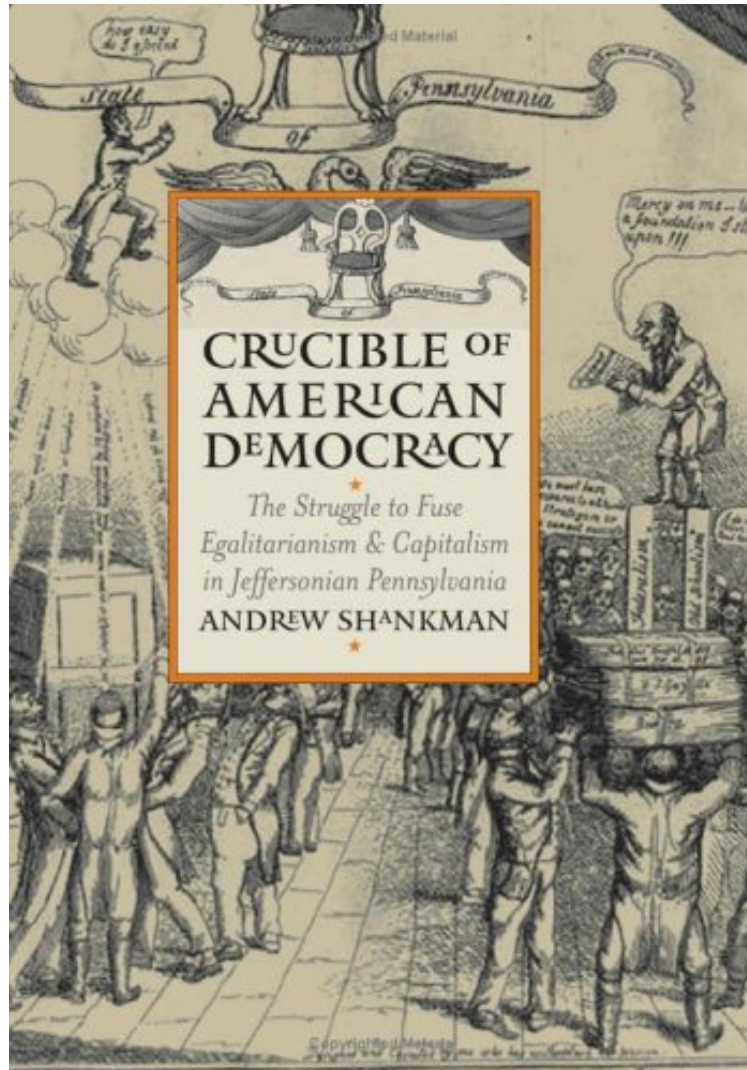


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Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania (American Political Thought (University Press of Kansas))

Andrew Shankman

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Andrew Shankman : Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania (American Political Thought (University Press of Kansas)) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism and Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania (American Political Thought (University

Press of Kansas)):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Review - Crucible of American Democracy By John Mugge Andrew Shankman gets five stars right off the bat just for his choice of subject matter. By focusing on the political debate in Pennsylvania in the first decades of the nineteenth century, insight into the nature of America's internal political and economic conflicts is gained which otherwise might be missed by those who focus too narrowly on the national scene. Shankman identifies the different strains of Jeffersonianism that remained after Federalism was mostly discredited and defeated. In *Crucible of American Democracy* he details the debate which raged among Pennsylvania Jeffersonians in the wake of the Federalist defeat as to the meanings of capitalism, freedom, and equality in a democracy. Jeffersonian thought is initially illuminated by its contrast with Federalism, especially as represented by the writings and actions of Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton is the great architect of the Federalist vision of America. He admired the British and aimed to establish America to a great extent in its image. He was for a strong central government, would have had a president elected for life, wanted and even for a time established a standing army, and favored the authority of the federal government to tax the population directly. Both politically and culturally, Hamilton would promote an elite class, an upper crust of privileged citizens with the wisdom and leisure to govern. Most telling were his efforts to establish the First Bank of the United States in which government debt was accepted at par to whoever held that debt. This rewarded speculators over those among the general population such as farmers and former revolutionary soldiers who had sold their bond shares issued to them in lieu of wages for pennies on the dollar. He also promoted such enterprises as the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures. Here again Hamilton favored investors over the craftsmen who directly produced manufactures. These measures would promote control by the governing elite, apparently in Hamilton's mind to be equated with wealthy financiers and merchants. Such were the men who, in Hamilton's view, were in possession of the wisdom with which to lead the new nation. Jefferson and Madison were among those who, though believing in a proper role for the central government, balked at many of these Federalist ideas. They, too, believed in a kind of natural aristocracy, but an elite supported by this new sort of wealth seemed anything but natural to them. Furthermore, the legions of tradesmen, farmers, and laborers who fought the revolution and were promised a new democratic republic were anathema to the elitism of the Federalists. With the Federalist defeat in 1800, the field was left to the Jeffersonians. But the Jeffersonians in Pennsylvania, once rid of the Federalists, found that they were anything but united under a single vision for the future of America. The most radical promoters of democracy to be found in Pennsylvania in 1800 were to be found in Philadelphia. Shankman fittingly calls them the Philadelphia Democrats. Whereas the Federalists had held a hierarchical vision for America, the Philadelphia Democrats were alarmed at the disparity they saw between the rich and poor. They perceived a powerful elite gaining unfair economic advantage thanks to their close (and corrupt) association with the power of government. Though the Federalists were defeated, problems persisted due to an institutional thwarting of the will of the majority. The governor could, and did, veto measures passed by the legislature. Judges set aside measures as unconstitutional. Philadelphia Democrats called for a constitutional convention to correct these limitations placed on democracy. At issue were the corrupt associations of the wealthy business men with government officials, and the accessibility to productive property. A true democracy would limit unfair advantages and promote broader access to productive property and thus enhance a sharing in the new nation's economic potential. Standing opposite the Philadelphia Democrats were the Quids. This group inherited the Federalist distrust of pure democracy and universal suffrage. They stood for the status quo and the protection of personal property. The Snyderites were the moderates who promoted more modest and gradual reform. In the end, the path selected was rapid economic development. Among the solutions enacted was a rapid expansion of banking so that credit was made available to small business owners and farmers. Protective tariffs and internal improvements were also favored to improve economic opportunity for all. These and similar measures were made to ensure that the rising tide of the American economy would truly lift all boats. The market place would be the bringer of prosperity that all could share in. The American experiment was set up to be an alternative to European style monarchy and oppression. Equality and democracy were supposed to result in some measure of egalitarian spreading of wealth, or what Thomas Jefferson referred to as "that happy mediocrity of condition." The extent to which one judges America to have achieved its aims will rely on the reader's political and economic predilections. What Shankman presents here is a special look into a time and place when the direction of the country was still very much in doubt. It sheds light on much that happened in America in the first half of the nineteenth century, and demonstrates that America's inability to deal fully with questions of democracy and equality at the time has left America today still wondering how issues of inequality might yet be addressed. Shankman makes mention of the American System, a school of thought that crystallized thanks in part to Pennsylvanians such as Mathew Carey. This school promoted protective tariffs, internal improvements, and central banking with which to capitalize rapid economic expansion. As time went on and the market failed to realize all of its egalitarian promises, the American System began to promote an educated work force and higher wages. (Anyone interested in this aspect of nineteenth century American history should read *America's Protectionist Takeoff 1815-1914*, by Michael Hudson.) Shankman entices us to consider the economic side of political economy, repeatedly referring to access to productive

property and egalitarian fairness. It would seem, however, that direct consideration of these issues has constantly been diverted by purely business interests. (Hudson complains that the American System is neglected by history and economic departments in modern day academia.) And in a book like *Crucible of American Democracy*, like any history text, when discussion of economics comes into play, one has to take care to understand the bias of the author. To his credit, Shankman seems quite disciplined and objective in his presentation of the subject, and this makes *Crucible of American Democracy* most valuable from whatever direction the reader may approach it. 17 of 18 people found the following review helpful. How what is came to be. By greg taylor This book is a well-focused incursion into several ongoing debates in early American historiography. Anyone who has read academic history about that period in the last thirty years should be aware of the republicanism-liberalism debates as well as the arguments surrounding the development of capitalism in the early republic. Shankman's book focuses on Pennsylvania politics during the years of the Jefferson and Madison administrations as well as the decades immediately prior and after. Pennsylvania had the most advanced and diversified economy of any of the states. For that reason, Shankman believes that the arguments among the various factions of the Jeffersonian party ended up being of great consequence. Much of the rest of the country followed Pennsylvania's lead and the broad consensus that came out of Pennsylvania in regards to the meaning of democracy and the state's role in economic development became the national consensus for the first half of the nineteenth century. Shankman's first chapter is a superb exposition of the development of the opposition to Hamilton's economic policies and to Adam's assertion of national power in reaction to the Whiskey Rebellion and in the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. His exposition is concise and very even handed. On the state level, three strands of Jeffersonians emerged: the Quids, the Snyderites and the Philadelphia Democrats. Shankman delineates their differences and traces those to differences in their geographical origins and social status. As long as they were a party of opposition these three variants were able to work together. With the election of Jefferson in 1800 their differences fractured their alliance. This is the meaning of Shankman's title. The "crucible of conflict" is practically a mantra throughout this book. The idea is that the political debates and electoral conflicts in Pennsylvania drove the Jeffersonian's thought in directions it would not otherwise have gone. In the end, they had to either give up some of their cherished ideals or be brushed aside in state politics as irrelevant. For example, one of the basic assumptions of the thought of the time was the idea of "the people". There was this sense that there was a common interest that united the whole populace. If no one started out from a position of too much relative wealth or political influence and if all were allowed to freely pursue their dreams then no major conflicts could develop among the people. If there was discord, it was due to distortions in the system, e.g., the judges manipulating the judicial system in defiance of the majority (the more things change...) The problem that the Jeffersonians had to face was "the creative endeavors of certain citizens were causing inequality to grow among citizens" (p.168). The eventual solution to the issue of equality and economic development was to allow everyone an "untrammelled right to pursue his self-interest" (p.165). This development is played out in Shankman's telling of the 1805 governor's race. This chapter is another incisive exposition. Shankman is an excellent writer. One final but very important point. In his final chapter, Shankman positions his thesis in the ongoing debates that I mentioned at the beginning. He expounds on Merrill and Wilentz' point that it is easy to look back at this period and to see the development of a capitalist economy as being inevitable. They point out that while everyone back then embraced "commerce and commodity production" that that is not the same thing as capitalism (p.240). This is a common problem in historical writings. A wide open development is seen as having been almost inevitable. One of the real strengths of Shankman's book is that he reminds us just how wild and woolly in possibility this period was. Capitalism was not inevitable. We could have gone a different way. This is a superb telling of why we went the way we did. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By tom richter A must read!

Arguments over what democracy actually meant in practice and how it should be implemented raged throughout the early American republic. As Andrew Shankman shows, nowhere were those ideas more intensely contested or more representative of the national debate than in Pennsylvania, where the states Jeffersonians dominated the day. Pennsylvania Jeffersonians were the first American citizens to attempt to translate idealized speculations about democracy into a workable system of politics and governance. In doing so, they revealed key assumptions that united other national citizens regarding democracy and the conditions necessary for its survival. In particular, they assumed that democracy required economic autonomy and a strong measure of economic as well as political equality among citizens. This strong egalitarian theme was, however, challenged by Pennsylvanias precociously capitalistic economy and the nations dynamic economic development in general, forcing the Jeffersonians to confront the reality that economic and social equality would have to take a back seat to free market forces. Seeking democracy became a debate about the desirability of capitalism and the precise relations between majority rule and the pursuit and protection of individual rights and interests. From this struggle to fuse egalitarianism and free enterprise in Pennsylvania emerged most subsequent mainstream beliefs concerning the respective roles of democracy and capitalism in American society. In fact, it did much to shape the boundaries of permissible thought in the Jacksonian era concerning political economy and the extent of popular democratic power. Shankmans illuminating exploration of the Pennsylvania experience

reveals how democracy arose in America, how it came to accommodate capitalism, and at the same time forced egalitarian assumptions and dreams to the margins of society. A resonant work of intellectual and political history, his study also mirrors the aspirations, fears, hatreds, dreams, generous impulses, noble strivings, selfish cant, and enormous capacity to imagine of those who first tried to translate the blueprint for democracy into a tested foundation for the nation's future.

A valuable contribution to the literature on the early republic and a timely intervention in our larger, ongoing discussion of the limits and possibilities of American democracy. Peter S. Onuf, author of *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* Shankman has brought the rambunctious politics of Pennsylvania under close examination, revealing the inherent tension in the commingled affirmations of democracy and capitalism in the Early Republic. Joyce Appleby, author of *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* A superb book that sheds fresh and provocative light on a subject of central concern to historians of the early national United States. Drew R. McCoy, author of *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* "An important new study." *American Historical* "Shankman has written a splendid book that . . . shows that Jeffersonian Pennsylvania was the first site of a complicated ideological transition that led to the identification of a democratic polity with a capitalist economy. His narrative is swift-moving and persuasive." *Journal of the Early Republic* "A superb contribution to the political and intellectual history of the early republic." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* "A powerful reminder that, even if political democracy and free market capitalism emerged contemporaneously, their relationship has often been as contested as it has been consensual." *Journal of American History* From the Back Cover A valuable contribution to the literature on the early republic and a timely intervention in our larger, ongoing discussion of the limits and possibilities of American democracy.--Peter S. Onuf, author of *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* Shankman has brought the rambunctious politics of Pennsylvania under close examination, revealing the inherent tension in the commingled affirmations of democracy and capitalism in the Early Republic.--Joyce Appleby, author of *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* A superb book that sheds fresh and provocative light on a subject of central concern to historians of the early national United States.--Drew R. McCoy, author of *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* About the Author Andrew Shankman is assistant professor of history at Northeastern Illinois University of Chicago.