

REVIEW ESSAY

“Corrupt and Contented”: Where Have All the Politicians Gone? A Survey of Recent Books on Pennsylvania Political History, 1787–1877

IN *THE SHAME OF THE CITIES* (1904), Lincoln Steffens, the greatest of the “muckrakers,” wrote that Philadelphia politicians were “Corrupt and Contented” and implied that this was true of the entire Pennsylvania state machine. These Republicans, led in their heyday by the bigger-than-life Senator Matt Quay, were so dominant that they even financed their opponents in order to maintain the fiction of a working two-party system. But Steffens focused on local politicians—those who held public office and “pulled the strings.” As much as he disliked the situation, he named names and had a certain respect for the political game and the actual functions that these unsavory, but politically savvy, fellows performed for their constituents—such as getting someone’s boy out of jail or finding some spare coal for a poor family on a cold winter’s night. Today we call that “service” to one’s constituents, and congressmen often remain in office for doing similar favors. Lately, Pennsylvania historians have strayed from a concern for politicians and how, in plying their trade, they made government function in the past. Like Steffens, they seem to be bothered that Pennsylvania’s is not exactly a story of democracy at work.

In 1973, Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom produced what many considered to be the definitive one-volume history of the state of Pennsylvania.¹ Not quite thirty years later, Randall M. Miller and William Pencak edited a new and quite different “History of the

¹ Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1973; 2nd and enlarged ed., University Park, PA, 1980).

Commonwealth.”² The former is in many ways traditional, and the latter is original and certainly avant garde! Together they have served the commonwealth far better than most other state histories.³ They are both readable, and the latter has a wealth of information and covers topic areas that no other state history has ever delved into. Their differences in relation to political history, however, tell less about the authors involved than about the changes in American historians’ perceptions during the last forty years.

While Klein and Hoogenboom touched on social, economic, and cultural history, the structural backbone of their book was political history.⁴ In contrast, social history largely drives the narrative of Pennsylvania history in the first four hundred pages of Miller and Pencak’s lengthy edited volume. Though the political monographs cited by Klein and Hoogenboom do not appear in the bibliographies at the end of each chapter in Miller and Pencak’s work, they inform—at least implicitly—the thinking about the political framework and functions of parties and government. The prevailing political interest in the Miller and Pencak volume, however, remains political culture, political activism outside the voting booth, and the control of the public square by competing religious, ethnic, racial, and other groups; a recounting of electoral behavior is of lesser importance to them.

These different perspectives reflect the way in which the focus of pro-

² Randall M. Miller and William Pencak, eds., *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* (University Park, PA, 2002). An older history written by Paul A. W. Wallace, *Pennsylvania: Seed of a Nation* (New York, 1962), reflected the author’s expertise on the history of Native Americans as well as his interest in cultural history.

³ I say this as the coauthor of a very good new politically oriented state history of Virginia: Ronald L. Heinemann, John G. Kolp, Anthony S. Parent Jr., and William G. Shade, *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: A History of Virginia, 1607–2007* (Charlottesville, VA, 2007).

⁴ For the nineteenth century, they relied upon a series of monographs influenced by Roy F. Nichols and most often mentored by Klein at Penn State: Robert L. Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776–1890* (Harrisburg, PA, 1971); Harry M. Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania, 1790–1801* (Harrisburg, PA, 1950); Philip S. Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics: A Game without Rules, 1817–1832* (Philadelphia, 1940); Charles M. Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics, 1833–1848* (Harrisburg, PA, 1958); John F. Coleman, *The Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy, 1848–1860* (Harrisburg, PA, 1975); Erwin S. Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism: A Study of Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics, 1860–1872* (Philadelphia, 1964); and Frank B. Evans, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1872–1877: A Study in Political Leadership* (Harrisburg, PA, 1966). See also the numerous references to Pennsylvania politics in two books by Nichols: *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948); and *The Invention of the American Political Parties: A Study in Political Improvisation* (New York, 1967).

fessional history in the United States has changed during my lifetime. The trend in the profession has been away from the political narrative toward a broader methodological approach. The following essay is an attempt to examine the various ways in which books written in the last quarter century have portrayed Pennsylvania political history in the century from the movement for a new constitution in the 1780s through the Civil War and the unraveling of Reconstruction in the 1880s.⁵ It was surely a crucial century in American political life and in the evolving political history of the Keystone State.

Historiographers often try to chart the shifting winds in the profession by clustering past practitioners into “schools” that represent the themes emphasized in each era. For the first half of the twentieth century, “Progressive History,” associated most prominently with the work of Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles A. Beard, dominated the profession.⁶ The “Progressive” historians emphasized economic conflict between the business classes and the “others”—primarily the farmers and workingmen—that fueled the cyclical, but on the whole progressive, advance of democracy.⁷

A reaction set in after World War II. New work by Daniel Boorstin, Richard Hofstadter, and Louis Hartz, among others, emphasized a consensus among Americans regarding liberal democracy. Although neither Hofstadter nor Hartz would readily accept the label of “Consensus” historian,⁸ historians following their lead saw “the party battle” as a matter

⁵ For reasons of space, this article will focus on books—monographs—and avoid the collections of essays, important though they are, such as: Theodore Hershberg, ed., *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1981); Russell F. Weigley, Nicholas B. Wainwright, and Edwin Wolf II, eds., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York, 1982); Michael J. Birkner, ed., *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s* (Selinsgrove, PA, 1996); and William A. Blair and William Pencak, eds., *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania's Civil War* (University Park, PA, 2001). Although it is not specifically on Pennsylvania, Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller, eds., *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans' First Generation* (Philadelphia, 2002) includes a collection of political images from the Library Company of Philadelphia that reveal the relevance of posters and broadsides in the period.

⁶ On this very important “school,” see Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York, 1968); and Ernst A. Breisach, *American Progressive History: An Experiment in Modernization* (Chicago, 1993).

⁷ Among the studies of Pennsylvania politics mentioned above, Brunhouse, *Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania* presents a “Progressive” perspective.

⁸ Hofstadter and Hartz had the most profound effects in defining liberal democracy, the bedrock interest of the “Consensus” historians, while Boorstin was more of a “popular” historian who also gained influence by writing in public-policy and general-interest publications. See especially Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955); and Louis Hartz, *The*

of electoral machines seeking the vote rather than as a conflict between progressive and reactionary classes.⁹ The “New Political History” emerged out of this tradition in the 1960s. These “New” political historians, such as Lee Benson, Samuel P. Hays, and Allan Bogue, promoted the idea that ethnoreligious cultural differences heavily affected American political interests and behavior, and they used political theory and quantitative analysis to a much greater extent than had traditional political historians.¹⁰

In time, however, the “New” political historians shared the stage with “Neo-Progressives” and historians engaged in writing the “New Social History,” the “New Labor History,” and/or the “New Urban History,” or combinations of them. All of these scholars reemphasized factors of class and ideology in their commentary on past politics. African Americans, Native Americans, and women increasingly became important subjects in the study of the American past.¹¹ These various schools and perspectives all have been reflected in studies of the Keystone State.¹²

Any survey of the recent literature on politics in Pennsylvania during the first century under the U.S. Constitution would show that the results are uneven and that the best recent studies deal with the early republic. However, in two of the most important recent books treating the early nineteenth century, Charles Sellers’s *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian*

Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution (New York, 1955). In general, see John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore, 1989).

⁹ This is best illustrated in a work by Roy Nichols’s premier student, Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1966), which has an excellent chapter on Pennsylvania. Most of the authors mentioned in note 3, including Nichols himself, can be considered “Consensus” historians.

¹⁰ See William Shade, “The New Political History and the Systematic Study of Early American Democracy,” in *Experiencing American History: Viewpoints of American and Russian Historians*, ed. A. S. Manykin, Y. N. Rogulov, and E. F. Yaskov (Moscow, Russia, 2005), 98–142; and Ronald P. Formisano, “The Invention of the Ethnocultural Interpretation,” *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 453–77. Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860* (New Haven, CT, 1968) is an example of the “New Political History” applied to Pennsylvania politics. See also Lee Benson, *Toward the Scientific Study of History: Selected Essays of Lee Benson* (Philadelphia, 1972); Allan G. Bogue, *Clio and the Bitch Goddess: Quantification in American Political History* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1983); and Samuel P. Hays, *American Political History as Social Analysis: Essays* (Knoxville, TN, 1980) for a general orientation of these men toward the practice of history.

¹¹ Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Philadelphia, 1997) gives a sense of the breadth of the new histories.

¹² A classic example of the “New” urban history, Sam Bass Warner Jr.’s *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968) contains an excellent chapter on the riots in the 1840s and is essential to understanding Pennsylvania politics at the time.

America, 1815–1846 and Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, Pennsylvania politics play a role—brief but important in the former, and crucial in the latter.¹³ The authors highlight the early democratic orientation of Pennsylvania politics and the class-based nature of political differences, especially in Philadelphia.

Sellers and Wilentz, to some extent, posit a “Progressive” economic interpretation that points to the importance of the short-lived Philadelphia Working Men’s Party and its influence on the Jacksonians. Both also deal extensively with the “Bank War” that followed Jackson’s 1832 veto of the bill to recharter the Second Bank of the United States (BUS), which was a story of Pennsylvania interests and politics as much as a national struggle for power. The headquarters of the BUS was located on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, and its president, Nicholas Biddle—a government director appointed by James Monroe and who had voted for Andrew Jackson in 1828—was a scion of an old Philadelphia family.¹⁴ The Bank War had a major effect on Pennsylvania politics since it also included the chartering of the BUS as a state bank after its federal charter expired and because Philadelphia lost its place as the nation’s banking center.

A number of new books on Pennsylvania politics have appeared in the past twenty-five years that provide a more nuanced view of these various issues. On the whole, by emphasizing ideology and conflict, they represent a return to the “Progressive” perspective. For example, Terry Bouton’s *Taming Democracy: “The People,” the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* exalts the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, casts the writing and ratification of the U.S. Constitution as a counterrevolution, and criticizes the Federalists for tamping down democracy by suppressing the Whiskey and Fries’s rebellions.¹⁵ Bouton’s well-written and carefully argued discussion of the Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution, with his strong emphasis on class and

¹³ (New York, 1991) and (New York, 2005). Both pay homage to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945). This Pulitzer Prize-winning classic placed urban working men and the 1832 Bank War at the heart of Jacksonian Democracy. Wilentz consciously attempts to update that understanding of the evolution of American democracy. Sellers, who was a contemporary of Schlesinger, has always put forth quite similar views. See particularly, *James K. Polk: Jacksonian, 1795–1843* (Princeton, NJ, 1957).

¹⁴ Thomas Payne Govan, *Nicholas Biddle: Nationalist and Public Banker, 1786–1844* (Chicago, 1959) is a superb biography of Biddle that contests Schlesinger’s view of the Bank War and also reminds us that Henry D. Gilpin and Charles J. Ingersoll need biographies.

¹⁵ (New York, 2007).

economic matters, echoes Elisha P. Douglass's *Rebels and Democrats: The Struggle for Equal Political Rights and Majority Rule during the American Revolution* and Jackson Turner Main's *The Anti-federalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781–1788*. These works, along with Bouton's book, might be regarded as "Neo-Progressive."¹⁶

The tumultuous politics of the late eighteenth century claim center stage in the excellent *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788–1800*, written by two of the finest of the "Consensus" historians, Stanley Elkins and Eric L. McKittrick.¹⁷ Their book, which canvasses the new nation in its birthing process, offers a powerful narrative of Pennsylvania politics, tracking the causes, conditions, and consequences in the activities and roilings of the democratic republican societies, the Whiskey and Fries's rebellions, and the Keystone State's critical role in the election of 1800. Like most "Consensus" history, it implies the uniqueness of America and the pragmatic way that even these early politicians responded to questions about the right of a political opposition to exist and the extent to which a free press could or should publish criticisms of government and persons. Elkins and McKittrick's work commands respect because of their even-handed manner and the great detail in their discussion of these often emotional subjects.

Saul Cornell's perceptive study *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* is replete with discussions of Pennsylvania politics, as is James Roger Sharp's *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis*.¹⁸ Cornell highlights the democratic nature of Anti-Federalist activity in Pennsylvania, and his book has Neo-Progressive overtones. Sharp moderates the emphasis on economic questions and comes off here as almost a "Consensus" historian, enjoying the way that early politicians worked while acknowledging that violence and the possible dissolution of the "experiment" in republican government were ever-present dangers.¹⁹

Several monographs look specifically to Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century. As one might glean from the title, *Religion, Ethnicity,*

¹⁶ (Chapel Hill, NC, 1955) and (Chapel Hill, NC, 1961).

¹⁷ (New York, 1993).

¹⁸ (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999) and (New Haven, CT, 1993). Sharp discusses Pennsylvania politics extensively in his earlier book, *The Jacksonians versus the Banks: Politics in the States after the Panic of 1837* (New York, 1970).

¹⁹ See also Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom Just around the Corner: A New American History 1585–1828* (New York, 2004).

and *Politics: Ratifying the Constitution in Pennsylvania*, Owen S. Ireland has written a study of the fight over ratification of the Constitution that reflects a greater influence of the "New Political History."²⁰ Ireland delicately separates the interests involved and provides the best analysis of the subject that we have because of the clear way in which he shows how ethnocultural variables, class, and sectional matters intersected.

Admirable studies of the Whiskey Rebellion have been written by both Thomas P. Slaughter and William Hogeland.²¹ Slaughter stresses sectional differences within the commonwealth and the long-standing American opposition to taxation of any kind. Hogeland, in an extensive bibliographic essay that is worth the price of the book, avoids Slaughter's overemphasis on the rebels' Republican ideology and Bouton's tendency to "romanticize" the rebels as the epitome of popular sovereignty.

In *Fries's Rebellion: The Enduring Struggle for the American Revolution*, Paul Douglas Newman has given us a long-needed scholarly study of this nonviolent tax revolt in which German Reformed and Lutheran farmers in eastern Pennsylvania protested the so-called "Window Tax" laid by the Federalists to support their preparations for military conflict with the French.²² Newman follows many of the themes of the books listed above, emphasizing localism, ethnicity and religion, and the long-standing opposition to taxes. Thus, taken together, these four books underscore the tenuous nature of the "new nation" and the conflicted meanings of 1776.

Several historians have explored aspects of politics that the traditional literature had ignored. In *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, Simon P. Newman examines the social rituals that were connected to politics in the eighteenth century and continued into the early republic.²³ A similar book by David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820*, takes a more expansive view, but also has much

²⁰ (University Park, PA, 1995).

²¹ Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York, 1986); and William Hogeland, *The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and the Frontier Rebels Who Challenged America's Newfound Sovereignty* (New York, 2006). They provide the long-needed revision of Leland Baldwin, *The Whiskey Rebels: The Story of a Frontier Uprising* (Pittsburgh, 1939).

²² (Philadelphia, 2004).

²³ (Philadelphia, 1997).

that is worthwhile to say about Pennsylvania politics.²⁴ Both Newman and Waldstreicher illustrate the broadening of the idea of politics with the introduction of the concept of “the public sphere,” which can be found in a number of recent studies of the early republic.²⁵ Waldstreicher in particular portrays “fetes” as occasions when men came together not only to drink but also to bond as new Americans. Newman focuses more on parades and erecting liberty poles as symbolic of the people’s entrance into the political sphere.

In a class by itself is Richard N. Rosenfeld’s *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republican Returns: The Suppressed History of Our Beginnings and the Heroic Newspaper That Tried to Report It*.²⁶ The author assumes the persona of one of the *Aurora* editors, William Duane. He provides some analysis and some pseudoautobiography, while drawing heavily on the *Aurora*’s articles, which are extensively reprinted in the book. As a consequence, the book (which is a joy to read), like the *Aurora*, is fervently Anti-Federalist.

Jeffrey L. Pasley has written a much more balanced and academic study, which also focuses to an exceptional extent on Philadelphia. In *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early Republic*, Pasley concentrates on the 1790s, but carries the study forward into the early nineteenth century.²⁷ Essentially pro-Jeffersonian, he reminds us that newspapers were essential both in forming, and informing, the “First Party System” and in creating the early republic. By his accounting, newspapers not only reported on politics, but also directed much of the political discussion and fostered a sense of partisanship. In a closely related fashion, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* by David A. Wilson, an Irishman who teaches at the University of Toronto, explores the international basis of much of the democratic radicalism that these other studies find in Philadelphia journalism and politics.²⁸

²⁴ (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

²⁵ This trend reflects the influence of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. See particularly his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

²⁶ (New York, 1997).

²⁷ (Charlottesville, VA, 2001). The anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace has written an excellent study, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1978), which includes commentary on local politics at the time in a Philadelphia suburb.

²⁸ (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

Andrew Shankman's *Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania* is nearly impossible to categorize, other than to say that it is traditional political history at its best.²⁹ Shankman deals with the Federalists, who dominated Pennsylvania politics in the 1780s and 1790s. However, his primary interest is in sorting out and making sense of the factional infighting among the Jeffersonian Democratic Republicans, who took almost complete control of the state after 1800. He also seeks to understand how Americans, especially in a dynamic economy such as Pennsylvania's, came to see democracy as the handmaiden of free-market capitalism. Political conflict in Pennsylvania during these years generally was carried on in the "big tent" of the Republicans who supported Jefferson.

The Philadelphia Democrats, led by Michael Leib and William Duane and supported by the city's artisans and immigrants from Ireland and France, were the most radical element. They would limit or eliminate the powers of the courts and use the legislature to equalize opportunity and defend democracy. Constituting a much larger element of the party were the rural Democrats led by Governor Simon Snyder. They advocated small government and laissez-faire principles, believing that the expansion of the market and economic growth would benefit all. Shankman gives considerable attention to a third Democratic faction, the "Quids," who were basically "silk-stocking" Democrats. This account conflicts with the Progressive view that the Jeffersonian Republicans, led by an aristocratic slaveholding Virginian, were basically supported by the working class in cities like Philadelphia. It draws a more realistic picture of the cross-class nature of party coalitions in most of American history.

Shankman's emphasis on the differing approaches of these Democratic factions to questions of political economy offers an original explanation of how Pennsylvanians fused the quest for equality and the desire to obtain the fruits of liberal capitalism. Shankman's nuanced discussion of one state's political history posits a convincing answer to one of the central questions about the development of American capitalism and its relation to the nation's political history. His conclusion is similar to the one given by Hartz a half century ago.³⁰

²⁹ (Lawrence, KS, 2004).

³⁰ Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776–1860* (Cambridge, MA, 1948). See William G. Shade, "Louis Hartz and the Myth of Laissez Faire," *Pennsylvania History* 59 (1992): 256–73.

The Federalists in Pennsylvania have been the subject of two books: Kenneth W. Keller's *Rural Politics and the Collapse of Pennsylvania Federalism* and William C. Dowling's *Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and The Port Folio, 1801–1811*.³¹ The former, in the spirit of the "New Political History," tracks the shifting voting patterns that moved the Keystone State from Federalist control to one of the most powerful Democratic Republican states in the North. Dowling provides a cultural history, emphasizing attitude and rhetoric. It is an intellectual history focused upon the elite, but it also gives a sense of why those of lesser means, artisans called "mechanics and manufacturers," might have voted for the Federalists. Like Shankman, he shows the simplistic and unrealistic nature of the two-class/two-party analysis put forth by the Progressive historians.

While students of the early republic have been well served by recent studies of Pennsylvania politics, most of what has been written is in some form social history. Joyce Appleby's *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, based on autobiographies, details how individual Americans, including Pennsylvanians, came to terms with the new world of the early republic.³² In *Moral Visions and Material Ambitions: Philadelphia Struggles to Define the Republic, 1776–1836*, A. Kristen Foster picks up the general argument set forth by Bouton and traces the development of a class structure in the first third of the nineteenth century.³³ Actually, her story is familiar, as she returns to the "Progressive" profile of class conflict culminating with the emergence of the Philadelphia Working Men's Party, which Foster argues grew out of the division between master artisans and journeymen.

Although Foster gives extensive detail about the trials of journeymen in 1806 and 1827, her book lacks the substance of two other labor histories concerning class and politics in Pennsylvania: Bruce Laurie's *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* and Ronald Schultz's *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720–1830*.³⁴ Both return to the "Progressive" idea that the "transition to

³¹ (Philadelphia, 1982) and (Columbia, SC, 1999).

³² (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

³³ (Lanham, MD, 2004). Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (Cambridge, 1989) focuses heavily on middle-class development in Philadelphia.

³⁴ (Philadelphia, 1980) and (New York, 1983). These challenge the traditional study of workingmen's politics as represented by William A. Sullivan's *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania*,

capitalism," especially in cities like Philadelphia, led to a politics rooted in economic class. They portray the Jacksonians (as had Beard and Schlesinger) as the protectors of the poor and downtrodden, thus giving "Jacksonian Democracy" a renewed resonance.

The populist aspects of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania politics have been revisited in the recent historiography in a way that the "Progressive" historians avoided. Historians have now detailed racial and ethnic riots and the associated electoral violence. Just as political passion marked the 1790s, it returned to the political scene in the period from the 1830s to the Civil War. Voters did not go to the polls alone. American democracy was a competitive "manly sport," rag-tag and rough.³⁵ It got out of hand in Philadelphia. Again, this is old news, and previous historians have related it. Michael Feldberg has two excellent recent books on the subject, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* and the shorter and more general *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America*.³⁶ He tends to see the working-class, ethnic, religious, and racial riots of the day as a part of the "politics of the streets" or "politics out of doors," purposeful rather than random. Although Mark Summers's books on corruption and the spread of political news through newspapers, pamphlets, and other print media are not specifically about Pennsylvania, they include much discussion of the connections between the manner and substance of making and spreading "news" in, and the politics of, the commonwealth.³⁷

In contrast, John M. Belohlavek, in *George Mifflin Dallas: Jacksonian Patrician*, looks at a quite different part of the Jacksonian Democratic Party in this biography of the only U.S. vice president from the Keystone

1800–1840 (Harrisburg, PA, 1955). On the formation of the entrepreneurial class, see Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800–1885* (Cambridge, 1983).

³⁵ David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward the Civil War* (New York, 1998).

³⁶ (Westport, CT, 1975) and (New York, 1980). These books revise, but do not replace, Ray Allen Billington's classic study, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800–1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York, 1938). See also Dennis Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* (Philadelphia, 1973); and Dale B. Light, *Rome and the New Republic: Conflict and Community in Philadelphia Catholicism between the Revolution and the Civil War* (South Bend, IN, 1996). Richard Franklin Bensel, *The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2004) is the most recent study of the process of voting in the nineteenth century.

³⁷ Mark Summers, *The Plundering Generation: Corruption and the Crisis of the Union, 1849–1861* (New York, 1987); *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York, 1992); and *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865–1878* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994).

State.³⁸ For three decades, Dallas was a central figure in the state's politics and the major rival of James Buchanan within the Democratic Party. Dallas was not only a consistently important player in the state's political game throughout the antebellum period, but he also served quite successfully as a minister to Russia and then, later in life, to Great Britain. On the whole, the discussion of Dallas's role in foreign affairs is the best part of the book.³⁹

Belohlavek does not seem to like his subject and underrates his obvious importance. He tells his readers that Dallas should have been a Whig and perhaps would have been a Federalist. But Dallas was the son of Madison's secretary of the treasury, Alexander Dallas, and thus an heir to those Shankman calls the Quids. Although Belohlavek does not want to admit it, his book tells us more about the complex socioeconomic make-up of the Pennsylvania Jacksonians than the labor histories mentioned above.

Those who want to commemorate Pennsylvania's peaceful Quaker traditions require a modern and critical study of the Pennsylvania abolitionists. But one of the most famous incidents of violence leading to the Civil War is detailed in Thomas P. Slaughter's *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North*.⁴⁰ Actually, this was, as Slaughter shows, less a riot than a small-scale interracial defensive action to prevent a fugitive slave from being captured and returned to slavery by his masters; it hardly represented a statewide commitment to the enslaved. Still, the incident revealed the collapsing political structures of accommodation and compromise amid the rising sectional rancor that forced slavery and race into all political discussions by the mid 1850s.

There have been no new political histories of Pennsylvania's role in the coming of the Civil War since John F. Coleman's 1975 study. Thus, one has to refer to discussions of Pennsylvania in more general studies. Jonathan H. Earle's account of antislavery sentiments among the Democrats, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854*, contains a congenial portrait of David Wilmot (who certainly

³⁸ (University Park, PA, 1977).

³⁹ The number of Pennsylvanians sent, or exiled, to Russia as ministers during these years is striking.

⁴⁰ (New York, 1991).

deserves a modern biography).⁴¹ Two other important books provide new insights into Pennsylvania history in the 1850s: William E. Gienapp's *The Origins of the Republican Party: 1852–1856* and Mark Voss-Hubbard's *Beyond Party: Cultures of Antipartisanship in Northern Politics before the Civil War*.⁴² Gienapp's "New" political history relates the emergence of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania to both the role of the Know-Nothings and the 1854 referendum on prohibition. Voss-Hubbard adeptly shows how the American antiparty tradition functioned in Pennsylvania as part of the political culture of the Know-Nothings.

Michael F. Holt, who began his career with a book on Pittsburgh and party realignment in the 1850s, has now written the "big book" on the American Whigs.⁴³ It is not about Pennsylvania per se, but anyone interested in the role of the Keystone State in the breakup of the second party system and the coming of the Civil War will appreciate this immensely detailed and politically driven book. Jean H. Baker, who has written a compelling book on the northern Democrats before the Civil War, as well as a text with Holt that is crammed with references to Pennsylvania, has produced a new brief biographical sketch of Pennsylvania's only president, James Buchanan.⁴⁴

She does not paint a very pretty picture. In his biography, Philip Klein made the strongest argument for Buchanan, who, as Baker acknowledges, was one of the best-prepared men ever to take the office.⁴⁵ Her answer to why he failed so badly in the crisis of the Union is that he was consumed by his typically Democratic adherence to strict construction of the Constitution and his "excessive" affection for the South. Buchanan continues to suffer in the estimation of historians, who regularly rank him in the bottom tier of presidents. Only novelist John Updike and a band of Buchanan adherents in Lancaster County have worked to resurrect Buchanan's reputation.

⁴¹ (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004). The best study on this subject emphasizes New York politics. See Champlain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1967).

⁴² (New York, 1987) and (Baltimore, 2002).

⁴³ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York, 1999).

⁴⁴ Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 1983) and *James Buchanan* (New York, 2004). Holt and Baker worked with their mentor, David Herbert Donald, on the latest revision of *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 2001).

⁴⁵ Philip S. Klein, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park, PA, 1962).

When one turns to the war itself, most references to Pennsylvania concern the Battle of Gettysburg. The military history of the war, with a nod to politics, was the life work of a Pennsylvania historian, Russell F. Weigley. By contrast, J. Matthew Gallman's *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War* largely avoids political history, but makes the case that the war did not profoundly alter the economic or social structure of the city, which was already industrializing. On political matters, however, Gallman leaves the story where William Dusenberre left it over forty years ago in his *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856–1865*. That work was traditional history of the best sort, relying principally on newspapers, with political concerns principally framed in terms of party differences and the ways in which national issues impinged on local interests. It differed from the “New” political historians’ concerns with political culture, competing ethnic, religious, and racial “identity” interests, and extralegal political activism. The subject of political dissent in wartime Pennsylvania is gaining interest, as evidenced in master’s theses and doctoral dissertations being written by graduate students at Pennsylvania State University. Yet, only Arnold M. Shankman, in *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement, 1861–1865*, treats the Copperheads in Pennsylvania in a book-length study. In it, he argues that the Democrats served as an effective critical counterweight to the Republicans, using fears of black emancipation, federal abuses of power, and suppression of civil liberties to make their case.⁴⁶

Seemingly out of nowhere there appeared a most modest book that tells us more about the Civil War than its more ambitious predecessors. Edward Ayers’s *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*, is based on one of the most original historical Web sites, called The Valley of the Shadow. The project compares Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and Augusta County, Virginia, both located in the Great Valley that extends from New York nearly to Georgia. Ayers and his colleagues gathered together an entire array of revealing sources, from census data, church records, newspapers, and public documents, to diaries, letters, and memoirs of “the People.” By contrasting two counties with very similar economies, culture, terrain, and more that are not that far apart geographically, Ayers shows how pervasive and subtle the influence of slavery was on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line and how

⁴⁶ (Cambridge, 1990); (Philadelphia, 1965); and (Rutherford, NJ, 1980), respectively.

crucial the slavery question became by 1861.⁴⁷ It also reflects the way in which community obligations and local identities formed people's understanding of national politics.

Mark E. Neely Jr., in *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North*, focuses upon the divisions within the northern states—particularly the states that bordered on slave states that did not secede. His main thesis is that rather than being a force for cohesion, and thus contributing to the ultimate Union victory in the Civil War, the continuation of prewar partisanship was a source of division, conflict, and mistrust within the North. In this, he counters a widely accepted argument that the continuation of the two-party system played a vital role in the Union victory and stood in contrast to the divisiveness within the Confederacy, which lacked a functioning two-party system.⁴⁸

Neely is clearly correct, but he overplays his hand. He divides the Republicans (as had the “Progressive” historians) into a radical antislavery element and a business element that sought to use government to promote economic growth. Some historians have criticized Thaddeus Stevens, who was both a Radical Republican and a businessman, by casting doubt on his antislavery convictions.⁴⁹ These two elements are together and even evident in the portrayal of Abraham Lincoln, who was both a corporate and a circuit-riding lawyer. Neely also ignores David Potter's focus, particularly with regard to the weaknesses of the Confederacy, but he makes an excellent point that such partisan animosity, particularly in the press, spread misinformation and encouraged political division in states such as Pennsylvania. In these states, the dominant Republicans looked upon the “loyal opposition” as treasonous, and they called the Peace Democrats “Copperheads,” after the venomous snake. But, in inventing the term “miscegenation,” the Democratic press plumbed the sexual element of racist ideology. Neely's book devotes more space to Pennsylvania politics during the Civil War than it does to the politics of any other state.

⁴⁷ (New York, 2003). Ayers reminds us that a modern biography of Alexander K. McClure is badly needed.

⁴⁸ (Cambridge, MA, 2002). See also Neely, *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).

⁴⁹ See Richard N. Current, *Old Thad Stevens: A Story of Ambition* (Madison, WI, 1942); Robert P. Sharkey, *Money, Class, and Party: An Economic Study of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baltimore, MD, 1959); and Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South* (New York, 1959).

Although not focused exclusively on the Keystone State, Nina Silber's *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* treats the ways mobilization for war gave northern women, in Pennsylvania as elsewhere, a new sense of power and purpose as their civic responsibilities expanded. However, assumptions about their proper political place did not grow accordingly.⁵⁰ This and several other books that essentially emerged out of the women's studies movement, which has flowered since the 1970s, have broadened our conception of political history and emphasized the role of women in shaping the political and civic culture at a time when women could not vote.⁵¹ A majority of the members of abolition societies were women, and they ran the great petition campaigns of the 1830s. Some of these women launched the movement for women's rights, which was energized by the Civil War and emerged organizationally during the Reconstruction era. Although the activities of reformer Florence Kelley, the daughter of the inflationist and protariff Republican William "Pig-Iron" Kelley, are well known, this aspect of Pennsylvania political history remains surprisingly understudied.⁵²

Recently, post-Civil War Pennsylvania politics have gained little scholarly attention. Some years ago, David Montgomery, the founding father of the "New" labor history, wrote a superb book on northern politics and Reconstruction, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872*. He has continued to produce books and articles on labor history that discuss developments in Pennsylvania.⁵³ But Pennsylvania's political history during these years has not generated much new interest. To be sure, the Molly Maguires have remained a perennial topic in folklore and a subject of interest in history and tourism, not to mention the basis of a popular movie.

⁵⁰ (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

⁵¹ See especially Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990); Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1997); Cindy Sondik Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service: Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York, 1987); Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630–1970* (New York, 1992); and Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998). A study of the ways the war affected women's political expectations and actions in Pennsylvania is badly needed.

⁵² Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (Urbana, IL, 1978).

⁵³ (New York, 1967). One example is Montgomery's *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993).

One of my students, William A. Gudelunas Jr., and I did a study of Schuylkill County politics in *Before the Molly Maguires: The Emergence of the Ethno-Religious Factor in the Politics of the Lower Anthracite Region, 1844–1872*.⁵⁴ Grace Palladino, David Montgomery's student, replied with an excellent book, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State of the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840–68*. She emphasizes class conflict in the coal region, which was layered onto religious and ethnic differences separating miners and mine owners. She also details the draft protests during the war and the later emergence of labor-union politics.

Although there are several fairly good books on the "Mollies," Kevin Kenny has produced a modern revisionist version of their story favorable to the Irish radicals.⁵⁵ His book is readable, detailed, intelligently argued, and may be the definitive study of the Molly Maguires. It gives a good sense of the social basis underlying this sometimes mysterious secret society. Like Palladino, he largely bases the conflicts in the region on class, but Kenny also acknowledges overlapping ethnoreligious factors. Although they emphasize social and labor history, Harold W. Aurand, in *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers: The Social Ecology of an Industrial Union, 1869–1897*, and Walter Licht, in *Going to Work: Philadelphia, 1840–1890*, show how unions emerged as an important part of Pennsylvania politics as the state became an industrial powerhouse and a center of organized labor.⁵⁶ Most of the famous incidents of violent clashes between labor and the police protecting the interests of capital took place in the Keystone State. At the end of the nineteenth century, the owners of the mines and iron, and later steel, companies had their own private police forces, and the Pennsylvania State Police originated as an agency to control labor unrest.

As the various biographies of George M. Dallas, James Buchanan, and Thaddeus Stevens remind us, an understanding of Pennsylvania politics must include the impact of Pennsylvanians on the national stage. This impact is often obscured because of historians' unwillingness to pay much

⁵⁴ (New York, 1976). See also Anthony F. C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster-Prone Industry* (New York, 1987), which focuses on miners' lives at the time.

⁵⁵ Kevin Kenney, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York, 1998).

⁵⁶ (Philadelphia, 1971) and (Cambridge, MA, 1992). In *Andrew Carnegie and the Rise of Big Business* (Boston, 1975), Harold C. Livesay has written a model brief biography of a most unusual adopted Pennsylvanian on the other side of the class divide.

attention to the inner workings of Congress. An exception is Margaret Susan Thompson's *The "Spider Web": Congress and Lobbying in the Age of Grant*.⁵⁷ She shows the important role that Pennsylvania Democratic congressman Samuel J. Randall played during these years.⁵⁸

Randall is often contrasted with Thaddeus Stevens in terms of his attitude toward the South, but Thompson clearly relates how "Sam" Randall influenced numerous pieces of legislation during these years, such as the Civil Rights Bill of 1875; he also worked on structuring the House rules of procedure. For good or ill, depending on your perspective, he acted as a powerful force moderating the desires of the Radical Republicans and, in doing so, represented the postwar Democratic Party in the Keystone State, which openly saw itself as protector of the white South.

The contributors to the Miller and Pencak history of Pennsylvania emphasized social and labor history because that has been the focus of most of the secondary literature written in the last twenty-five years. Yet, they showed their "New" political historians' perspectives by seeing politics as being more than simply the story of elections. In the last decade, Pennsylvania historians have talked of writing a "new, new political history."⁵⁹ They are doing it by emphasizing social and cultural themes. Others discuss writing the "newest" political history by returning to traditional narrative and by closely scrutinizing political rhetoric. They may also employ a modest use of quantification associated with the old "New Political History," which emphasized the role of cultures of ethnoreligious groups, as well as economic classes, in structuring the electorate's response and general social outlook of the parties.⁶⁰ They also have examined political mobilization and the changing make-up of the electorate.⁶¹

Since politics is at the center of our lives—everything from snow

⁵⁷ (Ithaca, NY, 1985). This book is representative of the "New Political History."

⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Albert V. House's dissertation, "The Political Career of Samuel Jackson Randall" (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1934), was never turned into a book.

⁵⁹ William G. Shade, "Commentary: Déjà Vu All Over Again: Is There a New New Political History?" in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 387–412.

⁶⁰ See the "Introduction" of Pasley, Robertson, and Waldstreicher, eds., *Beyond the Founders*, 1–28. Pasley, *Tryanny of Printers*, mentioned above, represents this tendency.

⁶¹ Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted?: The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870–1980* (New York, 1982); Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1828* (New York, 1986); and Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York, 1998).

removal, the education of our children, the control of crime, and, of course, war and taxes—political life will continue to be at the center of our history. And it will continue to be revised. Major books like those of Sellers and Wilentz, along with the numerous monographs mentioned here that focus on Pennsylvania, show that political history is alive and well even though it may have given up its once primary place in the discipline.⁶² Several recent studies of political organization, leadership, and various local-level interests extend their attention beyond the period on which I have focused, but they reinforce the notion that we must remember the functions that much-maligned politicians have played in our history.⁶³ Perhaps “all politics” isn’t local, but a good part of it has been, and this was particularly true in the nineteenth century. This means that historians must never lose sight of the politicians, even as they infinitely expand the definition of “politics.” We dare not lazily rely on generalities about why things happened as though everyone was overwhelmed by “larger” forces. We must always keep in mind that most often it is the decisions by those with political power that cause “things” to happen.⁶⁴ This perhaps brings us back—or maybe forward—to Lincoln Steffens, who had an uncanny understanding of the politicians and public figures of his time (particularly those in Philadelphia) and how they functioned. Just maybe that is why American democracy has worked for so long.

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⁶² Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988) ends with a chapter, “There was no king in Israel.” By the end of the twentieth century, Novick argues, no “school” was dominant.

⁶³ Particularly, Harry C. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics from the Bottom Up: The Life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824–1901* (Philadelphia, 1989); and Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933* (University Park, PA, 1993).

⁶⁴ William W. Freehling’s two-volume study, *The Road to Disunion* (1990; New York, 2007), represents what I am advocating as the best kind of political history. It is my generation’s classic analysis of the coming of the Civil War. Because it, properly, focuses on the South and the secessionists, it contains only random references to Pennsylvania.