

CONTESTING AUTHORITY: CULTURAL POLITICS,  
IMPERIAL ANGLICANISM AND THE MIDDLE COLONIES, 1745-1760

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores two examples of cultural politics in New York and Pennsylvania occurring simultaneously in the early 1750s. In New York City, a trio of young, Yale-educated, Presbyterian lawyers led by William Livingston attempted to wrestle away the cultural authority of the Anglican clergy. In Pennsylvania, the largely Anglican proprietary party attempted to gain control of the Quaker-dominated Assembly by culturally assimilating the large German population in order to win their votes. Taken together, these episodes show an intersection between culture and politics in the colonial period that has largely been ignored.

This paper will briefly explore two examples of cultural politics—i.e., intersections between culture and politics in which constituted authority was either contested or asserted with the goal of overturning an opposing set of beliefs, assumptions, norms, and practices—in New York and Pennsylvania occurring simultaneously in the early 1750s. In New York City, a trio of young lawyers, led by William Livingston and known as “the triumvirate,” embarked upon a project aimed at raising the cultural level of the city and publicly challenging the cultural authority of the Anglican clergy. Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, the largely Anglican proprietary party sought to Anglicize the outsized German immigrant in an effort to win their political support away from the Quaker party, who dominated the colonial Assembly. Both are examples of a politics of culture that emerged when the imperial Anglicanism of a group of clergy clashed

with the religious pluralism, ethnic diversity, and factional political culture of the middle colonies. Taken together, these episodes illustrate a closer relationship between culture and politics in the colonial period than most early American historians have recognized.<sup>1</sup>

In 1700, the middle colonies were mostly an imperial afterthought. Both New York City and Philadelphia paled in comparison to Boston in almost all demographic, economic, and cultural aspects. However, by 1750, the ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and factional political culture that had been fostered by staggering increases in population and trade formed the cultural and political means and ends for those who engaged in such cultural politics in the middle colonies during the 1750s.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1740s and early 1750s, a new generation of middle colonies-based Anglican clergy began to rise in the colonial Church. They subscribed to a decidedly High-Church brand of political ecclesiology, or “imperial Anglicanism.” The term, “imperial Anglicanism,” has been used occasionally by British historians in recent literature on the Church of England and the SPG, primarily regarding its missionary work with the indigenous populations of India and North America.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it has ignored how this religious ideology subsequently manifested

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<sup>1</sup> For a re-evaluation of this relationship, see Michael Meranze, “Culture and Governance: Reflections on the Cultural History of Eighteenth-Century British America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 65, no. 4 (2008): 713–44.

<sup>2</sup> On the middle colonies, see Ned C. Landsman, *Crossroads of Empire: The Middle Colonies in British North America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). For the population and trade growth of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, see Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 407-11.

<sup>3</sup> For recent works on “imperial Anglicanism,” see Peter M. Doll, *Revolution, Religion, and National Identity: Imperial Anglicanism in British North America, 1745-1795* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000); Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire, c. 1700-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); James B. Bell, *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Bell, *The Imperial Origins of the King's Church in Early America*.

itself in relations between Anglican clergy and dissenters of European origins in the colonies. Politically, imperial Anglicans, such as William Smith, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Seabury, and James Wetmore, believed the Church to be inextricably linked with both Britain's national identity and fundamental to the success of the empire.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the Church's low standing and lack of broad, meaningful establishment in the colonies seemed nothing less than a crime against the empire. Regardless of the pluralism and diversity of the colonies, they envisioned British North America as the one place in the British empire outside of the mother country that could possibly be united under the aegis of Anglicanism. Hence, they wished to see the Church of England established throughout the colonies and invested with enough power to play as fundamental a role in colonial society as it did in English society. Socially, their seventeenth-century Tory roots also instilled in them belief in a rigid social hierarchy fueled by deference and secured by passive obedience to one's superiors, both in Church and state. By the middle of the 1740s, they stood ready to unabashedly exert what they deemed to be the Church's prerogative upon the most ethnically diverse, religiously plural, and politically factious population in the empire.

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<sup>4</sup> On the fundamentality of imperial thought in the early development of the Anglican Church in the colonies, see William Gibson, *The Church of England 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2. Gibson wrote, "National identity in eighteenth-century England was also indivisible from Anglicanism: government was a religious construct and Anglicanism was welded into the structure of the establishment." Also, see Bell, *The Imperial Origins of the King's Church in Early America, 1607-1783*, 3-57.

<sup>5</sup> Donald F. M. Gerardi, "The King's College Controversy 1753-1756 and the Ideological Roots of Toryism in New York," *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1978): 147-96.

Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, the most educated segment of society

<sup>5</sup> The lack of cultural institutions and a dearth of learning among the upper class could be frustrating for young men just out of college and wishing to continue their intellectual pursuits while also pursuing careers. In the Anglo-American world of the eighteenth century, voluntary associations, coffeehouses and taverns, and the expansion of the print medium came together to create communities and provide forums in which these young, urbane gentlemen could rationally debate matters of art, literature, and government.<sup>6</sup>

### CULTURAL POLITICS IN COLONIAL NEW YORK CITY, 1748-1754

New York City's cultural development had been much slower than either Boston or Philadelphia, due, in large part, to the deep suspicion of and staunch opposition to secular cultural forms and institutions by the established Anglican Church.<sup>7</sup> The most powerful colonial officials belonged to the Church, giving it a prestige and influence disproportionate to its

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1991). On voluntary associations in the Anglophone world, see Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter Clark, *Sociability and Urbanity: Clubs and Societies in the Eighteenth-Century City* (Leicester: University of Leicester. Victorian Studies Centre, 1986); Peter Borsay, "The Culture of Improvement," in *The Eighteenth Century, 1688-1815*, ed. Paul Langford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 183-210; On colonial club culture, see David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); David S. Shields, "Anglo-American Clubs: Their Wit, Their Heterodoxy, Their Sedition," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 51, no. 2 (1994): 293-304.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 11. Lofton writes, "Scholars define the secular as a way of conveying a condition in which theism is an option, rationalism is the logic, and liberation is the universal ambition."

numbers.<sup>8</sup> Many of the High Church clergy themselves longed to acquire the status and exercise the kind of power that accrued to the Church hierarchy back in England. Those who aspired to the elite status of Anglican politicians, merchants, and clergy were required to conform, at least outwardly, to the Church's theology and, especially, its broader world-view, furthering Anglican cultural hegemony in the city. Any institutions outside Anglican purview were inherently suspect.

For the triumvirate of William Livingston, William Smith, Jr., and John Morin Scott, however, these institutions and associations, as well as prints, allowed for the creation of communities that posed an alternative to the old forms of religious polity and modes of discourse through which the clergy maintained its cultural authority. During the latter part of the 1740s, Livingston began conceiving of undertaking a project to not only uplift but also reform the city's notoriously underdeveloped cultural life.<sup>9</sup> To do so would require three tasks: the exposure of the broader populace to fundamental elements of enlightened learning and genteel culture, the establishment of the city's own secular college, and the displacement of the Anglican clergy from their role as the city's cultural arbiters. The project would also come to consist of three stages

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jones. "History of New York during the revolutionary war and of the leading events in the other colonies at that period," in *Collections of the New-York Historical Society* 1 (1879) 1:2. Jones, a judge and later exiled loyalist, wrote, "Of all these several denominations of Christians, the Church of England was the most extensive, of the most influence, and greatest opulence. To this Church the Governor, the Lieutenant-Governor, most of his Majesty's Council, many members of the General Assembly, all the officers of Government, with a numerous train of rich and affluent merchants, and landholders, belonged."

<sup>9</sup> On the city's cultural life, see Cadwallader Colden, *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 9 vols. (New York: Printed for the New York Historical Society, 1918-26), 2:257. In 1742, Colden wrote, "We scarcely have a man in this country that takes any pleasure in such kinds of [learned] speculations." Also, see Alexander Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744*, ed. Carl Bridenbaugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 43. During Hamilton's visit to New York City in June of 1744, he socialized with the "Hungarian Club." However, instead of the discussions about literature and philosophy to which he had become accustomed at his own club in Annapolis, the Tuesday Club, "the company seemed to be of opinion that a man could not have a more sociable quality or enduement [sic] than to be able to pour down seas of liquor, and remain unconquered, while others sank under the table."

defined by their corresponding components: voluntary associations, print, and cultural institutions.

The project began in 1748 with informal weekly meetings that grew into a philosophical and literary club, the “Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge.” Livingston believed that “it was Learning that . . . now distinguishes the true Gentleman” rather than the “vanity of Birth and Titles.” Hence, along with the young lawyers, the club’s dozen or so members included “a *Mechanick*,” a “*Register*,” and “a *Clerk*.” Their broader goal was to “improve the *Taste*, and *Knowledge*, to *Reform*, and *Correct*, the manners of the Inhabitants of this *Town*.”<sup>10</sup> The city’s Anglican elite, particularly the clergy, became increasingly uneasy, perceiving a group of young educated Dissenters meeting privately to engage in secular, rational-critical discourse as a direct threat.<sup>11</sup> The clergy immediately sought to reassert their traditional position as the gatekeepers of knowledge and to prevent the anarchy or “licentiousness” that would follow should ordinary people think and speak critically of those above them in the social and political power structure. They were accused of being a “Whig Club,” in which “plans [were] laid, schemes devised, and resolutions formed . . . of pulling down the Church, ruining the Constitution, or heaving the whole province into confusion.”<sup>12</sup> The perceived threat to Anglican elite, especially the clergy, might seem exaggerated in response to a dozen or so men drinking wine and discussing literature and philosophy in either a public house or a private apartment, but not if one understands what the clergy and elite felt was at stake. This “Society of pretended Philosophers” challenged not

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<sup>10</sup> *New-York Weekly Journal*, February 13, 1749.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Livingston recounted some of the rumors surrounding the club: “Some call it the *Libertine* Club . . . others, conjecture that the Members of it, are a sort of speculative *Free Masons*, from the profound Secrecy, with which they assemble themselves . . . some again, maliciously suppose, they *Conventicle* themselves, to concert Schemes, detrimental to the Government.”

<sup>12</sup> *New-York Weekly Journal*, March 20, April 3, 1749.

only the clergy's own social and political positions, but also the very ideology upon which they derived those positions and from which they believed society and government derived its stability.

In late 1752, they began publishing their own weekly periodical entitled *The Independent Reflector*, which consisted of a single four-page essay. The essays, mostly written by William Livingston, promoted the rational mode of thought that had begat the genteel culture and liberal politics of the eighteenth-century Anglophone world.<sup>13</sup> They discussed Lockean epistemology, a rational form of Christianity, religious toleration, and meritocracy.<sup>14</sup> As the conflict with the clergy grew, they published a number of virulent anticlerical essays accusing the clergy of using “Priestcraft” to establish “an universal and absolute Dominion over the Minds of Men.”<sup>15</sup> The sum of Livingston's critique in the *Reflector* was a vision of a secular politics and culture in which government and religion inhabited separate spheres, both subject to reason, and the individual was free from all forms of intellectual bondage and judged according to his own merit. He drew out the cultural effects of the relationship between the Anglican Church and New York's political establishment and accused the clergy of being purveyors of a “political Christianity.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Livingston to Welles, February 18, 1749, JFP, Yale.

<sup>14</sup> [William Livingston], “Of Credulity,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XLVII, October 18, 1753; [William Livingston], “Primitive Christianity short and intelligible, modern Christianity voluminous and incomprehensible,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XXXI, June 28, 1753; [William Livingston], “A Vindication of the Moravians, against the Aspersion of their Enemies,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. VI, January 4, 1753; [William Livingston], “The Vanity of Birth and Titles; with the Absurdity of claiming Respect without Merit,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XLIII, September 20, 1753

<sup>15</sup> [William Livingston], “Of Creeds and Systems,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XLVI, October 11, 1753.

<sup>16</sup> [Livingston], “Of the Veneration and Contempt of the Clergy,” *Independent Reflector*, no. XXXIV; [William Livingston], “The Absurdity of the Civil Magistrate's interfering in Matters of Religion, Part I,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XXXVI, August 2, 1753; [William Livingston], “The Absurdity of the Civil Magistrate's interfering in Matters of Religion, Part II” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XXXVII, August 9, 1753.

“It is not the Business of Religion,” he wrote, “to settle the Authority of the Prince, nor the Submission of the Subject.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, that was exactly the foundation of the clergy's imperial Anglicanism and their perceived role within the empire.

In 1753, the triumvirate used the *Reflector* to lobby for the establishment of a new college in New York City by an act of the Assembly, ensuring popular control. The Anglicans, on the other hand, sought to have the new institution chartered by the King, ensuring their own control of the college.<sup>18</sup> Six consecutive issues of the *Reflector* were dedicated wholly to making the argument for a non-denominational college that would be dedicated to liberal learning as opposed to merely being an Anglican seminary. Yet, an Anglican seminary was exactly what the clergy wanted.<sup>19</sup> Countering the *Reflector's* arguments on behalf of the clergy, a young emigre named William Smith wrote: “The *Statesman* has always found it necessary for the Purposes of Government, to raise some one Denomination of religion above the Rest to a certain Degree. This favor'd Denomination, by these means, becomes as it were the Creature of the Government, which is thus enabled to turn the Balance and keep all in Subjection.” If the government were to “let all Sects and Persuasions be equally favor'd,” such “unbridled Liberty of Conscience” would

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<sup>17</sup> [William Livingston], “Of Passive-Obedience,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XXXVIII, August 16, 1753.

<sup>18</sup> [William Livingston], “A farther Prosecution of the same Subject,” *The Independent Reflector*, no. XX, April 12, 1753.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Johnson to W. S. Johnson, June 1754, in *Samuel Johnson, President of King's College: His Career and Writings*, ed. Herbert and Carol Schneider (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 1:191.

lead to chaos.<sup>20</sup> For them, in an empire spread across multiple oceans, the established Church alone could provide social and political stability by transmitting the values of Britannia.

Though King's College was chartered by the King in 1754, the Anglicans were forced to recoil from their vision of an Anglican-dominated college and extracted concessions from the Anglican trustees guaranteeing equal access to the college among all denominations. The public challenges to their authority had caught the clergy off-guard. Both their authority and matters of such importance as a college were not proper objects of consideration for the broader public. Yet, because their authority had been challenged in the public sphere, they had been forced to respond in kind, effectively justifying their authority to a public they did not think fit to judge such matters. They did this primarily by attacking the reputation of the *Reflector's* authors and their readership and reasserting the Church's position due to its establishment and its role as the guarantors of an obedient empire.<sup>21</sup> Livingston and the triumvirate had shone a light on the imperial ambitions of the Anglican clergy, which resulted in a more engaged and vigilant public, especially regarding the affairs of the Anglican Church and its clergy, that would play a significant role in the resistance to Britain in the following decade. Immediately after the King's College, Livingston and company founded a number of other cultural institutions and voluntary

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<sup>20</sup> *New-York Mercury*, July 23, 1753; [William Smith], *A General Idea of the College of Mirania; with A Sketch of the Method of teaching Science and Religion, in the several Classes: and Some Account of its Rise, Establishment and Buildings. Address'd more immediately to the Consideration of the Trustees nominated, by the Legislature, to receive Proposals, &c. relating to the Establishment of a College in the Province of New-York* (New York: Printed and Sold by J. Parker and W. Weyman, at the New Printing-Office in Beaver-Street, 1753), 85.

<sup>21</sup> [Samuel Seabury], *New-York Mercury*, April 30, 1753.

associations including the city's first public library.<sup>22</sup> Culture and politics had intersected in New York as the city's rising intellectual class challenged the cultural authority in the city's public sphere in an effort to usurp religion's "traditional superintendency of city culture."<sup>23</sup> In so doing they not only intersected culture and politics but set in motion changes in "the salient attributes of thought and culture in New York after mid-century."<sup>24</sup>

### CULTURAL POLITICS IN COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA, 1747-1755

A different form of cultural politics emerged in Pennsylvania in the early 1750s, as did the imperial Anglicanism of the New York-area clergy. The latter arrived in the form of William Smith, the twenty-six-year-old Scottish immigrant who had ingratiated his way into the inner circle of the New York clergy during the college debate by writing pamphlets and newspaper essays against the triumvirate.<sup>25</sup> One of those pamphlets, entitled, *A General Idea of the College*

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<sup>22</sup> *The Charter, and bye-laws of The New-York Society Library; with A Catalogue* (New York: Printed by Hugh Gaine, 1758). On the inclusive character and ideal of the library enterprise, see Tom Glynn, "The New York Society Library: Books, Authority, and Publics in Colonial and Early Republican New York," *Libraries & Culture* 40, no. 4 (2005): 493–529. For an even fuller account of the behind-the-scenes machinations, see Austin Baxter Keep, "The Library in Colonial New York," PhD diss., Columbia University, 1909. On other parts of their project, see "Minutes, 1770-1774, of the Moot Club of New York City," *New-York Historical Society; New-York Mercury*, December 3, 1764; *New-York Gazette*, December 17, 1764; *New-York Gazette, and the Weekly Mercury*, July 24, 1769; *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, October 9, 1769; *New-York Mercury*, July 31, August 7, September 25, 1769; "The Society of Dissenters Founded at New York in 1769," *American Historical Review* 6, no. 3 (1901): 498–507; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209.

<sup>23</sup> Donald F. M. Gerardi, "The American Doctor Johnson: Anglican Piety and the Eighteenth-Century Mind," PhD diss., (New York: Columbia University, 1973), 258. Also, see Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 6, which concurred that "the central expression of culture in New York City was religion."

<sup>24</sup> Michael Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 241.

<sup>25</sup> William Smith, *The Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, D.D.*, ed. Horace Wemyss Smith (Philadelphia: Published by Ferguson Bros. & Co., 1880), 1:17.

of *Mirania*, impressed Benjamin Franklin, who offered him the position of rector of the Academy and the to soon-to-be-established college.<sup>26</sup> While in England for his ordination, Smith met Thomas Penn, the head proprietor of the Pennsylvania colony, and secured from him a promise of support for the Academy and college.<sup>27</sup> Smith quickly became the most active proponent of imperial Anglicanism in the colonies and, as in New York, sought to both stifle and incorporate those outside imperial Anglican culture, primarily the Quakers and the colony's large German population. The Quakers dominated the Pennsylvania Assembly. For Anglicans, this was frustrating enough, but the Quakers' religious-based pacifism was not only galling but threatening, especially with increasing French incursions from the Ohio Valley into western Pennsylvania in the early 1750s.<sup>28</sup>

Ever since the early part of the century, Pennsylvania had been absorbing heavy waves of German immigrants.<sup>29</sup> Making their homes in towns outside the city, the Germans intentionally

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Franklin to William Smith, April 19, 1753, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (hereafter *Franklin Papers*), Vol. IV, ed. Leonard Labaree, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Benjamin Franklin to William Smith, May 3, 1753, *Franklin Papers*.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Johnson to Thomas Herring, Archbishop of Canterbury, June 29, 1753, in *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York, procured in Holland, England, and France*, ed. Edmund B. O'Callaghan (Albany: Weed, Parsons, and Company, 1855), 6:777.

<sup>28</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 257-8. For the contemporary interpretation, see [William Smith], *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania* (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, at the Dunciad, in Pater-Noster-Row, 1755), 7. In this pamphlet aimed at an English audience criticizing the Quakers' stewardship of the colony, Smith wrote that the "Powers they enjoy are extraordinary, and some of them so repugnant, that they are the Source of the greatest Confusion in the Government" having turned "*Religion into a political Scheme of Power.*"

<sup>29</sup> Alan Tully, "Englishmen and Germans: National-Group Contact in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1700-1755," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 45, no. 3 (1978): 237-56. For recent works on German immigration in early America, see Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717-1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Philip Otterness, *Becoming German: The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

remained culturally isolated from Anglophone Philadelphia with most unable to read or speak English. Contemporaries reported believing that by mid-century Germans comprised almost half of the population of the colony. Despite their cultural isolation, the Germans were not politically isolated. For more than a decade, they had been strong electoral supporters of the Quaker party.<sup>30</sup> The combination of their willful otherness, their numbers, and their political participation led to fears that the Germans would soon comprise a majority and impose their language and culture upon the rest of the colony.<sup>31</sup> Fears so real that, Franklin, the leading colonial American *philosophe* and *cosmopolite*, wrote:

Why should the *Palatine Boors* be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to *Germanize* us instead of our *Anglifying* them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion.<sup>32</sup>

Like the Quakers, the Germans, too, were predisposed toward pacifism. With the increasing French threat on the frontier, they became the first line of defense against a French invasion. Yet, the Germans ignored these pleas and the Quaker Assembly refused to pass money bills for defense appropriations, heightening the tension between the largely Anglican proprietary party

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<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, *Franklin Papers*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* This controversial letter was originally written in 1751 and appeared in *Gentleman's Magazine* in the November 1755 issue. Also see Smith to the SPG, December 13, 1753, in *Life and Correspondence of William Smith*, 36-7; Franklin to James Parker, March 20, 1751, *Franklin Papers*. Franklin wrote, "This will in a few Years become a German Colony: Instead of their Learning our Language, we must learn their's, or live as in a foreign Country."

<sup>32</sup> [Benjamin Franklin], "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.," in [William Clarke, M.D.], *Observations On the late and present Conduct of the French, with Regard to their Encroachments upon the British Colonies in North America....To which is added, wrote by another Hand; Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.* (Boston: Printed and Sold by S. Kneeland in Queen-Street, 1755; London: Re-printed for John Clarke, under the Royal Exchange, Cornhill, 1755), 53.

and both the Quakers and the Germans.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, in the early 1750s, the proprietary party, spearheaded by William Smith, was faced with two goals, one immediate and one long-term. First, they needed to secure the colony's western frontier by getting the Germans to comply with defense measures. Second, they wanted to gain control of the Assembly from the Quakers. Smith realized both ends could be achieved through the same means if only they could “Anglicize,” or culturally assimilate, the Germans. The Germans were cultural outliers—much as dissenters had been in New York—and therefore posed a threat to the unified vision of imperial Anglicanism. For, they were “uninstructed in the right use & value” of liberty which made them “apt to be misled by our unceasing enemies.”<sup>34</sup> Groups that refused to assimilate themselves into the Anglo-American culture—like the Moravians, who Smith and the other Anglican clergy had targeted in New York—simply could not have the best interests of the empire at heart.

The Germans' exclusive use of their own language had been disconcerting matter for officials for a while. They conducted their public affairs in German. Both Franklin and Smith knew the first step toward assimilation had to be to get them to speak and conduct their business in English. Hence, they formed a plan to establish charity schools throughout the countryside that would teach Germans, primarily children, to read and speak English. At the same time, they

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<sup>33</sup> [Benjamin Franklin], *Plain Truth: or, Serious Considerations On the Present State of the City of Philadelphia, and Province of Pennsylvania. By a Tradesman of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1747), 11, 8-9. Franklin writes of the possibility that “others who live in the Country, when they are told of the Danger the City is in from Attempts by Sea, may say, *What is that to us? The Enemy will be satisfied with the Plunder of the Town, and never think it worth his while to visit our Plantations. Let the Town take care of itself.*”

<sup>34</sup> Franklin to Collinson, May 9, 1753; Smith to the SPG, December 13, 1753, in *Life and Correspondence of William Smith*, 36-7.

could “teach them to value & exult” in the British “Spirit of Liberty & Commerce.”<sup>35</sup> Because they did not speak the language, Anglican officials could not “remove any prejudices they once entertain.” This project provided an opportunity to share with the Germans the “peculiar Glory of the British Government.” Without being able to speak English, they could neither “expect to rise to Places of Profit and Honor” nor intermarry with powerful Anglican families, as the Dutch had in New York.<sup>36</sup> The objective was “to incorporate & mingle them” into Anglo-American society. Winning political allegiance was important to the proprietor, whom Smith wanted to please, but the imperial importance was primary for Smith. “This is not the work of any particular party,” he told the SPG. “It is a British work.” Fully persuaded, the Archbishop of Canterbury concurred, saying this project “seems as great and as necessary to be put in Execution as any that was ever laid before the British Nation.”<sup>37</sup> They went on to secure donations from wealthy Englishmen including one thousand pounds sterling from King George II.

To help gain support in England, Smith wrote an incendiary pamphlet in 1755 entitled, *A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania*, in which he portrayed the Quakers' pacifism as a dereliction of imperial duty.<sup>38</sup> Would they really let one of Britain's colonies fall to the French without a fight? As Smith saw it, the British empire, through its colonies, had welcomed and even arranged the tens of thousands of German emigrants forced to flee from the economic woes and religious military conflict of the German principalities over a period of decades. Now, when their part of the empire came under threat, they refused to defend it. For Smith, this was the

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<sup>35</sup> Franklin to Collinson, May 9, 1753.

<sup>36</sup> Smith to the SPG, December 13, 1753, in *Life and Correspondence of William Smith*, 30-2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-7.

<sup>38</sup> [William Smith], *A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania, for the Year 1755* (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, at the Dunciad, in Pater-Noster-Row, 1756).

greatest proof of the need to Anglicize both the Germans and the Quakers.

The first schools opened in mid-1754, but attendance was well below initial expectations. The proprietary party, including Smith, chose not to push Anglicanism itself in these schools, not out of tolerance but because they assumed that once educated Germans would begin converting out of ambition anyway, much as had happened with the Dutch in New York. Besides the voluntary charity schools, Smith and Franklin believed more immediate measures had to be taken, especially with the increasing French threat. Hence, they petitioned Parliament to bypass the Assembly and enact legal measures aimed at forcing German assimilation. These included loyalty oaths, both to the Crown and to the defense of the colony. They wished to limit voting rights to only those who could speak English, thereby either immediately nullifying the German voting bloc or winning it to the proprietors in the long-term. They also wanted to require all official and public business, particularly legal documents, be written in English. Finally, Smith and Franklin, particularly the latter, wanted to forbid any foreign-language printing in the colony.<sup>39</sup> These were harsh, repressive measures aimed at culturally suffocating the Germans, of which the proponents felt justified due to the immediacy of the French threat.

These measures, however, only alienated a German population already wary of the Anglicans and their charity schools. Saur, the most vocal German critic of the motives behind the schools, claimed the Trustees of the schools cared “no farther than the stupid Germans could be used as militia-men to protect their property.” He saw through the Anglican rhetoric, claiming the schools were designed “to establish the thralldom of the Germans.” He related some of the concerns he had heard among the Germans including: “If German children learn to speak

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<sup>39</sup> Whitfield Bell, Jr., “Benjamin Franklin and the German Charity Schools,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 99, no. 6 (1955): 386; [Smith], *A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania*,

English, and have intercourse with others, they then desire to be dressed according to English fashions; and parents have a great deal of trouble to get such foolish whims out of their heads.”<sup>40</sup> Making matters worse, someone published a letter Franklin had written criticizing the Germans for their ignorance and disloyalty to the empire. In it, he wrote of them, “Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation.” Their presence, he said, “bode us no good,” as they viewed the “trouble hazard and Expence of defending the Province, as a greater inconvenience than any that might be expected from a change of Government.”<sup>41</sup> By the end of 1755, the fate of the schools had become clear, though they lingered on until the end of the decade. Germans simply were not interested in attending and compulsion was not an option.

## CONCLUSION

The charity school movement in Pennsylvania and the conflict between the triumvirate

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<sup>42</sup> Yet, like a number of other developments that would take place across the country in the nineteenth century—increasing ethnic diversity through immigration, religious pluralism, party politics, the dominance of commerce—cultural politics had its roots in the late colonial period in the mid-Atlantic region of British North America.

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<sup>40</sup> Christopher Saur to Conrad Weiser, September 6, 1755, qtd. in Arthur D. Graeff, “The Relations between the Pennsylvania Germans and the British Authorities (1750-1776),” PhD diss., Temple University, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Franklin to Collinson, May 9, 1753.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 169-70. Trachtenberg writes that it was during the late nineteenth century when “the national parties learned in these years what recent historians call ‘cultural politics.’”

Historians have only recently begun thinking of the United States as a postcolonial nation.<sup>43</sup> That is, in part, because we have often assumed the Revolution and the early national period to have been a complete break with the colonial era. Historians of these periods have always been more interested in showing what was new—or uniquely “American”—while ignoring the perhaps now more interesting continuities. This examination of early forms of cultural politics should serve as a reminder that we did indeed have a colonial experience that influenced the development of the country well beyond the War for Independence. Indeed, with our current political culture mired in a culture war for the last few decades, it is not that hard for us denizens of the twenty-first century to relate to our colonial experience.

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<sup>43</sup> This issue has recently been addressed in Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Also, see *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); David Armitage, “From Colonial History to Postcolonial History: A Turn Too Far?,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 64, no. 2 (2007): 1–4; Jack P. Greene, “Colonial History and National History: Reflections on a Continuing Problem,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 64, no. 2 (2007): 235–50; Michael Zuckerman, “Exceptionalism after All; Or, The Perils of Postcolonialism,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 64, no. 2 (2007): 259–62.