridle even as the militiamen were shouting "march on," "draw your sword on him," and "ride over him." At this point, according to Clark, a nephew of Judge Beale's "presented" his pistol to Clark's breast, while William Wilson drew his sword and told the state attorney that he would hurt him "unless [he] would let go the reins." Clark retreated, walking to the outside stairs of the courthouse, where he met Judge Armstrong, who with "a number of persons" determined to defend the stairs. A scuffle ensued, swords and guns were drawn, and the

Revolutionary cry "Liberty or Death" was taken up by the crowd. Then Holt and Walker, as heads of their militias, came forward to direct the attack on the courthouse. Neither side gained an advantage and finally Clark and Armstrong persuaded William Wilson to appoint three representatives to present the mob's complaints. Clark then met with Wilson, Walker, and an attorney, one William Sterrett, at "Mr. Alexander's tavern."

At that meeting, the mob's leaders stated that their resistance stemmed from Bryson's voiding of local elections for militia colonels. The people of Mifflin County wished to have the militia colonels for whom they had voted. Hence they wanted to have their elected colonels and they wanted Bryson's resignation. Clark, at first, refused to yield on Judge Bryson's right to sit on the bench. With the conference deadlocked, however, and the prospect of renewed violence, Clark compromised and agreed to Bryson's departure from the court session now sitting—but not to a forced resignation. Bryson accepted the compromise and left the court.

Militia leaders William Wilson and David Walker, however, proved unable to control their people. In fine democratic fashion, the mob carried their leaders with them. Marching with the fife tootling ahead, Wilson struggled to remain at their front. Clark objected that Wilson had violated his word of honor. William Wilson responded that he knew it, but that he could not stop his men; they wanted to possess Samuel Bryson physically and they intended to do so. Clark remonstrated that Bryson had already departed. Wilson then turned and read to the crowd a paper signed "The People." Beyond the demand that Bryson be dismissed, neither Clark nor the Carlisle source detailed the contents of the paper, which Clark speculated afterward had been written by Attorney Sterrett. Wilson's reading of the statement spurred the mob once again to press forward. "Young Beale" cocked his pistol and held it, once again, to Clark's chest. Clark offered "to decide" the issue "by [individual] combat." Beale backed down and either Beale or Sterrett exclaimed that they had been "out-generaled."¹¹

Both Clark and the Carlisle source indicate that Samuel Bryson returned the next day, September 14, 1791, noted that he was not frightened by the mob but said he would not, due to the agreement, return to the court that session.¹² There is no evidence that Bryson, a colonel in the Continental Army who had been wounded at Germantown, ever lacked courage. It appears that no militias remained directly in Lewistown and the morning apparently passed peacefully after Judge Bryson's reappearance. Near two o'clock that afternoon, some judges summoned the sheriff, George Wilson, and asked him

to request Judge Thomas Beale to join them in opening court. Sheriff Wilson met with Judge Beale, who refused to attend court if Bryson was still there. When the sheriff returned with this message, a sudden exchange of words occurred between the sheriff and Bryson. As Clark put it, George Wilson apparently demanded to know, "with warmth," if Bryson had spoken ill of him and Bryson responded "in a becoming manner." The sheriff struck at Bryson and then kicked him; Judge Armstrong seized the sheriff and took his rod, turning it over to the county coroner. The judges summoned the sheriff and remanded him to jail.¹³

At this point, a new militia (or, rather, part of one) appeared on the scene. This militia, led by James McFarlan, descended from the Kishacoquillas Valley, a large and long valley northwest of Lewistown. McFarlan had reason to support Bryson. In the elections held to select officers for 1791, McFarlan had been defeated by William Holt.¹⁴ Bryson had then overridden the election to put McFarlan in charge. Since Holt clearly had control of a significant number of men, it appears likely that Bryson's actions had either split the militia or accentuated an already existing split. Neither Clark nor the Carlisle source nor any other source suggests that this new militia had been summoned by any authority.¹⁵ An address of McFarlan's, reported by Clark, commended his troops for being prepared on short notice, after midnight, to uphold the law. McFarlan may well have acted on his own to help secure the position of the man who had elevated him to the colonelcy.

Both State Attorney Clark and the Carlisle source indicate that McFarlan and his militia remained on the scene briefly, returning home before sunset. Whether intended or not, McFarlan's rapid departure allowed him to avoid a confrontation with Holt and his segment of the Kishacoquillas militia. Holt had quickly collected "about seventy men" (which suggests that his troops had not dispersed to their homes but had stayed assembled near Lewistown). The reports indicate that they once again raised the shout of "Liberty" and descended on the jail to release Sheriff Wilson, who was not interested in adding charges of jailbreak to those of his assault on Bryson. Attorney Sterrett appeared, informing Holt and his militia that "the sheriff thanked his friends for their intention to serve him, but this is not the proper period. . . ."

Later on the night of the second day, probably by ten o'clock, the sheriff accepted bail and agreed to appear before the next court session. The news did not travel quickly enough to keep the militias south of the Long Narrows from rising once more when they received news of the sheriff's arrest. Whether these messengers also carried news of McFarlan's arrival is unknown. State Attorney

Clark reported: "The next day [September 15] near three hundred men were assembled below the narrows, and I prevailed on some gentleman to go down and disperse them; and upon being assured the sheriff was out of gaol, they returned to their respective homes." It does not seem likely that Clark was exaggerating the size of the group preparing to march on Lewistown on the third day of confrontation. The Carlisle source notes that "Great numbers in Tuscoraro valley and its vicinity prepared the following day to march and liberate the Sheriff, and probably to demolish the Court house and prison." Evidently, the number of people willing to march from the Tuscarora Valley through the Narrows and attack the seat and buildings of formal government had grown steadily as the confrontation dragged on.

At this point, Clark, in his role as State Attorney, closed the court session. This may have been a move to defuse the situation. As Governor Mifflin would discover months later, though, this may also have been a move to protect Clark himself. In the same sentence in which Clark noted that he had "prevailed on some gentlemen to go down and disperse" the mob gathering south of the Narrows, he also noted that ". . . the court [having] finished all business; nothing further requiring the attendance of the grand jury, the court dismissed them and broke up." The court had not conducted business on the first day, on the second day it had probably not started until mid-afternoon if it had started at all, and, on the morning of the third day Clark declared the court's business finished. Clark's statement that the court had finished its business was probably a bland bit of double-talk covering a strategic retreat. As will be indicated below, Clark may, in fact, have been facing a grand jury sympathetic to the rioters, furious with Bryson and himself, and about to take sovereignty into its own hands. With the court closed, however, the courthouse could no longer be targeted as a place to protest; the judges, scattered to their homes, could not be threatened en masse; and Clark's actions removed the potential for unwitting provocations.

The series of events had been singular. A well-known and popular judge (Thomas Beale) had refused to sit with a junior colleague (Samuel Bryson) for the opening of court. The next day, various militias, led by those whom Bryson had refused to affirm as militia colonels, descended on the county seat. One of the mob leaders was Judge Beale's nephew, another the brother of the sheriff. After various confrontations, Judge Bryson agreed to remove himself, but the mob stayed and sought physical possession of him. Failing, the militias eventually left. The next day, Bryson did not sit as judge, but, for some reason, remained with the court. Sheriff Wilson then struck and kicked

Bryson, acts that landed the sheriff in jail and temporarily cost him his authority. Soon thereafter a different militia, friendly to the court, arrived, most likely without official summons. That militia left quickly—and one of the riotous militias attempted to rescue the sheriff, which the sheriff refused. On the third day of confrontation, September 15, State Attorney Clark dismissed the court before hundreds of militiamen could renew their attack.

The Background of the Lewistown Riots

To begin to parse the riots and the events associated with them, we need to turn back to the Juniata Valley's past and particularly to the place of militias in the valley's development. During the mid-eighteenth century, English, German, and Scots-Irish settlers moved into the Juniata Valley from the east.¹⁶ As these settlers carved out isolated pockets of land, a series of wars began to swirl around the valley. During the American Revolution, the settlers fought both the English to their east and the Native Americans to their west. Each little "cove" of European settlers fought on its own. Failing to receive assistance from other European-Americans and too isolated to help each other most of the time, the Juniata Valley communities developed a strong self-identity associated with their militias.¹⁷ When the fighting finally ended, Anabaptist groups, who were already known for shunning outside affairs and for their preference for local autonomy, moved into the region.¹⁸ Over the years, the people of the Juniata Valley had received little impetus to move, or to think, beyond their locales. Moderating influences did not generally find their way down the narrow valleys; interest in the outside world was limited to what seeped over the main stem of the Juniata River. Travel between the more isolated parts of the valley was virtually impossible and, being virtually impossible, eventually unnecessary.¹⁹ Families became entrenched within small mountain valleys, turning identifications with family into identifications with locales. There was scarce reference to larger cultures and, in many places, little reason to reference those cultures.²⁰

The ties between the Juniata Valley and the colonial and state governments had always been tenuous. The various communities had survived and grown with little assistance from the central government, thereby reinforcing localist tendencies. The Juniata Valley's different polities had shown that they could govern the region far more effectively than could distant governments in Philadelphia. During the Revolutionary War, the region had turned back

attack after attack, had mounted its own counter-attacks,²¹ and had handled its own Loyalists with little reference to the state government.²² In fact, while other frontier regions in Pennsylvania had crumbled under attack, the forts and defenders of the Juniata Valley had repeatedly stopped assaults near their upper borders. The state government had responded to the valley's efficiency by directing assistance away from the Juniata to regions that were not coping as well. This decision made strategic sense, but did not endear the state government to Juniata residents.

By the end of the 1770s not only had a series of independent and localist identities evolved within the Juniata Valley, but those identities were enwrapped within an ethos of self-government. At the best, the colonial/state authorities were very junior partners in the government of the Juniata Valley. The local militias had been successful.²³ The local office-holders, drawn from a cross-section of society, had governed well.²⁴ Judicial appointments and functions had become a traditional prerogative of the local citizenry and no complaints about the system have survived. In the Mifflin County region every judge elevated to the Court of Common Pleas between 1776 and 1790 had also been approved by election to a township magistracy, either prior to their appointment or concurrently.²⁵

Indicating the deep ethos of localism, six of the seven delegates from the Juniata Valley to the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1789–1790 were members of the solid core of twenty-one delegates who voted repeatedly to retain a central government in which all male taxpayers could aspire to participate.²⁶ This bloc successfully pushed the convention to accept limits on state government, secure local power, and preserve the rights of those who were neither wealthy nor famous. In fact, by the end of the convention, the “western democrat” bloc had won on such matters as frequent censuses; an upper house based on popular voting; no property qualifications for state officials; an unfettered right of resistance; the insertion of truth as a defense in libel cases; the right to criticize office-holders, candidates for office, and others acting in the public interest; local residency requirements for elected officials; and the institution of voting districts sufficiently small to guarantee local control. Thomas Beale, as Mifflin County's representative to the 1789–1790 Constitutional Convention, voted on sixty percent of the roll-call votes. He joined the majority nearly seventy percent of the time. When he voted with the minority, it was almost always on motions where the western bloc had taken their drive for local autonomy and expanded rights of personal agency too far for the more moderate delegates.²⁷

The Aftermath of the Riots

Given the background of Mifflin County and its political orientation, resistance to a strong central government could be expected. Similarly, Governor Thomas Mifflin's political views, as evidenced during the 1789–1790 Constitutional Convention, indicate that he stood for a strong central authority. If one stopped the analysis at this point, the Lewistown riots could easily be seen as just another act of resistance by parochial rural groups against a distant centralizing government and governor. If this were so, the riots might be primarily of antiquarian interest as “simply” one more local rebellion. Yet, to return briefly to the start of this article, sometime before September 21, 1791, John Clark, State Attorney for Mifflin County and Judge Thomas Smith of Carlisle (presiding judge of the Fourth Judicial District, the district that included Mifflin County), made reports informing Governor Mifflin that at least three different militias had attacked state judges and government property, that another militia had apparently attempted to engage these three militias at the county seat of Lewistown, and that the numbers of people engaging in attacks on the state government seemed to be growing. No governor can tolerate such a forthright and apparently lawless challenge to state authority and Mifflin *had* to respond. But the evolving nature of the responses of Governor Mifflin and Chief Justice McKean, the shrewd judgment of Thomas Beale, and the resolute insistence on the letter of the law by Samuel Bryson allow the riots to reveal a great deal about the intermingling of consensus, conflict, and institutional imperatives.

At first, Governor Mifflin, facing what verged on civil war in a distant region of difficult access, advanced the threat of government sanctions and power. Beale, facing what he could trust would be a strong response to the riots, had either to find grounds that would satisfy the state or lead his neighbors into continued defiance. Bryson, now lacking virtually all direct power and with much of the county against him, had to depend on the state government to protect him. To make matters worse for Bryson, his dependence on the state would work only if its officers were willing to stick closely to the “letter of the law.” If a literal adherence to the narrow confines of printed law (called “black-letter” law) did not evolve, if, in the pursuit of peace, the state officials used discretion in applying the laws, then Bryson would find it hard to survive with position and honor intact.

Thomas Beale did not wait for his enemies to move first. On September 17, two days after the riots ended, he sent a letter defending the

people of Mifflin County, putting forth his framing of republican theory and, by implication, defending himself. Beale had helped write a constitution with Mifflin and could have observed that the governor was not a “bitter-ender” against “Western” interpretations of republicanism and democracy. A successful practicing politician, Beale rested his defense on a belief that sufficient common ground existed with the governor for Mifflin to recognize the validity of his arguments. In addition, Beale held a fairly strong hand, with broad backing (including three Mifflin County militias and part of a fourth) and experience in the state constitutional convention and assembly. The minutes of the 1789–1790 constitutional convention and of the 1784–1787 legislature suggest that a *lingua franca* of post-Revolutionary republicanism had evolved.²⁸ Even people of quite different political allegiances appealed to similar terms while they jostled with one another. To some degree, Beale could base his appeal on a post-Revolutionary sense of what constituted “right order” between different members of society.²⁹

Beale began by indicating that, by at least one set of standards, the “people’s” actions, however excessive, did not lack warrants: “I expect before you Receive this Letter that you have heard that the people of this County have Committed very Rash & Extraordinary proceedings; They I believe have done {a} very great wrong; but that wrong ought not to be painted in Darker Colours than the facts *Deserve* [emphasis added]. . . .³⁰ In short, Beale believed that he could advance a case that would allow the governor to find suitable justification for mob force. Beale’s long discussion demonstrated a search for arguments that a governor of the time period might find convincing. As such, it indicates a number of concepts that those in the early national period believed could justify violent resistance.³¹ Beale, here, did not contend that Bryson had technically violated Pennsylvania militia law, but rather that his exercise of that law had violated the social contract.

[H]e has acted a Liutinant over the Militia of this County a little more than a year & his manner of Acting has Caused more heat and Illwill than has been among us since the Revolution . . .

[H]e has publicly Declared [that] he has a Right by the Militia Law to Return two persons for each office & he knew his Influence with you would [sic] Commission which he pleased[.]

He declared he would hold Every Officer to bail in Large Sums for the performance of their offices and threatened such as Did not please him[.]

[He] Violated & Returned all the Commissions in his hands to your Secretary & Lifted the Returns of the Elections[,], for this we have his words.

he is Charged in One Instance of publicly pledging his word & honor to furnish Col. William Willson with his Commission & to assist him in Doing the Duty of his Office [and then not doing so.]³²

Beale did not contend that Bryson lacked the right in “black-letter” law to overturn elections, but that he had done so improperly and in a manner disdainful of republican ideals. By charging Bryson with improperly overriding choices made by the community, with threatening the people by flaunting his “influence,” with abusing his authority by improperly demanding extraordinary bonds for performance, with voiding some commissions before forwarding them to the governor, with improperly removing votes cast for militia captains, and with violating his word of honor, Beale portrayed Bryson’s actions as breaking standards so common that Governor Mifflin would recognize “the people’s” justification for resistance.

To reinforce the idea that Bryson had acted both arbitrarily and unilaterally—that is, in anti-republican fashion—Beale emphasized other actions by Bryson that constituted anti-republican behaviors:

[he indicated that he would perform his] Duty with an Iron Rod (in the hand of A Despot;).

Mr. Bryson had vaunted that he Could Obtain anything he would wish or Ask of you & he is now determined to apply for an Armed force to Establish the Laws and protect the Court[.] [T]his however plausible it may appear is only founded On himself & to establish his Own power.

W^m. Bryson often Vaunts he is a member of Cincinnatus [and that] he and a few can make and unmake what they please, and Damn the Rable,. . . —This is too much to hold so dark a Cloud over Freemen[']s heads

[T]he Question will then be whether it will be better to use Every severe Measure to punish the people & spend money and perhaps Lives; minely [mainly] for the pleasure of one man

I . . . found Imediatly that under his appointment as Judge . . . he wish'd to Cover a felony Done by one of the most noted villains in our County & he wish'd to have it Done in Defiance of the people. . . .

Finally Beale pointed to the right of the people to choose their own guardians—as central a tenet of shared Anglo-American tradition as there could be:³³

the people is now about petitioning you & both houses of the Legislature to Remove Mr. Bryson from Office. . . .

Remove him & give the people a man who has their confidence & will make them happy. . . .

it has been asserted here that the mob assembled with Intention to Oppose the Officers of the Court generally . . . this manner of Representing the wrong is not true . . . what Ever was Done was Solely . . . to Operate against Judge Bryson. . . .

Beale reflected a broad majority of “the people” of Mifflin County, as indicated by the number of people who signed the petition to remove Bryson. In a county with 1,954 white males over 16 in the 1790 census, 983 people (who would have been white males over 16) signed. However one constructs “the people,” such a number indicates that they wanted Bryson removed.³⁴

Others also defended the rioters. The Mifflin administration preserved in its files three affidavits given September 17, 1791 by William Sterrett and Samuel Jackson. These affidavits linked the reputation of the new state government (as represented by Judge Bryson) with the question of whether or not the State government *would* stand four-square for republicanism. They chart an effort by Bryson to use judicial prerogatives and his influence with the governor to bypass normal judicial processes. If true, such actions would have violated the intent of the recent Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, which had wrangled long and hard over judicial prerogatives and finally limited them to a bare minimum.³⁵ Sterrett’s and Jackson’s

affidavits also support Beale's contention that Bryson held a deep disregard for the common people. If accurate, Bryson, attempting to settle a problem resulting in both unnamed criminal charges and a civil suit, proposed that the injured party accept payment and, in exchange, decline to testify in court.³⁶ For his own part, Bryson promised to have the officers of the law drop the charges and then enlist Governor Mifflin to "mitigate and forgive" the failure of the parties to keep their recognizances.³⁷ When the injured party indicated that public opinion bound him to bring the felon to justice, all affidavits agree, Judge Bryson then stated:

. . . if you are satisfied [speaking to the plaintiff] & paid your damages and the officers of the law agreed to drop the business Damn the people[,] why need you Care about them as they Can be easy pleased[.] I have kept shop and [s]tore among them and have sued a great number of them & have acted as luitenant & quarled with almost the whole of them & at Last Done what I thought ought to be Done & now Could please the best among them with a hearty shake of the hand & a drink of grog. . . .

However self-serving these affidavits may have been, the issues they raised were matters that might enlist the Governor's sympathy. The belief that Mifflin would take notice of such items testifies to a conception that those near the seaboard and those in isolated backwoods communities shared a body of mental constructs. The people, so Beale, Sterrett, and Jackson maintained, had been wronged in both their legal selves and their private capacities and Bryson had openly held both in disdain. Mifflin, as a seasoned revolutionary, faced with such testimony and a situation complete with armed leaders wearing plumed hats, people with guns marching behind fifes, and shouts of "Liberty or Death," probably did not have to reflect much to understand that Bryson's arrogance, disdain, or perhaps (as suggested below) a plain lack of social intelligence could have created an insurrection. Although the surviving documents from this stage of the conflict do not refer to the question of why Bryson may have desired "covering a felony Done by one of the most noted villains," it seems likely that a politician as experienced as Mifflin must have considered the *possibility* that Bryson had behaved corruptly.³⁸

Mifflin, however, almost certainly had not received Beale's September 17 letter as of his address to the legislature on September 21, 1791. His address would have been based on the reports by State Attorney Clark and Judge

Thomas Smith. Smith lived in Carlisle and there is a good chance that he was the source for the unsigned account in *The Federal Gazetteer and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, above referred to as "the Carlisle source." Certainly, Mifflin was at his grimmest on September 22 when he wrote to Judge Smith, George Wilson, and Thomas Beale. He thanked Smith for his "communications," telling him that Sheriff Wilson's and Judge Beale's actions were "highly reprehensible" and that he wanted "to assure you [Smith] that the Executive power shall be faithfully and vigorously employed in opposition to any attempt which violates the peace and order of society."³⁹ The letters to Wilson and Beale, on the other hand, might be considered "warm." For instance, his letter to Sheriff Wilson read in part:

My surprise and mortification at hearing of this lawless proceeding, have been greatly increased by finding that you, Sir, to whom, in compliance with the choice of your Fellow Citizens, the sacred truth had been committed of preserving the public peace, so far from exerting your authority to qual [quell] the tumult have contributed to foment and extend it.⁴⁰

The next day, September 23, Mifflin wrote to James McFarlan to praise and reward him for "your firm and patriotic conduct which could not fail to command my attention . . . you [will find] therefore, enclosed a commission as lieutenant of the County of Mifflin; and I trust that your [illegible] and prudence in discharging the duties of this office will greatly [illegible] . . . to [illegible] the public peace and justice which have been so *unwarrantably violated* [emphasis added]."⁴¹ McFarlan's commission as county lieutenant effectively replaced Bryson's commission to the same post. Although Bryson had resigned as the Lieutenant of the Mifflin County militia, no evidence has been uncovered as to when this occurred.⁴²

Mifflin's first response stressed his authority and the threat of governmental force. As indicated above, it could hardly have been anything else; if new disturbances had occurred Mifflin would have had to use the full range of state authority (and the Lewistown riots would have earned a place in the history books). His letters to Beale and George Wilson stressed that he had notified the legislature and that he would "employ the powers of the Executive in maintaining the authority of [the] government and punishing those who wished to oppose it." Beale and Sterrett, on the other hand, used the language of republicanism and people's rights. Behind their responses

though, lurked the reality that, as Beale indicated, an attempt by Mifflin to use the full authority of the government would result in much “money” and “perhaps lives” being wasted. Given the difficulties of a fight in the mountains and passes of the Juniata Valley against militias who had proven their worth, such a remark was a barely veiled threat. It is unlikely that a seasoned veteran and revolutionary such as Mifflin would have missed the implication. On the other hand, the governor and Beale both stressed the opportunity to return to a generally recognized “right order” between differing members of society. Beale had stated that the riots were not against order; Mifflin emphasized that he simply wanted a return to obedience to the law.

After September 23, however, the pace of Mifflin’s actions slowed. In part, procedural concerns may have dictated a more deliberate speed. There had been no fresh outbreaks and Mifflin had referred the matter to the attorney general and ordered the justices of the Supreme Court, particularly Chief Justice Thomas McKean, to investigate. More importantly, even if Governor Mifflin had been appalled by his citizens’ actions, he had reason to avoid the insurrectionary possibilities inherent in the situation.⁴³ Also, new evidence promoted a significant shift of opinion within the governor’s office. Although the surviving evidence does not allow us to establish the exact chronology, a few glimpses allow us to detect this shift. On December 3, 1791, Thomas Beale responded to the governor’s reprimand of September 22. Beale notified the governor that he had received his letter “some time since” and “when it [the governor’s reprimand] was wrote, I know not.” Beale had waited for over two months to respond to the governor. Beale’s inaction and the nature of his response suggest that he believed that his position was stronger than the governor’s and that Mifflin had written while lacking all of the facts. Beale noted that “you [Mifflin] seemed much irritated” and then went on to warn the governor against allowing himself to be taken in by Bryson’s flattery, stating that the governor had proven to be susceptible to such in the past. Beale then lectured Mifflin against allowing “the first story you have [heard take] such deep root in your mind but what it may be [eradicated?] by truth.” Beale then concluded that he would “have no idea of resigning my Commission” and that “I have never learned to sham Contrition for wrongs I never committed.” The tone of the letter borders on that of a schoolmaster talking, not quite so patiently, to a naive student.

One passage in the letter deserves somewhat greater attention: “I did refuse to sit on the bench with W [sic] Bryson because I thought him a disgrace to the seat on account of his Corruptions and Lying base principles

which I knew him Immediately Guilty off[;] besides his Ignorance renders him altogether inadequate to sit as a Judge.”⁴⁴ This passage, which seems fairly straightforward, could have had a slightly different meaning than its first appearance. Although Bryson may indeed have been guilty of monetary corruption, Robert Remini pointed out years ago that for some “corruption” stood as shorthand for anti-republican sentiments.⁴⁵ There is simply no way to determine the meaning of “corruption” here, but the “Lying base principles” could also indicate that Bryson’s “corruption” was a combination of both anti-republicanism and basic dishonesty.

Beale apparently believed that he knew Mifflin sufficiently well that his less-than-deferential response would do little to harm his case. Certainly, by December, Beale had every reason to suspect that the governor had a very different point of view than at the time of his reprimands of Beale and George Wilson. On January 4, 1792, a month after Beale’s letter to Mifflin, the governor’s secretary,⁴⁶ A. J. Dallas, wrote to the attorney general, Jared Ingersoll, that he was in receipt of a number of documents, including a petition to suspend Bryson until impeachment proceedings could be initiated.⁴⁷ Dallas found the documents so significant that he attempted to determine if the executive branch had the power at least to suspend Bryson. He found that it did not. He then requested that Ingersoll evaluate the documents for the governor while the governor’s office explored “a voluntary session [cession] from the Bench” by Bryson. Similarly, on February 6, Dallas wrote to David Walker, one of the militia leaders who had led his militia into town, that the governor had directed Dallas “to handprint” the governor’s commission of Walker as a colonel of a battalion in Mifflin County.⁴⁸ Less than six months earlier, Mifflin had considered military action against the rebellious Mifflin County militias, one of which Walker had led. In fact, there is on one side of the “Field Return of Field Officers of the Militia of Mifflin County,” dated May 10, 1791, where Bryson as lieutenant of Mifflin County had listed the elected militia officials, the notation, in different handwriting, that “the Commissions to W^m. Holt, David Walker and W^m. Wilson were made out February 17th 1792 by direction of the Governor.”⁴⁹ This document testifies to Samuel Bryson’s overturning of three militia elections and, then, seven months later, the governor’s overturning of Bryson’s decisions—despite the fact that it had been Bryson, operating as an officer of the state, who had been the subject of illegal attacks by the officers the governor now commissioned.

Much obviously had occurred in the intervening time; the remarkable change in the governor’s office implies that Mifflin now believed Bryson’s

conduct justified armed resistance by the people. Indeed, in the letter of commission to Walker, there is the rather remarkable statement—from the governor to a low-ranking backwoodsman—that the governor's office had “reason” to believe that Bryson's conduct derived from “a mistaken construction of the constitution.”⁵⁰ Governor Mifflin's review of the evidence had led him to try to ease out a properly commissioned judge at the behest of a “mob” and to give aid and comfort to those who had attacked that judge. By this time, too, the realization that “the people” may have had good reasons to rise up against Bryson had apparently led James McFarlan to resign from the office of county lieutenant. Given the appearance that McFarlan had used armed force to support the man who had overturned an election to make him a lieutenant colonel, McFarlan's continuance in that office would have been problematic. On February 6, 1792, the same day as the letter of commission to Walker, A. J. Dallas sent a letter to one Thomas Nesbit explaining that the 1790 Pennsylvania Constitution had “vested absolutely” the power of militia commissions in the governor and that Mifflin was directing Nesbit, as “Lieutenant of the County of Mifflin,” to commission William Hoalt [Holt] and William Wilson and recover the commissions from George Wilson and “[illegible] McFarling [McFarlan].”⁵¹

The executive branch, including Mifflin, had now decided to take the side of backwoodsmen, men whom State Attorney Clark had labeled *banditti*, against properly commissioned officers of the state. In essence, Mifflin had decided that matters in Mifflin County had reached a point, by September 1791, where resistance could be constitutionally justified. Samuel Bryson, however, could not have disagreed more. Like Beale, Bryson had not waited for events to overwhelm him. His attempts to strike before his enemies could carry the day illuminate the reality of the countervailing powers built into the system. In a letter to the governor dated March 26, 1792, Bryson noted that he had heard that the governor and attorney general had been “surprised at my conduct.” Bryson's letter makes clear that the judge believed that his actions after the riot had offended the governor.⁵²

Bryson, for all his apparent lack of social intelligence, did not miss the signs that something had gone wrong; he may have even realized that members of the executive and judicial branches wished him to leave office. The good judge, however, refused to fade into anyone's good night. He had, upon discovering that the warrants for Beale, the Wilsons, and others had not been issued, taken the lengthy trip from Mifflin County to Philadelphia. There he obtained warrants directly from Chief Justice McKean. He then hand-carried

the warrants back to Mifflin County and had the coroner serve them on the accused. It may be conjectured that he did not undertake this effort with grace; in his March 26 letter he attempted to lay aside a rumor that he had said that Governor Mifflin and the attorney general were conducting a "Sham Prosecution." Bryson, in the same letter, asked that the ringleaders be tried and then suggested that the governor might, at that time, show leniency to those convicted.

But by the time Bryson had moved to force the state government to live up to its own "black-letter law," others had begun to see political advantages in the situation. Mifflin found that he had a political fire in his own backyard. Bryson pointed out to Governor Mifflin that he (or other leaders in the East) might be receiving a false picture of what was going on in the backwoods.

I am well assured they [the leaders of the riots] have no idea of more Rioting, nor if they had[,] the Populus are daily forsaking them, although I find by Letters a different idea is held out in the city, nothing but Burning Jails & we expected the authors of such stuff behave very ill, and if we ever have any more you may find their encouragement must come from that Quarter. . . .

Bryson implicitly suggests that in terms of public opinion in southeastern Pennsylvania, some people (politicians it may be speculated) had attempted to paint the backwoods as being in a state of anarchy. Had these misrepresentations prevailed, the Mifflin administration may have been required to take steps against the very people who had so influenced the recent state constitutional convention—those who had supported the most republican provisions of the 1790 Constitution. As Joseph S. Foster has observed, the "whig" elements of southeastern Pennsylvania found it difficult to swallow the victory of "democratic" forces in the convention and believed the new government to be fatally flawed by "the absence of social discrimination."⁵³ Unnamed easterners may have depicted Mifflin as siding with the lowly agents of backwoods discord and anarchy. With the state a complex mixture of politicians who favored central authority and those who favored local privilege, Mifflin could easily have been pushed to choose one over the other. To avoid having his hand forced, the governor promoted the appearance that he was allowing the wheels of justice to grind impartially. He meanwhile avoided overt actions while gently tipping the scales of justice in favor of the backwoods "mob." If some in the East continued to seek, opportunistically,

advantage in the situation, he would allow them to hoist themselves on the person of Samuel Bryson.

Both a letter and an investigation rolled out. A. J. Dallas wrote to Bryson on April 10 that the governor had “directed” him to acknowledge the receipt of Bryson’s “letter of the 26th.” Secretary Dallas went on to suggest that the governor and attorney general had no wish to see the government “prostrated” by a “sham prosecution,” but wished judicial proceedings to be seen as moving deliberately and not due to “resentment” on Bryson’s part. Dallas continued that the governor had told him:

to inform you that having referred the Prosecution of the Rioters in Mifflin County to the Attorney General, he presumed there would be no personal interference on your part.

If that officer’s instructions had been neglected, he would no doubt have proceeded to furnish the neglect, but the information that has assured the Governor that before your warrants were executed, the ringleaders had in fact, been bound over to answer the charges against them.⁵⁴

The administration, and seemingly Mifflin himself, had moved to both assuage Bryson and upbraid him for his recent actions.

The investigation, however, indicated that the administration was mustering evidence against Bryson, even as it asked Bryson to allow the courts to move forward without the hint of spite and malice. Sometime earlier, the governor had requested John Oliver, Mifflin County’s state representative, to send him a report concerning the situation. In a report dated April 17, 1792, as the administration probably anticipated, Oliver stated that peace was impossible with Bryson in a position of authority. As Oliver noted, his findings could “afford you [Mifflin] little Pleasure in Reading.” Since two of the chief justice’s warrants had been defective, Bryson had responded to the delay by swearing out warrants to arrest “Seven or Eight Others.” Representative Oliver also reported that Judge Bryson and State Prosecutor Clark had been indicted for accepting bribes in regard to the felony case (that is, the attempt to influence the courts or the governor on behalf of William Patterson—the felon referred to in the September 17 affidavits and in the letter from Beale to the governor of the same date). At least as bad, by the standards of Mifflin County, were the actions by Bryson against one James Hurrett. Bryson had

ordered that Hurret—a militia officer from the previous year—have his goods seized and sold on grounds that he, while ill, had not turned out his militia battalion on the proper day. Oliver also stated that Bryson might use his judicial authority to stay the governor's commissioning of the militia officers. He then noted that Samuel Bryson's resignation as county lieutenant had not assuaged the enmity of "the people," and that "the mans conduct Seems calculated to Inflame the Minds of the People Rather than conciliate their Affections." Oliver's report concluded with a rather ominous statement, and given events, a warning that should probably be judged as credible: "be assured the People of Mifflin are not in a Disposition of Mind to be Dragooned or terrified Into Submission to W^m [sic] Bryson." Oliver noted that he saw no "Prospect of Reconciliation" except Bryson's resignation. But Oliver also echoed Bryson's warning about attempts to worsen the situation by some of those acting in the eastern part of the state, saying that "there are proposals made by Gentlemen in Your Part of the State to Individuals Here In order to Avail themselves of the unhappy Disputes that Subsist Among us."⁵⁵

Oliver's statement provides additional evidence that eastern groups were attempting to utilize the riots for their own purposes and suggests that some, but not all, eastern leaders were unwilling to accept the rise of the West. Certainly the reductionism of dividing a state as complex as Pennsylvania into "elites" and "the common people" poses dangers. Fault lines ran in all directions, not just horizontally. In any instance, the governor appears to have been caught between his desire to stop or limit the prosecution of the Mifflin County rioters and potential charges that he was mollicoddling vile and violent backwoodsmen.

By April 1792, Samuel Bryson's psychological state also began to play a role. The judge, not without reason, felt he was under siege. Ten days after Oliver's report, Bryson sent a long, rambling, and, at times, indecipherable letter to the governor. Bryson's handwriting, which had deteriorated since his March 26 letter, seems to show the strain of the situation. The letter suggests that, whatever the truth of the situation, Bryson had convinced himself that he had acted to keep those lacking the requisite virtues from heading militias. The "Ringleaders" and the militia heads, he stated, were not of "character" sufficient to their posts. In two different places he emphasized that his motivation had been to prevent people of "improper Character" from assuming militia offices. He went on to suggest that the governor was misinformed regarding whether the "Ringleaders" had actually been bound by the courts;

"it is like so many other things in this business, a very [soft?] one, for they were not . . . taken [.]” But among the impetuous tumble of words, the letter reveals that Bryson now had five civil suits filed against him.⁵⁶

The core of Bryson's letter unintentionally affirms and clarifies what Representative Oliver had already stated. The source of the petition to suspend Bryson and subject him to impeachment had been Mifflin County's September 1791 grand jury. The petition had gone to the state assembly as well as to the governor. Almost certainly "the petitions" to remove Bryson referred to in Beale's letter of September 17 and the "charges" which A. J. Dallas had referred to Attorney General Ingersoll on January 4, 1792 came out of the September grand jury. The grand jury apparently had also been on the verge of indicting State Attorney John Clark when he adjourned the session, so he had reason, beyond simply calming the situation, to shut it down. Technically, the grand jury did not indict Clark and Bryson because the jurors acted after they had been dismissed. Nevertheless, Oliver reported the indictments as though they had actually been filed. Clark had, understandably, failed to notify Mifflin of the entire story. Bryson, who by now was seeing plots in every direction, speculated that attorney William Sterrett prompted the actions of the runaway jury. Finally, Bryson referred to "Clubs" associated with the leader of the Penn's Valley militia (the fourth hostile militia to arrive) and concluded that the governor would never have commissioned "them" had he been aware of all the facts.⁵⁷

Samuel Bryson's letter of April 27 reveals a man firm in his own righteousness, defying his enemies and caught in the grasp of strong emotions. The intersection of Bryson's psychology and a government seeking to ground itself in impartial law kept the pot roiling. In a government open to appeals by individuals, the relentlessness with which Bryson pursued his rights stripped the governor of any shelter that delay could offer him. Short of an outright denial of Bryson's rights, the government had to offer him due process; the governor could not stop Bryson from using the court system. By June, when the Supreme Court arrived in Mifflin County while riding the circuit, Bryson had ten warrants sworn out. Chief Justice McKean, despite his ability to drag his feet, could not stop the process from moving forward. Of the ten warrants, four (those against Thomas Beale, William Sterrett, George Wilson, and William Wilson) were found to be "true bills." Beale, Sterrett, and William Wilson were either found guilty or pled guilty on charges of rioting. George Wilson was apparently charged and convicted only for his assault on Bryson.⁵⁸ Though Bryson reported to the governor that the four

made “very light” of the fines, “being flattered with an immediate remission,” the fines had not yet been remitted. The McKean-led Supreme Court decamped before a grand jury could make several presentments regarding the riots. Attorney General Ingersoll delayed the presentments until the next court.⁵⁹

A year later, in April 1793, the governor rescinded the fines owed by Beale, Sterrett, and the Wilsons upon receiving their apologies for misconduct.⁶⁰ As to the later court, no evidence exists that the grand jury presentments were ever made or, if made, that trials or pleas were ever held. The complete absence of later records suggests that everybody but Bryson had had enough. One may hypothesize that, given the Mifflin administration’s views, Attorney General Ingersoll never allowed the later presentments to see the light of day. If so, then the Mifflin administration continued to walk a narrow path which, while bending in favor of the rioters, avoided comment on any unusual “tenderness” toward them.

The denouement was perhaps not what Bryson wanted. Despite his statements regarding clemency to the rioters, he had been relentless in pursuit of vindication. His vindication, however, was limited to the bare scraps of satisfaction that the judicial system offered. He died in 1799 and except for references in local and regional histories of the 1800s, disappeared from history. The populace remained committed to their original leaders, electing William Wilson and William Sterrett to the post of sheriff. William Wilson, in fact, was elected sheriff before the governor had rescinded his fines, following his brother directly into office.⁶¹ Since the governor, himself, had to commission sheriffs, Mifflin ratified Wilson’s election while he was still under court sentence for rioting against the state. Oliver, Walker, and Beale appear to have had townships named after them.⁶² And, perhaps equally displeasing to Bryson, the governor promoted William Holt to a higher militia post while Bryson was still pursuing the “ringleaders.”⁶³

A Riot of Perceptions

To appreciate the importance of the Lewistown riots, we must understand the transactions between real people—pulled taut between conflicting psyches, desires, emotions, duties and belief systems, shaped by personal projections, group customs, fears, and traditions, and accompanied by attempts to evaluate pragmatically the situation. Beale, Bryson, Oliver, the marching militias and their leaders, Mifflin, McKean, Ingersoll, Dallas, and

the unnamed eastern opposition leaders all had to undertake transactions with each other or face gridlock. It may be trite, but not all could win, at least not all could win as much as they wanted. Yet, no one, not even Bryson, lost totally—the evolving system within Pennsylvania allowed all sides partial victories. Of the four people (Mifflin, McKean, Bryson, and Beale) who had the greatest impact on events, each demonstrated what the socio-political system would or would not allow in 1791 and 1792. Mifflin, as governor and an experienced leader, had to deal with a complex of issues. As indicated above, the outcome of a fight with the military forces of Mifflin County might have been prohibitively expensive and could discredit the new state government in a twinkling. But Mifflin had to work through his own differing, even conflicting, perceptions of what events meant. At the distance of two centuries, the reports from John Clark and the Carlisle source barely qualify the riots to be called “riots.” In fact, the disturbances were remarkable for what did not happen. Little if any destruction of property occurred. If there were injuries beyond Bryson’s kicked leg, they were minor. One person apparently died—but only because he got drunk and fell into a pond. The case could be made that Mifflin overreacted given the little damage and the limited violence, even as represented in these two somewhat biased reports. On the other hand, Mifflin, an experienced revolutionary and inheritor of British governmental practices, would have been hard pressed *not* to associate riots against state officials with riots against the state. Moreover, the rioters used the signs and slogans that the revolutionaries of 1776 had used to overthrow an empire. The governor would have needed a Solomonic perspective not to take alarm at the first reports.

Governments and society, however, were trending toward less personal interaction. Mifflin himself reflected an ethos in transition. While his first responses were entirely consistent with the traditional view that governments were based largely on personal relationships between the rulers and the ruled, his later actions, after he realized that State Attorney Clark and Judge Smith had rendered incomplete reports and that Bryson and McFarlan may have been knaves, were consistent with a view that the people had the right to resist unreasonable or corrupt uses of official discretion.

To take one step back, Mifflin’s actions reflected the transitional *mentalité* of the period. The Revolution had broadened the acceptable means and goals of resistance. Mifflin’s validation of the mob’s actions had been presaged by his votes in the 1789–1790 State Constitutional Convention. There, during debates over whether to limit the right of resistance to “peaceable and

orderly" means, Mifflin had broken with his whiggish colleagues, voting to allow the people to resist "in such manner as they may think proper." In short, he had knowingly endorsed possible violence as a legitimate means by which the people could "alter, reform or abolish their government."⁶⁴ And when, in Mifflin County, the people had exercised the rights for which he had voted, he found ways to uphold them. Mifflin's actions confirmed David Ramsey's views that in the Revolution, the people were "changed from subjects to citizens."⁶⁵ Somewhere in Thomas Mifflin, the ardor and ideals of the Revolution continued to smolder.

But Mifflin's actions also reflected the growing reality of politics in a democratic state. On one hand, he could have, both practically and ideologically, openly favored the rioters and their leaders—and by implication the forces of western democracy. On the other hand, he had to respect those forces centered in the East who favored a more traditional socio-political order and who were searching for a means to undermine the Mifflin regime—and by implication undo the recent constitutional triumph of western and other democratizers. On the most basic level, Mifflin could easily have become a propaganda target. He could have been charged as being pusillanimous in the face of anarchy or even as someone aiding and abetting those who had voted against social discrimination. Mifflin trimmed his course and, in the long run, helped save the "democratic" intent of the 1790 Pennsylvania Constitution. That Mifflin created the perception that he was listening to the traditionalists even as his views evolved to favor the rioters, suggests a real political dexterity. Mifflin, using a schema that paralleled *Federalist* no. 10, achieved consensus, not by agreement, but by balance.

Samuel Bryson, on the other hand, represented an older, more rigid, tradition. His attempt to exercise the prerogatives of a "gentleman" among his "lessers" ran afoul of what the people of Mifflin County had come to view as the "right order" between the governed and governors. Bryson set off the riots by attempting to exercise powers traditionally held by "the few" in the midst of a region dominated by western democrats. Moreover, if Beale's and Oliver's letters and the September 17 affidavits may be trusted, Bryson also expected a certain level of "class" solidarity from the illustrious gentlemen of eastern Pennsylvania. Bryson, however, misjudged those above him. His view of place and status and the use of the prerogative traditionally executed by "the few" gained support among only "a few" eastern leaders.

Beale, on the other hand, correctly perceived the governor's psyche and the political attitudes of much of the state. Beale had been exposed to both

during his service in state government and in the long debates that created the new Pennsylvania constitution. While it appears unlikely that Mifflin had much reason to notice the Juniata delegate, Beale could not have failed to observe the convention's presiding officer. Beale's letter of September 17, 1791, demonstrated that he well understood that Mifflin could react in ways that would spend much blood and money. The same letter, however, reveals that Beale had judged, correctly as it turned out, that Mifflin could be swayed to support a more democratic viewpoint if it was couched in republican terms. Beale also correctly judged that the passage of time would bring information to Mifflin that the governor could not ignore. Beale understood the *mentalité* of the times and the mental apparatus of Governor Mifflin. Not even Beale, however, could have anticipated Bryson's relentlessness or the threat posed by the opposition eastern leaders.

While Beale and Bryson remained steadfast in their socio-political views and Mifflin continued his movement toward a "republican" perspective, Chief Justice Thomas McKean, who, as late as September 1791 had been resolute in asserting a more traditional "whig" viewpoint, now began his journey toward republicanism.⁶⁶ McKean clearly perceived something fundamental about the crisis in Mifflin County. Whether this fundamental was his political future and the realization that popular politics had won or whether it had to do with democracy and the rights of the people, McKean, by delaying the warrants for the "ringleaders," limiting the trials to the four most visible conspirators, and then ignoring other presentments, turned his back on Bryson's views. It would have been easy to support Samuel Bryson against his enemies and set precedents regarding the power of the new state government. McKean, however, chose to drag a foot for the emerging democratic view. Too much could be made of McKean's actions, but the fact that he did not use these trials to establish a government that could dominate the common citizen says a great deal about the chief justice's political perceptions. While Governor Mifflin showed enormous political acumen, the growing acceptance of western democracy appears most clearly in the actions of McKean.

The decisions of Mifflin, McKean, Dallas, and Ingersoll in 1791-1792 indicate that what would eventually be called "Jeffersonian Democracy" had already begun to emerge, complete with accommodations made by formally staunch defenders of social division. But the Lewistown riots also demonstrate why government would not become completely "democratic." Despite McKean's (and probably Ingersoll's) determined foot dragging, Bryson did

get his day in court. He did not obtain all that he wanted, but in a government with broad access to the judicial system, Bryson's warrants and suits could not be dismissed out of hand. The government had shifted ever more toward procedure and away from personalities. As Joseph Strayer has noted, evolution of the modern state has involved movement from governance by families, lordships, communities, and religious groups to reliance on impersonal organizations of the state.⁶⁷ As the modern state emerged, a bloc of one could demand satisfaction against the largest majority. Moreover, with the state constitution sharply limiting the right of the judicial prerogative, even a chief justice could do only so much. In delicious irony, Bryson's day in court reflected a triumph of rights over both democracy and Bryson's own traditional sense of order.

The fact that the humblest participants in the polity could, and did, sue both the great and the representatives of the majority, also argues against the concept of a deferential society. The emerging debate over the once entrenched idea of a "deferential society" suggests that deference may not have been as common as once thought—if indeed such existed in the early national period. Michael Zuckerman has found that the idea of deference "decayed" from the beginning of the Quaker colony and there appears every reason to believe that, in this section of Pennsylvania's periphery, hostility to hierarchy had become endemic.⁶⁸ The disputes, adaptations, and maneuvers associated with the Lewistown riots do not support the idea of a deferential society; they support a notion of hostility against those who believed in such. If indeed subjects had become citizens, then the residents of the Juniata Valley, accustomed to self-governance and autonomy were, *a priori*, potential dissenters against centralization and hierarchy. In fact, perhaps the presence of functioning state authority was perceived as an invasion—at least when mobilized by Bryson's heavy-handed actions. The shouts of "Liberty and Death" and papers signed "The People" harkened back to the Revolution. The rioters certainly cared not a fig about the status of those they rioted against. The leaders they favored, Walker, Holt, McClelland, and the Wilsons, counted for little beyond the borders of Mifflin County. Beale, a politician who had been significant in state affairs in the late 1780's and early 1790's, did not come close to having the cachet of former presidents of the United States Congress such as Mifflin and McKean. Yet Beale had no trouble at all in standing up to—even treating with disdain—a governor who had also been a Revolutionary War general, member of Washington's staff, a signer of the U.S. Constitution, and presiding officer of the Pennsylvania

Constitutional Convention. Nor do the riots present evidence that most members of the so-called elite sought to impose sanctions in support of a deferential society. Secretary Dallas, Attorney General Ingersoll, and Chief Justice McKean had little trouble bending the law to allow members of the “lesser sort” to have justice beyond the law.

When the entirety of the Lewistown riots is examined, there is little evidence to support the deferential heuristic and much that indicates an increasingly accepted, if still partially uncoded, heuristic of equality. It calls into question the use of the term “elites” to group those who occupy high political office. One is hard pressed to see, on the many issues raised by the Lewistown riots, how such groupings can be justified. The divisions between people of similar socio-economic status and the alliances between those who had differing socio-economic status suggest that the use of the term “elites” to signify a generic group positioned high in the socio-political system is *ad hominem* in nature and has an aura of tautology. Office-holders are said to have belonged to “elites” because, apparently, they held high public office. Perhaps we need to be more precise in defining “elites” or even do away with the semantic altogether in favor of a term more open to definition.

Conclusion

At the end we are left with “riots” that occurred because Samuel Bryson, with exalted notions of his status and a belief that the “better” class had a tangible and cohesive set of perceptions, attempted to deny those he believed to be of the “lesser” sort their offices, their pride, and their traditional sense of how society should be ordered. The people so denied rose up, led by those they had selected to lead them, entwining their traditions with the codes learned from the Revolution, forcing Bryson from his position as county lieutenant and attacking his judgeship. The region’s accepted leaders spearheaded the defense of its citizens, appealing to the tenets of the Revolution. Those associated with Bryson’s elitism, Clark and McFarlan, fell into difficulties. After a first harsh reaction by a governor who thought he faced a potential civil war, the executive branch maneuvered to support those exercising the right to resist. Alliances formed between the distant high and mighty and the nearby low and mean. The aggrieved judge fought back by falling back, not on rights granted by status and position, but on the bare legal rights offered to most members of the polity. The “whiggish” Chief Justice, Thomas McKean,

made it difficult for Bryson to vindicate himself in defiance of the populace. The governor, however, realizing that open support for "the mob" left him open to political attack from unreconstructed whigs, found it expedient to maintain a public neutrality while working steadily to undercut Bryson. The riots came to an end with Bryson winning a hollow victory in court, Ingersoll and McKean apparently doing all they could to keep Bryson from further victories, and the governor granting a remission of the fines. Those who led the uprising were elected (or in the case of Holt, promoted) to higher positions.

Some historians have found sharp and lasting divisions between the so-called "elites" and the common folk in Pennsylvania. Terry Bouton, for instance, has argued that almost all members of the government stood on one side of a great divide promoting their own interests and oppressing the common rural folk who lived on the other side.⁶⁹ The presence in Pennsylvania history of the Paxton Boys, the Whiskey Rebels, and Fries Rebellion has been used to highlight such a division. Similar conclusions have been reached concerning other late colonial/early national conflicts in other colonies and states. Barbara Karsky, however, has made a telling point: referring to David Szatmary's discussion of Shays' Rebellion, she notes: "Szatmary's vision of subsistence agriculture lacks an adequate margin for manoeuvring. . . ."⁷⁰ Although Karsky focuses on economic maneuvers, the same could be said of political maneuvers. It is too easy to miss the interplay between conflict and consensus and institutional imperatives, an interplay that allowed crises to be defused.

A close scrutiny of the Lewistown riots suggests that bipolar interpretations may miss the nuanced balancing that occurred as a day-to-day matter in Pennsylvania; the fact that most desired to live without conflict and in concert; and the reality that a few leaders could easily determine whether a crisis deepened or events moved toward a *modus vivendi*. Although this account may seem to support the interpretations of Gordon Wood and Pauline Maier, such an assumption is erroneous.⁷¹ Maier and Wood do not adequately approach the contingent, indeed, the fragile nature of a riot's course. Their formulations do not sufficiently take into account the importance of individuals, in all their glory, taking action in reaction to other individuals. Had Mifflin been stiff-necked enough to waste money and lives in making an example of the rioters, had Beale misjudged or ignored the governor, had McKean decided to stand on the letter of the law (or on his views of social distinction), the results could have been dramatically different and much more conflictive. The Lewistown riots appear to be more appropriately

studied by analysis of leadership and cultural norms than by analysis of class and other group behaviors. Indeed, one may well wonder whether the crisis over the excise tax would have erupted in the Whiskey Rebellion had Mifflin and McKean held the federal authority rather than Washington and Hamilton.

NOTES

1. This paper owes a great deal to a great many people, including the almost infinite patience of those who work in the State Archives of Pennsylvania and the County Courthouse of Mifflin County Pennsylvania. A former version of this paper was presented at the 2001 annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association. Four people stand out in particular for the completion of this lengthy project: William Pencak, former editor of *Pennsylvania History*, who lent encouragement and good spirits; Gail Chiriani, my former secretary at Penn State-Lehigh Valley who suffered patiently through innumerable early drafts of this paper; Richard Law of Alvernia College whose self-sacrifice and collegiality brought the disparate parts of this paper under literate control; and, Rosalind Hyman for her love, encouragement and, to be truthful, her indefatigability as we stalked errant pieces of paper through dusty and dank archives throughout the state. Without her, this could not have been possible.
2. Legislative Communications from the Governor to both Houses of the Legislature, Sept. 21, 1791. Record Group 26, Records of Department of State, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Executive Correspondence [Mifflin Administration], Letter Book and Rough Copies [hereafter cited as Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives]. On microfilm, Reading Room, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.
There is no evidence that the fact the riots occurred in his namesake county had any influence on the governor's actions, then or later.
3. Richard D. Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (2003): 18.
4. For that matter, even the temptation to reason by analogy from matters that did not result in armed confrontation, such as the political-religious divisions Owen Ireland and James Hutson have studied, can be avoided without having to risk the fallacy of counter-questions. See Owen S. Ireland, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics: Ratifying the Constitution in Pennsylvania* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995); James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1746–1770: The Movement for Royal Government and its Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Hutson, ed., *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999). As to the fallacies of counter-questions, see: David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), 28–31 and 255–259.
5. *The Federal Gazetteer and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* [Philadelphia], Sept. 23, 1791. On microfilm, Newspaper Room, Pennsylvania State Library, Harrisburg, PA. Judge Bryson's first name was not James, but Samuel. Several other sources (see below) referred to him incorrectly as William. Like

Bryson, Judges Beale, Brown, and Armstrong were well known in Mifflin County. Beale had served as a representative to the state assembly and had prevailed in a disputed election over who should represent the Mifflin region at the 1789–1790 state constitutional convention. Brown was a wealthy farmer and Beale's opponent in the election. Armstrong had served as a Revolutionary War general. Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1790, *Minutes of the Convention of Pennsylvania Which Commenced at Philadelphia, On Tuesday, the twenty-fourth Day of November, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Nine, for the Purpose of Reviewing, and If They See the Occasion, Altering and Amending the Constitution of this State*, [First Session] (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1790) [Charles Evans Index Number 22764], 4–5.

6. The route through the Long Narrows, an eleven-mile water gap cut by the Juniata River through three mountains, Shade, Blacklog, and Blue, was narrow, winding, and dangerous. News of the gathering would have taken several hours to reach Lewistown.
7. Walker is cited as being from “below Narrows and [illegible] Juniata” and Holt is cited as “above Narrows, Kishacoquillas [illegible].” Both were lieutenant colonels of the militia. See: Return of Field Officers of the Militia of Mifflin County from Sam^l Bryson the Lieutenant, May 10, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives. However, in the basement of the Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, there are papers from the September 1791 Quarter Sessions of Huntingdon County that detail seven charges of assault, battery, and rioting against David Walker. These cases, nos. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25, would place Walker at the far end of the Tuscarora Valley in August 1791. If so, Walker lived 40 miles (or almost two days' ride) from Lewistown. The charges against Walker in Huntingdon County have little to do with the riots in Lewistown.
8. The fourth militia came from Penn's Valley, which lay many miles away across the tangled uplift known as the Seven Mountains, an uplift that effectively slows passage between the watershed of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River to the north and that of the Juniata Valley. The Return of Field Officers, May 10, 1791, indicates that an Andrew Gregg had been elected to head the unit, but Robert McClelland, the second-in-command, apparently led the militia at the time of the riot.
9. *Federal Gazetteer*, Sept. 26, 1791. The narrative that follows is based on the published Clark and Carlisle accounts.
10. Unfortunately, there appears to be no way to determine the number of rioters. As will be seen, below, members of four different militias were on hand. We do know that nearly 1,000 people were willing to sign a petition to have Bryson removed—or almost half of the number of adult males over 16 recorded in the 1790 Census. Numbers taken from University of Virginia, Fisher Library web site: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/census/cen.pl> accessed January 13, 2004.
11. At this point, the Carlisle source claims, four armed men surrounded the sheriff, George Wilson, a “*delusive* imprisonment” [emphasis added] that “prohibited” “all intercourse of communication.” Sheriff Wilson's situation was anomalous. Because of his brother's leadership of the mob, people assumed George was involved. Yet, the evidence that the sheriff had acted in collusion with his brother is simply missing from available records. Moreover, when court proceedings regarding the riots were conducted, George Wilson was not named as a conspirator. Bryson, however, had named George Wilson as a legitimate militia head.
12. *Federal Gazetteer*, Sept. 23, 1791, Sept. 26, 1791.

13. Ibid.
14. Return of Field Officers, n. 7, above.
15. This seems particularly likely since the two judges (Armstrong and Brown) who lived in the Kishacoquillas Valley were well known. If they had summoned McFarlan, he would have stated that he had come under their authority. No evidence exists that Bryson sent for them.
16. Tim H. Blessing, "The American Revolution in the Upper Juniata Valley," *Beyond Philadelphia: The American Revolution in the Pennsylvania Hinterland*, ed. John B. Frantz and William Pencak (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998), 157–58.
17. Ibid., *passim*.
18. Glenn Gingerich and Anne Kreider, *Amish and Mennonite Genealogy* (Philadelphia: Campion Press, 1986), xxi–xxii. This retrograde movement needs further investigation, particularly as this is the only known movement into the Juniata Valley from the west. Gingerich and Kreider's work is exhaustive in terms of individual movements, but it fails to explain why these pietists made this move.
19. See Tim Harry Blessing, "The Development of a Dysfunctional Society: The Systems of Pennsylvania's Juniata Valley, 1740–1985" (Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1989), 45–53.
20. Ibid., 48–53, 208–16.
21. U. J. Jones, *History of the Early Settlement of the Juniata Valley Embracing an Account of the Early Pioneers . . .* (Altoona, PA: Hoenstine Library, 1940), 252–57, traces an attempted Juniata Valley attack on the Tory/Native American center at Kittanning, PA, several days' travel from the Juniata Valley. This attack was led by Captain Thomas Blair of Path Valley (the valley immediately south of the Tuscarora Valley).
22. Ibid., 250–65.
23. Blessing, "Revolution," 167–68.
24. Ibid.
25. State of Pennsylvania, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2nd ser., ed. John B. Linn and William H. Egle (Harrisburg: Clarence M. Busch, 1896), 3: 658–63, 671–79, 696–97.
26. This builds on the work of Joseph S. Foster, "The Politics Ideology: The Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1789–1790," *Pennsylvania History* 59 (1992): 122–44. See graphs following p. 144 in particular. Although Foster could group only 61 of the 70 delegates, hierarchical cluster analysis (SPSS Base 10.0) applied to different groups of votes allowed all delegates to be placed within political groupings.
27. Tim H. Blessing, "The West Flows East: the Dominance of "the West" in Pennsylvania's 1789–1790 Constitutional Convention" (paper presented, annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, Harrisburg, PA, October 24, 2003); Blessing, "Strangers in a Disordered Land: The Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1789–1790" (paper presented, annual meeting of the Society for the Historians of the Early Republic, Columbus, OH, July 19, 2003). Papers in possession of the author, Tim H. Blessing, Alvernia College, Reading, PA 19607.
28. *Minutes of the First Session of the Ninth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania . . . One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty Four* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1794); *Minutes of the Second Session of the Ninth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania . . . One Thousand Seven Hundred*

and Eighty Four (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1795); *Minutes of the First Session of the Twelfth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania . . . One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty Seven* (Philadelphia: Hall and Sellers, 1797); *Minutes of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention*. This is a subject that needs greater and more precise exploration. But of the minutes read, there appears to be a *prima facie* validity to the concept that during this period groups who strongly opposed each other used similar terms in similar ways.

29. The concept of "right order" in society is a venerable one, dating back at least to the time of Augustine. It suggests that for society to be well-governed and at peace that it had to be in coordination (and perhaps in imitation) of God's heavenly kingdom. To do otherwise, it seemed to many, invited chaos and anarchy. George Duby has traced the idea of "right order" back to the time of Gregory the Great (590–604) and concludes that it found its ultimate expression in the thought of two prelates, Adelbaro of Laons and Gerard of Cambrai, in the early 11th century. The concept of "right order" held that people of different respectabilities/levels of illumination should have the proper relationship with each other, that the world is divided by universal rules regarding who should have what level of responsibility and how those people should act. Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); "The Field of Inquiry" and Chapter 1–4 are particularly useful. See also: Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy. The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Ute Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarch from the Ninth to the Twelfth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–85* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Sverre Bagge, *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography: C. 950–1150*, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, 103 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002). For a discussion of how deeply this concept had penetrated even the lower literate layers by the Late Middle Ages, see A. V. C. Schmidt, introduction to William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, trans. A.V.C Schmidt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), particularly pages xvii–xxv. This concept seems particularly useful for the Revolutionary/early national periods of American history since, as the 1789–1790 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention well demonstrated, the crux of disputes often rested on exactly how society and polity should be interrelated.
30. Letter from Thomas Beale, Esq. of the County of Mifflin to the Governor, Sept. 17, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
31. Surviving Juniata Valley papers give considerable attention to militia matters—reprinting militia laws, commenting on militia elections, publicizing militia meetings, and supporting militia recruitment—and it is clear from the sheer volume of printed matter on militia activities that these were matters of considerable importance to the readers of the papers. See, for instance, copies of the *Huntingdon Gazette* for 1807 (microfilm, Juniata College Library, Huntingdon, PA). Of the fifty-two issues that year, twenty-one issues carried official notices of militia activities and elections. In the June 25 issue, the *Gazette* carried two columns devoted solely to militia returns. The front pages of the June 11, June 18, June 25, July 2, and July 9 issues, each six columns wide, were devoted to reprinting the militia law and subsequent amendments.
32. Beale to Mifflin, Sept. 17, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.

33. Witness the debate in the 1789–1790 Pennsylvania Constitutional convention over the bounds of the right of resistance. Thomas McKean proposed that this right be limited to peaceful resistance with the phrase “in a peaceful and orderly way.” He was overridden decisively, 9–51. Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1790, *Minutes of the Grand Committee of the Whole Convention of Pennsylvania Which Commenced at Philadelphia, On Tuesday, the twenty-fourth Day of November, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Nine, for the Purpose of Reviewing, and If They See the Occasion, Altering and Amending the Constitution of this State* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1790), Jan. 14, 1790, [Charles Evans Index Number 22766], 18–25.
34. Beale to Mifflin, Sept. 17, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives. Pennsylvania House of Representatives, *Journal of the first session of the second House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which commenced at Philadelphia, on Tuesday, the sixth day of December, in this year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey and Thomas Lang, 1792), 63.
35. *Minutes of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention*, 43; *Minutes of the Grand Committee*, 54–58. The key motion to limit judicial prerogatives was introduced by Thomas Ross on Jan. 20, 1790. Despite intense debate the amendment carried 42–21, with Thomas Beale and Thomas Mifflin voting in favor and Thomas McKean voting against.
36. There are two documents entitled Deposition of Samuel Jackson respecting the conduct of Judge Bryson, dated Sept. 17, 1791, sworn before two different magistrates; there is also a Deposition of William Sterrett respecting the conduct of Judge Bryson, Sept. 17, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
I have been unable to locate any detail regarding the charges or the lawsuits beyond that indicated in the correspondence and affidavit.
37. Where Beale had every reason, based on his time in the legislature and his attendance at the 1789–1790 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, to believe that he could have some influence with Governor Mifflin, it might reasonably be asked whether Bryson really believed he also had some influence. On the one hand, this may have been a bluff. On the other hand, Bryson had been a colonel in the Continental Army and Mifflin and Bryson may have known each other. In addition, Bryson had married into the Harris family (founders of Harrisburg and Mifflintown) and may have thought his connection to one of the state’s leading families would assure him a sympathetic hearing.
38. See, for instance, David R. Caruso, John D. Mayer, and Peter Salovey, “Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Leadership,” in *Multiple Intelligences and Leadership*, ed. Ronald Riggio, Susan Murphy, and Francis J. Pirozzolo (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), 55–74. Suffice it to say that Caruso et al. would not have placed Bryson high on their varying axes of emotional intelligence.
39. Thomas Mifflin to Thomas Smith, Esq. President &c., Sept. 22, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
40. It is impossible to tell if Sheriff Wilson had communicated with the governor. It appears unlikely though since Mifflin notes that he has the satisfaction “to understand that the opportunity which had been afforded for serious reflection, had made you sensible of your error.” The use of the word “understand” suggests that information concerning the sheriff’s state of mind probably came from

someone other than Wilson. Perhaps this understanding came from either Clark's or Smith's report or both. The "opportunity which had been afforded for serious reflection" may well stem from the sheriff's stay in jail and his refusal to be freed illegally. Thomas Mifflin to George Wilson, Sept. 22, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.

41. Governor Thomas Mifflin to James W. McFarland, Esq., Lieutenant of the County of Mifflin, Sept. 23, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives. This document has suffered significant water damage, but its intent is clear.
42. See the reference to Bryson's apparent resignation in John Oliver to Thomas Mifflin, April 17, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
43. In fact, in Mifflin's September 21st address to the Senate and House of Pennsylvania, he tied the riots, indirectly, to ongoing tensions between Huntingdon and Mifflin counties regarding a border dispute. He appears to have believed that the riots were at least influenced by an "air" of general hostility in the region. Such a perception would have, at least initially, led him to regard the attempt to remove Bryson as one in a string of difficulties; of this perception he would soon be disabused.
44. Thomas Beale, Esq. of the County of Mifflin to the Governor Thomas Mifflin, Dec. 3, 1791, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
45. Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 2:117, 129-31.
46. The 1790 Pennsylvania constitution made the governor's secretary a somewhat independent official who the governor had to employ, but who could be summoned to testify before the legislature without the governor invoking executive authority. See: Pennsylvania Constitution [1790], Article 2, Section 15.
47. Secretary A. J. Dallas to Jared Ingersoll Esquire Attorney General, Jan. 11, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives. For some indication of the nature of the petition, see Pennsylvania House of Representatives, *Journal first session second house*, 101.
48. Secretary A. J. Dallas to David Walker, Esq. of Mifflin County, Feb. 6, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
49. See n. 7.
50. Secretary A. J. Dallas to David Walker, Esq. of Mifflin County, Feb. 6, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
51. Secretary to Thomas Nesbitt, Esq. Lieutenant of the County of Mifflin, Feb. 6, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
52. Samuel Bryson to Gov. Mifflin, March 26, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
53. Foster, "The Politics of Ideology," 139. If some leaders had a vested interest in discrediting the more democratic elements on or near the frontier, then the question naturally occurs as to whether the situations that produced the Whiskey and Fries rebellions may have been exaggerated for similar purposes.
54. A. J. Dallas to Samuel Bryson, Esq., April 10, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
55. Letter from John Oliver relative to the disturbances in Mifflin County, April 17, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
56. Samuel Bryson to Gov. Mifflin, April 27, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.

57. Were these clubs similar to the Democrat or Democratic-Republican Clubs that may have anticipated the Whiskey Rebellion? There is, at this point, no real evidence from which to decide. For suggestive parallels, see Jeffrey A. Davis, "Guarding the Republican Interest: The Western Pennsylvania Democratic Societies and the Excise Tax," *Pennsylvania History* 67 (2000): 43–62.
58. From Samuel Bryson Esq. an Associate Justice of the Common Pleas in Mifflin County, June 8, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
59. Ibid.
60. *Pennsylvania Archives, Executive Minutes*, ser. 9, 1:543, outlines the end of the controversy.
61. F. Ellis and A. N. Hungerford, eds., *History of that Part of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys, Embraced in the Counties of Mifflin, Juniata, Perry, Union and Snyder, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts, Peck & Richards, 1886), 457. That George Wilson had been in an ambiguous position since he kicked Bryson is clear. There is no evidence, though, that he had actually ceased being sheriff—despite the fact that Bryson's warrants were served by the coroner. The obvious approval of the people and the willingness of the governor to accept their choice—despite the trial—support the view that the people in general, the governor, and the attorney general had taken anti-Bryson positions. See also the indices for the Sheriff's Deed Book, "F," Mifflin County Court House, Lewistown, PA. There is some confusion as to how this book has been titled and filed. The Sheriff's Deed Book presently listed as "F" is actually the oldest, and has generally been filed as first in the row of Sheriff's Deed Books. The surest way to be certain that this is the correct book is to examine its dates: 1792–1852.
62. The townships of Walker and Beale are in present-day Juniata County—which was separated from Mifflin County four decades after the riot.
63. Mifflin County Commissions [illegible] Returns of Military Officers for the several Battalions in that County, July 11, 1792, Mifflin Correspondence, State Archives.
64. *Minutes of the Grand Committee*, 83.
65. David Ramsey quoted in Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 169.
66. See *Minutes of the Convention of Pennsylvania Which Commenced at Philadelphia, On Tuesday, the twenty-fourth Day of November, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Nine, for the Purpose of Reviewing, and If They See the Occasion, Altering and Amending the Constitution of this State, [Second Session]* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1790), *passim*. An examination of the individual motions indicates that, up until the end, McKean continued to put forward motions that would establish a society of social distinctions. Some of the motions were on items that had been voted down decisively earlier in the convention.
67. Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), *passim*, but note the introduction on p. 3.
68. Michael Zuckerman, "The Decay of Deference on the Provincial Periphery," *Early American Studies* 1, no. 2 (2003): 1–12. Zuckerman puts it succinctly: "When the 'oligarchs' failed to court the commoners, they discovered that ordinary folk did not merely suppose themselves important. They were important. They could vote, and they could vote a soi-distant grandee out of office if he disdained their interests" (p. 9). Zuckerman, "Tocqueville, Turner, and Turds: Four Stories of Manners in Early America," *Journal of American History* 85 (1998): 13–42.

69. For instance, Terry Bouton, in "No wonder the times were troublesome: The Origins of Fries Rebellion, 1783–1799," *Pennsylvania History* 67 (2000): 26, contends that "Over time, whole neighborhoods and *even entire county governments* [emphasis added] united in collective efforts to frustrate elite policies [regarding economics and their relationship to political efficacy.] See also, Bouton, "A Road Closed: Rural Insurgency in Post-Independence Pennsylvania," *Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 855–87. To a lesser extent, Thomas Slaughter's *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) makes the same argument, but with much less emphasis on a class context.
70. Barbara Karsky, "Agrarian Problems in the New Republic," *Transatlantica* (2/2002), accessed January 15, 2004 at <http://etudes.americaines.free.fr/TRANSATLANTICA/2/karsky.pdf>: 4; David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).
71. Pauline Maier, "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth Century America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 27 (1970): 3–35; Gordon S. Wood. "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 23 (1966): 635–642.

