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# HOT-HEADS, GENTLEMEN AND THE LIBERTIES OF TRADESMEN

## POPULAR POLITICS AND THE PHILADELPHIA TANNERS' AFFAIR OF 1739

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**ABSTRACT** Over the summer and autumn of 1739 Philadelphia's two newspapers published competing versions of a hearing in the Pennsylvania assembly that was described as the 'Affair of the Tanners'. What began as a minor property dispute in the colonial assembly became, with the aid of the local press, a citywide paper war for the support of the urban populace. This article argues the affair provides unique evidence for competing conceptions of the common good in the eighteenth-century colonial city, and was an expression of conflict with deep roots in Philadelphia's history. The affair also shows how the medium of print could reflect both transatlantic cultural processes as well as distinctly local grievances, as a group of prosperous city artisans and their opponents utilized the city's newspapers to articulate competing commonwealth ideologies.

**Keywords:** artisans, commonwealth ideology, popular politics, print culture, Philadelphia, tanners

'Vile' and 'dirty' is what Tommaso Garzoni called leatherworkers in sixteenth-century Italy, though he admitted that 'they make good money'. In 1651 the Flemish lawyer Theodor Ameyden referred to the 'smelly art of leather-tanning' when noting the artisan origins of a number of elite Roman families.<sup>1</sup> Throughout early modern Europe leatherworkers, and especially tanners, occupied an ambivalent social position. Though frequently wealthy tradesmen and urban citizens, tanners' craft was a difficult, malodorous one. If the ancient craft of tanning was stigmatized in early modern European culture as a result of the smells and materials (alum, lime, oil, lard, blood and urine) associated with the trade, many of its practitioners were prosperous and politically powerful urban citizens.

Such was also the case in early eighteenth-century Philadelphia. In 1739 a petition signed by 'a great Number' of citizens was delivered to the Pennsylvania assembly complaining of the 'great Annoyance' caused by slaughterhouses and tan-yards in the neighbourhood around Dock Creek in the heart of the growing city. Petitioners requested a ban on the construction of new tan-yards in the town, and called for the removal of existing yards for the 'Convenience and Reputation of the City, and the Health of the Inhabitants'.<sup>2</sup> The hearing of petitions before provincial authorities was not unusual. As

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in much of late medieval and early modern Europe, free Pennsylvanians felt the airing of grievances through petitions to be an essential right.<sup>3</sup> What distinguished a relatively minor incident regarding Philadelphia tanners and their yards was the hearing's re-enactment in the city's two newspapers, which became an 'affair' over the summer and autumn of 1739 that captured the attention of the urban 'Publick'. In all, over 1739 four letters appeared in the city's two newspapers, Andrew Bradford's *American Weekly Mercury* and Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which interpreted the proceeding in very different ways. The drama pitted leading petitioners against Dock Street tanners, with each publication attempting to enlist the support of the broader Philadelphia public in the ostensible interests of truth, justice and the public welfare.

The tanners' affair demonstrates in a unique manner the complicated relationship between customary conceptions of the urban *bonum commune* (common good) and social and cultural development in a rapidly changing British Atlantic world. While in recent years scholars of early America have explored the transplantation of European ideas concerning civic improvement and urban refinement to colonial cities like Philadelphia, the rich historiography on popular politics and protest developed by historians of early modern England has not been systematically applied to the American context.<sup>4</sup> Relative economic prosperity in Philadelphia between the late 1720s and early 1760s has led social and labour historians to portray the mid-eighteenth century as a period of political quietude, while scholars interested in colonial print culture have generally focused on the formation of a cosmopolitan, 'polite' literary culture.<sup>5</sup> Historians of health and the environment have noted the relationship between pollution and disease in colonial cities like Philadelphia, but only Michael McMahon has given the tanners' affair sustained analysis.<sup>6</sup> McMahon interprets the controversy as a struggle between petitioners concerned with public health (led by a civic-minded Benjamin Franklin) and a small group of economically and politically powerful tanners. In this view, the dispute reflected a clash between public and private values at a time when urban growth placed new demands on authorities to protect the health of city inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

This article argues the tanners' affair is evidence of far more than a disagreement between partisans of a 'public' or 'private' interest in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. The dispute demonstrates how traditional popular conceptions of the urban *communitas*, whose main features dated to medieval Europe and included values such as reasonableness, honesty, justice, fairness and equality, were transplanted to the unique environment of colonial America.<sup>8</sup> Though at root the controversy concerned property and a changing urban landscape, both sides claimed to privilege convenience, reasonableness and the common good. Both deferred to the right of 'the public' to an objective representation of the assembly hearing. The competing representations of the tanners' affair in Philadelphia's two newspapers indicate how social criticism, satire and conspiracy played a crucial role in popular political practice in the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Close analysis of the controversy also reveals how the new medium of print could reflect long-standing local class grievances and personal animosities, despite the emergence of a superficially consensual political culture. Tanners in the *Mercury* drew on a populist cultural tradition that celebrated the virtues of small producers, while their opponents in the *Gazette* articulated a classical corporatist ideology suspicious of popular politics.

The conflict was thus a struggle over material resources *and* social power, and suggests how the terrain of popular politics could shift from the institutional space of the colonial assembly to the forum of public opinion through the local press.<sup>10</sup> Republicanism constituted the 'legitimate language' through which both sides appealed to the city populace, though who possessed the 'linguistic authority' to give a truthful account of the hearing remained an issue of contention.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, focus on a specific group of tradesmen such as the tanners provides unique insights into social relations and cultural change in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world. As frequently wealthy members of the labouring class, tanners in the American colonies, much like their fellow artisans across the Atlantic, occupied an ambiguous social space. In the expanding Atlantic economy of the eighteenth century, however, Philadelphia tanners' exportation of hides to external markets drove up the price of their goods in the local community, making the tradesmen objects of censure from other leatherworkers and consumers. Yet if tanners were occasionally seen as violators of customary commonwealth norms, they were also active participants in urban politics and social life, and evidence suggests they supported a popular anti-proprietary movement for paper money in the 1720s. Their status, wealth and education made possible the utilization of the town's print culture in a way that was not possible for most Philadelphia artisans in 1739. At the same time, despite their affluence and prominence, some Philadelphians viewed tanners not only as nuisances in terms of their smelly craft, but also as un-deferential political upstarts. The tanners of Philadelphia thus paradoxically show how, as many historians have argued, no clear separation between 'high' and 'low' culture existed in early Europe and America, while also demonstrating how a privileged group of artisans could utilize a class-based discourse in a new medium to defend the 'liberties of tradesmen'.

## I

In August of 1739 Andrew Bradford, printer/editor of the *American Weekly Mercury*, published an anonymous letter described as the 'Account of the Tanners'.<sup>12</sup> The narrative described a hearing before the Pennsylvania assembly during which tanners confronted a number of leading inhabitants in the city who had earlier delivered a petition to the colonial government requesting the removal of noxious tan-yards from the city. On receiving news of the petition, tanners sent a counter-petition to the assembly and requested an audience to defend themselves and their craft. After hearing both sides, the assembly recognized the need for reform but referred the issue to the city corporation, and its ambiguous ruling meant that the event could be interpreted in a number of ways – as indeed it was.<sup>13</sup> The account claiming victory for the tanners in the *Mercury* made two primary arguments. First, it acknowledged the 'disorderly Condition of the Dock' but claimed that tanners were not solely responsible for the refuse there. Instead, the tradesmen proposed that if the city government regulated the area around the public Dock, the artisans would better maintain their yards, and to this suggestion the assembly agreed. More provocatively, according to the *Mercury* writer, the anti-tanner petition unjustly targeted an innocent group of tradesmen, which if successful consti-

tuted a significant threat to the liberties and properties of all Philadelphians – though city artisans would be especially vulnerable.

Tanners in Philadelphia occupied property along Dock Creek from the town's first years of settlement in the 1680s.<sup>14</sup> Shortly after the arrival of English colonists in Pennsylvania in 1682, William Hudson, a Quaker from Yorkshire with a family background in tanning, began purchasing properties in the colony. By the early eighteenth century, Hudson had established several tanneries along 'the Dock', a low-lying inlet that ran inland from the Delaware River along which the town was situated; by the 1730s wastes from a number of trades were dumped into the creek.<sup>15</sup> Tan-yards required large amounts of water for a manufacturing process that involved curing, soaking and cleaning, de-hairing, tanning, washing, drying and softening. A number of minerals and chemicals, most importantly salt, alum, lime water and bark, were required for the craft. Like butchers' slaughterhouses, tanners' yards produced noxious smells and effluvia, a foul-smelling and unhealthy consequence of the trade in densely populated towns and cities. The craft was, in short, 'Odious, dirty, and no task for an aesthete'.<sup>16</sup> While in early modern cities like Philadelphia tanners, butchers, chandlers and soap boilers produced a 'witches' brew of industrial by-products', for local inhabitants their necessity was self-evident.<sup>17</sup> The labour of tanners was essential for the production of many basic goods; without them curriers, shoemakers, cobblers, saddle makers, gloves and other specialist leatherworkers would be unable to produce their commodities for the local community.

By the 1730s Philadelphia tanners such as William Hudson Jr., Samuel Morris, John Snowden, John Howell and John Ogden occupied eight yards along Dock Street. They were a wealthy and close-knit group with powerful Quaker connections in the city. William Hudson Sr.'s two sons, William Jr. and Samuel, practised the trade in the city; the Hudsons, Morris and Ogden all belonged to prominent Quaker families and were related through marriage.<sup>18</sup> Given the abundance of hides available in North America, tanners prospered in colonial Pennsylvania, and the opportunity for economic advancement in the trade was celebrated by seventeenth-century promoters of immigration such as Francis Pastorius of Germany and Gabriel Thomas of Wales.<sup>19</sup> While operating his tannery in early Philadelphia, John Snowden was able to accumulate hundreds of acres in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.<sup>20</sup> Some were also active participants in a colonial system of bound labour. The elder Hudson owned many slaves and was a substantial slave trader; in 1737 Ogden advertised the sale of 'a Negroe Man that can work at the Tanners Trade, and some part of the Curriers Trade: And also a Negroe Girl about seven or eight Years old, this Country Born'.<sup>21</sup> Less prosperous tanners, excluded from the prime area around the Dock and inhabiting yards on the city's fringes, purchased indentured servants. In 1738 Timothy Scarth of the Northern Liberties advertised for the return of runaway Irish labourers Randal McDaniel and John Eagen, whose service in city tan-yards was noticeable by their fingernails, 'which are stain'd of a deep Brown by their Business'.<sup>22</sup>

A primary element in tanners' defence before the Pennsylvania assembly was their implicit assertion that maintenance of the public Dock was a municipal responsibility, a claim that pointed to Philadelphia's chartered status as an urban commonwealth in the

British Atlantic world. In 1691 and 1701 Penn granted the town oligarchic corporate charters that reflected local merchant demands and an aristocratic shift in urban governance in England and the colonies towards the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>23</sup> One of those nominated by Penn to the common council in 1701 was William Hudson, a wealthy landlord, tannery owner and merchant who would eventually become mayor in 1725.<sup>24</sup> As in England and continental Europe, an aristocratic municipal structure did not necessarily mean government was not theoretically oriented towards the common good, and traditional conceptions of the urban *communitas* were evident in early Philadelphia.<sup>25</sup> In addition to some traditional corporate privileges involving the regulation of land, courts and markets, the charter declared a number of urban spaces – including ‘the Swamp between *Budd’s* Buildings and *Society* Hill’, or the Dock – ‘open and common for the Use and Service of the said City and all others’.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the incorporation of the city and the establishment of customary urban rights and privileges, the commonalty’s relationship with the municipal government was not without conflict. Though after 1701 the Philadelphia common council attempted to address a number of urban health issues in the city, including the relocation of city slaughterhouses, it was generally unresponsive to ordinary residents’ petitions for traditional corporate protections.<sup>27</sup> In 1705 city coopers requested the incorporation of their trade; though a common council committee (on which William Hudson sat) responded favourably to the coopers’ petition, there is no evidence the artisans obtained corporate privileges.<sup>28</sup> In 1717 the council admitted 424 people to the freedom of the city over a six-week period for a nominal fee, vastly expanding the number of citizens in town.<sup>29</sup> While many of those admitted (including tanners William Hudson Jr., his brother Samuel, John Snowden and printer Andrew Bradford) were current residents of the city, a significant number were new arrivals, and some artisans unsurprisingly found the mass admittance a threat to their livelihoods.<sup>30</sup> The following year tailors and cordwainers petitioned the common council to have their crafts incorporated, while a number of workmen complained many ‘Strangers’ were ‘not Qualify’d’ to practise their trades, despite having obtained the freedom of the city. Petitioners intimated that, notwithstanding paying a fee for urban freedom, many newcomers remained outsiders to the community, depressed wages and produced inferior goods. Utilizing customary commonwealth rhetoric, petitioners emphasized great damages had accrued to local tradesmen specifically, and to the public generally, as a result of the practice. Rather than agree to the craftsmen’s requests, the common council suggested artisans obtain legal aid in drafting an ordinance of incorporation conformable to the laws of England, after which the matter was dropped.<sup>31</sup> When a council board voted to lay aside the draft of a new statute for the better enforcement of the privileges of freemen in the city in 1727, municipal regulation of trades effectively ceased.<sup>32</sup>

The city government still had responsibilities and, according to Philadelphia tanners’ *Mercury* representative in 1739, the object of petitioners’ discontent should have been the municipality rather than the tradesmen. The Dock had indeed become a ‘Receptacle for all kinds of filth from a very great Part of the Town’, as residents throughout the increasingly crowded city dumped refuse in the creek, where insufficient water failed to drain the waste into the Delaware River. The petition had contended that tanners



were responsible for “an outbreak of yellow fever in 1699” tanners refuted this claim, noting that those near the tradesmen’s yards were largely unaffected.<sup>33</sup> The artisans claimed that tan-yards were allowed in one ward in London and other British cities and dismissed the anti-tanner petition’s use of New York’s seventeenth-century removal of tanning pits from that city as a precedent.<sup>34</sup> While anti-tanner petitioners cited the ‘inconvenience’ of the yards and the ‘reputation’ of Philadelphia in their remonstrance, tanners emphasized customary corporate keywords such as ‘convenience’ and ‘reasonableness’ in arguing for their right to remain in the city.<sup>35</sup> If for anti-tanner petitioners the odours and chemicals produced by the craft were inconvenient, tanners argued their practical utility overrode any slight discomfort they may have caused. The most important reason tanners offered for their success in the dispute was their written application to the mayor and recorder to maintain the Dock better, in exchange for which the tanners would regularly clean their yards. To this proposal of local workmen, it was claimed, ‘the House readily agreed’.

In addition to claiming victory in the hearing before the provincial assembly, the *Mercury* account asserted that the success of the anti-tanners’ petition would have portended the possible dispossession of other city commoners. Tanners not only persuaded a number of assemblymen to stand by the liberties of the artisans; when ‘Fellow Citizens’ who signed the anti-tanner petition learned ‘how far such a Precedent might be made use of to the Destruction of many other Tradesmen, or almost any others’, they immediately renounced their ‘Inadvertant Error’ and withdrew their names. The reference to the ‘destruction’ of tradesmen was likely intended to resonate with readers living in a commercial colonial system in which the properties of local artisans and farmers had been seized for debt in earlier years.<sup>36</sup> In 1683 the Pennsylvania legislature legalized forced labour or the confiscation of land for debt; a Philadelphia common council decision in 1704 to raise fees for debtors’ court resulted in at least two petitions from impoverished inhabitants in protest over the ordinance.<sup>37</sup> A lack of currency, land seizures and the forcing of debtors into servitude remained controversial issues throughout the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Local residents regularly requested the assembly provide a provincial medium of exchange, while a number of petitions asserted city merchants and landlords charged usurious interest rates and excessive rents.<sup>38</sup> When an economic depression in the aftermath of the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in the early 1720s led to a collapse in construction, shipbuilding and trade, calls for paper money grew more vocal, appearing publicly for the first time in the local press.<sup>39</sup> A pamphlet war ensued, with proponents of paper currency utilizing a populist literary tradition that pitted honest tradesmen and farmers against local ‘Ty-rants’ who engrossed all the land and money in the province for their own benefit.<sup>40</sup> The ultimate success of the oppositional anti-proprietary movement was demonstrated by three emissions of paper currency between 1723 and 1729.<sup>41</sup> The conflict also publicized competing ideologies regarding the common good and the threat posed to small producers by avaricious city grandees.

Tanners in 1739 thus drew on a long tradition of hostility to city and provincial authorities’ economic policies with their suggestion in the *Mercury* that their removal constituted a dangerous precedent for the appropriation of other city workmen.

Anti-tanner petitioners allegedly prosecuted the affair with ‘Violence’, suggesting a malicious plan to dispossess ordinary Philadelphians that was fortunately resisted by ‘Worthy Members’ of the assembly and formerly deceived ‘Fellow Citizens’. Crucially, it was tanners’ own actions that saved them, a claim that recalled the popular politics of the previous decade. According to the *Mercury*, a group of modest tradesmen stood up to the ‘Principle [*sic*] Promoters’ of the petition before the provincial government, and their political acumen gained them support from the legislature and the urban community, resulting in a victory for tanners as well as for the liberties of all Philadelphia tradesmen.

## II

A refutation of the tanners’ account was published in Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 30 August, two weeks after the appearance of the initial *Mercury* letter.<sup>42</sup> Michael McMahon has speculated that if Franklin was not the author of anti-tanner letters, he was behind their publication – a likely assertion considering Franklin’s ownership of the *Gazette* and his prominent involvement in urban reforms in colonial Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup> According to the *Gazette*, the tanners had published a ‘partial Account’ of the assembly hearing, ‘magnifying what was said on their own side, and stifling everything that was urged by the Petitioners in support of their Petition’. It was therefore necessary ‘to give the Publick the Substance’ of what tanners had deliberately suppressed. The *Gazette*’s argument consisted of three parts. The first justified the petition and enumerated the benefits for the city resulting from tanners’ removal. The second provided a very different representation of the assembly hearing, which brought into question the honesty of tanners. The third was a response to the *Mercury* writer’s attempt to sow division in the corporate urban community. Whereas in the *Mercury* tanners appealed to the class consciousness of city artisans in addition to the justness of provincial representatives and fellow citizens, the *Gazette* endeavoured to isolate the tradesmen by portraying Dock Street tanners as a small group of immoderate, demagogic troublemakers.

The *Gazette* response began with a summary of the initial petition’s contents, which served as a corrective to tanners’ misrepresentation and emphasized the private and public benefits accruing from the removal of tanners from the city. The original petition requested a prohibition against the erection of any new tan-yards within the bounds of the city, and the elimination of those already in existence ‘in such Time as might be tho’t reasonable’. Reasons offered for tanners’ removal combined olfactory, health and economic concerns. Many ‘offensive and unwholesome Smells’ emanated from the tan-yards, which in turn caused ‘great Injury’ to property holders in the neighbourhood, since the value of their lots and tenements was greatly reduced by their proximity to the Dock. If the tanners were removed, ‘great Improvements’ would be made on the grounds, which would become ‘more valuable to build on, than to be us’d as Tan-Yards’. The *Gazette* also cited Penn’s charter in arguing the Dock had been given for the ‘public Service’. Tanners, however, had appropriated the public space for private use, encumbering the street with their pits and clogging the formerly navigable Dock Creek ‘with their Tan, Horns, &c.’ Were the Dock not filled with tanners’ refuse, the body of water would provide an important public service, particularly in case of the perennial danger of fire



in the early modern city. Since the number of tanners who owned land on the Dock was few, and 'the People whose Interest is affected by their Remaining there, are a very great Number', any damage suffered by the removal of the tradesmen would 'be but a Trifle' compared to the damage that would accrue to the city at large should they remain. Notwithstanding this, the *Gazette* emphasized, 'if the Tanners could be so regulated as to become inoffensive, the Petitioners declar'd that they should be therewith satisfied'.

The *Gazette* writer also refuted tanners' claim to victory, as well as their assertion in the *Mercury* that their own actions saved them, by inserting a long extract from the minutes of the House. The resolve in fact stated that the mayor and commonalty of Philadelphia were to draw an ordinance to 'make such Provision for the Relief of the Petitioners, against the Tanners, Skinners, Butchers, &c. as they shall find to be necessary and consistent with the Powers of their Corporation'. If the aid of the legislature was needed to compel obedience, application to the assembly could be made for that purpose, demonstrating tanners' claim to victory was belied by the evidence. A copy of the tanners' proposals was then to be delivered to the mayor along with the assembly's ruling, suggesting a negotiated settlement. According to the *Gazette*, however, it was 'hard to imagine what could induce the Tanners' to publish an account in the *Mercury* that was 'so partial and so false'. In contrast to the tanners' biased representation of the assembly hearing in the *Mercury*, the *Gazette* writer used documentation based on the anti-tanner petition and the minutes of the House to provide a factual and objective account of the dispute.

As objectionable as tanners' fabricated claims to victory in the House was their accusation that the petition was a threat to the liberties of all city artisans. For the *Gazette* author, such assertions lacked prudence and a proper sense of justice, traits indispensable to the virtuous practice of politics. By contrast, rather than an assault on the liberties of all Philadelphia tradesmen, the anti-tanner petition was but a 'modest Attempt to deliver a *great Number* of Tradesmen from being poisoned by a *few*', evidence petitioners were acting in the interest of the health of the commonalty, artisans included. Satire was deployed to accuse tanners of hyperbole concerning their clamours about rights and liberties: petitioners simply sought to restore to city craftsmen the '*Liberty* of Breathing freely in their own Houses'. Perhaps most threatening, and suggestive of how a minor urban dispute could reflect the dominant social theory of the age, the *Mercury* account had attempted to sow social discord in the community by stirring up 'Faction, Heats and Animosities among Fellow-Citizens, who should live in Love and Peace'.<sup>44</sup> Tanners' evocation of the class position of urban tradesmen was a demagogic appeal that masked a small group of artisans' self-interest, in clear violation of a corporate commonwealth ideal. Fortunately, according to the *Gazette*, not all Philadelphia tanners, let alone all city tradesmen, were 'of that Disposition'. Instead, the six tanners who produced the paper for the assembly were represented as a small group of 'Hot-Heads' who falsely claimed to speak for the craft as a whole. Demonstrating confidence in the virtue of the majority of tanners, the *Gazette* author did not doubt the 'Brethren' of Dock Creek artisans would fail to thank them for their divisive and deceitful conduct.

The *Gazette* author could have, though he did not, further distinguished tanners from other tradesmen by recalling their troubles with other labourers in Philadelphia.

In 1704 city shoemakers, saddlers and others petitioned the provincial assembly requesting a prohibition against the exportation of leather, suggesting tanners drove up the price of their goods by selling on Atlantic markets. In response the House ordered the preparation of a bill 'for the true Tanning of Leather, and to prohibit the Exportation of raw Hides, and tann'd Leather made here'.<sup>45</sup> A 1719 petition from neighbouring rural Chester County complained the 'Extravagance' of the local price of leather was a result of a 'Combination' among tanners to export their product out of the country. In another petition in the same year city carriers protested that tanners carried their own leather to the detriment of those trained in the craft.<sup>46</sup> A counter-petition submitted by tanners to the assembly may have been successful, for less than two years later carriers petitioned the House about the 'irregular Practices' of tanners, and asked that they 'may be confined to the Customs and Practices of *Great-Britain*'.<sup>47</sup> In August of 1721 the Pennsylvania legislature attempted to end the Philadelphia leatherworkers' feud by passing a law regulating the price of leather, banning its export and prohibiting all leatherworkers from practising others' trades.<sup>48</sup> The following year tanners unsuccessfully requested the repeal of the regulatory statute.<sup>49</sup> Tanners' involvement in the Atlantic market economy frequently created problems with other urban leatherworkers and local consumers, who petitioned the colonial assembly – instead of the relatively inactive city common council – in defence of traditional methods of urban governance that privileged the public over the private good.

That the *Gazette* did not refer to tanners' earlier violations of traditional corporate practices, or to their privileged position in the urban economy, reflects broader changes in Philadelphia's society and culture as well as the orientation of the paper under Franklin. Between 1720 and 1740 the city's trade nearly tripled, as merchants' expansion into markets beyond the West Indies into the British Isles, southern Europe and other continental colonies fuelled economic expansion and employment.<sup>50</sup> Anglican merchants began to challenge Quaker traders' economic, political and cultural hegemony, symbolized in the city by the construction of Christ Church and a new Georgian State House. By the end of the 1730s elegant taverns and coffeehouses in the centre contrasted with the distinctly working-class taverns on Philadelphia's outskirts.<sup>51</sup> For English and American participants in a transatlantic republic of letters, an ideology of free trade in an empire of the seas made traditional corporate privileges seem like antiquated relics, and new forms of association compensated for the erosion of traditional institutions such as craft guilds and economic regulations.<sup>52</sup> As Philadelphia became the primary North American destination for European immigrants in the 1720s and 1730s, city and provincial governmental concerns revolved largely around growing numbers of sickly immigrants, an increasingly unruly workforce of slaves and servants, crime and poverty.<sup>53</sup>

The creation of a lively print culture in the city, without which the tanners' affair could not have occurred, was a crucial part of this transformation. Franklin purchased the *Gazette* from the London émigré Samuel Keimer in 1729, six years after both arrived in the city. During the 1720s both Keimer and Bradford (whose *Mercury* began publication in 1719) profited from the pamphlet war, and both printed political tracts for the proprietary as well as popular parties.<sup>54</sup> Franklin had been a supporter of the movement for paper money in the 1720s, anonymously publishing *A Modest Enquiry*

into the *Nature and Necessity of a Paper-Currency* in 1729, and later claiming in his autobiography that the success of the movement was due primarily to his efforts.<sup>55</sup> Yet, despite his artisan origins, Franklin was thoroughly bourgeois in his economic views. As an outspoken critic of traditional popular culture and advocate of a number of civic reforms, it is unlikely the *Gazette* would have criticized tanners' historical violations of customary corporate regulations or the wealth of the artisans – particularly if Franklin was the author.<sup>56</sup> As James Amelang has put it regarding his *Autobiography*, Franklin 'directly based his highly cultivated self-image, centring on an ideal of solitary, moralistic individualism, on a sharp break with corporate traditions'.<sup>57</sup> Though not averse to clubs or improvement societies, Franklin – and by extension his *Gazette* – was not inclined towards endorsing economic regulation or traditional corporate rights and liberties.

The expansion of printing and publishing in cities like Philadelphia in the early eighteenth century led to the consolidation of ideas regarding society and politics rather than the dissemination of new ones. Despite the factional publications that characterized Philadelphia's print culture in the 1720s, and in contrast to the openly partisan writing in news books in England between the 1640s and early 1660s, by the early eighteenth century journalistic publications typically adhered to a rejection of 'faction' that also made good business sense. In colonial publications a republican political theory inspired by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's *Cato's Letters* dominated newspapers and political pamphlets, while the genteel social writings of Addison and Steele greatly informed elite cultural development.<sup>58</sup> Bradford's *Mercury* and Franklin's *Gazette* both reflected this trend. Both printers copied the political writings of Trenchard and Gordon and targeted the urban trading classes as consumers and providers of news and useful information, while also cultivating a polite and refined readership by publishing essays from the *Tatler*, *Spectator* and *Gentleman's Magazine*.<sup>59</sup> Numerous articles either copied from British periodicals or inspired by them appeared in both Philadelphia newspapers, reflecting aristocratic republican as well as bourgeois values similar to those outlined in Joseph Morgan's *The Nature of Riches*, published by Franklin in 1732. The poor were instructed their labour would be rewarded in the afterlife; the political affairs of the world were better left to the industrious rich, whose independence paradoxically made them 'Slaves' to the public.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, the great were also informed that they too had a specific social role that, if not performed as providentially designed, could cause instability and disorder. In addition to the dangers of an excessive and effeminate love of luxury, the natural right of the elite to rule could only be legitimated by the proper display of republican virtue to the mimetic lower orders.<sup>61</sup> The *Gazette's* response to the tanners in 1739 vociferously maintained petitioners' commitment to the common welfare, while also subtly criticizing the *Mercury's* populist deviation from standard discourse.

### III

An answer to the *Gazette* was published in the *Mercury* on 13 September.<sup>62</sup> Since the 'Affair of the Tanners had made a great deal of Noise in this City, and by its Importance justly engaged the Attention of the Inhabitants', yet another 'Publick Relation' of the

assembly hearing was in order. The *Gazette's* challenge to the honour and honesty of tanners and their supporters produced a vigorous defence of the veracity of the *Mercury's* earlier representation, while more pointedly imputing malicious designs to their opponents. If according to the *Gazette* it was difficult to understand what induced the tanners to publish an account 'so partial and so false', for the *Mercury* writer it was 'hard to imagine with what Design the Gentlemen appear'd before the Assembly', other than to show their 'Talent at Invective and Scandal'. More than invective and scandal were apparently involved, however. Whereas the first *Mercury* account was primarily concerned with representing tanners' political acumen before the assembly, the second stressed that a small number of improving speculators attempted to dispossess humble urban tradesmen for the sake of urban 'improvement'. The *Gazette's* characterization of Dock Street tanners as a minority of designing troublemakers was countered by tanners' claim that their opponents in the city and public press were a deceitful group of self-interested schemers. Instead, it was again stressed, tanners successfully rallied assemblymen and other citizens to their cause, and the artisans' own proposal saved them from the dangerous designs of their opponents.

The *Mercury* response began with a justification of the first pro-tanner account, and reiterated the 'highly Iniquitous' nature of the attack against the tradesmen. The assembly hearing was in fact truthfully represented in the earlier tanners' account, though for brevity's sake some of the irrelevant arguments made by anti-tanner petitioners were omitted. Citing the *Gazette's* claim that many suffered for the interest of a minority, the *Mercury* letter rhetorically asked whether it was more just and humane to impose a small disadvantage to a great number if it would prevent the utter ruin of a few innocent inhabitants and their families. An interesting question from the perspective of the *communitas*, but it was of little matter, since it was in fact untrue that the affair pitted a minority of tanners against the rest of the urban community. Tanners possessed almost all the lots on either side of the Dock between Walnut Street Bridge and Third Street; it was therefore highly unlikely the yards impacted anyone's property below the bridge. The *Gazette* claim that city tan-yards were a nuisance to the neighbourhood was therefore itself false, since whatever offensive smells may have arisen from the yards were of disadvantage mainly to tanners themselves. When it became clear that assembly representatives would not be moved by anti-tanner petitioners' 'trifling' arguments for the tradesmen's removal, in order to 'take off the Odium they had Incur'd', tanners' opponents 'put on the appearance of Moderation, and join'd with the Tanners and their Friends in promoting a Regulation'.

The *real* reason petitioners desired the removal of tanners from the city was, according to the *Mercury*, more sinister. Because the workmen did not 'Improve' their grounds in a way that would be disadvantageous to their interests, their yards were called a 'hindrance to the Improvement of the City'. For this and the 'Imaginary loss of two or three Men', tanners would be deprived of the liberty of following their trades in the city. Though scholars have examined early modern English concepts of agricultural improvement, the idea was important in urban settings, too.<sup>63</sup> Philadelphia renters deployed the concept in 1726, when they petitioned the assembly to use the grounds they had 'improved' through building construction as security for a new emission of

paper money. Since the estates were not freeholds, however, the assembly rejected the offer.<sup>64</sup> Not only would the tanners be deprived of their livelihood, but they were to be 'Banish'd' from the city by improving landholders, and denied 'the greatest Pleasure that the World affords, the Society of their Relations and Friends, to sit down where-ever their little means can cheapest furnish them with Ground and Conveniences'. Thus affluent freeholding tanners along Dock Creek had become, in the second *Mercury* account, common artisans of 'little means', whose desire to enjoy their small properties in peace was threatened by monopolizing elites. Commonwealth values required that the modest needs of simple labourers be met, and if relatively powerful workmen like tanners could be dispossessed, the *Mercury* seemed to suggest, what recourse would lesser labourers have if similarly threatened?

Despite the danger posed to the tradesmen by a gentrifying cabal of property owners, the second *Mercury* narrative reiterated that it was tanners' own proposals that had rescued them from removal. Tanners' recognition that some of their pits produced offensive smells did not mean, as the *Gazette* asserted, that they confessed to being nuisances. On the contrary, such an allowance gained for tanners a counter-petition signed by more than 150 inhabitants, the recognition by almost all anti-tanner petitioners that the original petition was 'unreasonable', and a general consensus that only a minor regulation was needed. This concession led to the 'overthrow' of the anti-tanner petition; the *Mercury* author therefore hoped 'the Gentlemen won't be uneasy that we rejoice in having escaped the Danger and call it VICTORY'. Tanners' 'Adversaries' were in fact well aware that no one in the House objected to their proposals, and 'all impartial Men' could judge whether the assembly's decision was justly interpreted as a rejection of the anti-tanner petition, and their 'right to follow their Trades in the City according to their own Proposals asserted'. In contrast to the *Gazette*, the tanners' representative placed the artisans on an equal footing with the common council. Though acknowledging they were not to disobey any new ordinance of the corporation, the *Mercury* claimed the municipality was enjoined by the House resolve not to go beyond what was 'Reasonable'. The account concluded by asserting the author's 'careful regard to Truth' and the absence of any 'Personal Reflections till the Author in the *Gazette* gave the first Occasion', declining to enter into further debate on the matter, since 'Writing is not his Business'.

Tanners' self-representation as politically astute, though humble, artisans again recalled the popular activism of the 1720s, while also alluding to the social life of common local workmen such as 'Roger Trades-Man' and 'Roger Plowman'. As a number of historians have noted, during these years new spaces of working-class sociability like the Leather Apron Club were established.<sup>65</sup> James Logan, the likely author of the anti-paper money satire *A Dialogue Shewing What's Therein to Be Found*, echoed Daniel Defoe's *A Vindication of the Press* in his allusion to the excessive politicking in such places, where commoners 'over a Dram or a Mugg without Doors, make all the Laws, and do all the Business' of the colony.<sup>66</sup> City tanners were specifically referenced when Logan wrote of the 'Tann'd Impudence' of one local 'Looby', who allegedly attempted to intimidate the author at the election site in the city during provincial elections in 1723.<sup>67</sup> It is suggestive of the limits of cultural mobility in the town that the slur was directed at William Hudson Sr., tanner, merchant, long-time common council mem-

ber and mayor of Philadelphia at the time of the *Dialogue's* publication in 1725. The insult did not go unnoticed in the satirical *Observer's Trip to America*, an extended populist lampoon of ruling Quakers generally and aristocratic scholarly types like Logan specifically.<sup>68</sup> The dialogue between the Observer and 'Honest Roger' ridiculed the *Dialogue Shewing's* emphasis on thrift, industry and sobriety as little more than 'a dull Recipe for a Poor Devil just got out of Servitude' for debt, as well as the 'scurrilous senseless Pun' against the current mayor (Hudson), a worthy member of the 'Tanners Company'.<sup>69</sup> Though around this time the city corporation ended any efforts to enforce the traditional privileges of freemen in the city, informal networks of craft association and 'company' persisted.<sup>70</sup> If tanners consistently violated customary norms in selling their goods on the Atlantic market, they clearly belonged to the popular party during the pamphlet war of the 1720s.

The *Mercury's* contrasting of 'improvement' with the simple pleasures of social life pointed towards the persistence of economic problems and an oppositional ideology in the city during the later 1720s and 1730s. Though the printing of provincial bills of exchange contributed to the revival of trade and employment in the city in the later 1720s, popular hostility to debt and servitude remained. When Logan and other assemblymen again opposed a new money bill in 1729, they were threatened with violence by crowds gathered at the State House.<sup>71</sup> After the legislature's decision to print £30,000 in bills of credit in 1729, the following year the House re-passed the statute allowing servitude as repayment for debt. Instead of providing a distinctly colonial solution to the debt problem (in England 'they are wholly Strangers to Servitude as practised amongst us, or binding of Persons otherwise than as Apprentices'), the law had to be amended the following year, and hostility to labour service as payment for debt was evident throughout the middle years of the eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup> Despite the dominance of the ideas of Trenchard, Gordon, Addison and Steele in the colonies, the survival of a populist oppositional ideology was also evident in the 1730s. John Webbe wrote a series of letters in the *Gazette* that articulated a radical social and democratic vision, with one essay asserting that 'Nature has made no distinction; from the same Clod of Dirt she forms a Monarch and a Cobbler'.<sup>73</sup> On the eve of provincial elections in 1735, a pamphlet written by 'Constant Truman' and addressed to colonial freemen celebrated the English and Pennsylvania constitutions, while imploring the commonalty to elect honest poor men rather than deferentially vote for lawyers, magistrates or loan office trustees. Suggestive of the economic and cultural change occurring in the city at the time, the pamphlet emphasized that it was 'the poor Countryman and the industrious Mechanick, after all, that supplies the Merchant, and fits out the Gentleman with all his fine Cloaths, his gay Houses and Furniture, and his Train of Servants and Attendants'.<sup>74</sup> Tanners' allusion to the simple pleasures of honest small producers in opposition to overbearing grandees continued and perpetuated this oppositional ideology.

#### IV

Though the *Mercury* author stated his intention to return to his business and refrain from further debate, the controversy was not over. The last missive in the tanners'



affair appeared in the *Gazette* over a month later, on 18 October.<sup>75</sup> The letter was the longest of the affair and, despite its repetition of a disinterested concern for truth and justice, it was the most acerbic and personal of the controversy. It was also the most detailed in its criticism of the apparent deceptions of the *Mercury* and its denunciation of the tanners' un-deferential involvement in provincial politics. Though the letter did not abandon petitioners' professed republican commitment to the common good, it did attempt to make the tanners look like a ridiculous group of ignorant youth, whose flamboyant behaviour before the House indicated their complete lack of political tact. Tanners' repeated emphasis on the fact that their own proposals led to the rejection of the petition requesting their removal was stridently refuted. Rather than politically savvy artisans, Dock Street tanners were humorously represented as bumbling and insolent fools. Whereas according to the *Gazette* the first pro-tanner account in the *Mercury* was 'partial', the second was a complete 'Fiction'.

A preamble to the letter, enigmatically signed by 'E.F.' and addressed to Franklin, is suggestive of the elite view of popular politics in 1730s Pennsylvania. The paper was written immediately after the 13 September pro-tanner publication in the *Mercury*. However, provincial elections were held in early October, and 'considering how we (in this Town) abound with Learning and Politicks', it was thought that 'some mighty Genius' would discover in the paper a plot to overthrow the Pennsylvania constitution, or at least insinuate the *Gazette* was attempting to divert attention from the elections. In order to avoid a conspiratorial attribution of the text to ulterior political motives, publication was therefore delayed until after the election. An association between the excessive politicking evidently all too common in the city and the tanners' persistent falsifications in the *Mercury* was, if implicit, clear.

The *Gazette* letter began by contrasting a regard for truth, justice and modesty – the 'Bands of Society' – with fraud, malice and falsehood, whose reign inevitably portended social anarchy. Though the defenders of the tanners had attempted to remain anonymous, according to the *Gazette* it was obvious the recent 'Performances' in the *Mercury* were the 'united Labours of the same Men, who have for Years past polluted and fill'd our Publick Papers with the most false and infamous Insinuations'. According to this accusation, certain local writers had attempted to spread dissension in the community by publishing untrue intimations in the local press – during a period of political calm and general economic prosperity. The *Gazette* author had hoped that, after the 'true Account' previously published on 30 August, those writing in support of the tanners would have put a stop to their 'false Representations of our Superiour's Proceedings in an Affair that was publicly debated'. *Mercury* writers instead disregarded impartiality and truth, and with 'an Assurance peculiar to themselves' created for the populace a fictional representation that was manifestly contrary to the actual proceedings in the assembly. Disowning conspiratorial intentions among anti-tanner petitioners did not inhibit the *Gazette* author from accusing tanners' *Mercury* representatives – apparently more than one – of being involved in previous years' mysterious slanders and insinuations. As in the tanners' account, the suggestion was that there were larger political issues at stake in the conflict; allowing the *Mercury* representation to stand seemingly portended the dissolution of social order.

As in the first *Gazette* letter, the author repeatedly referred to the proceedings of the assembly as evidence for the falsehood of the tanners' narrative of events, while also portraying tanners' actions as lacking wisdom. In addition to exposing the artisans' misrepresentation of their negotiations, the *Gazette* poked fun at tanners' claim that tan-yards were allowed in the principal towns of England. The paper quoted 'Young M—s' – Samuel Morris – 'who appeared as the Chief of the Tanners', as saying that it was plain tan-yards were allowed in London, for they were settled in Southwark. This, however, as 'all Men' knew, was untrue: Southwark was on the south side of the Thames River, outside the city proper. Tanners were similarly wrong about the history of disease and tan-yards in Philadelphia. The artisans were too young to remember the epidemic of 1699, which swept off great numbers of inhabitants, including one of two tanners in the city and many more who resided near the Dock. At that time there were just two tan-yards on Dock Street, belonging to William Hudson and one Lambert, the latter of whom died from a disease 'in a very violent and uncommon Manner'. The young tanners had received their false information from 'an ancient Brother, or rather Father of the Pit' – meaning the elderly Hudson – 'whose Memory is weak, and not to be at all times depended upon'.<sup>76</sup> While the author did not claim the death of those in the neighbourhood was actually caused by the stench of tanning pits, it did state 'the Probability is strong'. Tanners' lack of historical awareness, and their distortions, were accompanied by their wilful making of the 'Proceedings of our Assembly such as they are pleased to admit them to be'.

The youth of the tanners, and especially the theatrics of Samuel Morris, were used by the *Gazette* to make the artisans' appearance in the hearing scandalously irreverent. In contrast to the well-known odour arising from tan-yards, the 'Youth' that spoke for the tanners allegedly said much about the 'Sweetness and Cleanliness' of their trade and that tanners were as healthy as other men – 'Are not we healthy Men?' The behaviour and mannerisms of the tanners' principal representative were 'extraordinary and amazing', as he 'assumed a Military Air and Strutt' and gesticulated dramatically before spectators with his handkerchief. He looked on the amazed petitioners with 'an Air of Grandeur, Self-sufficiency, and Contempt', and because he was a 'Young-man' with no patience he indecorously interrupted the speaker of the House in his eagerness to begin his speech. In addition to violating the customary protocols of the assembly, Morris 'said and unsaid, asserted, confused, and confounded himself and all his Opponents' during his performance. By contrast, the gentlemen on the other side said little, preferring to patiently submit the reasons for their petition to the reasoned 'Judgment of their Superiours', something the tanners were unequipped to do. In thus contrasting the behaviour of youthful and politically naive workmen with the sober, wise and genteel manner of the petitioners, the *Gazette* author sought to reinforce a deferential social order without specifically saying so. As in earlier years, tanners had stepped beyond the bounds of what was politically and culturally proper.

The comedic outlandishness attributed to tanners in the House was then extended to 'those Writers' in the *Mercury* who, as 'the Ethiopian cannot change his Skin nor the Leopard his Spots', could not refrain from a natural propensity to dissimulation. The author of the second *Mercury* narrative was described as a 'Tyro', an allusion to Marcus

Tullius Tiro, an ancient Roman writer and Cicero's slave. Readers would have recognized the reference as a significant slander in the context of colonial America, while the learned hint more subtly suggested tanners' attempt at self-representation in the press contradicted the social order. The *Gazette* author also, despite claiming a faithful adherence to truth, misquoted the *Mercury* when citing 'the Tanners Confessing they are a Nuisance, was the very thing that gained them the Victory'. In fact, according to the tanners' account of 13 September what gained them victory was 'their allowing that some Pitts afforded offensive Smells'. To the claim that petitioners against the tanners acknowledged their complaint was unreasonable after hearing tanners' defence, proof instead of mere assertion was needed. A biblical allusion to the book of Samuel further implicated Morris and the tanners' youth: though it was said in town that 'M—s' was a good man, he was still to blame, for the sons 'made themselves vile, and he reprov'd them not'.<sup>77</sup> In essence, tanners' account of the hearing was filled with 'wild Chimeras and Fictions of their own Brains', while their leader, instead of admonishing them, encouraged the artisans '(or their Agent)' to perpetuate the spectacle. If the tanners' actions before the Pennsylvania assembly demonstrated their inability to engage in proper politics, the *Mercury* writer's deceptions exacerbated the threat to social order in the public press.

But one more point needed to be made, which related to the *Mercury* authors' 'Grand Design'. According to the *Gazette*, the real purpose of the pro-tanner letters was to insinuate that the petition was a threat to the liberties of Philadelphia's tradesmen. For this plan to be successful, however, such writers would have to persuade city artisans that their 'Callings' were as 'offensive, infectious and injurious' to their neighbours as were the tanners'. Until this 'mean Artifice' was accomplished, tanners' advocates had no right to make such an inference, since no 'modest Man' would rank clean and healthy trades with tanners' employment, which was 'at best but a necessary Nuisance', justly prohibited in most well-regulated towns and cities. This closing by the *Gazette* again attempted to isolate Dock Street tanners, while leaving open the possibility that the machinations of writers such as those in the *Mercury* could ultimately seduce the city's tradesmen, a peril to be pondered by readers of good sense. The message for Philadelphians was that constant vigilance against demagogues was indispensable in the urban commonwealth, an old idea with a novel application in the colonial city.

## V

The tanners' affair was quickly overshadowed by more serious local and international developments, most importantly England's war with Spain and eventually France in the 1740s. Yet the controversy of 1739 is important precisely because it provides evidence of long-standing social, cultural and political conflicts during ordinary and even prosperous times. The dispute suggests the extent to which commonwealth values informed everyday life in the city at a time when traditional urban institutions – never particularly strong in Philadelphia – were largely irrelevant or in abeyance. Honesty and a disinterested regard for truth were the supreme cultural values espoused by both parties in the argument; representatives of the opposing side were portrayed as deceitful

conspirators who put self-interest above the common good. Tanners' spokespersons were distinguished by their emphasis on customary rights and the class consciousness of urban tradesmen, whereas petitioners' representatives expressed a corporate concern with the well-being of the whole community, including city artisans. A populist and producerist discourse was therefore opposed to a classical republican stress on social harmony and the organic community. Though both ideologies had long histories in English and American culture, changing economic and cultural contexts in the late 1720s and 1730s shaped the representation of the affair. Tanners emphasized the arbitrary appropriation of property to a populace long concerned with dispossession through credit and debt relationships. Petitioners argued for the importance of public health and urban improvement at a time when the city was undergoing dramatic physical transformation and growth in an expanding Atlantic system.

Whichever representation of the tanners' affair was more truthful, the artisans continued to practise their craft in the city and, like other tradesmen in the British Atlantic, continued to play an active role in urban society. Despite their appropriation of a populist commonwealth ideology in 1739, tanners were not radicals or social revolutionaries. Following an election riot in 1742, signers of the tanners' proposals of 1739 such as John Ogden, William Hudson Jr. and Samuel Morris all testified to the disorderly and threatening behaviour of sailors at the port and their own efforts to maintain order during the *mêlée*.<sup>78</sup> Tanners remained conscious of the social distance between themselves and those who laboured for them. Eight years after the controversy, a statement by William Hudson Jr. in a local publication succinctly captured how many Philadelphia artisans conceived of their place in society. When the Irish servant Daniel Brady fled the service of Hudson, the tanner stated in his advertisement for the fugitive's return that it was possible Brady would 'endeavour to pass for a tanner, tho' he is not a workman'.<sup>79</sup> Tanners also continued to feud with Philadelphia cordwainers, and neighbourhood residents again protested against tanners' refuse in Dock Creek between the 1750s and 1770s.<sup>80</sup> Though willing to appeal to the sentiments of urban commoners when their interests were threatened, during normal periods Philadelphia tanners defended their privileged place in the economic and social hierarchy. Their adaptation of a small producer commonwealth ideology dating at least to late medieval Europe to the print culture of the eighteenth-century colonial American city suggests the extent of cultural continuity as well as change in the early modern British Atlantic world.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps most revealing in the affair was the extensive social power accorded both the public and local artisans by the middle decades of the eighteenth century, long before the American Revolution overturned an allegedly deferential cultural order. David Zaret has argued in the context of seventeenth-century England that 'the public' was not synonymous with 'the people', the former having some access to literary and economic resources.<sup>82</sup> Yet if in the eighteenth century 'the public' often connoted an urbane readership in growing Atlantic seaports, the tanners' controversy suggests how a minor property dispute could be transformed into a contest for the allegiance of a public clearly not confined to a polite and learned elite. While the dispute is demonstrative of an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards 'the people' among intellectuals in England and the colonies in the eighteenth century, it also shows how ordinary people

gradually asserted a right to political engagement at a local level.<sup>83</sup> The grievances and animosities in colonial Philadelphia that were dramatized by the tanners' affair were part of a much broader transformation in Anglo-American society and culture over an early modern *longue durée*.

## NOTES

1. Garzoni and Ameyden quoted in James S. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA, 1998), p. 98.
2. The author has been unable to locate the (likely non-existent) petition, so it is impossible to know who the signers were. As some of the wealthiest inhabitants of the city constructed homes along the pleasant shores of the creek in the city's early years, however, it is probable leading citizens living along the creek solicited signatures from more humble neighbourhood residents. The petition's summary can be found in *Pennsylvania Archives*, 138 vols (Philadelphia, PA, 1852–6; Harrisburg, PA, 1874–1935), Series 8, vol. 3, p. 2487 (hereafter *PA*).
3. R. W. Hoyle, 'Petitioning as Popular Politics in Sixteenth-Century England', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), pp. 365–89; Christian D. Liddy and Jelle Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City: York and Bruges', *English Historical Review*, 128 (2013), pp. 771–805; Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, "Let Each Man Carry on with His Trade and Remain Silent": Middle-Class Ideology in the Urban Literature of the Late Medieval Low Countries', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), pp. 180–2; David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), ch. 8.
4. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992). For Pennsylvanians' application of new eighteenth-century English cultural standards to the colony, see Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2008). A by-no-means-exhaustive list of authors who have advanced the understanding of popular politics in early modern England in recent years includes Ethan Shagan, Phil Withington, Andy Wood, David Rollison, Steve Hindle and Michael Braddick. An important exception to this lacuna in early American historiography is Simon Middleton, *From Privileges to Rights: Work and Politics in Colonial New York* (Philadelphia, PA, 2006).
5. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Ronald Schultz, *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720–1830* (New York and Oxford, 1991); Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds), *A History of the Book in America: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2000); David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).
6. Simon Finger, *The Contagious City: The Politics of Public Health in Early Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY, 2012); Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775–82* (New York, 2001).
7. Michael McMahon, "Publick Service" versus "Mans Properties": Dock Creek and the Origins of Urban Technology in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia', in Judith A. McGaw (ed.), *Early American Technology: Making and Doing Things from the Colonial Era to 1850* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), pp. 114–47; McMahon, "Small Matters": Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, and the "Progress of Cities", *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 116 (1992), pp. 157–82 (hereafter *PMHB*).



8. Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure van Bruaene (eds), *De Bono Communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City, 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Turnhout, 2010). For *communitas* in early modern England, see Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005).
9. Works that address the Habermasian notion of a ‘public sphere’ in England and early America include Phil Withington, ‘Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England’, *American Historical Review*, 112 (2007), pp. 1016–38; Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); David D. Hall, ‘Introduction: Part I’, in Amory and Hall (eds), *Book in America*, pp. 1–13. For the prominence of conspiracy in contemporary culture, see Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York, 2005).
10. This article follows Andy Wood in arguing for an expansive definition of politics, but which requires an attempt to ‘extend, reassert, or challenge’ the existing distribution of power in society to qualify as political. A. Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Houndmills, 2002), p. 13.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp. 43–65, 105–16.
12. The *Mercury* account discussed in this section refers to that of 16 August 1739.
13. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 3, p. 2504.
14. Peter C. Welsh, *Tanning in the United States to 1850* (Washington, DC, 1964), p. 7; for tanning in the colonies generally, see Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946), pp. 68, 82, 89, 130 and 141.
15. Thomas Allen Glenn, ‘William Hudson, Mayor of Philadelphia, 1725–1726’, *PMHB*, 15 (1891), pp. 336–9; McMahon, “Publick Service” versus “Mans Properties”, p. 121.
16. Welsh, *Tanning in the United States*, p. 18. For the labour process, see also Amelang, *Flight of Icarus*, p. 97; McMahon, “Publick Service” versus “Mans Properties”, p. 123.
17. Finger, *Contagious City*, p. 3.
18. Glenn, ‘William Hudson’, pp. 336–9; *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of Philadelphia, 1704–1776* (Philadelphia, PA, 1847), pp. 128, 133 (hereafter *MCC*).
19. Albert Cook Myers (ed.), *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey, and Delaware, 1630–1707* (New York, 1912), pp. 327, 409.
20. *Mercury*, 18 February 1735.
21. *Gazette*, 10 November 1737; Glenn, ‘William Hudson’, p. 341. For Philadelphia artisans’ increasing use of unfree labour in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, see Sharon V. Salinger, *“To Serve Well and Faithfully”: Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (Cambridge and New York, 1987), pp. 65, 69.
22. *Gazette*, 15 and 22 June 1738. For residential patterns, see Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, PA, 1968), pp. 11–13.
23. The 1691 charter was likely abrogated when Pennsylvania briefly became a royal colony in 1692. For England and the Atlantic world, see Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, p. 106; Christopher Brooks, ‘Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550–1800’, in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 65, 72; Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), pp. 20–4; Paul Musselwhite, ‘Annapolis Aflame: Richard Clarke’s Conspiracy and the Imperial Urban Vision in Maryland, 1704–8’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 71 (2014), pp. 362–5.



24. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 1, pp. 393–4; Glenn, ‘William Hudson’, p. 339. Despite the admission of a tanner to the common council, the charter’s restrictive qualifications would have excluded approximately 30 percent of those on the tax list of 1697 from urban freemanship. Gary B. Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681–1726* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), pp. 232–3.
25. Eberhard Isenmann, ‘The Notion of the Common Good, the Concept of Politics, and Practical Policies in Late Medieval and Early Modern German Cities’, in Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (eds), *De Bono Communi*, p. 110; Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, pp. 25–37, 106, 126–7, 182, 267; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 10.
26. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 1, pp. 393–4, 400–1 (quotation).
27. For municipal health regulations, see Finger, *Contagious City*, pp. 30–1. For the inactivity of the Philadelphia common council, see Judith M. Diamondstone, ‘Philadelphia’s Municipal Corporation, 1701–1776’, *PMHB*, 90 (1966), pp. 183–201.
28. *MCC*, pp. 16, 20, 34. It is not unlikely the committee’s finding that the incorporation of coopers would set a good precedent for other trades in the town was influenced by Hudson, who saw advantages in the possibility of incorporation for tanners.
29. *MCC*, pp. 118–35.
30. Significant numbers of immigrants from Ireland and Germany began to arrive in the later 1710s, with 5,000 arrivals from Ireland in 1717. Salinger, ‘*To Serve Well and Faithfully*’, pp. 52–4.
31. *MCC*, pp. 145–7.
32. *MCC*, p. 271.
33. For the yellow fever outbreak, see Finger, *Contagious City*, pp. 32, 35.
34. The city of New York received complaints about tanning pits as early as the summer of 1676, and tanners were ordered to move out of the city in November. *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675–1776*, 8 vols (New York, 1905), vol. 1, pp. 20–1; Middleton, *Privileges to Rights*, pp. 84–5.
35. For the importance of these terms, see Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (eds), *De Bono Communi*; Dumolyn and Haemers, ‘“Let Each Man Carry on with His Trade”’.
36. John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600–1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1978), pp. 125–6; Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620–1720* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Simon Middleton, ‘Private Credit in Eighteenth-Century New York: The Mayor’s Court Papers, 1681–1776’, *Journal of Early American History*, 2 (2012), pp. 150–77.
37. *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1681 to 1802*, 18 vols (Harrisburg, PA, 1896–1919), vol. 1, p. 65; *MCC*, p. 19; ‘The Humble Petition of Divers Poor Inhabitants of the City and County of Philadelphia’, Records of Philadelphia County, 1671–1855, Collection 1014, Box 1, Folder 6, HSP; Daniel Johnson, ‘“What Must Poor People Do?”: Economic Protest and Plebeian Culture in Philadelphia’, *Pennsylvania History*, 79 (2012), pp. 122–3.
38. Much of the currency controversy surrounded Queen Anne’s 1704 proclamation that prevented colonial governments from inflating the value of their money by more than one-third of its sterling equivalent. McCusker, *Money and Exchange*, p. 126. For petition summaries, see *PA*, Series 8, vol. 1, p. 461; *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 840–2, 844, 889, 921–2, 955, 1124, 1237, 1262–3, 1266, 1269, 1361. For residents being bound over for debt, see Records of Philadelphia County, 1671–1855, Collection 1014, HSP.
39. The first printed call for paper money came from an anti-proprietary Quaker merchant named Francis Rawle. Rawle, *Some Remedies Proposed, for the Restoring the Sunk Credit of the Province of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1721).

40. *A Dialogue between Mr. Robert Rich and Roger Plowman* (Philadelphia, 1725); *The Triumvirate of Pennsylvania* (1725); *A Revisal of the Intreagues of the Triumvirate* (Philadelphia, 1729).
41. *Statutes at Large*, vol. 3, pp. 324–38, 389–407; *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 98–116.
42. References to the *Gazette* throughout this section refer to 30 August 1739.
43. McMahon, “Small Matters”, p. 168; Finger, *Contagious City*, pp. 58–64.
44. For the broader cultural prominence of these qualities and their gendered significance, see Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale*; Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009).
45. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 1, pp. 411.
46. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 1294, 1301.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 1375–6.
48. *Statutes at Large*, vol. 3, pp. 258–60.
49. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 3, pp. 1404, 1413.
50. John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), p. 205; James G. Lydon, ‘Philadelphia’s Commercial Expansion, 1720–1739’, *PMHB*, 91 (1967), pp. 401–18.
51. Gary B. Nash, ‘The Early Merchants of Philadelphia: The Formation and Disintegration of a Founding Elite’, in Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn (eds), *The World of William Penn* (Philadelphia, PA, 1986), pp. 337–51; Peter Thompson, *Rum, Punch, and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, PA, 1999), p. 63.
52. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), chs 5 and 6; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 117–30; Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), part 4; Thompson, *Rum, Punch, and Revolution*, ch. 4.
53. ‘Petition of the Grand Inquest for the City of Philadelphia to the Mayor Recorder & Aldermen of the City of Philadelphia, January 1735/6’, Records of Philadelphia County, 1671–1855, Box 1, Folder 14, HSP; *MCC*, pp. 279–80, 293, 300, 305, 309, 311, 326, 332, 333, 342; *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, 16 vols (Harrisburg, PA, 1851–2; Philadelphia, 1852–3), vol. 4, pp. 47, 99–100, 225–6, 274–6, 278, 304, 306–7 (hereafter *MCP*); Finger, *Contagious City*, pp. 35–49.
54. James N. Green, ‘Part 1. English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin’, in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds), *A History of the Book in America: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 251–2. Bradford printed tracts both in favour of and opposed to paper money prior to the opening of Keimer’s business in 1723.
55. Benjamin Franklin, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper-Currency* (Philadelphia, 1729); Green, ‘English Books and Printing’, p. 254.
56. David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York, 2004), pp. 93–5; Green, ‘English Books and Printing’, pp. 255–6.
57. Amelang, *Flight of Icarus*, p. 228.
58. Green, ‘English Books and Printing’, pp. 248, 256; Charles E. Clark, ‘Part 1. Early American Journalism: News and Opinion in the Popular Press’, in Amory and Hall (eds), *History of the Book in America*, pp. 349–50.
59. *Mercury*, 16 February 1720; *Gazette*, 1 October 1728; Clark, ‘Early American Journalism’, pp. 347–66; David S. Shields, ‘Eighteenth-Century Literary Culture’, in Amory and Hall (eds), *Book in America*, pp. 434–76.
60. Joseph Morgan, *The Nature of Riches* (Philadelphia, 1732).

61. For examples, see *Gazette*, 30 March 1738 and 1 February 1739. For the prominence of fears of luxury and 'effeminacy' in contemporary England, see Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 186–7.
62. References to the affair throughout this section are from the *Mercury*, 13 September 1739.
63. Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996); Richard W. Hoyle (ed.), *Custom, Improvement and the Landscape in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham, 2011).
64. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 2, p. 1739.
65. Schultz, *Republic of Labor*, pp. 21–7; Thompson, *Rum, Punch, and Revolution*, p. 127.
66. *A Dialogue Shewing What's Therein to Be Found* (Philadelphia, 1725), p. 30; Daniel Defoe, *A Vindication of the Press* (London, 1718).
67. *Dialogue Shewing*, pp. 30, 31.
68. Logan's learning was well known in town; his frequent trips to London allowed him to accumulate one of the largest private libraries in the colonies. David D. Hall, 'Learned Culture in the Eighteenth Century', in Amory and Hall (eds), *Book in America*, p. 422.
69. *The Observer's Trip to America* (Philadelphia, 1726), p. 25.
70. For the continuing importance of 'company' in English towns, see Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, pp. 127–37.
71. Patrick Gordon, *By the Honourable Patrick Gordon, Esq; Lieutenant Governour of the Province of Pennsylvania: A Proclamation* (Philadelphia, 1729); *MPC*, vol. 3, pp. 351–2.
72. *MPC*, vol. 3, pp. 376–7; *Statutes at Large*, vol. 4, pp. 171–84, 211–5. See also the mid-century comments of Gottlieb Mittelberger in Oscar Handlin and John Clive (eds), *Journey to Pennsylvania* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), pp. 68–9, and the petition of Joseph Sturgis, 15 June 1737, Court of Common Pleas, in Philadelphia Court Records, 1676–1825, HSP.
73. *Gazette*, 6 May 1736. See also *ibid.*, 1 and 8 April 1736; Schultz, *Republic of Labor*, pp. 27–8. See also the 'Anti Z' letter, *Mercury*, 22 April 1736.
74. *Advice to the Free-holders and Electors of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1735).
75. Quotations in this and the following paragraphs are from the *Gazette*, 18 October 1739.
76. William Hudson Sr. would die in 1742 at the age of eighty. Glenn, 'William Hudson', p. 336.
77. I Samuel, 3.13.
78. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 4, pp. 2978–9, 2983, 2989–90. For the riot, see Michael Bradley McCoy, 'Absconding Servants, Anxious Germans, and Angry Sailors: Working People and the Making of the Philadelphia Election Riot of 1742', *Pennsylvania History*, 74 (2007), pp. 427–51; Thompson, *Rum, Punch, and Revolution*, pp. 129–33.
79. *Gazette*, 3 February 1747.
80. *PA*, Series 8, vol. 5, pp. 3871–2, 3882–3; *ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 6510, 6523; Charles S. Olton, 'Philadelphia's First Environmental Crisis', *PMHB*, 98 (1974), pp. 92–3.
81. David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People: Popular Politics and England's Long Social Revolution, 1066–1649* (Cambridge, 2010); McRae, *God Speed the Plough*; Dumolyn and Haemers, "'Let Each Man Carry on with His Trade'".
82. Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, p. 33.
83. For a representative example of a contradictory attitude towards 'the people' in Trenchard and Gordon, see John Trenchard, 'The Arts of Misleading the People by Sounds', in John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, 4 vols (London, 1737), vol. 1, pp. 82–8.