Cultural Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania Politics

Interpretations of Pennsylvania politics have frequently stressed the cultural, ethnic, and religious sources of a series of eighteenth-century political controversies. Historians have seen the struggles of the 1750s as a conflict between Quakers and newly assertive Presbyterians, a conflict played out in the Revolution with a Presbyterian victory. In the Pennsylvania debates over a new national government in the 1780s, some historians have found a division between Calvinist and anti-Calvinist religious and ethnocultural groups. Other scholars interpret the rise of political parties in the 1790s, the development of the Democratic party, and the collapse of the Federalists within the context of a conflict among the Germans, new British immigrants, Presbyterians, and pacifist sectarians. But after the rise to power of the Jeffersonian Democrats in 1799, accounts of Pennsylvania politics turn starkly away from ethnocultural explanations. Pennsylvania politics are said to have become a great struggle for office, or a battle of personalities, or a competition for transportation and communication improvements, or a "game without rules." The most respected history of Jeffersonian Pennsylvania concludes that, "geographic, racial, and religious factors appear to have had little influence on party allegiances." The same author notes that


among Germans, for example, "there is no indication that cultural factors had any effect on their political leanings." He stresses that personal leadership influenced their political choices far more than cultural factors. The major study of the War of 1812 in Pennsylvania avoids any discussion of the Commonwealth's pacifist sectarians. Yet it seems unlikely that the cultural and religious bases of late eighteenth-century political rivalries could disappear so dramatically when Pennsylvania became a Jeffersonian commonwealth after 1799. Indeed, ethnocultural antagonisms continued and had much to do with the course of Pennsylvania politics after the Jeffersonians came to power.

The consensus about Pennsylvania politics in the Jeffersonian era emphasizes growing factionalism and competition for patronage among Pennsylvania Democrats. In the most commonly accepted narrative, Thomas McKean, who served for three terms as governor of the Commonwealth from 1799 to 1808, offended various factions within the Pennsylvania Democratic movement in administering the extensive appointments power of his office. This initial criticism of McKean's use of patronage was limited to Democrats of Philadelphia City and County, led by Michael Leib and the editor William Duane. Eventually this criticism spread to other sections of Pennsylvania. Although the Democrats who entered office pledged to make Pennsylvania's government more republican, McKean's conservatism soon had him at odds with the more radical members of the Democratic coalition. McKean himself had advocated revising the judicial system to make it more efficient and less expensive, but by 1803 it became clear that his antagonists had more far-reaching changes in mind. While McKean wished to preserve the authority of the courts and the dignity of the legal profession, his more radical Democratic adversaries attacked the bench and bar by demanding that justices of the peace—generally laymen—be given greater jurisdiction. They also advocated a system of arbitration to make Pennsylvania's citizens

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5 Pennsylvanians used a variety of names to designate political parties and factions in the early nineteenth century. I have chosen to use the word "Democrat" to designate the party also known as the "Republican," "Democratic-Republican," or "Jeffersonian Republican" party. Party names varied from county to county and election to election.
less dependent on lawyers. Pennsylvania Democrats soon plunged into a bitter and divisive controversy about judicial reform.

The quarrel forced McKean into an alliance with Pennsylvania's battered Federalists, who formed with him the nucleus of the "Quid" party. The Quids resisted radicalism and the demagogic appeals of McKean's critics. McKean had been easily re-elected governor in 1802, but during McKean's second administration tensions between the governor and his critics worsened. By 1805 McKean's foes tried to replace the Constitution of 1790 with a new document intended to give the Commonwealth's government a more popular tone. When the movement for a new constitution failed by the spring of 1805, McKean's Democratic party enemies decided to replace him by nominating Simon Snyder for governor in 1805. McKean survived both a close election and a subsequent impeachment effort. Throughout these political quarrels, McKean vetoed one proposal after another to reform the operations of state government. Legislative efforts to override McKean's vetoes usually failed, and the last years of his administration were filled with animosity, disappointing Thomas Jefferson and the national Democratic administration. The infighting ended in 1808, when the Democrats nominated and elected Snyder governor. The new administration seems not to have followed through on the political agenda of the reformers; instead, it devoted its attention to developing corporations to improve the transportation and communication systems of the Commonwealth and to the growing threat of war with Britain. The movement to democratize Pennsylvania government faded.

Why then had so little issued from the hopeful campaign to implement true Jeffersonian democracy in the Commonwealth? Why had the struggles to reform the constitution and to oust McKean led

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6 Champions of constitutional reform wanted to trim the power of the governor and Pennsylvania Senate, institute popular election of justices of the peace, limit the terms of militia officers, county officers and judges, strip the governor of his power to choose sheriffs, impose restrictions on changing state officials' salaries, and provide for a regular decennial convention to revise the state constitution. See William Duane, Experience, the First Test of Government (Philadelphia, 1806).

7 Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, May 11, 1805, Logan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania [hereafter, HSP]; Thomas Jefferson to Caesar Rodney, October 23, 1805, Gratz Collection, Old Congress, HSP.
nowhere? Why were the opponents of reform able to resist plans to transform Pennsylvania into a more republican society? Certainly, the popularity and political influence of persons who came to McKean’s aid cannot be discounted. And the bitter personal rivalries between Philadelphia’s Democratic leaders and other politicians were clearly destructive of a populist challenge to McKean and the alliance of moderate Democrats and Quids. But more fundamental causes brought the failure of reform. Voters feared the radicalism of McKean’s opponents. The radical Jeffersonians were perceived as threatening cultural values dear to some of the Commonwealth’s more important ethnic and religious subcultures. McKean’s success in keeping hold of his office and resisting radical judicial innovation owed much to his sensitivity to the felt needs of diverse Pennsylvanians to preserve and enhance their ways of life. McKean was able to reassure members of these ethnic and religious communities that he would protect their distinctive practices from the assaults of radical ideologues whose programs threatened to homogenize the Commonwealth.

The oldest of these communities were pacifists: Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, Moravians, German Baptists, and Schwenkfelders. In the aftermath of the American Revolution in which many of them refused to bear arms or cooperate with the Commonwealth’s militia system, these “defenseless Christians” had been harassed and ridiculed for their non-cooperation. Although some of them did not vote, by 1800 enough members of these pacifist sects did vote, and the group gained a significant influence, especially in southeastern Pennsylvania. The second subculture, sometimes overlapping the first, was the German-speaking community. Substantial numbers of Pennsylvanians continued to speak and understand only the German language. They hoped to continue using their mother tongue; they also wanted to be represented in local government by persons who could give them access to the public business in their native language. German speakers were suspicious of those who might try to coerce them into abandoning their language. A third and much smaller subculture were the “new Irish” who had come to America since independence. Many were filled with hatred of England for its suppression of the Irish Revolution of 1798. These new Irishmen were often poor; many worked as day laborers on canal and road construction projects. Unlike the large numbers of descendants of Ulster Protestants in Pennsylvania, the new Irish were often Roman Catholic. Various of the political
issues of the McKean administration touched each of these subcultures and built support for it.

The best known debate of the McKean administration concerned judicial reform. Thomas McKean, who had served as the Chief Justice of the Commonwealth from 1777 to 1799, was well aware of the delays and inefficiencies in the administration of Pennsylvania justice. When he assumed the governorship in 1799, McKean recommended simplifying the system by abolishing the High Court of Errors and Appeals, expanding the county courts of common pleas, and redrawing the lines of judicial circuits so that judges could more easily ride to court sessions. Beyond making these proposals to the legislature, McKean removed from office Federalist judges and court clerks who—he claimed—were using the courts to punish enemies of the Federalist party. McKean appointed Democrats and some moderate Federalists in their places, naming—in addition—hundreds of local justices of the peace in places where such officers had not theretofore existed.¹

McKean sought to address judicial inefficiency by removing incompetent officials. He also swept out at the same time those Federalists who had been hostile to him, renewing the appointments of Federalists who had shown him no personal animosity. In addition, he wanted to make the legal system itself more accessible. More zealous Democrats objected to his retention of moderate Federalists and they argued that the system was in need of fundamental reform. They wanted elected rather than appointed juries, and a system of lay arbitration for civil disputes. The reformers wanted to expand the authority of justices of the peace, so that disputes that could not be arbitrated could still be settled without lawyers and courts. McKean resisted these sweeping reforms. When legislators voted to expand the jurisdiction of justices in 1802 and 1803, McKean vetoed the bills on the grounds that they would increase litigation and weaken the system of trial by jury. The Democratic party split over the issue.²

¹ The Philadelphia Democratic Press of December 19, 1807, estimated that McKean had appointed one thousand justices of the peace during his administration. An extensive list of appointments of justices of the peace currently sitting in the Commonwealth appears in the Journal of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for 1808-1809, 3:47.

² On the debate over judicial reform in Pennsylvania see Richard Ellis, The Jeffersonian
On the surface, the dispute over judicial reform had little to do with the interests and needs of subcultures within Pennsylvania's pluralistic society. The newspapers, especially in Philadelphia and in the state capital of Lancaster, reported extensively on the court reform debate. And political leaders like Leib and Duane were intensely involved in the controversy. But to many Pennsylvanians other issues were far more compelling. In the midst of the controversy the Democratic *Harrisburger Morgenröthe Zeitung* reported that the chief topics of conversation in rural Pennsylvania's interior towns of Harrisburg, Reading, and Sunbury were a church lottery, the route of a turnpike, the building of a bridge across the Schuylkill, and the imprisonment of a local woman for fraud.\(^{10}\) Observers noted that rural farmers were too preoccupied with their crops to take much notice of the judicial debate. The German-speaking inhabitants of Pennsylvania, many of whom did not understand much English, ordinarily did not mix in court business. Indeed, rural German-language papers reported that people who spoke German exclusively were customarily excluded from jury service because they did not understand court proceedings.\(^{11}\) Among the pacifist religious groups in the Commonwealth, nonlitigation was an established religious principle. Disputes within the Quaker and German-speaking sectarian groups were often settled without resort to courts.\(^{12}\)

Nonetheless, the courts were important to the state's religious and ethnic communities. In the late eighteenth century, it had been common for Germans in rural Pennsylvania to receive some recognition when court appointments were made. McKean's predecessor,

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\(^{10}\) *Harrisburger Morgenröthe Zeitung*, July 2, 1803.

\(^{11}\) See the *Readinger Adler*, June 16, 1807; the *Harrisburger Morgenröthe Zeitung*, May 16, 1807. The Federalist *Lancaster Amerikanische Staatsbothe*, January 26, 1803, asserted that the Germans did not use the court system much because they did not understand English. English had been the official language since the days of Penn.

\(^{12}\) The Mennonite writer Francis Herr asserted in 1790 that Quakers were more likely to use the courts than other pacifist sectarian groups. See Peter Brock, *Pacifism in the United States* (Princeton, 1968), 393. Of the pacifist groups considered here, the Quakers were the only native English-speakers, and so would have understood court business more readily.
Governor Thomas Mifflin, had responded positively to German communities that had petitioned for German-speaking justices of the peace. When McKean took office, German leaders, confident that their votes had elected the governor, visited McKean and demanded a thorough purge of old officials in their communities. William Findley explained to Thomas Jefferson that he knew how McKean had made his judicial selections. Findley noted that "The leading Germans in many instances insisted on and procured the removal of all in their respective counties." McKean removed officials German political leaders deemed undesirable. By 1800 the Germans had developed their own leaders who were politically powerful enough to demand that the governor appoint their supporters. McKean complied, placing German leaders and their supporters in his political debt.

German-speaking communities in rural Pennsylvania also wanted justices of the peace and associate judges on the county bench who could speak their language. McKean complied, appointing so many Germans, according to the Democratic Gettysburg Gazette, that the greatest number of justices of the peace in the Commonwealth were German. It was at the level of justice of peace that most German farmers were likely to have contact with the courts, for these officials dealt mostly with the collection of debts, a problem common in agricultural parts of the Commonwealth. Germans petitioned for the appointment of German-speakers and criticized the German language skills of candidates for appointment as justice. Local meetings or-

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15 The list of justices appointed by McKean in 1808-1809 indicates he appointed persons with German surnames as justices of the peace in the counties of Adams, Beaver, Bedford, Berks, Bucks, Centre, Cumberland, Dauphin, Erie, Fayette, Franklin, Huntingdon, Lancaster, Luzerne, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montgomery, Northampton, Northumberland, the City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Somerset, Washington, Wayne, Westmoreland, and York. See House Journal, 3-47.
16 Gettysburg Gazette, July 29, 1803. The Gazette noted that three-fourths of Pennsylvania's Germans were Democratic, and that the judges of York, Lancaster, Berks, Bucks, Dauphin, Northampton, and Mifflin Counties "are not of Irish and Scotch extraction, but many of them are German. . . . In almost every county, the Germans have their full share of the county offices, viz., commissioners, sheriffs, &c. &c."
17 For example, see the petition to Thomas McKean of October 1-7, 1803, in which John
ganized political pressure to secure the appointment of German-speakers. On the Saturday before the gubernatorial election of 1805, Germans called a public meeting in Westmoreland County, where the population was at least one-third German, to press for the appointment of a German associate judge. About two hundred persons attended the meeting, which endorsed McKean for governor in the hotly fought 1805 election. A McKean supporter reported the events to Secretary of the Commonwealth Thomas McKean Thompson, McKean’s nephew, forwarding as well a list of five local Germans loyal to the administration. McKean appointed one of them to the county bench. These rural Germans did not share the radical hostility to the courts; they merely wanted their share of judicial appointments so that court business could be explained to them in their own language if necessary. McKean’s careful attention to German-speakers’ demands for representation and his cultivation of German leaders may have defused the issue of judicial reform among rural Germans. By the time of the judicial reform debates of the McKean administration, many Germans felt a proprietary interest in the system the urban radicals attacked. McKean’s sensitivity to the needs of German leaders won him the endorsement of the powerful Muhlenberg and Hiester families in the election of 1805.

McKean’s enemies argued that he showed contempt for rural Germans in his choice of justices. Possibly the best-known incident of the 1805 campaign involved anti-McKean politicians who solicited

Capp was recommended as justice of the peace in Harrisburg because he could read both English and German. Capp was appointed on January 2, 1804. (The petition is found in the Jacob Bucher Collection of the Dauphin County Historical Society, Harrisburg.) A petition from Mahonoy Township in Northumberland County, described in the petition as “a large German settlement,” objected to the appointment of Samuel Rhoadermal because of his “having no learning, neither duch [sic] or english.” Rhoadermal was not appointed. See undated petition of the inhabitants of Mahonoy Township, Northumberland Appointments File, McKean Administration, Bureau of Elections, Papers of the Secretary of the Commonwealth (RG 26), Division of Archives and Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, [hereafter, PHMC].

James Brady to Thomas McKean Thompson, October 15, 1805, Westmoreland County Appointments File, McKean Administration, Bureau of Commissions and Elections, Records of the Secretary of the Commonwealth (RG 26), PHMC. Governor McKean appointed Jacob Painter to be associate justice of the Westmoreland County Court of Common Pleas. Westmoreland County’s German inhabitants had been demanding more German appointees since the 1790s. See Keller, Rural Politics, 18.
an appointment for justice in Northumberland County’s Mahonoy Township, a settlement with a large German population. (Among the group was Simon Snyder, who was soon to challenge McKean for leadership of the Democratic party.) McKean had appointed a German named Adam Linkhart as justice in the township in January and was considering the appointment of Hugh Brunson, who could not speak German, to a second position. The politicians requested the appointment of Henry Latscha, presumably a German-speaker, but McKean refused. In one version of the story, McKean asserted that Latscha lacked popular support and other qualifications for the job and then lamented aloud that the movement to reform the constitution was the project of “geese and clodhoppers.” Leaving the governor, the disgruntled politicians spread the story of the confrontation to editors hostile to McKean. According to reports these editors circulated, McKean had called the inhabitants of Mahonoy “geese and clodhoppers,” although he really had intended that phrase for constitutional reformers. The “clodhopper incident” spread across over the Commonwealth, usually in more garbled forms, so that by the summer some versions had McKean calling the Germans “clodhoppers,” while others had him referring to Pennsylvania farmers as “clodpoles.” Whatever the truth, the incident shows how important these local appointments had become and how easily political antagonists might seize upon supposed slights to ethnic groups. McKean’s critics could not claim that he had failed to appoint a German-speaker, because he had made an appointment of a German-speaker a few months earlier. But they were quick to use McKean’s outburst to anger Germans whose votes would be critical in the gubernatorial election of 1805.

19 See *The Address of the Members of the General Assembly Agreed upon at a Numerous Meeting Held after a General Notice at Lancaster, April 3, 1805* [broadside]; “Facts in Plain Language,” *Philadelphia* General Advertiser, May 20, 1805; *The Address of the Society of Constitutional Republicans Established in the City and County of Philadelphia, 1805* [broadside]; Emerson Lee Derr, “Simon Snyder, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1808-1817,” Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1960, 68. The politicians who came to visit McKean objected to the appointment of Brunson because he was not a Democrat. McKean responded that Brunson was well recommended. McKean thought that too many appointments had been proposed for people qualified only by their political affiliations. McKean may have been told that Brunson could speak German. *Philadelphia* General Advertiser, May 23, June 3, 1805.
A second set of political issues centering on reform of Pennsylvania's militia legislation involved pacifist sectarian religious groups. The militia—with 88,707 men between the ages of 18 and 45 enrolled in 1802—touched the lives of many inhabitants. The largest foot militia in the nation, it was organized under the Fourth Militia Act, passed in April, 1799. Both Thomas McKean and his critics agreed that the militia act needed revision, but they disagreed on how it should be changed. The sectarians thought the existing legislation too punitive to those who refused, out of conscience, to participate in the militia. Opposing them were radical Democrats who wanted to bolster provisions of the law that punished pacifist sectarians who refused to comply with the act. McKean and his advisors sided substantially with the sectarians, preferring a less punitive law that allowed latitude for conscientious objections. The Fourth Militia Act provided that white males of age were to enroll before the commanding officer in charge of their militia district. Those refusing to enroll—and this included pacifist sectarians—were automatically classified as "exempts," and their names were turned over to the county commissioners, who were to fine them six dollars. Pacifists objected to the fine, regarding it as a form of cooperation prohibited by their scruples. Radical reformers wanted harsher penalties for non-compliance, advocating the disenfranchisement of persons who refused to enroll. A legislative proposal to do that, introduced in February, 1800, intitated a newspaper debate that continued for two years. As the debate began, McKean's political ally Tench Coxe advised him not to be swayed by extremists out to persecute the sectarians.

20 This figure is reported in Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, General Return of the Militia (1802). See also the Oracle of Dauphin, April 12, 1802. The Carlisle Gazette, May 9, 1806, reported another count of 86,105. On August 7, 1807, the same newspaper reported 94,221 persons were enrolled.
22 Mitchell and Flanders, 16:276-77.
24 See issues of the Lancaster Amerikanische Staatsbothe as noted above, and the Harrisburger Morgenrörthe Zeitung, April 27, 1801; the Philadelphische Correspondenz, January 28, 1800; the Lancaster Correspondent, March 8, 1800, April 18, 1801; and the Lancaster Intelligencer, December 28, 1802.
It would have a good effect, and would I conceive be wise and humane, if some improvements could be made in the laws and executive proceedings by which militia fines are collected from the members of the societies of Menonists, Moravians, people called Quakers, and other churches professing peace. They have been sadly harassed, and injured by some inconsiderate men. That circumstance has occasioned many of them, who have been called to the legislature during the last 12 or 15 years [to] be unfriendly to the militia, and to favor regular troops. When our opponents [the Federalists] are continuing their abuse, their intrigues, their associations, their seductions and all their devices [,] it behooves the friends of republican government to render it as great and manifest an instrument of public justice and benefit as possible.25

Coxe advised the governor to be lenient with the pacifists for both humanitarian and political reasons. The legislature debated militia reform in its session late that year, but it did not produce any legislation on the militia until its 1801-1802 session. Meanwhile, petitions to McKean and the legislature urged that the statute be made less onerous to pacifists.26 A Quaker address to McKean commended his administration; in March, 1802, the Quakers appealed to the legislature, noting that paying militia fines was contrary to their conscience and to the Charter of Pennsylvania. They reminded the legislature that some persons who had refused to cooperate had been imprisoned and their property distrained for non-payment of fines.27 After much debate, the legislature passed and sent the Fifth Militia Act to McKean, who signed the bill on April 6, 1802.28 The new measure

25 Tench Coxe to Thomas McKean, July 17, 1800, Tench Coxe Papers, Box 82, HSP. Coxe’s comments reveal that Democratic leaders were concerned about increasing political activity among pacifist sectarians in the early nineteenth century. In the years after the American Revolution, many pacifist sectarians refrained from voting. As the party battles of the 1790s intensified, more began to vote and some were even sent to the legislature. Undoubtedly, some pacifists refrained from voting in the early nineteenth century, but Coxe saw them as an important, politically active force. Voting patterns from regions with large sectarian populations indicate that they were participating more in politics. For the 1790s, see Kenneth W. Keller, “Diversity and Democracy: Ethnic Politics in Pennsylvania, 1788-1799,” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1971, 185-200; 222-34; 247-52.


28 House Journal, 1801-1802, 214, 240, 308, 457, 495; Mitchell and Flanders, 17:174-218. No useful roll calls were recorded in the House Journal on this issue.
eased the provisions of its predecessor respecting exempts; it also guaranteed those who refused to comply the right to appeal to a militia board for exoneration from exempt status even if they neglected to choose exemption. In addition, the exempt fine was lowered from six to five dollars.\textsuperscript{29} While the new measure was hardly the total triumph the sectarians wanted, it was certainly not the defeat that disenfranchisement would have represented.\textsuperscript{30} The role of the McKean administration in the legislative debate over the militia law is not fully clear, but the governor's signature on the act and his commendations from pacifists indicate that he favored less rather than more punitive militia legislation.

Clear signs of some Democrats' hostility to the pacifists came as the widening war in Europe forced Pennsylvanians to re-examine their militia. Pacifists continued to appeal for modification of the militia laws in the legislature of 1802-1803.\textsuperscript{31} In the next two legislatures, radical Democrats battling Thomas McKean gave further thought to tightening provisions about exempts. In the 1803-1804 session, a committee chaired by Cumberland County radical David Mitchell proposed that appeals for exempts be abolished.\textsuperscript{32} Nathaniel Boileau (another McKean foe) of Montgomery County and Robert Giffen of Northumberland County also supported this proposal.\textsuperscript{33} Although the House Journal recorded no votes on the issue, demands for stricter militia laws continued. Some of the radicals advocated a twenty dollar fine for anyone disavowing the militia law, and others closely associated with Snyder's candidacy (like Thomas Leiper and

\textsuperscript{29} Mitchell and Flanders, 17:175-76.

\textsuperscript{30} The debate over the treatment of the pacifists continued. On June 17, 1802, a public debate was held at Ker's Long Room in Philadelphia on the topic "Ought a man, whose principle is against fighting in defense of his country, be allowed to have a vote in the administration thereof." See [Philadelphia] General Advertiser, June 16, 1802.

\textsuperscript{31} Pennsylvania House Journal, 1802-1803, 218, 310, 360, 557, 661; Pennsylvania Senate Journal, 1802-1803, 171, 229. No significant changes were made in the militia laws in 1803 on the grounds that the old act had not been in force long enough. For reports of the pacifists' petitions, see the Carlisle Gazette, February 23, 1803, March 16, 1803; the Lancaster Intelligencer, February 15, 22, 1803; and the [Lancaster] Amerikanische Staatsbothe, March 2, 1803.

\textsuperscript{32} [Northumberland] Republican Argus, March 30, 1804.

\textsuperscript{33} House Journal, 515.
John Steele) urged steeper fines. But the radicals were unsuccessful. A meeting of delegates from fourteen Lancaster County townships warned the county's substantial pacifist population that the "revolutionists" wanted to "persecute men of all denominations"; the delegates reminded conscientious objectors that there would be "destruction to their earnings and possessions; [and to] those who have scruples of conscience against bearing arms, immediate disenfranchisement." The address was published in the pro-McKean *Lancaster Constitutional Democrat.* A supplementary statute modifying the Fifth Militia Act passed the House of Representatives in April, 1805, and was signed by McKean. The measure did not abolish appeals; nor did it change the fines. McKean had taken the path of moderation.

The next major struggle over militia legislation occurred in the legislature of 1806-1807, after McKean's 1805 re-election to a third term in a close victory over Simon Snyder. With James Monroe and William Pinkney unable to secure an acceptable agreement with the British, Thomas Jefferson's diplomacy lay in shambles and war seemed likely. As arguments between the sectarians and the radicals intensified, William Duane's *Aurora* and the *Lancaster Intelligencer*, a paper that opposed McKean, endorsed the demands of Philadelphia militia units for double fines. At the same time, pacifists in Chester and Delaware Counties petitioned the legislature for mitigation. The legislature passed the Sixth Militia Act in April, 1807, retaining the appeals process and lowering the fine from five dollars to four dollars. Thirty-four of McKean's forty-three legislative supporters voted...
in favor of lowering the fine, while twenty-eight of Simon Snyder’s thirty-five supporters voted against lowering the fine.\textsuperscript{38}

Still dissatisfied with the legislation, McKean declared the Commonwealth’s militia laws totally defective in his annual message to the legislature of 1807-1808. Legislators debated a supplement to the militia act in that session, and in March, 1808, voted whether to increase militia fines. Twenty-eight of thirty-nine Snyder supporters agreed, while thirty-four of thirty-eight pro-McKean legislators did not. The bill that passed and received McKean’s signature included none of the radicals’ demands about abolishing appeals, increasing militia fines and the fine for disavowal, or disenfranchising conscientious objectors.\textsuperscript{39}

Throughout the struggle over militia reform, McKean and his supporters stood consistently on the side of moderation; they even succeeded in reducing militia fines in the face of radical sentiment for harsher penalties. McKean carried the heavily pacifist counties of Lancaster, Chester, Delaware, Bucks, and Montgomery in 1805; those counties gave him most of the edge he needed to defeat Simon Snyder and the radicals. In the election of 1808, which pitted Snyder against the resurrected Federalist James Ross, the sectarians again remembered the position of the pro-Snyder forces on militia reform.\textsuperscript{40} While Ross and the Federalists carried only six counties in their unsuccessful

\textsuperscript{38} House Journal, 1806-1807, vote of March 10, 1807.

\textsuperscript{39} House Journal, 1807-1808, 319; Mitchell and Flanders, 18:829-34. My identification of the factional affiliations of legislators in the 1806-1807 and 1807-1808 sessions is derived from local newspapers and legislative journals for the period.

\textsuperscript{40} One observer of sectarian participation in the campaign against Snyder in 1808 noted that the Quakers had shown “unexampled activity” in the election. See the [Philadelphia] General Advertiser, October 13, 1808. Rural Pennsylvania newspapers spread the word that if Snyder were elected, militia fines would increase and military tribunals would be given the power to assess the value of estates to be seized from those who disavowed the militia law. See the [Lancaster] Volksfreund, August 9, September 20, 1808; the Cumberland Register, July 26, August 31, 1808; the Norristown Herald, September 16, 23, 30, 1808; the Lancaster Journal, July 1, August 5, 12, September 2, 9, 1808; the Lancaster Amerikanische Staatsbothe, July 6, 13, 1808; the Lancaster Weekly Advertiser, July 9, 23, August 20, 27, September 24, 30, 1808; the Lancaster Intelligencer, July 26, August 30, 1808; the Harrisburger Morgenröthe Zeitung, July 16, 23, August 20, September 17, 1808; the Pittsburgh Gazette, July 27, September 7, 1808; the Reading Weekly Advertiser, September 10, 24, 1808; the Readinger Adler, August 2, 1808; the Northumberland Gazette, August 16, 1808; the Oracle of Dauphin, October 1, 1808; and the [Philadelphia] Democratic Press, August 23, 1808. See also the broadside Bauern, Sehe hierher. . . . (Lancaster, 1808).
gubernatorial campaign, Ross did win majorities in Lancaster, Chester, Delaware, and Bucks.41

The last major cultural conflict of importance to early nineteenth-century Pennsylvania politics was the growing hostility toward recent immigrants, especially those from Ireland. In the 1790s, the Federalist party had exploited anti-Irish sentiment. At that time, Democrats welcomed the Irish into their party and denounced England for its domination of Ireland. But after the Pennsylvania Democrats came to power, moderates like McKean began to express second thoughts about liberal immigration laws and especially about Irish radicalism. McKean and his allies came to identify recent Irish immigrants with anarchy, with hostility to the law and to the constitution, and with the movement to elect Simon Snyder.42

Irish immigration to the United States increased dramatically in the early years of the nineteenth century.43 Most of these immigrants

41 For the returns of 1805, see the [Philadelphia] American Daily Advertiser, October 26, 1805, and the House Journal, 1805-1806, 69. For the returns of 1808, see Senate Journal, 1805-1806, 80-81. The Snyderites, once in office, passed another supplement to the militia laws, an act of April 4, 1809. This measure contained no provisions to institute the demands of the extremists. See Mitchell and Flanders, 18:1172-73. The next significant alteration in the basic militia law of the Commonwealth did not occur until the passage of the Seventh Militia Act of March 28, 1814.

42 Thomas McKean’s suspicions of recent immigrants are surprising in the light of his having been president of the Hibernian Society of Philadelphia between 1790 and 1800. The Hibernian Society was a philanthropic organization of merchants, professional men, and skilled craftsmen of Irish descent that aided recent Irish immigrants. See John H. Campbell, History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and of the Hibernian Society (Philadelphia, 1892), 315. By 1805, such philanthropic organizations were becoming politicized. A St. Patrick’s Benevolent Society was organized in Philadelphia by Irishmen opposed to “the apostate” McKean. William Duane alleged that McKean no longer attended celebrations of St. Patrick’s Day in Philadelphia, but did attend a meeting of the English St. George’s Society at which Phineas Bond, the British consul, was present. The St. George society toasted the health of the royal family on the King’s birthday. Duane quoted McKean that only a “few vagabond Irish” will vote for Snyder in 1805. See the [Philadelphia] General Advertiser, March 21, October 5, 1805.

43 For some examples of reports on Irish immigration in rural Pennsylvania newspapers, see the Harrisburger Morgenrote Zeitung, August 8, 1801; the Readinger Adler, July 21, 1801; the Lancaster Journal, August 1, 1801; the Carlisle Gazette, August 4, 19, 1801; the Oracle of Dauphin, July 26, 1802; May 21, 1808; the Easton American Eagle, October 11, 1802; the Country Gazette of the United States, October 26, 1804. See also Edward C. Carter, II, “A Wild Irishman under Every Federalist’s Bed: Naturalization in Philadelphia, 1789-1806,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 94 (1970): 331-46.
were fleeing Britain's harsh suppression of the unsuccessful Irish risings of 1798 and 1803. These abortive revolutions were widely reported in the American press which told of the heroic deeds of Irish revolutionaries and published sympathetic histories of Ireland.⁴⁴ At the same time, another less favorable image also gained currency as stereotypes about comic, ignorant, whiskey-sodden Irishmen grew ever more common.⁴⁵ Hugh Henry Brackenridge, a political ally of Thomas McKean, published parts of his novel *Modern Chivalry* in Carlisle in 1804-1805. In episodes Brackenridge wrote during these years, Teague O'Regan, an Irish bogtrotter, becomes imbued with revolutionary notions he does not understand and launches a crusade (comically rendered) against learning, the law, and the constitution.⁴⁶ Even as these ethnic stereotypes gained in popularity, impoverished Irish immigrants moved into the Pennsylvania countryside as canal and road laborers or hardscrabble farmers. Soon xenophobic newspaper editors began reporting murders, duels, thefts, illegal voting, and other crimes allegedly perpetrated by Irishmen.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See the [Philadelphia] *General Advertiser*, September 14 to 28, 1803; the *Oracle of Dauphin*, September 25, 1803; June 23, 1804; the *Carlisle Gazette*, September 21, October 5, 1803; August 3, 1804; the *Northumberland Argus*, November 4, December 9, 1803. Archibald Loudon of Carlisle published collections of songs, poetry, and stories from Scotland and Ireland in 1804-1806. He also published a history of the rising of 1798, *The History of the Late Grand Insurrection*, in Carlisle in 1805. In 1802, William Duane published a compilation of pieces from the Irish press called *Extracts from The Press: A Newspaper Published in the Capital of Ireland*. Philadelphia printers published Francis Plowden's *An Historical Review of the State of Ireland* in five volumes in 1805-1806.

⁴⁵ For stereotypes about comic Irishmen, see the [Pittsburgh] *Tree of Liberty*, May 19, 1804; the [Lancaster] *Constitutional Democrat*, March 18, 1806; the [Carlisle] *Cumberland Register*, April 19, 1808; the *Adams Centinel*, December 3, 1800, January 21, 1801; the *Lancaster Journal*, April 18, 1801; the *Harrisburg Times*, February 15, 1808; the *Lancaster Intelligencer*, June 30, 1807. Newspapers like the *Tree of Liberty*, the *Cumberland Register*, and the *Constitutional Democrat* supported McKean.


⁴⁷ On the poor Irish in western Pennsylvania, Gouverneur Ogden to William Meredith, July 18, 1803, in the Meredith Papers, HSP. See also the *Lancaster Amerikanische Staatsbote*, May 20, October 21, 1801; July 6, 1808; the *Pittsburgh Commonwealth*, February 5, 1806; the *Adams Centinel*, July 6, 1808; the *Cumberland Register*, June 28, 1808; the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, October 23, 1801; the [Philadelphia] *General Advertiser*, October 24, 1801; the *Carlisle Gazette*, September 2, 1808. After a series of reports about alleged illegal Irish voting, one correspondent to the *Lancaster Intelligencer* of October 14, 1806, noted that "There is a great noise made about Irishmen!"
1805, Pennsylvanians were developing a new sense of urgency about Irish immigration.

Not surprisingly, politicians sought to capitalize on anti-Irish sentiment. Thomas McKean and his friends were soon opposing laws intended to widen political participation by new immigrants, especially those from Ireland. When the Jeffersonians took office in 1801, Thomas Jefferson had urged repeal of the Federalist-inspired Naturalization Act of 1798. This measure required a fourteen-year residency before an immigrant could become a citizen. Pennsylvania Democrats petitioned for its repeal. In April, 1802, Congress made naturalization less difficult by lowering the residency requirement to five years. Some Democrats—notably editor William Duane—advocated even simpler naturalizations, asking the state to permit the procedure in the Commonwealth’s courts of common pleas. Governor McKean demurred, noting that the legislature would have to grant this specific power to the courts. When the legislature produced a bill in March, 1802, authorizing naturalization in state courts, the bill included a provision requiring only two-years’ residence. The bill passed the Pennsylvania House, but it failed in the Senate.

The effort to amend Pennsylvania’s electoral law continued in the session of 1802-1803. Legislators swept aside opponents’ objections that a two-year residency requirement was inconsistent with the federal Naturalization Act. Supporters argued that naturalization was a concurrent power shared with the federal government. Legislator John Ross of Easton (a McKean supporter) argued that the two-year requirement would bring in enough “new Irishmen” to overthrow the government. The bill passed but was vetoed by McKean, who argued

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48 For reports of and solicitations for repeal, see the [Philadelphia] General Advertiser, December 24, 1801; the Readinger Adler, November 24, 1801; the Lancaster Intelligencer, December 23, 1801; February 3, 10, 1802. The five-year residency requirement re-established the period stipulated in the old naturalization act of 1795.


50 See the Lancaster Journal, March 27, 1802; the Readinger Adler, March 30, 1802; the Easton American Eagle, March 27, 1802; the [Philadelphia] General Advertiser, April 5, 1802; the Lancaster Amerikanische Staatsbothe, April 7, 1802; the [Pittsburgh] Tree of Liberty, April 17, 1802.

51 Lancaster Journal, February 19, 1803; Carlisle Gazette, March 9, 1803; Norristown Herald, March 4, 11, 1803; Lancaster Intelligencer, March 8, 1803. The Carlisle Gazette
that a longer residency was necessary "to wean immigrants from their prejudices, habits, and natural regard for their native land and to attach them to our own." An attempt to override the veto failed.

The veto had important political repercussions. It drove another wedge between McKean and William Duane. According to one sympathizer in Philadelphia, it triggered rumors that a radical Democratic faction opposed to McKean was forming in the city. But the veto seems to have been well received in rural Pennsylvania, where new Irishmen were not popular. The German editor Salomon Myer of York wrote McKean that "The rejection of the alien bill is universal with us." At least as Myer saw it, Pennsylvanians endorsed McKean's caution about the new Irish.

The political consensus assumed that most recent immigrants and especially the "new Irish" tended toward political radicalism. McKean's third inaugural message denounced "political incendiaries, just landed on our shores, [who] attempt to acquire for sinister purposes the mastery of the passions and prejudices of the people." William Findley, a man of Ulster descent, blamed opposition to McKean on "unprincipled emigrants." In a series of letters written under the pseudonym "Sidney," Findley complained that too many Irish and English radicals were emigrating to the United States.

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report quoted Ross saying that "foreigners had come among us with high wrought notions of liberty and equality such as could not be adopted here, with manners not in unison with the cool and mild temper of Americans, hostile to our general government, turbulent and presumptuous ... [The law would] open all the jails of Europe to stock our country with their inhabitants." John Ross, a Democrat, had been nominated for the legislature by a Democratic meeting on July 29, 1799. See the [Philadelphia] General Advertiser, August 7, 1799. McKean had appointed him clerk of the orphan's court, recorder of deeds, and register of wills for Northampton County in 1800. McKean appointed John Ross of Easton commonwealth attorney to prosecute cases in Luzerne County about 1805. See Samuel Bryan to Joseph B. McKean, February 25, 1805, Society Collection, HSP.

52 Carlisle Gazette, March 23, 1805.
53 George Worrall to Tench Coxe, April 11, 1803, Coxe Papers, Box 72, HSP.
54 Salomon Myer to Thomas McKean, March 19, 1803, Lamberton Manuscripts, Vol. 2, HSP. Another version of the electoral law passed the House without the two-year residency requirement. It received McKean's signature on April 4, 1803.
55 See his message of December 17, 1805, in the House Journal, 1805-1806, 15.
56 Lancaster Constitutional Democrat, October 29, 1805. Findley is identified as "Sidney" in the July 30, 1805, issue of the Lancaster Constitutional Democrat. His essays against the project to revise the constitution ran from July 2 to November 5, 1805. Findley wrote to
According to Andrew Gregg, another of McKean's supporters, recent emigrant editors were responsible for Pennsylvania's political confusion. Hugh Henry Brackenridge blamed the Commonwealth's political quarrels on "emigrant Hybernians." Tench Coxe informed Joseph Gales in a letter condemning McKean's radical opponents in Philadelphia that "anticonstitutional and foreign considerations govern them."57 George Logue, whom McKean had appointed brigade inspector of the militia of Cumberland and Franklin Counties, reported that "All the disappointed [sic] office hunters of our county together with the new Irish has [sic] enrolled themselves against the re-election of our present Governor." And a political supporter from Butler County informed Thomas McKean Thompson in 1805 that "The Irish as far as came within my view were opposed to his [McKean's] re-election."58 The Lancaster Democrat William Barton, another McKean appointee, blamed the attack on both constitution and courts on "ALIENS and NEWLY ADOPTED CITIZENS who are overrunning the land." To give such persons citizenship was "a national evil of vast magnitude."59 McKean's supporters in the 1805 election openly attacked the Irish as the instigators of Snyder's candidacy.60

57 Andrew Gregg to Joseph Hiester, August 9, 1805, Society Collection; Hugh Henry Brackenridge to [A.J.Dallas], May 25, 1805, Alexander J. Dallas Papers, Correspondence; Tench Coxe to Joseph Gales, January 9, 1805, Coxe Papers; all at HSP.
58 Letter of George Logue to Thomas McKean Thompson, July 31, 1805, Executive Correspondence; letter of John Gilmore to Thomas McKean Thompson, October 20, 1805, Washington County Appointments File, Bureau of Commissions and Elections; both in the Records of the Secretary of the Commonwealth (RG 26), McKean Administration, PHMC.
60 The Montgomery County address of McKean's supporters maintained that among the radicals "it was thought sufficient to delude the Germans of Pennsylvania, by nominating Mr. Snyder, who is a German, and as to the Irish, they were to be satisfied with an assurance that the Irish influence in Philadelphia would govern Snyder whenever he was chosen to govern the state." See the Easton American Eagle, September 14, 1805. Articles in the Readinger Adler played upon German rivalry with the Irish in Berks County by associating Snyderites with "newly arrived Irishmen." See the Readinger Adler, September 10, 1805. An address to the Constitutional Republicans in the Cumberland Register, October 1, 1805, asserted that in Chester, Montgomery, and Berks Counties, a party calling itself the "Sons of Ireland" was organizing to overturn the constitution and defeat McKean.
By the election of 1805, there had been a complete turnabout on the immigration issue. In 1799 the Federalists had attacked McKean as the candidate who would bring thousands of Irish rebels to American shores. Now McKean and his allies had adopted the nativist position, exploiting popular fear of the new Irish.

Other cultural and ethnic conflicts in early nineteenth-century Pennsylvania did not relate as directly to the divisions among factions in the Democratic party. Nearly all white Pennsylvanians, for example, condoned restrictions on the civil and political liberties of blacks. Blacks could not serve on juries or in the militia. In 1807 the legislature debated requiring blacks and mulattoes to register with county prothonotaries and pay fees if they wished to seek employment.61 These restrictive, racist measures were never a matter of political disagreement between McKean and his foes.

Another cultural issue not significant to Democratic party factionalism involved the creation of public schools. Germans and Quakers maintained large church-related school establishments. The Germans feared that public schools would destroy the German language and would hinder religious instruction in that language; the Quakers preferred not to endorse a public school system that might promote ideas contrary to the teaching of the Friends. But the debate over school legislation did not divide Democrats against each other.62 McKean endorsed public schools, but he settled for an act providing free education for the poor, which Simon Snyder’s administration altered only in minor details in 1809.63

Geographic and historic considerations sometimes took center stage in otherwise culturally nuanced political disputes. Proposals to support the construction of churches or academies through lotteries or to incorporate colleges and religious institutions were often fought out on the basis of local rivalries, usually between eastern and western Pennsylvania. Legislation to suppress vice and immorality, to regulate dueling, or to abolish slavery did not produce clear divisions among Democratic factions. In the conflict between Pennsylvanians and Yankee claimants to Luzerne County lands, neither wing of the

61 Lancaster Intelligencer, February 11, 1806; Lancaster Journal, January 24, 1806.
63 Mitchell and Flanders, 18:1171-72.
Democrats opposed strong support for the rights of the Pennsylvania claimants, though some Federalists supported the transplanted Yankees trying to win legal recognition of their titles. Not every issue involving conflict among ethnic, cultural, or religious groups led to ongoing political alliances or political divisions.

The politics of cultural conflict might at times be overshadowed by other disagreements. The War of 1812 temporarily brought positions on international politics to the fore. Economic issues—monopolies and internal improvements—were always important, as were rivalries over patronage between competing politicians and their supporters. Only a false precision can conclusively determine which of these sources of political infighting dominated Pennsylvania politics. But it is incorrect to conclude from the evidence that cultural factors did not influence early nineteenth-century Pennsylvania politics because Pennsylvania Germans did not unite behind Simon Snyder in an ethnic bloc in the election of 1805.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, Pennsylvania subcultures were no longer satisfied with simple ethnic or linguistic recognition accomplished through ticket-balancing. Religious, linguistic, or cultural groups had special public policy agendas. These groups wanted access to the public business in their native language, protection from excessively punitive militia requirements, and the preservation of the ballot from supposedly corrupt alien influences. The politicians who stood with McKean against the radicals did not merely recognize the subcultures; rather, they shared power with emerging leaders, pursued public policies important to these groups, and responded to their fears. A new kind of ethnocultural politics emerged. The politics of ethnic recognition continued at the local

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64 George Worrall to Tench Coxe, February 5, 1802, Tench Coxe Papers; letter of Lord Butler, October 7, 1803, Northampton County Manuscripts, Box 1; both in HSP. Tench Coxe to Thomas McKean Thompson, February 21, 1803, Executive Correspondence, McKean Administration, Records of the Secretary of the Commonwealth (RG 26), PHMC. See also the Luzerne Federalist, October 22, 1803. Luzerne was one of three counties that voted for Federalist James Ross for governor in 1802 (the other two were Delaware and York). It went by a slim margin for McKean in 1805. In 1808 it was one of the six counties that voted for Federalist James Ross against Simon Snyder.

65 I have described changing styles of ethnic politics in Keller, “Diversity and Democracy,” 61-201.
level, but now Pennsylvania's subcultures were associated with one another in a political system in which they were represented by powerful leaders. Thomas McKean and his advisors understood this transformation of the political system. They kept their offices and held back radical reform because they accommodated themselves to political change.

Historians should be careful in making claims about the impact of cultural differences on politics. The divisions in Pennsylvania's Democratic party were not the culturally determined product of bloc voting by ethnic or religious subcultures. Nor were they merely the result of competition among factions organized around personalities. By the time Jeffersonians came to power in Pennsylvania, the sectarians, the German-speakers, and those who feared the new Irish were trying to achieve specific political objectives at odds with the radical Democratic agenda. The alliances they formed with Thomas McKean held the line against radical reform and kept the Commonwealth on a conservative path until Simon Snyder's election. Once Snyder became governor, economic development and patriotic indignation against the British assumed higher priorities and diverted him from pursuing the radical Democratic program. Pennsylvania was the largest laboratory for democracy in the early American republic. It had the largest electorate and nearly the most liberal suffrage requirements in the nation. The Commonwealth developed a growing political party system; a largely free labor economy with agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing sectors; an ethnically and culturally diverse population; a government not beholden to a religious establishment; and—for a time—the largest city of the republic. More than any other state, Pennsylvania was a pluralistic democracy that foreshadowed communities that did not appear until much later in the nation's history. It was there more than any place that one could see what democracy meant to early Americans. And to Pennsylvanians of the early nineteenth century, democracy meant a system by which local ethnic and religious subcultures claimed power and defended themselves against real or imagined threats that in the name of a majority sometimes attempted to homogenize the pluralistic commonwealth.

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