

# **The Paxton Boys and the Pamphlet Frenzy: Politics, Religion, and Social Structure in Eighteenth- Century Pennsylvania**

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## **History**

On December 13 and 27, 1763, bands of men from the Pennsylvania frontier, commonly referred to as the Paxton Boys\*, murdered 20 Conestoga Indians vigilante style. The first attack occurred at Conestoga Manor where the Indians lived, but the second attack occurred in the City of Lancaster while the remaining survivors were in protective custody. None of the Conestoga Indians survived, and many of the victims included women, children, and the elderly. In January of 1764, Benjamin Franklin published a scathing response to the murders in which he characterized the behavior of the perpetrators as “barbarous Men who committed the atrocious Fact, in Defiance of Government, of all Laws’ human and divine, and to the external Disgrace of their Country and Colour.” He further claimed that the “Frontier People call themselves *Christians*,” but the Indians “would have been safer, if they had submitted to the *Turks* ... the *Moors* ... the *Popist Spaniards* ... in any known Part of the World, -- except in the Neighborhood of the CHRISTIAN WHITE SAVAGES.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout this narrative, Franklin repeatedly compared the frontier inhabitants with entities, which would seem to colonial Pennsylvanians as the most inhumane and uncivilized in the world.

Then, less than two months later, in February of 1764, more than 250 men marched from the frontier to Philadelphia, allegedly to rout out 140 Moravian Indians temporarily housed in Philadelphia barracks. In the end, the City of Philadelphia was able to avoid violence and a possible “revolt” when City leaders met the “rioters” in Germantown and persuaded them to return home. In exchange for the dispersal of the Paxton rioters, the Philadelphia leaders agreed that the protesters could present their grievances and submit petitions to the Pennsylvania Assembly for consideration. In their Declaration, the Paxton Boys claimed that the Indians were allied with the enemy (the French), but that despite this fact, the Assembly favored the Indians while the frontier settlers “were left to starve neglected.” In addition, the Paxton Boys castigated the political leadership, specifically blaming the Quakers when they claimed, “Such is our unhappy Situation, under the Villany, Infatuation and Influence of a certain Faction that have got the political reigns in their Hand and tamely tyrannize over the other good Subjects of the Province!” In their formal petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly, the protesters requested equal political representation, a halt to the allocation of public money to protect Indians, a request for the release of public funds to assist frontier settlers, and a cessation to Indian trade until frontier captives were released.<sup>2</sup>

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\* While it seems that the men who murdered the Conestoga Indians and who marched on Philadelphia were not all from Paxton, but came from a number of the “frontier” counties, the term “Paxton Boys” became established as the “official” descriptor.

As these contemporary reactions suggest, there are many lenses one can use to examine the attacks on the Conestoga Indians and the subsequent march on Philadelphia. These include looking at the changing racial framework in Pennsylvania or the hostile relationship between the frontier and urban regions. However, the aftermath of these events, in particular the publishing of 63 pamphlets, commentaries, and satires and 10 political cartoons, also provides an opportunity to examine and consider the tensions that existed in the colony's social organization and how different groups within Philadelphia used the Paxton affair to garner greater political and societal power. For backcountry settlers, the events that took place between December 1763 and February 1764 centered primarily on issues reflecting frontier-urban animosity. In Philadelphia, the Paxton affair also appeared at first to reflect the same east-west tension. However, competing constituencies within Philadelphia also used the Paxton events and the subsequent frenzy of pamphlet publishing to further their own agendas and to augment their own power and influence within the established social organization. And ultimately, it was the framework of religion and religious affiliation upon which the battle lines hardened and along which the struggle for social and political hegemony was fought.

Some of the most recent scholarship on the Paxton riots emphasizes the racism against the Indians that was ignited by these events, and argues that racial, white-Indian, construction permanently changed in Pennsylvania, and also reflected change that was occurring throughout colonial North America. Other scholarship uses a frontier-urban filter to explain and illuminate the tensions between "easterners" and "westerners" and their respective interests and priorities. Finally, a significant amount of scholarship emphasizes the political implications of the events of 1763-1764. In this vein, some scholars view the Paxton affair and its aftermath as a reconfiguration of Pennsylvania politics, while others view the events as a precursor of the common people's emerging sense of democracy and willingness to engage in a revolution against the English crown.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I blend and elaborate on the themes of east and west contention and the battle for political power and influence in Philadelphia by examining a variety of publications that came out in the aftermath of the Paxton affair. In doing this, I hope to expose the tension, which existed within the established social organization of Pennsylvania and to highlight religion as a defining division between people.<sup>4</sup>

To understand the strain on the social structure in Pennsylvania, it is important to step back and examine the initial colonization efforts and how Pennsylvania society evolved through the mid-eighteenth century. William Penn and the Quakers came to Pennsylvania in 1681 to pursue a "holy experiment," to promote a plural society that incorporated religious and civil freedoms, while also ensuring that virtue, order, and structure characterized the colony. Overall, these efforts were successful, especially during the second quarter of the eighteenth century when many Quakers enjoyed increasing wealth as merchants. Because the Quakers lived primarily in Philadelphia, they dominated politics and the administration of the colony, thus making them the recognized and uncontested leaders of Pennsylvania. In addition, because of the Quakers' embrace of religious and civil freedoms, Pennsylvania welcomed a large and diverse array of immigrants, which resulted in a significant increase in population, from approximately 40,000 in 1726 to 150,000 in 1755, and the addition of five new counties. By mid-century, Pennsylvania was arguably the most populated and also the most pluralistic society in colonial North America.<sup>5</sup>

However, success also brought challenges and unanticipated tensions, economically, ethnically, religiously and politically. For example, economic success depended in large part on whether an individual was an earlier or later settler, with a distinct advantage going to those settlers who arrived first. In addition, especially between 1730-1750, the gap between the rich and poor layers of society widened. Thus, by the middle of the eighteenth century a new elite merchant class had developed, which predominantly was comprised of Philadelphia Quakers. This new elite had an increasingly capitalistic outlook as well as respect for wealth that not only posed internal religious debate within the Society of Friends, but also fostered a growing sense of resentment among non-Quakers.<sup>6</sup>

Compounding the challenges of this economic disparity was the pattern of settlement in Pennsylvania, which reinforced ethnic and religious differences. By 1755, for example, the English and Welsh made up only one-third of the population, but geographically they dominated the wealthier, eastern part of the colony. The scarcity of “eastern” land in turn forced the Scots-Irish, who numbered approximately 40,000, to settle predominantly in the relatively poor, western frontier counties; while the Germans, who numbered upwards of 60,000, tended to settle in the backcountry of the north and northwest.<sup>7</sup>

These ethnic settlement patterns also reflected religious patterns, in which the Protestants, predominantly made up of Scots-Irish Presbyterians and German Lutherans and Reformists, dominated the frontier region. The Quakers, who were only a portion of the English / Welsh minority, subsequently comprised an even smaller percentage of the population when measured by church affiliation. In fact, by 1755, Quakers as members of the Society of Friends made up no more than one-sixth of the population and possibly as little as one-eighth. Although a declining proportion of the population, Quakers continued to maintain a cohesive and powerful religious presence, partly because of their residential concentration in the interior counties and because of their religious devotion to mutual aid and discipline. In contrast, Protestants on the whole were not able to maintain such a tight community, because of continued fractures between “old light” and “new light” Presbyterians, differences in language and ethnicity, and a comparatively weak church structure and religious discipline on the frontier. Thus, despite the smallness of the Quakers as a group, ethnically and religiously, the Quaker community was situated firmly in the urban center of the colony and was able to maintain religious cohesion and economic power.<sup>8</sup>

Pennsylvania politics also reflected the disproportionate influence that the Quaker populace maintained during this period, primarily because political participation was grounded in specific social and economic requirements, which included an individual’s independence, virtue, wealth, religious reputation and education. These political prerequisites favored the more established, centrally located Quaker community, enabling Quakers to dominate all aspects of political life through the mid-eighteenth century, both in Philadelphia and in the surrounding countryside. In fact, between 1710-1755 Quakers held two-thirds of the Pennsylvania Assembly seats across Pennsylvania, and in some years held up to 90%.<sup>9</sup>

This political framework concentrated power in a small, homogenous elite, which in turn made the Assembly a closed insular, club-like entity. There was not only a strong connection between the Quaker religious hierarchy and the Pennsylvania political

hierarchy, but also a parallel between the wealthy and socially prominent and the religious and politically prominent.<sup>10</sup> Despite these disparities, peaceful political relationships and a stable social organization prevailed in Philadelphia through mid-century. In large part, this was a function of a general acceptance for the “organic” social hierarchy and “the existence of a whole series of widely shared social experiences, informal relationships, lines of influence, institutional arrangements, divisions of power, and forms of legislative behavior that worked to order political affairs, regularize decision making, and resolve conflict.” In fact, Pennsylvania colonists adhered to the tenets of civil Quakerism and a distinctive Quaker culture, which the Society of Friends had nurtured in Pennsylvania, and as British subjects, they also deferred to the concept that there was a natural order in life that stratified society.<sup>11</sup>

Conditions on the frontier were quite different and not nearly as neat and orderly. Life in the backcountry was subsistence-based and consisted of hunting, gathering and farming. Unfortunately, Penn’s concept of a structured and orderly society disappeared under an onslaught of arriving immigrants and disarray over land acquisition. Despite the Proprietors’ right to reserve land, for example, squatting was common and often the ability to improve and cultivate a parcel of land was sufficient to claim it. In fact, during a flood of immigration between 1718-1733, the Pennsylvania Land Office remained closed under pressure of outstanding legal questions regarding the claims of the Penn family. In addition, unlike in Philadelphia, formal institutions in the backcountry were rare and the structure of county administration meant that backcountry residents had to travel long distances to the few existing provincial offices.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the hard, uncertain, and isolated lifestyle frontier residents experienced, their share of the “political pie” was disproportionately small. As Pennsylvania had grown in population and territory and new counties had been created, the newer counties had received fewer representatives. For example, in 1760, the three original, “interior” counties, Philadelphia, Chester and Bucks, each had 10 representatives, but the five backcountry counties, Lancaster, Berks, Northampton, York and Cumberland, had a total of only eight representatives. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the distance to county centers was often great, which made it difficult for backcountry residents to voice their opinions through the election process. The community of Paxton, for example, was 30 miles from its county seat in the City of Lancaster, which meant that a resident had to make a full day’s ride in order to vote. Not surprisingly, between 1729 and the Paxton uprising in 1763, no Paxton man was ever elected to office.<sup>13</sup>

Then, during the Seven-Year’s War, particularly between 1754 and 1758, the ferocity of the Indian offense combined with an inadequate, nearly non-existent defense of the frontier made conditions that were already difficult in the backcountry, terrifying and for many untenable. Although Indian war parties were relatively small, they successfully employed tactics of stealth and surprise to attack individual settlers or clusters of homesteads in small areas. These raiding parties carried away everything that they could not destroy, including horses, livestock, food stores, and captives. Their goal was to inflict maximum physical destruction and psychological terror. This onslaught created a panic in the backcountry, which resulted in the flight of residents eastward and southward, and virtually collapsed the Pennsylvania frontier.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately for the frontier residents, the lack of provincial defense was primarily a result of political infighting and inaction in Philadelphia. Consequently, public funds were unavailable to the frontier, for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the Quaker-dominated Assembly had been deadlocked with the Proprietor over the issue of taxation and public revenue since 1740. This political deadlock combined with the passive, non-legislative style that characterized Quaker leadership, and their religious objection to war, left Pennsylvania without a militia and the frontier without public funds or resources to assist in defense or to come to the aid of the backcountry's victims of war.<sup>15</sup>

For the backcountry, the Seven Year's War and the negligible assistance received from the Pennsylvania Assembly was a transforming event. Grievances that had brewed over the years between the backcountry and Philadelphia leadership, and which had included the Proprietor and the Assembly, crystallized into a resentment that targeted the Assembly and by extension the Quaker elite. Specifically, the frontiersmen blamed the pacifism of the Quakers for the inadequacy of Pennsylvania's defense and for what the backcountry deemed as inappropriate protection of the Indians. This ongoing sense of neglect and abandonment also encouraged frontier residents, arguably by necessity, to intermittently organize themselves during times of crisis as well as to create their own "unofficial" leaders.<sup>16</sup>

For Philadelphia, the Seven Year's War was also a transforming event, but for different reasons. Specifically, the community of the Society of Friends, which had always emphasized the importance of maintaining their Quaker leadership and their distinctive Quaker culture within the colony, became less confident of their ability to "guide" Pennsylvania, as they became a smaller and smaller minority. Compounding this uncertainty, the War also prompted Quakers, based on their pacifist beliefs, to "officially" withdraw from provincial politics. This voluntary withdrawal from formal politics overtly changed the composition of political power and influence in Pennsylvania, but despite this "official" decision and the growing presence of other ethnic and religious groups, the cultural influence of Quakers over Pennsylvania prevailed. Thus, Quakers and the Quaker "party" continued to dominate the politics and administration of the colony, albeit with a less confident hand.<sup>17</sup>

By 1761, not only had peace returned to the frontier, but the rebuilding of the frontier had also begun. Unfortunately, the relative calm was short-lived. In June 1763, Pontiac's War came to the Pennsylvania frontier. Once again, Indian attacks and white casualties were on the rise and continued to increase through the summer and fall, which again brought terror, helplessness, and a renewed sense of the backcountry's resentment of the east.<sup>18</sup> Thus, when the Paxton Massacre and Riot occurred in December, frontier inhabitants were feeling threatened by Indian attacks, neglected by the urban elite, and powerless to affect any change. Within this contentious environment, the events of the Paxton Boys and its aftermath unfolded, at first seemingly as symptoms of the tension between the frontier and urban regions, but eventually as a "contest" between different social and political factions in the city.

As a reflection of sectional hostility, the events surrounding the Paxton Boys in many ways paralleled frontier-urban tensions, which other areas of colonial North America experienced during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Along the rapidly expanding frontier and backcountry, disadvantages in economics and politics relative to

their eastern “neighbors,” fostered growing resentment. In particular, a sense of entrenched inequity and a mistrust of the eastern elite permeated the backcountry, as frontier residents felt increasingly trapped in a subsistence lifestyle. In some colonies, like North Carolina, these resentments eventually boiled over into Regulator Movements, civil, “militarized” attempts to stop the perceived corruption of authorities. By contrast, up and down the Atlantic Seaboard, the eastern elite viewed the inhabitants of the frontier as socially inferior, uncivilized, and unimportant to the colonies, economically and politically. Despite this urban perception of the backcountry inhabitants as marginal there was also a growing recognition of the economic opportunities that abounded on the frontier.<sup>19</sup>

Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century reflected a similar pattern of frontier-urban tensions. The earliest writings of the Paxton Boys underscored this common animosity between the backcountry and urban centers when the frontier settlers used words like the “distressed, bereft, injured Frontier” to describe their situation. Like the backcountry inhabitants of other colonial regions, Pennsylvania backcountry settlers felt neglected and alienated; they distrusted the motives of the urban elite; and felt powerless to improve their situation because they were unequally represented. The *Paxton Declaration and Remonstrance* summarized these sentiments when the frontiersmen claimed that they were “a People grossly abused, unrighteously burdened and made Dupes,” and when they pleaded for the rescue of “a labouring Land from a Weight so oppressive, unreasonable and unjust.”<sup>20</sup>

Backcountry feelings of neglect by, and isolation from, urban centers were common themes in many of the published writings on the Paxton affair. One example is *The Apology of the Paxton Volunteers* in which the frontier settlers defended their actions based on “the weak defenseless State of our long extended Frontier ... We had no Militia in the Province to come to our Assistance, no Stockades or Forts to repair to for Safety; the Inhabitants living formerly in Peace were unaccustomed to the life of Arms, & unacquainted with the Indian Method of making War; so that we were unable to defend ourselves.”<sup>21</sup> In further support, another pamphleteer wrote that the frontier had “sent several Petitions to the Governor and Assembly, which its suppos’d have been conceal’d by some ill designing persons. And tho’ his Honour never receiv’d these Remonstrances, yet the distress’d People believ’d he had, and look’d upon themselves as utterly neglected and their sufferings despis’d by the Governement.” Just as North Carolina Regulators would believe in 1766, Pennsylvania frontiersmen writing on the Paxton affair also suspected that Philadelphia leadership purposefully ignored the needs of the backcountry and that the corruption of eastern officials exacerbated the trying conditions on the frontier.<sup>22</sup>

Another theme that the pamphlets revealed was the frontier inhabitants’ distrust of the motives of the urban elite, including plans to use the frontier to expand economically and a perceived favoritism toward Indians. This was particularly true with respect to the Quakers, who were not only successful businessmen, but who had also established a “private” organization, the Friendly Association, to bypass official government and negotiate directly with the Indians. Some Pennsylvania residents supported these “peaceful” efforts to mitigate violence in the backcountry, but others felt that Quakers harbored economic designs for negotiating with Indians through unofficial channels. Voicing similar suspicions, a pamphleteer pondered, “Whether the Affection which some

Principals of that Sect have shewn Indians, and the great Care they are now taking of them can possibly owe to any particular Advantages that may arise from their Trade.” Further, in the Paxton petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly, frontiersmen claimed that, “A certain Society of People in this Province...openly loaded the Indians with Presents and ... not only abetted our Indian Enemies, but kept up a private Intelligence with them, and publicly received from them a Belt of Wampum, as if ...our Governor or authorized by the King.”<sup>23</sup>

For the settlers on the frontier, these suspicions and resentments became all the more frustrating, because they were unequally represented, legally and politically, which made them powerless to affect any change to their circumstances. Reflecting these concerns, the Paxton *Declaration and Remonstrance* argued that, “We...as Free-Men and English Subjects... have an indisputable Title to the same Privileges [as] his Majesty’s other Subjects, who reside in the interior Counties... and therefore ought not to be excluded from an equal Share with them in the very important Privilege of Legislation... wherefore we humbly pray, that we may be no longer deprived of an equal Number with the Three aforesaid Counties, to represent us in Assembly.” Each of these passages conveyed the west’s hostility toward the east and demonstrated the backcountry’s belief that they were the victims of an entrenched prejudice by the urban elite.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, as in other areas of colonial North America the urban elite of Pennsylvania did view the frontier inhabitants as socially inferior, uncivilized and as an unwanted nuisance in the pursuit of their own “grand plans” for the colony. In addition, especially following the Paxton events, the Philadelphia elite increasingly viewed the frontier as a potential threat to peace and the established order. In particular, the inferiority of the backcountry settlers was a theme repeatedly incorporated into the published Paxton pamphlets. In one example, Charles Read denigrated the frontier as uncivilized when he wrote in a published “letter” that, “Such an inhuman Murder as that at Lancaster, can only serve to convince the World, that there are among us Persons more savage than Indians themselves.” Then, later in the same letter, he credited the irrational behavior of the settlers on the fact that, “Weak Minds are apt to be in an extraordinary Manner inflamed, and get into violent Ferments.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, another pamphleteer viewed the behavior of the Paxton Boys as unsurprising because, “the Rioters...[were not] Freeholders or Men of Property.”<sup>26</sup>

Satire was yet another means to convey the inferiority and uncivilized nature of the backcountry inhabitants. In *A Dialogue, Between Andrew Trueman and Thomas Zealot*, the author underscored the baseness, lack of education and brutality of the frontier, when Thomas Zealot, acting as one of the Paxton Boys, recounted that, “We shot six and a wee ane, that was in the Squaw’s Belly; we sculped three; we tomahawked three; we roasted three and a wee ane; and three and a wee ane we gave to the Hogs... We kilt them at the Mannor just as they getting out of their Beds; And the Gued Folks of Lancaster had taken away aw the Guns, Tomhawks...from them that were in the Goal.”<sup>27</sup> The brutality of the description of the murders, the ungentlemanly act of killing unarmed and defenseless people, and the intentional misspelling of words all identified the Paxton Boys as uncivilized and inferior to the erudite urban community in Philadelphia. In fact, the critiques of the Paxton events and the frontiersmen relied on the innate inferiority of the backcountry residents relative to their urban counterparts, including their lack of

intelligence, education, wealth, and understanding and respect for the principles of appropriate, gentlemanly behavior.

Another common theme in the pamphlets was a concern that the frontier posed a potential threat to the city elites' plans for economic growth, to their authority, and to the established order. As the backcountry suspected, many city merchants viewed Indians as a critical component to an expanding market economy and their ability to continue to accumulate wealth. One pamphlet even highlighted that Indian "Friendship might be of very great Benefit to us – The Skins and Furs are great Weights in the Ballance of Trade."<sup>28</sup> In the same vein, Charles Read in his "letter" commented on the critical role of Indians when he wrote that, "on this Continent their Numbers are very great; that every Individual will purchase some Article of British manufacture; that it is Trade only that enables Britain to maintain Armies, and sent forth Fleets... Indians will... make us Masters of the most valuable Trade for Furs and Peltry in the World."<sup>29</sup> These passages underscored the importance of Indians as consumers, as partners in trade, and as a critical component of British dominance worldwide. Thus, in economic terms alone, the tension and animosity that existed between frontier settlers and the urban elite were not surprising.

However, the Paxton events also awakened a real fear of the unruliness of the backcountry and their potential ability to threaten the authority of the eastern leadership, even to upset peace and the established order. One pamphleteer voiced growing anxiety of the backcountry when he expressed his concern that "if these People should take it into their Heads, not to pay Taxes, or not to pay the Proprietors for their Lands, or the Merchants for their Goods; what would be the Consequence?"<sup>30</sup> Not only was the leadership in Philadelphia concerned about maintaining their authority and control, but also they were also concerned about the possibility of violence and revolt. To that end, Philadelphia passed a Riot Act for the purpose of "preventing tumults." In this Act, "Any persons, to the Number of Twelve, or more, being unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously assembled together...and being required or commanded...to disperse... and continue together...shall be adjudged Felons, and shall suffer Death."<sup>31</sup> The timing of the Act makes it clear that the Governor enacted this law in direct response to the impending "revolt" led by the Paxton Boys.

All of these examples expressed distrust, disdain, even fear – whether it was of unruly frontiersmen, or Indians or the Philadelphia elite, and revealed an east-west orientation to the public dialogue. Ultimately, an unprecedented number of pamphlets and political cartoons were published in the aftermath of the Paxton events, which made it the most publicly contested issue in Pennsylvania up to that point. In total, writings pertaining to the Paxton affair comprised 20% of all of Pennsylvania's printed materials in 1764 (including government documents) and represented a 40% increase over 1763, which made Philadelphia the biggest publishing center in the colonies (surpassing Boston for the first time).<sup>32</sup> However, the divisiveness in the frontier-urban relationship does not seem enough to explain the extent of the pamphlet writing or the sudden shift in the content of the discourse to religion.

One pamphlet that demonstrated the switch from highlighting frontier-urban prejudices to religious ones was *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians*, in which the author challenged, "Was it not Presbyterians that Murdered the Indians at Lancaster, was it not Presbyterians, that came down with an intent, to murder the Indians in the Barraks? ... I



think the Presbyterians have been the Authors, and Abettors, of all the Mischief.”<sup>33</sup> While prior writings had placed blame on the frontiersmen, this pamphlet targeted a religious group for the blame. Moreover, by identifying Presbyterians as “the murderers” of the Indians, the author made a cross-sectional segment of Pennsylvania residents (i.e. frontier and urban Presbyterians) the proxy for all that had gone wrong in Pennsylvania.

Indeed, the volume of pamphlets combined with this definitive shift in the content of the materials published seemed symptomatic of a fractious environment and a broader social discord in Philadelphia. Instead of just a war of words between eastern and western factions over the Paxton affair, many pamphlets actually exposed how divided *Philadelphians* had become. It appears that different factions within Philadelphia increasingly used the Paxton Boys as a foil to criticize each other in a contest for political power and societal influence. However, political partisanship was not the overt divider. Instead, religion emerged as the primary delineator revealing three themes, including the expression of a broad resentment of the Quakers’ societal dominance, the attempt by Quakers to defend their role in Philadelphia, and ultimately the evolution of the Paxton affair into an election tool.

In 1764, Quakers were no longer the proprietors of Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, they still considered themselves stewards of the colony and as such believed that “the provincial government was and should be theirs to direct in ways consistent with the Holy Experiment.” Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Quaker religious and civil leaders had often been the same, which connected the governance of Pennsylvania directly with the Quaker religion. Another complicating factor by the 1760s was the presence of other groups, religious and ethnic, which were gaining strength. The Presbyterians, for example, had achieved a critical mass in terms of population. They had “officially” reunited the old and new lights; and had augmented their leadership because of the establishment of the College of New Jersey. As one important representative group, Presbyterians at this time were working to build their own spheres of power and influence and were poised to challenge the Quaker faction. Thus, Pennsylvania had become a place, which Quakers felt obliged to oversee, but in which many residents resented the Quaker community as a political machine that had established a cultural, ruling oligarchy.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the Paxton pamphlets reinforced these sentiments. In *The Quaker Unmask’d*, for example the author asked his fellow Philadelphians to “look around and see who are those who enjoy the Places of Profit and trust ... are they not Quakers or Quakers’ Creatures.” The resentment engendered by long-term Quaker dominance was further reinforced when the author accused the Quakers of having “lately prov’d their very Religion to be a political Engine” and to using their religion “as it suits their crafty Purposes.”<sup>35</sup> While Quakers had already been the targets for Paxton pamphlets that addressed east-west tensions, now the slant of the writings had switched to a Philadelphia-centered battle for societal control.

Put on the defensive, the Quaker community and their supporters tried to mitigate these attacks and uphold their traditional role within the colony. In making this argument, one pamphleteer responded directly to the author of *Quaker Unmask’d* and challenged him to consider, “If Q—rs are...so improper to represent a People, why are they chosen as such? ...I am certain it can’t be alledged, that the Numbers of Q—rs in this Province make a Majority...but their Constituents...seeing the happy Effects of their upright

Conduct in every public Trust...have always endeavoured still to keep them possessed of it.”<sup>36</sup> Other Quakers took a different tact and tried instead to deflect the attacks by downplaying the “official” political position that Quakers possessed in Pennsylvania. In this vein, a different pamphleteer claimed that, “Quakers are blamed without Cause” because “is the Governor a Quaker? Is his Council Quakers?... I answer in the negative.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the pamphlets acting as mirrors for the resentment against Quakers, the “Paxton” pamphlets also became important election tools. Historically, the Pennsylvania Assembly and the Quaker “party” had squabbled perennially with the Proprietor over the administration of the colony. Then in 1764, tensions came to a head when the Assembly, the Quakers, and Quaker supporters chose to endorse a proposal by Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway to convert Pennsylvania into a Royal Colony. The Paxton affair occurred just as the debate to convert Pennsylvania to a Royal Colony re-ignited (ultimately the most important election issue in 1764) and both sides viewed the Paxton events as an opportunity to gain political advantage.<sup>38</sup>

In this debate, the Proprietor “party” and the Quaker “party,” latched onto the use of religion in the dialogue over the Paxton events to accomplish two goals: one, to argue who was or was not fit to govern Pennsylvania and two, to broaden the public’s interest in the upcoming election. For example, the Proprietor faction, which included in this election Presbyterians, Anglicans and many Germans, argued that the Quakers were unfit to govern, by emphasizing the Assembly’s and “Quaker” party’s well-known and dismal record on defense and by underscoring the *Quaker religion’s* mandate against war. In one pamphlet, the author requested his audience to, “consider Quakers with Respect to Government: -- Can it be confident that a Person who declares that his Conscience by divine Inspiration forbids him to have any Hand in shedding Blood, should be instructed as a Representative?” In addition, the dismissive treatment and callous regard for the Paxton Boys and, more broadly, the backcountry and its defense were other reasons to question the appropriateness of Quaker leadership. In the same pamphlet, the author argued that Quakers “have often spent their Time in debating, whilst our poor Frontier Inhabitants, have been Suffering.”<sup>39</sup>

Put on the defensive, the Quaker faction also used religious delineators to debate who was fit to govern Pennsylvania. In numerous pamphlets, Quakers or supporters of the Quaker “party” characterized Presbyterians as quarrelsome, riotous, and dissatisfied with the establishment. While one pamphleteer even acknowledged that, “According to the strict Rules of Quaker Principles, [Quakers] are not qualified to govern in Time of War,” he went on to claim that, “Had their [Assembly] seats been fill’d with Presbyterians, we should inevitably have been in a much worse condition; for it is very evident...that they are by no means proper Men to hold the Reigns of Government, either in War or Peace...[in] ancient and modern History, Presbyterianism and Rebellion were twin-sisters.”<sup>40</sup>

An extension of the debate on the fitness to govern was an intentional attempt by both sides, Pro- and Anti-Proprietor, to broaden the public’s interest in the upcoming election. Not only were the pamphlets’ pricing, topical content, and format varied in order to attract different segments of the Philadelphia community, but the continued use of religion as the primary battle line served to capture the imagination and fears of a

broader electoral audience. In particular, religious toleration and tyrannical control were important factors in increasing the public's anxiety and soliciting votes.<sup>41</sup>

For example, many immigrants had come to Pennsylvania to escape persecution and to enjoy the benefits of religious and civil freedoms, which the Quakers sought to provide. Consequently, many of the "pro-Quaker" pamphlets emphasized the principles of Quakerism and alleged that by comparison, Presbyterianism was an intolerant religion. In *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians*, the author claimed that when Presbyterians "have the power in their Hands, they will tolerate no other ...Opinion but their own, and never cease till they establish themselves in such a Manner, so as to exclude all other Sects...witness *Scotland* and *New England*."<sup>42</sup> By juxtaposing the religious freedom that Quakers promised with the alleged intolerance of Presbyterians, the Quaker faction solicited a broader audience for electoral support. At the same time, Proprietor interests also charged Quakers with intolerance and characterized Quakers as **dismissive of** any who might hold different views or challenge their authority. In the *Quaker Unmask'd*, the author claimed to know what Quakers thought and believed when he wrote from the perspective of a Quaker, that "Tho' our [Quaker] Malice at present is openly pointed at the Presbyterians; yet to be plain with thee, we are as much in our Hearts against all who differ from us in Opinion."<sup>43</sup>

Civil freedom was another important principle to many Pennsylvanians. For Quakers, the Proprietor had traditionally represented a tyrannical obstacle to the autonomy of the colony and the pursuit of civil freedom. However, during the election season of 1764, the Quaker faction often substituted Presbyterianism as the primary perpetrator of tyranny and autocratic behavior. In an attempt to garner increased voter participation in the upcoming elections, one pamphleteer solicited support from fellow Philadelphians when he implored his "dear Countrymen and Fellow Citizens, THE time is now come that we must either submit our necks to the yoke of Presbyterian bondage, or exert ourselves with a true British Spirit in behalf of our King and Country."<sup>44</sup> Elaborating on the imminent dangers of Presbyterian tyranny and a consequential loss of civil freedoms, the author also played on the fears of many Pennsylvanians when he warned that "The Presbyterians want more Members ... to represent them...And, if these Motives prevail what may we expect to be the Consequences: Why – A Bill exempting the Proprietors from all Taxes forever... A bill for establishing Synods, Presbyteries, and Kirk Sessions... A Bill obliging every Body to attend Presbyterian Meetings, under Pain of Corporal Punishment for the first Offence, and Hanging for the second."<sup>45</sup>

In the end, the pamphlet "war" and the election "campaign" of 1764 resulted in the largest and broadest voter turnout in Pennsylvania up to that point. Furthermore, Benjamin Franklin lost his only popular election and the Quakers for the first time found themselves isolated politically and religiously (not just from the Presbyterians, but also from the Anglicans, Lutherans and German Reformed). However, these events changed little for the residents of the frontier. The Assembly ignored their *Declaration and Remonstrance* until September 1764 when finally one item unsuccessfully received official consideration. On the other hand, the Presbyterians were able to gain further unity and societal influence by aligning themselves (old lights and new lights, urban and frontier) against the Quakers.<sup>46</sup>

Overall, the Paxton affair and the resulting pamphlet frenzy revealed the complexity and the undercurrents of instability, which existed within Pennsylvania's pre-

Revolutionary social structure. The pamphlets not only exposed the societal strain between the frontier and urban regions, but their ultimate reliance on religious delineators also revealed the increasing societal tension within Philadelphia. In fact, for many colonial Americans, religion was a way in which they were able to better understand and order their universe. Thus, religious conflict in colonial America can be interpreted as symptomatic of an underlying uncertainty and instability within the social structure. Given the long-term cultural and political dominance of the relatively small religious “sect” of Quakers, and despite Pennsylvania’s adherence to religious tolerance, it almost seems inevitable that religious identity transcended other differences and became the focus and the lightning rod for public discourse in Philadelphia.

In Pennsylvania, the Paxton Massacre and Riot and the frenzy of publishing that ensued became the means by which different groups tried to advance their own social and political agendas, a particular focus of which was a direct challenge to the hegemony of the Quakers. However, despite these events, the inflammatory dialogue, and the direct challenge made to the continued hegemony of the Quakers, ultimately Quakers and their political allies were able to remain the dominant cultural and political force until the eve of the American Revolution.

## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin, Benjamin, *A Narrative of the Late Massacres, In Lancaster County, of a Number of Indians, Friends of this Province, By Persons Unknown. With Some Observations on the Same* (Philadelphia: Franklin and Hall ?, 1764), 9, 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Matthew and James Gibson *A Declaration and Remonstrance of the Distressed and Bleeding Frontier Inhabitants of the Province of Pennsylvania Presented by Them to the Honourable Governor and Assembly of the Province, Shewing the Causes of their Late Discontent and Uneasiness and the Grievances Under Which they have Laboured, and Which They Humbly Pray to have Redress’d* (Philadelphia: W. Bradford?, 1764), 4, quotations, 6 and 9, 10, 15-17

<sup>3</sup> There exists a wealth of scholarship on the Paxton Boys specifically as well as on pre-revolutionary period in Pennsylvania in general. Some of the scholarship that treats the Paxton affair as a story of racial reconstruction in Pennsylvania includes Alden T. Vaughan in “Frontier Banditti and the Indians: The Paxton Boy’s Legacy, 1763-1775” *Pennsylvania History* 51, no.1 (January, 1984) and Krista Carmenzind, “Violence, Race and the Paxton Boys,” in *Friends & Enemies in Penn’s Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, eds William A. Pencak and Richter, Daniel. For a general understanding of the frontier setting and the challenges and tensions that existed with the urban centers, refer to “*Poor Carolina: Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776* by Ekirch, A. Roger and Gregory H. Nobles’ “Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no.4 (October, 1989). For works specifically on Pennsylvania, see *Into the American Woods*, by James Merrell and on the Paxton area, *Paxton: A Study of Community Structure and Mobility in the Colonial Pennsylvania Backcountry*. By George Franz. There are also many works that address the political challenges and changes taking place in Pennsylvania, which the Paxton Boys figure prominently, including *Pennsylvania Politics, 1746-1770: The Movement for Royal Government and Its Consequences*, by James A. Hutson, *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania* by Alan Tully, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* by Richard Beeman and *The Paxton Papers*, by John Dunbar.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Butzin, made a similar connection in “Politics, Presbyterians and the Paxton Riots, 1763-1764,” *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, 51, no.1 (1980).

<sup>5</sup> Brock, Peter, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660 to 1914* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990) 87-91, Mekeel, Arthur, *The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), 1-2, Beeman, Richard R. *The Varieties of Political Experience in*

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*Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 204, Tully, Alan, *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726-1755* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, 66, 72-73.

<sup>7</sup> Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, 53-55.

<sup>8</sup> Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, 54-59.

<sup>9</sup> Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, 79, 82, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Beeman, 211, 215, 223.

<sup>11</sup> Quotation from Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, xvi; for a detailed description of civil Quakerism and its popularity, see Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 287-300.

<sup>12</sup> Carmenzind, Krista, "From the Holy Experiment to the Paxton Boys: Violence, Manhood, and Race in Pennsylvania During the Seven Years' War." PhD. Diss. (University of California, San Diego, 2002), 30, Beeman, 206, 234, Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Beeman, 210-212, 231-232..

<sup>14</sup> Carminzind, 49-51, Anderson, Fred, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 108.

<sup>15</sup> Beeman, 212, 223.

<sup>16</sup> Tully, Alan. *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 183, Beeman, 234.

<sup>17</sup> Beeman, 205-206, 227.

<sup>18</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 167.

<sup>19</sup> Ekirch, A. Roger, "*Poor Carolina: Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776*." Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 198, 644, 654, 659, 665 and Nobles, Gregory H, "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750-1800," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no.4 (October, 1989): 164.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, Matthew and James Gibson, *A Declaration and Remonstrance*, 7, 9.

<sup>21</sup> *The Apology of the Paxton Volunteers*, reprinted in Dunbar, John R. ed, *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 187.

<sup>22</sup> Dove, David James, *The Quaker Unmask'd; or, Plain Truth: Humbly Address'd to the Consideration of al the Freemen of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, February, 18, 1764), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Beeman, 226-227; quotation from Smith, Matthew and James Gibson. *A Declaration and Remonstrance*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, Matthew and James Gibson, *A Declaration and Remonstrance*, 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Read, Charles, *Copy of a Letter From Charles Read, Esq: To The Hon. John Ladd, Esq: And his Associates, Justices of the Peace for the County of Gloucester*, (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764), 4

<sup>26</sup> *The Quaker Vindicated; or Observations on a Late Pamphlet, Entitled, The Quaker Unmask'd, or, Plain Truth*, (Philadelphia: Andrew Steuart, 1764), 7.

<sup>27</sup> *A Dialogue, Between Andrew Trueman and Thomas Zealot; About the Killing at Cannestogoe and Lancaster* (Philadelphia, Anthony Armbruster, 1764), 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> *A Serious Address, to Such of the Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, as have Cannived at, or do Approve of, the Late Massacre of the Indians at Lancaster; or the Design of Killing Those who are Now in the Barracks at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1764), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Read, Charles, 7.

<sup>30</sup> *A Serious Address...*, 10

<sup>31</sup> *An Act for Preventing Tumults and Riotous Assemblies, and for the more Speedy and Effectual Punishing the Rioters*, Pennsylvania, Province (Philadelphia: February 3, 1764), 1-2.

<sup>32</sup> Olson, Alison, "The Pamphlet War Over the Paxton Boys," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 123, no. 1/2 (Jan/Apr 1999): 31.

<sup>33</sup> *An Answer, To The Pamphlet Entitled the Conduct of the Paxton Men, Impartially represented: wherein the ungenerous Spirit of the Author is Manifested, &. And the spotted Garment pluckt off* (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1764), reprinted in Dunbar, *The Paxton Papers*, 324.

<sup>34</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 186, 257, 271, quotation from 257, Butzin, 75.

<sup>35</sup> Dove, David James, *The Quaker Unmask'd*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Remarks on the Quaker Unmask'ed; or Plain truth found to be Plain Falsehood*, reprinted in Dunbar, 227.

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- <sup>37</sup> *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians, Number 2*... reprinted in Dunbar, 325.
- <sup>38</sup> Beeman, 241-246, Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 196, Butzin, 76, Hutson, pp110-113.
- <sup>39</sup> Dove, David James, *The Quaker Unmask'd*, 9.
- <sup>40</sup> *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians. Or a Brief Examination of their Loyalty, Merit, and Other Qualifications for Government. With Some Animadversions on the Quaker Unmask'd: Humbly Address'd to the Consideration of the Loyal Freemen of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbuster, 1764), reprinted in Dunbar, 246.
- <sup>41</sup> Olson, 34-36, Beeman, 243-246.
- <sup>42</sup> *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians*... reprinted in Dunbar, 250.
- <sup>43</sup> Dove, *Quaker Unmask'd*, 11.
- <sup>44</sup> *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians, Number 2*... reprinted in Dunbar, 301.
- <sup>45</sup> *A Looking Glass for Presbyterians, Number 2*... reprinted in Dunbar, 304-305.
- <sup>46</sup> Franz, George, *Paxton: A Study of Community Structure and Mobility in the Colonial Pennsylvania Backcountry* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 272, Tully, Alan, *Forming American Politics*, 186, Hutson, 105.