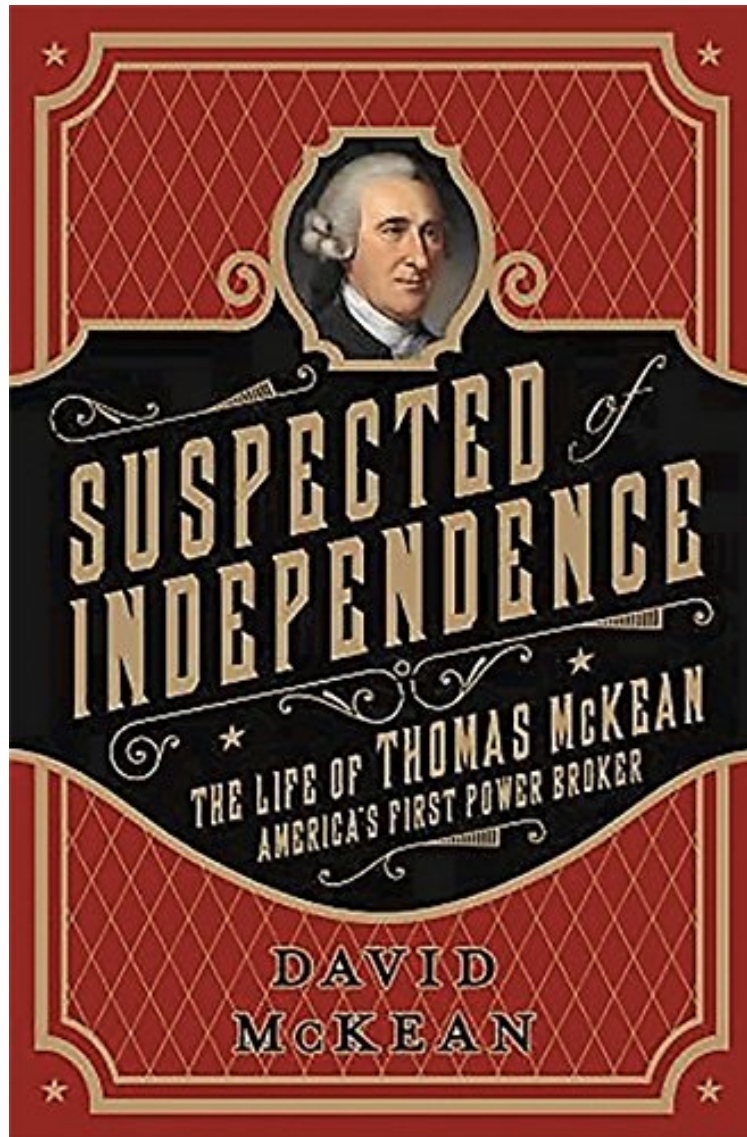


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David McKean

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David McKean : Suspected of Independence: The Life of Thomas McKean, Americas First Power Broker before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Suspected of Independence: The Life of Thomas McKean, Americas First Power Broker:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. David McKean on the life of Thomas McKean and his many

endeavors. By Ronald H. Clark As usual, the author has written an interesting and perceptive book, interlinking history, politics, and law. I have read all three of his previous volumes; especially his books on lawyer-power brokers Thomas Corcoran ("Tommy the Cork") and Clark Clifford were knowledgeable, superbly researched, and thoughtful in judging these two controversial figures. A longtime career State Department senior official, he was recently appointed U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg. Once again, his subject is a legal and political power broker, in fact one of his own ancestors, not from our own time, but covering the subject's life during 1734-1817. As I read the book and the many dimensions of Thomas McKean's life, I kept thinking of Woody Allen's movie "Zelig." That is because McKean pops up in almost every significant political, judicial and military event during the Revolutionary and Early National periods. Like Dean Acheson, he was "present at the creation." After an early career at the bar, he moved into politics as Clerk of the Delaware Assembly and member from New Castle (an interesting place to visit today). Widening his scope, he participates in the Stamp Act Congress in 1765; the Philadelphia City Committee and the boycott of the Tea Act in 1773; and the first Continental Congress in 1774. He was a signer of the Declaration and participant in the Second Continental Congress in 1775. He next served in the Revolutionary War where he interacted with Washington. He also came to know John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, and John Dickinson. McKean next shifted in 1777 to the judiciary as the First Pennsylvania state Chief Justice. Many were opposed to the state court system, feeling it infused with distasteful English law. So McKean undertook to reconcile this group with his own thinking that the legal system should be heavily influenced by English principles and practices. Concurrently, McKean surprisingly served as Chief Executive of Delaware. Much in demand, he next in 1781 is elected as president of Congress under the Articles; followed by participation in 1787 in the Constitutional Convention. During all this, he continues as Chief Justice, expanding the state judicial system and handing down important decisions relating to fugitive slaves and the primacy of American law when it was challenged by foreign legal systems in American courts. The final period covered in the book focuses upon his role as a politician. Long a Federalist, beginning with the election of 1796, McKean begins to shift to the Jeffersonian Republican camp. He opposed the Alien and Sedition Acts and eventually becomes the second Governor of Pennsylvania at age 65, re-elected two times. The author is not worshipful of his ancestor, instead he brands him as arrogant, actively engaged in patronage and nepotism on a grand scale, "prickly", and sometimes motivated by political revenge such as when he advises Jefferson to purge all Federalists from his administration after the election of 1800. Fortunately for the reader, who can be overwhelmed with all these offices and activities, the author has provided an essential Chronology at the beginning of the volume. For all the activities in which McKean engaged, the book itself proceeds at what seems a leisurely pace and is not hurried in its 270 or so pages. The extensive notes indicate that the author once again has done his homework and his sources are diverse. I also found the book to be nicely printed on excellent paper, with a section of helpful illustrations. McKean's constant involvement in nearly everything of note going on provides a nice history of American politics and law during this period--an extra important bonus of the book. So the reader is better informed in several regards on important issues after reading this pleasant book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Forgotten Founding Father Now Brought Nicely to Light By Peter H. Michael The 1780s, what John Quincy Adams called America's critical decade, have been strangely neglected by historians, as have many of that era's most important players. What would help are more biographies such as David McKean's illuminating book, *Suspected of Independence*, the story of his ancestor, Thomas McKean, who for a half century occupied one after another key role in the formation of the United States. Exceptionally deeply researched and elegantly written, *Suspected of Independence* ushers the reader through much of the fascinating give-and-take of how one of the fledgling democracy's foremost statesmen, jurists and opinion leaders and his new nation lived life. Given that descendant is writing of ancestor here, one might have expected hagiography, but the author is scrupulously even-handed in the treatment of his subject. An inexplicable shortcoming of the book is the omission the 1781 transition from the Second Continental Congress, the non-government consultative body among the colonies and then the states, to the nation's first government chartered by the Articles of Confederation. It was Thomas McKean, the Second Continental Congress's last president, who in effect passed the torch up to John Hanson, first president of the new government and actually therefore of the United States, on November 5, 1781 when the Articles took effect. Other than this gap, this well-written book giving a fine-grained view of the roles that one important Founding Father had in forming the United States is highly recommended.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An excellent read and would highly recommend By Vincent Martello A fabulous book that really brings the era to life from a highly personal and human perspective. It really deepened my understanding of, and appreciation for, the challenges and excitement inherent in attempting to create a new political and world order, despite all odds. An excellent read and would highly recommend.

The last signatory to the Declaration of Independence was one of the earliest to sign up for the Revolution: Thomas McKean lived a radical, boisterous, politically intriguing life and was one of the most influential and enduring of America's Founding Fathers. Present at almost all of the signature moments on the road to American nationhood, from the first Continental Congress onward, Thomas McKean was a colonel in the Continental Army; president of the

Continental Congress; governor of Pennsylvania; and, perhaps most importantly, chief justice of the new country's most influential state, Pennsylvania, a foundational influence on American law. His life uniquely intersected with the many centers of power in the still-formative country during its most vulnerable years, and shows the degree of uncertainty that characterized newly independent America, unsure of its future or its identity. Thomas McKean knew intimately not only the heroic figures of the Revolutionary era—George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin—but also the fascinating characters who fought over the political identity of the new country, such as Caesar Rodney, Francis Hopkinson, and Alexander Dallas. His life reminds us that America's creation was fraught with dangers and strife, backstabbing and bar-brawling, courage and stubbornness. McKean's was an epic ride during utterly momentous times.

McKean reaches back into his family's history to tell the story of revolutionary-era America through the eyes of a lesser-known founding father. The author efficiently alternates between politics and military developments, keeping the cradle-to-grave biography moving briskly. Publishers Weekly: "Perhaps second only to New York's George Clinton, revolutionary era political leader Thomas McKean remains America's least known founder despite having stood at or near the center of the action from the Stamp Act Congress through the cataclysmic election of 1800. Clearly written and comprehensive, *Suspected of Independence* should help to right the balance." Edward J. Larson, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Return of George Washington*: "In this fascinating tale of a long forgotten founder, David McKean reminds us that politics have long been rough and nasty but that integrity and steadfast faith in the rule of law can, then as now, overcome partisan pettiness and reckless passion. McKean is a gifted writer and historian with a clear-eyed view of the past that is highly relevant to the present." Evan Thomas, author of *Being Nixon*: "A brisk biography... McKean was more than a leading jurist in the Revolutionary era." Wall Street Journal