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Richard R. Beeman

THE eighteenth-century poet James Thomson, in a panegyric to England's glory, identified the three essential virtues in the classical republican prescription for public liberty: "independent life; / Integrity in office; and o'er all / Supreme, a passion for the commonweal."[1] Americans agreed that the "passion for the commonweal" that Thomson exalted was closely tied to the idea of "disinterested public service." As a Boston publicist noted, truly virtuous representatives were "disinterested men, who could have no interest of their own to seek," men who "would employ their whole time for the public good; then there would be but one interest, the good of the people at large."[2] For virtually all the political leaders of mid-eighteenth-century America—from Pinckneys in South Carolina to Randolphs in Virginia to Adamses and Hutchinsons in Massachusetts—the message was the same: the difference between rightful, virtuous rulers and unworthy parvenus was the ability to subordinate private interest to the common good.

United in venerating the ideal, Americans faced the problem of how best to identify and certify men who had a rightful claim to the public trust. Although the mechanisms for selecting public officials were shifting from hereditary right to some form of popular election, the personal criteria deemed necessary—property, education, lineage—were more resistant to change. Persistence of traditional attitudes toward political authority was reflected, we are told, in a "deferential" ethic, a belief among the ordinary citizens of colonial America that they were obliged to exhibit,

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[1] James Thomson, *Liberty* (London, 1735–1736), quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968), 50; for a fuller discussion of the poem see Alan Dougald McKillop, "The Background of Thomson's *Liberty*," *Rice Institute Pamphlet*, XXXVIII, No. 2 (July 1951).

[2] *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), July 10, 1777.

in John Adams's formulation, "a Decency, and Respect, and Veneration . . . for Persons in Authority."[3]

This emphasis on disinterested public service was useful not only to suppress unacceptable forms of private interest but also, and more subtly, to advance the interests of wealthy and well-born men whose access to political power was facilitated by an ideology that preached the deference of the many to the virtuous few. That the promotion of a deferential ethic could be self-serving is not in itself proof that those who invoked it were anything but sincere in their attachment to the ideal of public virtue. There is ample evidence that the rhetorical power of classical republican ideology was on at least some occasions sufficient to command appropriate behavior on the part of both the few who claimed political authority and the many who submitted to that authority. Yet our full comprehension of eighteenth-century American life requires that we do not too readily assume a correspondence between political rhetoric and reality but look closely at the relationship between the two.

We have long had available substantial testimony to the importance of "interests"—economic, ethnic, familial, regional, religious—in colonial American politics. Whether at polling places on election days or in the halls of provincial legislatures, the gap between the ideal of virtuous republican statesmanship and the reality of a political process in which individuals and groups jostled for advantage was often evident. Indeed, it seems that the frequency and effusiveness with which Americans used the language of republican virtue were often inversely proportional to the extent to which virtue actually prevailed.

This essay seeks to comprehend the connections between rhetoric and reality in eighteenth-century politics and to chart the changing relationship between political leaders and ordinary citizens whose interests were becoming recognized as a necessary and legitimate part of the public good. That relationship was not everywhere the same; the polities of the colonies displayed a remarkable diversity of styles and structures. The dominant trend, however, was unmistakable; increasingly, politics was marked by open and aggressive protection, promotion, and mobilization of interests. However eloquent or impassioned the republican language accompanying those interests, American politics was moving toward a very different future.[4]

[3] John Adams to James Warren, Apr. 22, 1776, in Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Warren-Adams Letters . . .*, vol. 1: *1743–1777*, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, LXXII (1917), 234.

[4] The idea of "interest-oriented" politics in the 18th century is hardly new. Progressive historians from Carl Becker to Merrill Jensen have contributed to our understanding of the way interest groups—particularly when monopolized by the privileged few—have controlled the distribution of power and preferment in early American politics. Historians such as Gary Nash, Ronald Hoffman, Edward Countryman, and Alfred Young, writing in the Progressive tradition, provide fresh and illuminating evidence on how the many—members of the lower orders in particular—began to organize politically to promote and protect their interests. This neo-Progressive interpretation of 18th-century American politics offers valu-

THE DISCOVERY OF DEFERENCE

Walter Bagehot, Victorian gentleman and chronicler of the English constitutional tradition, like many observers before and after, was impressed by the genius of a political system in which the great "mass of the people yield obedience to a select few." He described England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a "deferential community" in which, by mutual agreement between the many and the few, an elite group of political leaders assumed responsibility for maintaining civil order and liberty. The English tradition of government, Bagehot noted, was not easily imitated, for "no difficulty can be greater than that of founding a deferential nation. Respect is traditional; it is given not to what is proven to be good, but to what is known to be old."[5]

Historians of England since Bagehot have found in the concept of deference a means of describing a society that has seemed to them consensual in its social and political relations but hierarchical in its distribution of power and authority.[6] During all of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, however, historians of the American colonial experience—one shaped in part by traditional English attitudes and institutions—found it almost incomprehensible that a society could be simultaneously consensual and hierarchical. Whether in George Bancroft's description of the democratic, freedom-loving spirit that characterized the American past or in the Progressive emphasis on the persistence of conflict between the privileged and the disadvantaged, historians, at least until the middle of the twentieth century, were not inclined to see colonial American society as one in which ordinary citizens voluntarily deferred to their betters. Even when consensus historians such as Robert Brown launched counterattacks on Progressive interpretations of eighteenth-century America, there was little room in the historiographical tradition for a notion of society that included both consensus and hierarchy.[7]

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able clues to the process of popularization, although the starkness with which it contrasts the interests of the many to those of the few understates the complexity of voter recruitment.

[5] Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London, 1867), 236, 238, 239; see also David Spring, "Walter Bagehot and Deference," *American Historical Review*, LXXXI (1976), 524–531.

[6] The literature on deference in English society is voluminous and diffuse. One starting point is David Cresap Moore, *The Politics of Deference: A Study of the Mid-Nineteenth Century English Political System* (New York, 1976). Perhaps the most serviceable, all-purpose definition of deference has been furnished by J.G.A. Pocock, who describes a deferential society as "consisting of an elite and a nonelite, in which the nonelite regard the elite, without too much resentment, as being of a superior status and culture to their own, and consider elite leadership in political matters to be something normal and natural"; "The Classical Theory of Deference," *AHR*, LXXXI (1976), 516.

[7] Full consideration of the historiographical oscillations among whig, Progressive, and consensus approaches to early American society and politics is beyond the scope of this essay. For a useful discussion see Jack P. Greene, "Changing Interpretations of Early American Politics," in Ray Allen Billington, ed., *The*

Charles S. Sydnor was perhaps the first to recognize that it might be possible, even in America, for oligarchic and hierarchical arrangements to exist within a consensual and generally harmonious social and political system. Sydnor's 1952 classic, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia,* was an afterthought, a spin-off from his more substantial 1948 study of *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819–1848.* One chapter of that larger work, entitled "The Movement Toward Political Democracy," dealt with the growth of democracy in the South, and it was in that context that Sydnor addressed the political character of eighteenth-century Virginia. Sydnor never used the term "deference" in describing social and political relations in Virginia. He preferred instead to see the late eighteenth century as a transition stage between the frankly aristocratic politics of the preceding period and the explicitly democratic era inaugurated by constitutional reforms in the southern states in the early nineteenth century. Still working within the polarities of "aristocracy" and "democracy," but mindful that democracy in the South had led to an authoritarian commitment to slavery, states' rights, and secession, Sydnor praised late colonial Virginians for recognizing that "democracy and aristocracy [were] not mutually exclusive, and that both of these can and ought to be used by a self-governing people." It was that recognition, Sydnor maintained, that rested politics on a broad popular base but nevertheless vested the responsibilities of governance only in the most capable.[8]

It fell to an Englishman, J. R. Pole, to incorporate the concept of deference explicitly into an analysis of eighteenth-century American society. In "Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy" (1962) and *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (1966), Pole recognized a relatively broad and independent electorate in colonial America but went on to note the "paradox of popular consent to a scheme of government which systematically excluded the common people from the more responsible positions of political power."

Reinterpretation of Early American History (New York, 1968), 151–184. Historians who have best understood a society in which consensus and hierarchy coexisted have written from the perspective of British imperial rule. Though he focused primarily on institutions and not on the social relations underlying the deferential relationship, Charles M. Andrews noted that "self-government during our colonial period was not incompatible with dependence and in no sense implied 'democracy,' if by that evasive and much misunderstood term is meant something akin to political equality"; *The Colonial Period of American History,* 4 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1934–1938), IV, 423n.

[8] (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1952), 132; (Baton Rouge, La., 1948). While "deference" does not appear in *Gentlemen Freeholders,* Sydnor was almost certainly familiar with its English historiographical context, for his own training at Johns Hopkins had been concentrated on the history of Tudor-Stuart England. Though *Gentlemen Freeholders* focused on the post-Revolutionary period and on the peculiar political culture of Virginia, historians have subsequently read it as a description of the whole 18th century and as applying to most if not all of the southern colonies and even to the northern colonial experience.

The only way to resolve the paradox, Pole argued, is to understand that Americans were operating within a traditional, hierarchically ordered political culture in which it was customary for the many to bow to the judgment and wisdom of the few. "Deference," Pole concluded, "does not seem, in retrospect, a very secure cement to the union of social orders. Yet to those who live under its sway it can be almost irresistible."[9]

In the quarter of a century since Pole wrote, as the interpretive framework of classical republicanism has developed, the notion of deference has been frequently examined. Reacting to the tendency of both Progressive and consensus historians to impose modern-day concepts—whether of social class or of democracy—on their eighteenth-century subjects, scholars working within the republican paradigm have claimed for the concepts of deference and republicanism an ability to comprehend and describe American society in terms truer to the thought of eighteenth-century Americans themselves.

Republican ideas, as they were reshaped by Americans in the Revolutionary era, took on a dynamic and unsettling character, but in the pre-Revolutionary years the principal messages of republicanism were traditional ones. The classical concern with public virtue—the necessity for both leaders and followers to subordinate private interests to the public good—tended to buttress rather than to undermine traditional notions about an organic social hierarchy; the ownership of property as an important criterion for political leadership tended to limit the circle of men with a claim to the independence of judgment that characterized a virtuous leader. Moreover, a republican society, like a deferential one, depended on social harmony, whose ingredients were shaped and enforced by mutual sets of understandings between virtuous, propertied leaders and respectful followers.[10]

In 1959, before publication of *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967) and *The Origins of American Politics* (1968), Bernard

[9] Pole, "Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy," *AHR*, LXVII (1962), 626–646, quotations on 641, 646; Pole, *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (Berkeley, Calif., 1966).

[10] The accumulation of scholarly literature on republicanism in the past quarter century is formidable. Two useful overviews by Robert Shalhope are "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), 49–80, and "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," ibid., XXXIX (1982), 334–356. Equally formidable is the literature tracing the transformation of republican ideology in the post-Revolutionary era. Lance Banning, in "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic," ibid., XLIII (1986), 3–19, makes the strongest case for the persistence of republican ideas in the early republic, and Joyce Appleby, in *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984) and in "Republicanism in Old and New Contexts," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XLIII (1986), 20–34, argues for a sharp break with the republican tradition in the Revolutionary era. For a recent but simplistic analysis of many of these same issues see Colin Gordon, "Crafting a Usable Past: Consensus, Ideology, and Historians of the American Revolution," ibid., XLVI (1989), 671–695.

Bailyn's description of "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia" sketched brilliantly the prevailing ethic on which the American colonies were initially built. "All of the settlers," Bailyn maintained, "presumed a fundamental relationship between social structure and political authority," and that unity afforded the justification for the political authority of the few. While the social order of early seventeenth-century Virginia provided a distinctly dismal exemplification of that ideal, Bailyn, generalizing in *The Origins of American Politics,* argued that by the eighteenth century the common expectation throughout America was that "political leadership would devolve upon the natural social leaders of the community, whose identity, it was expected, would be steadily and incontestably visible."[11]

Even radical forms of pre-Revolutionary republicanism, as Pauline Maier has argued, were generated by traditional conceptions of the relationship between political and social authority. Tracing traditions of popular protest in eighteenth-century America, Maier concluded that most attempts at resistance "rested on a firm commitment to an idealized version of the British regime and embodied an almost conservative desire to prevent it from further change or decay." The leaders of resistance movements often represented the "respectable" and "virtuous" elements of their community, and they often defended their actions by stressing their commitment to a "*well-ordered* free society . . . [in which] obedience to the law was stressed as much or more than occasional resistance to it."[12] Thus, in pre-Revolutionary America, even popular insurgencies seem to have been tamed by long-ingrained habits of deference and respect to tradition.

The concept of republicanism, as elaborated and refined over the past two decades, has played an important, though not uncontested, role in shaping the historiography of early America. In the process, deference, like republicanism, has become a protean idea, susceptible to stretching and twisting to describe a wide range of disparate social and political behaviors.[13] As J.G.A. Pocock has noted, deference, in its classical sense, was "spontaneously exhibited rather than enforced." As the ideal was articulated in James Harrington's *Oceana* in particular, the many deferred

[11] Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia, " in James Morton Smith, ed., *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1959), 90–91; Bailyn, *Origins of American Politics,* 96; Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

[12] Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972), 28 (emphasis added).

[13] The only extensive reviews of applications of concepts of deference to early American history are Joy B. and Robert R. Gilsdorf, "Elites and Electorates: Some Plain Truths for Historians of Colonial America," in David D. Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad W. Tate, eds., *Saints and Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York, 1984), 207–244, and John B. Kirby, "Early American Politics—The Search for Ideology: An Historiographical Analysis and Critique of the Concept of 'Deference,' " *Journal of Politics,* XXXII (1970), 808–838.

to the few in a wholly voluntary fashion; patriarchs owed "their authority less to their own superiority than to the acknowledgement—it would be proper to call it election—of their inferiors." Moreover, the act of paying deference was not a passive one. The yeoman who deferred to his superiors did not lack a political will but was entrusted with the responsibility of identifying and evaluating his superiors. This notion of a deferential society was thus in no way incompatible with the idea of vigorously contested popular elections.[14]

The piece of evidence most frequently cited for the pervasiveness of this classical concept of deference in early American politics has been the slapstick farce *The Candidates,* written in 1770 by Robert Munford of Virginia. Munford's comedy portrays nearly the entire range of character types to be found in Virginia political life. The venerable Worthy comes closest to satisfying the Harringtonian, classical conception of deference; Worthy's traits—wealth that makes him independent of favors from others, a social position that instills in him a sense of noblesse oblige, and, most important, disinterested political conduct—are so exceptional in his political community that his election, whenever he chooses to run, is a foregone conclusion. It is Worthy's decision not to stand for reelection to the House of Burgesses that allows other, less-qualified men to enter the contest. Wou'dbe is a member of the lesser gentry who shares Worthy's genteel and statesmanlike view of the role of a political representative but does not quite match his colleague's exalted social standing. In past years Wou'dbe had represented his county alongside Worthy, but Worthy's determination to retire not only opens up the contest for his own seat but also encourages new aspirants to seek the seat occupied by the more vulnerable Wou'dbe. A spectrum of candidates, hopelessly inferior in status and authority to the gentry ideal, parades before the voters. Sir John Toddy, a planter of dissipated habits, promises to lower the price of rum. Smallhopes, a bullying figure more noted for his interest in horse racing than in public service, strips off his shirt and prepares to fight Wou'dbe to prove himself the better man. And Strutabout, a parvenu, violates the genteel code by open electioneering and irresponsible promises to follow the wishes of even the most uninformed of his constituents. In the end, virtue triumphs; thanks to Worthy's timely decision to seek another term after all, the slate of Worthy and Wou'dbe is elected by acclamation. As one freeholder comments to another, "Aye, aye, they've just come, and sit upon the bench, and yet all the votes are for them." In the final scene, Wou'dbe and Worthy thank the voters for having "shewn your judgment, and a spirit of independence becoming Virginians," and in turn are told by

[14] Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), in Pocock, ed., *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge, 1977), 155–359. Pocock, "Classical Theory of Deference," 516, 517. Pocock elaborates these views, with special reference to the American context, in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N. J., 1975), 506–552.

the voters, "we have done as we ought, we have elected the ablest, according to the writ."[15]

Munford's fable was more likely an exercise in wishful thinking than accurate reporting. Munford lived in a Southside region where the status order was unsettled and few, if any, men could possibly have lived up to his idealization of Worthy.[16] Some planters in more settled regions of the colony—men like long-time Speaker of the House of Burgesses John Robinson or Richard Bland or Peyton Randolph—approximated the Harringtonian description of a natural aristocrat, but even in Virginia, the colony so often labeled a particularly fertile ground for a natural aristocracy, the numbers were insufficient to sustain the ideal.[17] On close examination, the dominance of the political system by a few local worthies usually turns out to reflect simple apathy on the part of the citizens, a condition that political theorists like Harrington saw as positively dangerous to any true natural aristocracy. Moreover, while there were few issues capable of awakening the electorate, the predominantly Anglican political

[15] For 25 years, nearly every historian of early American politics has made conspicuous use of *The Candidates*, often for radically different purposes. Sydnor, in *Gentlemen Freeholders*, esp. 39–47, 149–150, used the play to illustrate the simultaneous operation of democratic and aristocratic forces on Virginia politics. Pole, *Political Representation*, 159–160, says that *The Candidates* is "as keen a commentary on its subject as could be found in any treatise" and uses it to demonstrate the persistence of the deferential ideal not only in Virginia but in American politics more generally. Robert E. and B. Katherine Brown, *Virginia, 1705–1786: Democracy or Aristocracy?* (East Lansing, Mich., 1964), 212, 236–237, view the play, anachronistically, as a description of democratic politics at work. See also Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 363–364, and *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York, 1988), 185.

The Candidates was not published until 1798 and not performed until the 20th century. The full text is in Jay B. Hubbell and Douglass Adair, "Robert Munford's *The Candidates*," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., V (1948), 227–257, quotations on 256, 257.

[16] It seems most likely that the only person Munford thought worthy of true gentry status was himself. See Richard R. Beeman, "Robert Munford and the Political Culture of Frontier Virginia," *Journal of American Studies*, XII (1978), 169–183, for a full discussion of these matters.

[17] Historians who argue for the persistence of deferential politics in Virginia point to the consistent domination of the political process by a small circle of men. While it is true that a high percentage (65% in the elections occurring 1728–1775) of the Burgesses gained election with virtually no competition, we cannot conclude that deference was the mechanism that insured their election. For an extensive analysis of Virginia elections in the 18th century see John Gilman Kolp, "The Flame of Burgessing: Elections and Political Communities in Colonial Virginia, 1728–1775," (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1988). For the most vigorous argument that the classical model of deference was a vital force in Virginia politics see Greene, "'*Virtus et Libertas*': Political Culture, Social Change, and the Origins of the American Revolution in Virginia, 1763–1766," in Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds, *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1978), 55–108, and Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of the Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth Century Virginia," in Richard Jellison, ed., *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York* (New York, 1976), 14–76.

leadership of the Old Dominion would find that, as evangelicals mobilized politically in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the "proper deference to Persons in High Offices" that they so idealized went right out the window.[18]

When we search elsewhere in colonial America for examples of the operation of the classical conception of deference, we find that behavior that might appear at first glance to qualify was often shaped less by spontaneous outpourings of respect than by more tangible calculations of benefit and loss. Students of colonial New York, for example, have concluded that the extraordinary dominance of such men as Robert Livingston, John Van Rensselaer, and William Johnson over their communities in the Hudson Valley owed more to economic coercion than to recognition of their superior virtue.[19] The bitter opposition to the manor lords that occurred outside the realm of electoral politics—for example, in the tenant riots of the 1750s and 1760s—suggests that the lords' privileged positions in their political communities did not conform to Harrington's formula.[20]

Between the apparently spontaneous and voluntary deference accorded the fictional Worthy and the manifestly coercive conduct of the actual Hudson Valley manor lords one finds a wide range of behavior to which the concept of deference has also been applied. While the classical notion implies reciprocal sets of understandings and obligations that are voluntary and largely intangible, historians have more frequently employed the concept to describe what Lord Castlereagh denoted "persuasion in a tangible shape." The key operative concepts behind this sort of deference are influence and interests, forms of persuasion that, according to Pocock, take us beyond "pure deference toward inducement and even coercion."[21]

[18] The phrase is Richard Bland's, from his distinctly undeferential attack on Gov. Dinwiddie in *A Fragment of the Pistole Fee, claimed by the Governor of Virginia, 1753*, ed. Ford, (Brooklyn, N. Y., 1891), 32. For the story of the evangelicals' political mobilization against the Anglican gentry see Thomas E. Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776–1787* (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), and Rhys Isaac and Beeman, "Cultural Conflict and Social Change in the Revolutionary South: Lunenburg County, Virginia," *Journal of Southern History*, XLVI (1980), 538–550.

[19] For a striking example of an election in which voter apathy was almost certainly not a sign of contentment but, rather, of the way wealth and family influence could be exercised in coercive fashion see John C. Guzzardo, "Democracy Along the Mohawk: An Election Return, 1773," *New York History*, LVII (1976), 31–52.

[20] It is no accident that works most closely identified with the Progressive historical tradition have focused on New York, the colony with the most obviously oligarchic social order. See, for example, Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison, Wis., 1909), Staughton Lynd, *Anti-Federalism in Dutchess County, New York: A Study of Democracy and Class Conflict in the Revolutionary Era* (Chicago, 1962), Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1967), and Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981).

[21] Pocock, "Classical Theory of Deference," 516.

In considering this revised conception, we come nearly full circle to the Progressive emphasis on the ways in which wealthy and socially prominent men wielded their superior influence and power for their own benefit. The principal difference between the Progressive paradigm and this modified, patron-client definition of deference is that the former presents the relationship between patron and client as fundamentally adversarial while the latter characterizes it as, if not wholly voluntary, at least possessing varying degrees of consensual and reciprocal understanding.

While much important work on early American politics and society in the past decade has operated on the patron-client model of deference, that work is marked by significant differences. Most historians, particularly those who stress the controlling influence of republican ideology, while recognizing imbalances of power and status in the patron-client relationship, have nevertheless been most impressed by the way in which ordinary citizens voluntarily deferred to their betters. Scholars such as Gordon Wood and Pocock, for example, have generally assumed that the classical republican concern for virtue served to introduce among the American population that "Decency, and Respect, and Veneration . . . for Persons in Authority" that Adams so earnestly desired.[22]

James A. Henretta and Rhys Isaac, by contrast, have sought to demonstrate the ways in which displays of wealth and social authority were in themselves coercive. Both make prominent use of a description of the gentry by young Devereux Jarratt, a carpenter's son growing up in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia. "We were accustomed to look upon, what were called *gentle folks*," Jarratt recalled, "as beings of a superior order. For my part, I was quite shy of *them*, and kept off at a humble distance. A *periwig*, in those days, was a distinguishing badge of *gentle folk*,—and when I saw a man riding the road, near our house, with a wig on, it would so alarm my fears, and give me such a disagreeable feeling, that, I dare say, I would run off, as for my life." Henretta in particular has magnified the hegemonic power inherent in such displays of superior social authority. In an imaginative, if overblown, analysis of Jarratt's recollections he claims that the "consciousness of social inferiority, inculcated in childhood to

[22] Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1969), esp. 65–70, and Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, have elaborated the importance of "virtue" in the republican lexicon. Nearly all historians writing in the republican tradition have emphasized this consensual side of republicanism. The one exception is the historian most responsible for reconstructing the components of the republican tradition in America—Bernard Bailyn. While Bailyn's work on 18th-century American politics focuses on the contentious character of Americans' relations with the crown, he also calls attention to the fragility of deferential styles in internal politics. Acknowledging that deference retained its power as an idealized description of how politics ought to be conducted, Bailyn recognizes that the reality was often different. Deferential politics may have prevailed "in *some* of the colonies, in *certain* respects, at *certain* times," but Bailyn goes on to note "the identity of the natural political leaders was seldom beyond contest, and at times was in itself the source of fierce political struggles"; *Origins of American Politics*, 96–97. Gordon's broad-brush attack on Bailyn as a "consensus" historian in "Crafting a Usable Past," 678–686, 690–695, ignores this side of his work.

such an extent that it induced physical fear, became an enduring part of the behavior patterns . . . of thousands of poor whites. Wherever they went, in the town or in the fields, in public or private, these men and women carried the stigma of subordinate rank with them: in their halting speech, gnarled hands, and emaciated faces."[23]

More than the donning of a periwig enabled gentlemen to dominate politics. Rather, the combined power of their public personae and their ability to wield influence—to dispense patronage or reward one set of interests at the expense of another—guaranteed them the suffrages of less prominent neighbors. The ability of a prominent citizen to dispense patronage was also the ability to deny such patronage, and here the line between the voluntary and coercive aspects of the patron-client relationship becomes fuzzy. The differences between voluntary and coerced behavior are not too difficult to recognize at the extremes—the affection and respect shown toward John Robinson by his King and Queen County, Virginia, neighbors contrasted to the grudging manner in which the tenants of Johnston Manor or Rensselaerswyck acceded to the rule of their landlords—but between those extremes there were nearly infinite combinations of influence and interest, fear and respect, that affected the outcome of elections.

Lack of agreement on a common application of the concept of deference results in part from the slipperiness of the concept itself. Since the foundations underlying the classical form were largely invisible, depending on respect that was unspoken, it is difficult to sort out the voluntary from the coercive aspects of that respect. Another complicating factor is that social and political relations were undergoing transformations that were bewildering to the parties to those relations. Americans had inherited an English political tradition that was deeply hierarchical and inegalitarian. One significant contribution made by scholars working within the republican paradigm has been to demonstrate how the language of classical republicanism—itself founded on hierarchical and inegalitarian assumptions—took hold as a description of the ideal of eighteenth-century American political behavior. At the same time, a host of monographic studies establish incontestably that the reality of American political behavior varied greatly from the classical republican and deferential ideals.[24]

[23] Jarratt, *The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt, Rector of Bath Parish, Dinwiddie County, Virginia* . . . (New York, 1969; orig. pub. 1806), 14; Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700–1815* (New York, 1973), 94. See also Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1982), 43–44, 116–117. However fearful the young Jarratt may have been in the face of the exemplars of gentry culture, once he had achieved gentry status himself he vigorously defended traditions of deference and noblesse oblige.

[24] That the colonial reality departed from the English ideal would hardly have surprised the "Darwin of Deference," Walter Bagehot. "Certain classes," Bagehot wrote, "in certain nations retain by common acceptance a marked political preference, because they have always possessed it, and because they inherit a sort of pomp which seems to make them worthy of it. But in a new colony, in a community where merit *may* be equal and where there *cannot* be traditional marks

Electoral practices in the colonies ranged from coercive, as on some New York manors, to occasionally polite and genteel modes, in Virginia, to aggressive and popular, as in southeastern Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. The direction in which the politics of all of the colonies was moving was a popular one, but the dominant condition was neither democracy nor aristocracy nor oligarchy nor deference but diversity. The colonies, on the eve of the Revolution, lacked a common political culture; the rules of politics—of electoral politics in particular—varied widely not only from one locality to another but also among groups within the same locality. Indeed, so great were the differences that Americans found themselves without a common language capable of describing and comprehending their political behavior. To be sure, they often drew from the rhetorical stockpile of classical republicanism, but the meanings they attached to some of the most oft-used words in the republican lexicon—words such as "interest," "influence," "representation," and "virtue"—varied enormously. Republican language, employed in selective and often contradictory ways in America's diverse and fragmented political cultures, indicated more confusion than cohesion.

The discussion that follows illustrates some of the confusion that Americans—both the many and the few—were experiencing as they engaged in electoral politics.[25] The evidence comes from locales with widely differing political structures and styles. In every case, close examination suggests that it was becoming ever more difficult for men to base their claims to political leadership on traditional assumptions about social and political authority. In practice, the process of recruiting votes was frequently so laborious as to indicate that voters were not simply deciding who among the competitors was the most worthy. Similarly a close look at the candidates reveals that most of them fell far short of the ideal of a natural aristocrat. We can see, too, that considerations of interest, as calculated by both candidates and constituents, often played a far greater role in political contests than anyone in those contests would have frankly acknowledged. And finally, as we recognize the fragile, often artificial character of the deference paid to the ostensibly virtuous political leaders of eighteenth-century America, we can also identify the inadequacies of republican ideology as a guide to political behavior in that society.

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of merit and fitness, it is obvious that political deference can be yielded to higher culture, only upon proof, first of its existence, and next of its political value"; *English Constitution*, 239.

[25] A full comprehension of 18th-century American politics must go beyond the formal realm of elections. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that jockeyings for power outside the electoral realm—whether tenant risings in New York or slave unrest in the South—represent the fragility of the deferential ideal. Elections do, however, provide an excellent opportunity to contrast avowed ideals with real behavior.

VARIETIES OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

If the Virginia of Worthy and Wou'dbe is the most often cited example of a deferential society, Puritan New England runs a close second. Although John Winthrop's injunction that "in all times some . . . must be highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subieccion" had been greatly modified by the mid-eighteenth century, New England has nevertheless seemed remarkable for the consistency of its commitment to order and hierarchy. Jack P. Greene in particular notes "the astonishing deference of the relatively extensive constituencies of New England to their magisterial elites," a fact he attributes to the "depth of New Englanders' devotion to the traditional ideal of an organic social hierarchy."[26]

Even though many New England political leaders enjoyed notable longevity in their posts, they had to work diligently—often in ways Harrington would have disapproved—to maintain their privileged positions. Nowhere was this more striking than among the "River Gods" of Massachusetts's Connecticut Valley. Among the River Gods, none had greater political power than Israel Williams of Hampshire County. Born into one of the wealthiest families in the valley, Williams was able to consolidate social power through skillful use of an intricate web of kin relations with the two other prominent families of the region, the Stoddards and the Hawleys. After graduating from Harvard in 1727 (Williams's rank, determined by the Harvard College officials' reckoning of social status, was tenth in a class of thirty-seven; his classmate and future political ally Thomas Hutchinson was third), he became a farmer, merchant, land speculator, and politician and involved himself in virtually every aspect of every business transacted in Hampshire County. Starting with an inheritance of a house, a home lot, and 109 acres, Williams systematically acquired land in Massachusetts and New York until he owned over 3,000 acres, a substantial amount by New England standards. The principal merchant and manufacturer in his region, he supplied his county not only with a large portion of its imported goods but also with most of the potash and linseed oil it exported.[27]

Williams began his political career as selectman for the town of Hatfield in 1732; the town elected him its representative to the General Court the following year, and he subsequently added positions as justice of the

[26] Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1988), 25; John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630), in *The Papers of John Winthrop*, II, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Publications*, II (Boston, 1931), 282–295.

[27] The best sources on Williams's social background and political activities are *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, vol. 8: *1726–1730, Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College*, ed. Clifford K. Shipton (Boston, 1951), 301–333, Kevin Michael Sweeney, "River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637–1790" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), and Ronald K. Snell, " 'Ambitious of Honor and Places': The Magistracy of Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1692–1760," in Bruce C. Daniels, ed., *Power and Status: Officeholding in Colonial America* (Middletown, Conn., 1986), 17–35.

peace, judge of the Hampshire court of common pleas, colonel in the local militia, and member of the governor's council. As a resident of Massachusetts, where plural officeholding was commonplace, he occupied many of these positions simultaneously. So great were his power and influence that his fellow townspeople called him the "monarch of Hampshire."

Williams's behavior as a businessman and politician was hardly a model of disinterestedness: he spent his whole life in battles, petty and grand, in which he aggressively used his influence to promote his interests. When the General Court was not dealing with issues of concern to Williams or to Hampshire County, he often skipped the session; when there were such issues—a bill to give him a ten-year monopoly on the manufacture of linseed oil, for example, or one relating to the distribution of political patronage in the Connecticut Valley—he worked hard to insure that his prerogatives were respected.[28]

In county politics, Williams rewarded his friends and punished his enemies. When a fellow townsman, Gideon Lyman, campaigning for the General Court, identified himself as one of the "honest Plowmen" in opposition to one of the "great men," Williams—who certainly considered himself a great man—did not let the challenge pass. He formally requested Governor Francis Bernard to remove Lyman as justice of the peace on the ground that "he made it his business, in a low private way, to slander and abuse those of the County who were noted for supporting Government."[29] Though Williams lost that fight, he did not lose many others. From 1733 to the Revolution few candidates gained seats in the General Court or on the county bench in Hampshire who had not joined interests with Israel Williams.

Williams's dominance was not based purely on the interested respect of his fellow citizens. His use of power and patronage as colonel and commander in chief of the Hampshire militia during the Seven Years' War—when escalating conflict on the frontier made high office in the militia more than merely honorific—provides a striking case in point. Williams's personnel decisions in reviving the county's weakened militia forces consistently consolidated the network of men loyal to him; his procurement practices in refurbishing disused frontier posts achieved a similar result; and many of his strategic choices for the defense of the Connecticut Valley benefitted some communities while hurting others. When neighbors opposed his policies, he did not hesitate to marshal support from powerful allies in the legislature and from the governor himself. Accordingly, as the toll of war mounted, citizens voiced complaints about Williams's strategic decisions and self-serving practices.

By the end of the war Williams was still entrenched as "monarch" of Hampshire, but the seeds of popular dissatisfaction had been sown. As

[28] Snell, "Ambitious of Honor and Places." See also Robert Zemsky, *Merchants, Farmers, and River Gods: An Essay on Eighteenth-Century American Politics* (Boston, 1971), 32–33.

[29] Robert Joseph Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, R. I., 1954), 25.

resistance to British policy surfaced during the 1760s and early 1770s, Williams's close associations with Bernard and Hutchinson were crucial in making Hatfield one of a handful of Massachusetts towns that usually sided with the royal governors. But after passage of the Coercive Acts, even the combined forces of a received tradition of obedience to authority and the entrenched power of Israel Williams were not enough to withstand the popular fury: in February 1775, Williams was seized by a mob, placed in a smokehouse, and smoked all night long until he emerged the next morning, smudged and disheveled, apparently ready to condemn the Coercive Acts.[30] Deference, even when buttressed by great social and economic power, had its limits.

Matthew Marrable of Lunenburg County would have loved to become known as the "monarch of Lunenburg." The son of a middling tobacco planter in Virginia's Southside, he could boast neither an impressive family background nor a college education. But he possessed abundant ambition. Through hard work and adroit land speculation, beginning in the early 1750s, he built an estate of 3,700 acres and sixteen slaves. He served as a justice on the county bench and as a vestryman of his Anglican parish, the two main requisites for political advancement.[31] Marrable understood the importance of marshaling influence and interest in order to establish claims to superior social status and political power, but he lacked the politesse and the power to exercise those claims without experiencing substantial challenge. Campaigning for the House of Burgesses in 1758, he bid for votes in ways that separated a parvenu from a natural aristocrat. He treated the voters on several occasions, including feasts of seven roasted lambs and thirty gallons of rum. Although he warned recipients of his election-day treat "to take care they should not intoxicate themselves, least a Riot might ensue at the Election," the Burgesses' Committee on Privileges and Elections found that his use of food and drink far exceeded the bounds of propriety. More serious, the committee noted that Marrable had written a letter to David Caldwell, "a man of Great Interest in the County, strongly soliciting his Interest, in which is contained the following Words: 'This shall be my obligation to be liable and answerable to you, and all who are my Friends, in the Sum of five hundred pounds, if I do not use the Utmost of my Endeavors (in case I should be a Burgess) to divide this our county of Lunenburg in the following manner, to wit, Beginning at Byrd's Mill, running a straight line

[30] Sweeney, "River Gods," 496–515, 538–569; Taylor, *Western Massachusetts*, 64–67. For an analysis that points more generally to the nondeferential and often combative character of politics and society in pre-Revolutionary Hampshire County see Gregory H. Nobles, *Divisions Throughout the Whole: Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1740–1775* (New York, 1983).

[31] Landon C. Bell, *The Old Free State: A Contribution to the History of Lunenburg County and Southside Virginia*, 2 vols. (Richmond, Va., 1927), I, 330; Bell, *Sunlight on the Southside: Lists of Tithes, Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1748–1783* (Philadelphia, 1931), 212–285; Bell, *Cumberland Parish, Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746–1816* (Richmond, Va., 1930), 265.

to the Head of the Nottoway.'"[32] Caldwell, principal agent for William Byrd III's land dealings in the area, was indeed a man of great interest whose opinion of the rival candidates could affect the election, but the attempt to win his support by pledging a vote on a bill or, worse still, by promising money, went far beyond any permissible definition of the deference code. In this respect, Marrable's behavior was characteristic of Strutabout in *The Candidates,* who, it was charged, told voters he would repeal their taxes, "make the rivers navigable, and bring the tide over the tops of the hills, for a vote." The House of Burgesses declared Marrable's election void, but the ambitious Lunenburg politician did not give up. Having learned a lesson about a proper joining of interests, Marrable cultivated sufficient support among the local worthies to gain a seat in the Burgesses in 1760 and held it for most of the next decade. For Matthew Marrable, the pathway to power was neither straight nor smooth.[33]

If there was an eighteenth-century American whom we might expect to have been a paragon of disinterested public service and therefore to have commanded the suffrages of his fellow citizens, that person was George Washington. And certainly at some point—perhaps by the mid-1760s, after he had distinguished himself in the Seven Years' War, and more assuredly after the Revolution—Washington ascended to archetypal status as the republican statesman. More revealing is the situation the aspiring colonel faced earlier in his career. His lineage was respectable but not preeminent; some even in his home county of Fairfax could claim more distinguished family connections. Washington found his path to power temporarily blocked by better-placed Fairfax neighbors.

Washington also owned land in Frederick County, immediately west of Fairfax, and in 1755, at the last minute, friends of the twenty-three-year-old colonel entered his name for burgess in that county against the two incumbents, Hugh West and Thomas Swearingen. Washington was not yet well known in Frederick, and he played no part in the campaign; moreover, none of his backers expended any effort in his behalf. In conse-

[32] Bell, *Old Free State,* 144–146; John Pendleton Kennedy and H. R. McIlwaine, eds., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia,* 13 vols. (Richmond, Va., 1905–1915), Mar. 8, 1758, 83–84.

[33] Hubbell and Adair, eds., *"The Candidates,"* 237. Marrable's experience may have been typical of many Southern backcountry politicians. The tumultuous character of backcountry politics was due not only to an uncertain status order in those newer societies but also to the willingness of ordinary citizens to demand their candidates' close attention to their interests. A. Roger Ekirch, *"Poor Carolina": Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729–1776* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1981), contrasts the nondeferential and unstable politics of that colony with the more stable political situation described in other colonies by his mentor, Greene. The situation that Ekirch describes in North Carolina was probably typical of the backcountry in all the southern colonies. For other examples of how backcountry politicians worked aggressively to win the suffrages of their fellow citizens see Albert Tillson, *Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740–1789* (Lexington, Ky., 1991), and Alan Gallay, "Jonathan Bryan's Plantation Empire: Land, Politics, and the Formation of a Ruling Class in Colonial Georgia," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XLV (1988), 253–279.

quence, he ran a distant third in the race for the two vacant seats, attracting only 40 votes to West's 271 and Swearingen's 270. While we lack explicit commentary about the outcome from Washington himself, it is notable that he took the pains to copy from the poll book the names of the forty who had cast their votes for him.[34]

Three years later, his reputation as a military leader rising, Washington made another bid from Frederick, and this time he took an active role in the campaign. He declared his candidacy several months before the balloting and assiduously cultivated the support of men of influence. When military duties called him to Fort Cumberland—some forty miles away—on election day, he made certain that his interests were well represented at the poll. He asked his friend Colonel James Wood, founder and leading citizen of Winchester, the county seat, to appear on his behalf and to thank the electors for their votes. He also saw to it that other influential men displayed their support in a timely and visible fashion.

Four candidates vied for the county's two seats. The incumbents West and Swearingen were running for reelection; Colonel Thomas Bryan Martin, related to the powerful Fairfax family, joined Washington in challenging them. Assembled at a table at the Frederick County courthouse were the sheriff, his clerks, and the candidates (in Washington's case, the candidate's representative). The first voter to approach the table was the most eminent man in the region, Thomas, Lord Fairfax, proprietor of the Northern Neck, county lieutenant, and senior justice of the peace of the county court. Lord Fairfax cast his votes for Martin and Washington. The next to appear, also voting for Washington, was William Meldrum, rector of Frederick Parish. Washington's designated representative, Colonel Wood, then cast his ballots for Washington and West. Another colonel in the militia and a leading merchant, John Carlyle, followed, casting his for Washington and Martin. As the balloting progressed, it became apparent that virtually all of the men of influence in the county had swung their support to Washington. Every voter identified on the poll sheets as "gentleman" voted for Washington, as did the county's three ministers—Presbyterian, Baptist, and Anglican. This strategy of pre-arranging prominent support was highly successful; Washington took an early lead that grew as the day wore on. When the poll closed, the vote stood Washington 310, Martin 240, West 199, and Swearingen 45.[35]

While Washington owed his victory in part to the highly visible support of local worthies at the election, he had also taken pains to woo the voters before the balloting began. He spent £39. 6*s*. out of his own pocket on 28 gallons of rum, 50 gallons and one hogshead of rum punch, 34 gallons of wine, 46 gallons of "strong beer," and 2 gallons of cider royal—a total of

[34] Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, 7 vols. (New York, 1948–1957), II, 147.

[35] For full documentation on the 1758 election see W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series, 6 vols. (Charlottesville, Va., 1983–), V, 332–343.

160 gallons of liquor to be served to the 391 voters of the district.[36] Washington made clear that he was not trying to buy votes with food and drink. He wrote to an associate that "I hope no exception were taken to any that voted against me but that all were alike treated and all had enough; it is what I much desird—my only fear is that you spent with too sparing a hand."[37] The young Washington knew that hospitality and liberality were defining traits of a gentleman, and this display of generosity, in combination with the mobilization of men of interest and influence, marked the successful beginning of his political career.

Washington was even more aggressive about mobilizing interests for his reelection in 1761, when he joined with his friend and neighbor George Mercer. Though assured that "the leaders of all the patrician families remain firm in their resolution of continuing for you," he was warned that one of his opponents, Colonel Adam Stephen, had "attracted the attention of the plebians whose unstable minds are agitated by every breath of novelty, whims, and nonsense." Confronting this challenge, Washington not only persisted in treating the voters but also appealed directly to Captain Van Swearingen, the sheriff responsible for conducting the poll on election day. "I hope," Washington wrote, "my Interest in your Neighbourhood still stands good, and as I have the greatest reason to believe you can be no Friend to a Person of Colo. Stephens Principles; I hope, and indeed make no doubt that you will contribute your aid towards shutting him out of the Public trust he is seeking." Washington pressed the sheriff further: "could Mercer's Friends and mine be hurried in at the first of the Poll it might be an advantage, but as Sheriff I know you cannot appear in this, nor would I by any mean have you do any thing that can give so designing a Man as Colo. Stevens the least trouble."[38]

In subsequent years, as his reputation grew, Washington did not need to go to such lengths to win the public trust, but at this early stage it was not sufficient merely to announce his willingness to serve. The young colonel, like many other Virginia gentry, could not rely on the automatic deference of his neighbors; rather, it was necessary to join interests with prominent local men in order to command the support required to gain office. While this joining was not inconsistent with a conception of deference as "persuasion in a tangible shape," it was, in the extent to which Washington had to exert himself to gain votes, far removed from classical notions of deference. Indeed, what we find in Washington's experience is that the popular impulses in American politics, though certainly not articulated or

[36] The merchant accounts for Washington's liquor expenditures are ibid., V, 331–333.

[37] Washington to Wood, [July 28, 1758], ibid., 349.

[38] Capt. Robert Stewart to Washington, Feb. 13, 1761, in Stanislaus M. Hamilton, ed., *Letters to George Washington and Accompanying Papers*, 5 vols. (Boston and New York, 1898–1902), II, 202; Washington to Van Swearingen, May 15, 1761, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington, from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, 39 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1931–1944), II, 359.

structured in a shape that we can call "democratic," were changing the conduct of politics in local communities.

THE EMERGENCE OF POPULAR POLITICS IN AMERICA

Political leaders such as Williams, Marrable, and even Washington were learning that ordinary citizens could assert themselves in an active and independent fashion. In some cases their assertion amounted to a judgment about the personal capacities of their political leaders, an assertion not incompatible with a Harringtonian system in which the ultimate power to certify membership in the natural aristocracy rested with the yeomanry; but more and more the voters were pressing and defending their own vision of their interests and voting for candidates who appeared best able to serve those interests. Accordingly, the number of contested elections whose outcomes were not considered either preordained or meaningless by the participants was steadily increasing.

While popular impulses remained subdued in most parts of New England, in Rhode Island they became a regular part of politics by the mid-eighteenth century. The freemen who drafted a charter for their colony in 1647 declared that their new government would be "DEMOCRATICAL," and though their conception of that word was a seventeenth-century one, the government they created went a long way toward establishing the structural preconditions for a responsive and popular political order. About three-quarters of Rhode Island's free adult male population probably met the property qualifications for voting, and the voters elected more of their public officials than was the custom anywhere else in America. They elected members of the lower house of assembly—by far the most powerful agency of government in the colony—twice a year and balloted annually for a group of ten assistants who together with the governor and deputy governor composed the upper house. And, in marked contrast to every other colony except Connecticut, the voters elected annually virtually all of the members of the executive branch—governor, deputy governor, secretary, treasurer, and attorney general. Rhode Islanders also possessed a tradition of local government that was activist and popular. Town meetings were more frequent, better attended, and more ambitious in agenda than elsewhere in New England; the colony's town councils, chosen each year, were far more active than their counterparts—the boards of selectmen—elsewhere in the region. The geographic compactness of assembly districts and towns gave citizens an immediate connection with their representatives unequaled anywhere else in America. That connection was strengthened by the frequency with which Rhode Islanders petitioned their assembly on matters of public interest.[39] The annual election for governor provided a focus for political

[39] Although there is no comprehensive political history of colonial Rhode Island, the structure of politics can be pieced together from Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1975), David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760–1776* (Providence, R. I., 1958), and

opinion that encouraged high rates of turnout, rates that by the late 1750s and 1760s regularly reached 40–50 percent of free adult males, the highest average turnout in America.[40]

The high rates occurred during the contest for the governorship and control of the assembly between Samuel Ward and Stephen Hopkins over the period 1757–1767. The Ward-Hopkins rivalry has been variously interpreted as a class struggle between the commercial interests of Newport and the agrarian interests of northern Rhode Island, as a division between Quakers and Anglicans on the one side and Baptists and Congregationalists on the other, and, most commonly, as a clash among men of similar class background and economic interests from the two principal seaports of the colony, with Ward favoring Newport and Hopkins speaking for Providence.[41] These elements were all present in the electoral contests, but more striking is the extent to which the citizens of Rhode Island entered into the fray. Some of their involvement was orchestrated from above. Backers of the competing candidates held caucuses to plan strategy and raised campaign war chests amounting to several thousand pounds. To organize the electorate, they distributed tickets with a slate of recommended candidates. But by almost every standard—the percentage of the populace voting, the volume and vituperation of published broadsides and newspaper articles, and the extent to which the voters were aware of the nature of the choices they were making—the Rhode Island gubernatorial elections between 1757 and 1767 were popular contests. They were also close; Hopkins won six times, Ward three, but in no election did the victor gain more than 54.5 percent of the vote, and on several occasions the margin was less than a percentage point.[42]

Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay: The Colonial Rhode Island Town* (Middletown, Conn., 1983). Rhode Island's towns and assembly districts were geographically compact and had small numbers of citizens. In 1770 the ratio of free adult males to representatives in Rhode Island was 167 : 1, compared to ratios of 368 : 1 in Massachusetts, 439 : 1 in Virginia, and 1,301 : 1 in Pennsylvania. For a fuller presentation of this evidence see Greene, "Legislative Turnover in British America, 1696 to 1775: A Quantitative Analysis," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXVIII (1981), 461.

[40] For voting rates in Rhode Island see Robert J. Dinkin, *Voting in Provincial America: A Study of Elections in the Thirteen Colonies, 1689–1776* (Westport, Conn., 1977), 161–172.

[41] William B. Weeden, *Early Rhode Island, A Social History of the People* (New York, 1910), describes the Ward-Hopkins controversy as a product of antagonism between an agrarian lower class and an urban upper class. James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 294–313, suggests some of the religious dimensions of the controversy; Mack E. Thompson, "The Ward-Hopkins Controversy and the American Revolution in Rhode Island: An Interpretation," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XVI (1959), 363–375, and Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics*, 18–30, argue that the struggle was between competing elites whose members shared the same values and many of the same interests.

[42] (Newport, R. I.) *Mercury*, Apr. 11, 18, 25, 1763, Apr. 23, 1764; (Providence, R. I.) *Gazette*, Apr. 16, 1763, Apr. 16, 1764, Apr. 18, 1767, Mar. 19, 1768. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics*, 21–26; Dinkin, *Voting in Provincial America*, 163.

While some of the popular interest in those elections may be attributed to the aggressiveness of the few in recruiting the votes of the many, this explanation does not go far enough: competition among elites existed in many colonies, but it did not uniformly result in popular involvement as in Rhode Island. Rhode Island's political structure made the mobilization of popular forces—whether manipulated from above or erupting from below—much easier. Moreover, the colony's social and economic order was far more complex than elsewhere in New England. Because of its long-standing policies of religious toleration, Rhode Island displayed an unusual religious and ethnic diversity; equally important, urbanization and commercialization were more advanced, creating conditions that made traditional notions of an organic social hierarchy ineffectual. Finally, and most crucial, Rhode Island's voters were coming to realize that their local and provincial governments really mattered, that those governments were willing and able to use their powers in ways that directly affected the lives of ever-growing numbers of citizens.

The involvement of provincial American governments in the making and financing of war from the mid-eighteenth century onward brought more and more Americans into direct contact with their governments, nowhere more so than in Rhode Island. As the colony's seaport towns became enmeshed in the military conflict of the Great War for the Empire, citizens discovered that government policies were not simply the business of a few distinguished leaders. A variety of actions—issuing of flags of truce to merchants to allow them to trade with the West Indies; decisions about which merchant ships might be fitted out as privateers; granting monopolies to businessmen; currency reform; allocation of tax monies or, more commonly, authorization of lotteries for the construction of buildings, bridges, or schools—all fell within the sphere of the provincial government.

The actions of government did not consistently arouse the interest of Rhode Islanders. Bruce Daniels's conclusion that politics at the town level was marked by a "curious blend of apathy and highly participatory democracy" probably holds true for politics at the provincial level as well. But Rhode Islanders proved increasingly capable of mobilizing politically when it was in their interest to do so. And popular mobilizations tended to be prompted not by outpourings of affection for or alienation from the personal qualities of the principal candidates but by a clearer understanding that politics was an important vehicle for the promotion and protection of interests.[43]

[43] Daniels, *Dissent and Conformity on Narragansett Bay*, 96, and, more generally, 62–114, provides impressive evidence on the activist character of government at the town level. Thompson, "Ward-Hopkins Controversy," 370–375, gives a glimpse of the expansion of governmental functions at the provincial level. Bruce P. Stark, "'A Factious Spirit': Constitutional Theory and Political Practice in Connecticut, c. 1740," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XLVII (1990), 391–410, gives convincing evidence that Connecticut, which like Rhode Island had a governmental structure that facilitated popular participation, was also experiencing waves of popular

This combination of a set of structural preconditions favorable to popular involvement and activist government that elicited such involvement was not everywhere present in the colonies. In Virginia and South Carolina, for example, members of the ruling elite went to great lengths to avoid factional quarrels that might lead to a popular challenge to their power. The political cultures in which they operated were ones that prized attributes of civility and gentility precisely for their usefulness in muting political conflict.[44] In New York, where relations among members of the elite could be decidedly uncivil and ungenteel, members of the traditional ruling class were nevertheless able to prevent their differences from becoming an entering wedge for popular insurgency. That they were able to control electoral politics so effectively is testimony not only to the strength of their determination but also to the economic power they were able to muster to enforce that determination. As the New York manor lords discovered during the Revolution, however, their relatively effective suppression of popular sentiment in electoral politics was hardly a guarantee of popular consensus or contentment.[45]

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insurgence in the 18th century. Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1985), recognizes that interest was the motive force in Bay Colony politics, but he also argues that deference and its more coercive cousin—dependence—continued to condition relations between the many and the few.

[44] The political cultures of the provincial legislatures of the southern colonies have been meticulously analyzed by Greene in a series of works, including *Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1963), *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Polities of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (Athens, Ga., 1986), and "*'Virtus et Libertas.'*" The political culture of South Carolina has been less studied than that of Virginia, but for views that emphasize its genteel and consensual side see Robert M. Weir, "'The Harmony We Were Famous For': An Interpretation of Pre-Revolutionary South Carolina Politics," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXVI (1969), 473–501, and Richard Waterhouse, "Merchants, Planters, and Lawyers: Political Leadership in South Carolina, 1721–1775," in Daniels, ed., *Power and Status*, 146–172. See also Waterhouse, "The Responsible Gentry of Colonial South Carolina: A Study in Local Government, 1670–1770," in Daniels, ed., *Town and Country: Essays on the Structure of Local Government in the American Colonies* (Middletown, Conn., 1978), 160–185. Waterhouse in particular has emphasized the responsible and responsive side of the South Carolina political elite, a characterization not wholly consonant with the evidence.

[45] For conflicting views on the "popular" or "oligarchical" character of politics in pre-Revolutionary New York see Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York, 1971), and Countryman, *People in Revolution*, 72–98. Bonomi emphasizes the often-bitter divisions both within the legislature and between the legislature and the governor. She presents evidence suggesting that levels of political competition in some parts of the colony—particularly Westchester County and New York City—were quite high. Countryman concentrates on the far more oligarchic social and political structure of the Hudson Valley. Whatever the differences between those regions, however, the structural features of New York's legislative assembly made it an unlikely forum for genuinely popular governance. With only 27 members, its ratio of representatives to constituents in 1770 was 1 : 1,065, the second highest in America, and

Mid-eighteenth-century Pennsylvania exhibited tendencies that stand midway between Rhode Island's popular politics and New York's popular discontent. The Pennsylvania Charter of Privileges of 1701 stipulated that representatives to the General Assembly be elected by secret ballot each year. By 1722, through an act of the assembly, voters were also empowered to elect their county commissioners. Sheriffs and coroners were elected indirectly, with the governor appointing one of the two highest vote-getters in each case.[46] William Penn had an explicitly popular vision of political representation: "Every representative may be called the creature of the people, because the people make them, and to them they owe their being. Here is no transessentiating, or transubstantiating of being, from people to a representative; no more than there is an absolute transferring of a title in a letter of attorney. the very term representative is enough to the contrary."[47]

The provincial leaders of Pennsylvania, while adept at using Penn's ideas about representative government to justify weakening proprietary prerogative, were nevertheless unwilling to enter into the sort of attorney-client relationship with their constituents that Penn envisioned. A small group of "weighty" Quakers and their non-Quaker allies came to dominate Pennsylvania's unicameral legislature; the secret of their success, according to Alan Tully, lay in a combination of the continuing deferential relationship between leaders and constituents, the unpopularity of the principal alternative source of political power in Pennsylvania politics—those in the circle of patronage of the proprietor—and, at least in the period 1726–1755—their ability to respond to the basic needs of the people they served, Quakers and non-Quakers alike.[48]

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with elections scheduled only irregularly—before 1743 they were held on the death of the king and after that date they were held on an average of every 5 years—there was little opportunity to install new faces in the assembly; Greene, "Legislative Turnover," 461.

[46] Theodore Thayer, *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740–1776* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1953); Wayne L. Bockelman, "Local Government in Colonial Pennsylvania," in Daniels, ed., *Town and County*, 217–220. Alan Tully, *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726–1755* (Baltimore, 1977), 92, 93, 228, estimates that at least 60% of free adult males were qualified to vote.

[47] William Penn, *England's present Interest Considered* . . . (1675), in William Phillips, ed., *The Select Works of William Penn*, 3 vols. (New York, 1971; orig. pub. 1825), II, 285–286. For an elaboration on Penn's views and on other matters concerning the relationship between representatives and constituents in pre-Revolutionary America see Pole, *Political Representation*, esp. 76–93. For a less sanguine view of the democratic potential of Penn's political ideas see Nash, "The Framing of the Government in Pennsylvania: Ideas in Conflict with Reality," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIII (1966), 183–209.

[48] This view of "stable factionalism" in an essentially consensual and deferential political order has been put forth succinctly by Tully in *William Penn's Legacy* and in "Quaker Party and Proprietary Policies: The Dynamics of Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania, 1730–1775," in Daniels, ed., *Power and Status*, 75–105. For a critique of stable factionalism see John Murrin, "Political Develop-

Tully's description of a generally stable and consensual political climate obscures occasions when portions of the electorate abandoned a deferential posture and mobilized forcefully to protect their interests. The main site was the city of Philadelphia. In the beginning, political mobilization was a top-down affair, as leaders of the Quaker or proprietary factions periodically attempted to broaden their political bases in order to gain advantage over their legislative rivals. Weighty Quakers were particularly skilled at recruiting voters; they had the advantage of being the most prominent and respected members of their communities, while their opposition to the proprietors enabled them to appear to be aligned with "popular" forces.[49] Recruitment of the people was a dangerous game, since the leaders of both Quaker and proprietary factions were committed to elite control of politics, but in the early decades of the century, with a population overwhelmingly English and middling in wealth, it was a game that could be fairly easily managed. By mid-century, however, after two decades of massive German and Scots-Irish immigration and in the context of a differentiated and stratified economic order, traditional leaders began to see the consequences more clearly.

Popular interest in Philadelphia elections rose steadily from the early 1740s through the mid-1760s. While upswings in popular participation during the 1740s were largely the products of elite manipulation unconnected with substantive issues, the mobilizations for assembly elections of the mid-1760s suggest that popular awareness of policy issues was developing and that elite control of the political arena was declining. The contenders were the same—Quakers in control of the assembly versus

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ment," in Greene and Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1984), 438–441. For a slightly different view of the basis of Pennsylvania's colonial politics that still stresses consensus and deference see Hermann Wellenreuther, "The Quest for Harmony in a Turbulent World: The Principle of 'Love and Unity' in Colonial Pennsylvania Politics," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, CVII (1983), 537–576. Thomas L. Purvis, like Tully a student of Greene's and a proponent of the notion that colonial American politics was increasingly stable and consensual, has constructed a similar description in *Proprietors, Patronage, and Paper Money: Legislative Politics in New Jersey, 1703–1776* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1986).

[49] The differences in policy and interest between the dominant group in the assembly and the proprietors and their clients were so consistent during the 18th century that some historians characterize the opposing groups as "parties." Indeed, as assembly and proprietary factions extended their popular support during the period 1740–1765, they began to take on some aspects of parties. I have refrained from using the word to describe them; they lacked many of the attributes of party as that term came to be known in the early republic.

Many have written on Pennsylvania elections, especially on the colorful and controversial election of 1742, in which both Quaker and proprietary faction leaders sought to mobilize the voters. See, for example, Joan deLourdes Leonard, "Elections in Colonial Pennsylvania," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XI (1954), 385–401, Norman S. Cohen, "The Philadelphia Election Riot of 1742," *PMHB*, XCII (1968), 306–319, William T. Parsons, "The Bloody Election of 1742," *Pennsylvania History*, XXXVI (1969), 290–306, and Tully, *William Penn's Legacy*, 32–34, 86–94.

wealthy and socially prominent politicians dependent on proprietary patronage. By the 1760s, however, popular confidence in the assembly, which had dragged its feet on defense of the frontier, was sinking. Moreover, the Quaker faction's attempt to put its proprietary opponents out of business once and for all by persuading the crown to convert Pennsylvania into a royal colony destabilized the political scene; many traditional constituents of the assembly faction—Germans in particular—viewed royal rule with apprehension. Finally, leaders of the proprietary faction, previously unwilling to look beyond the circle of a few wealthy and well-born Anglicans, took the bold step in 1764 of including on their eight-man assembly slate two Germans and a Scots-Irishman.[50]

The 1764 campaign was innovative. First, both sides went to unusual lengths in making face-to-face appeals to the voters. Benjamin Franklin, a stalwart of the assembly faction, organized a mass meeting in Philadelphia at which he and Joseph Galloway promoted the scheme for royal government. The speeches at that meeting, while including praises for the personal virtue of the antiproprietary candidates, also dwelled on the plan to royalize Pennsylvania. Second, there was a marked growth in both the quantity and the vituperative quality of the printed campaign literature. The opposing sides produced no fewer than forty-four pamphlets and broadsides, many of them in German. If a deferential attitude toward Philadelphia's "natural aristocracy" had ever been a factor in Philadelphia elections, it certainly was not much in evidence in 1764. Proprietary leader William Smith, an Anglican clergyman and provost of the University of Pennsylvania, was castigated as a "consummate Sycophant" with a head full of *"flatulent Preachments,"* and even such a civic paragon as Franklin became the target of abuse. To his proprietary opponents he was a person of "ingrate Disposition and Badness of Heart" who "By assuming the merit / Of other mens *discoveries* . . . obtain'd the name of / A PHILOSOPHER." One publicist took aim at Franklin's sexual habits, berating him as "a Letcher" who "Needs nothing to excite him, / But is too ready to engage, / When younger Arms envite him." He was also called a schemer, a squanderer of public funds, and a corrupt politician familiar with "every Zig Zag Machination," interested in the move for royal government only as a means of becoming the first royal governor.[51]

[50] Accounts of aspects of the election of 1764 can be found in James Hutson, "The Campaign to Make Pennsylvania a Royal Province, 1764–1770," *PMHB*, XCIV (1970), 427–463, ibid., XCV (1971), 28–49, and J. Philip Gleason, "A Scurrilous Colonial Election and Franklin's Reputation," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XVIII (1961), 68–84. My analysis is especially indebted to Nash, "The Transformation of Urban Politics, 1700–1765," *Journal of American History*, LX (1973), 605–632, and, for a more general understanding of the way in which urban societies proved particularly fertile grounds for the development of aggressive popular politics, Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

[51] Quotations in Nash, "Transformation of Urban Politics," 616–617, 627–628, and Gleason, "A Scurrilous Colonial Election," 68–84. For some of the flavor of the personal attacks on Franklin see [William Smith], *An Answer to Mr. Franklin's*

The 1764 campaign also engaged religious interests that allowed for a more far-reaching appeal to the electorate than had been possible earlier. Ministers and lay leaders of the contending religious groups of the city—Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Lutherans as well as Quakers—enlisted on one side or the other during this election. Perhaps most important, the campaign did not simply turn on questions relating to the personal honor of the leaders of the factions. The issue of royal versus proprietary government was a real one, and citizens made rational calculations as to how their interests would be affected by the imposition of royal control. Coming just when the crown was beginning to tighten its hold on the colonies, the question stirred fears among artisans, mechanics, and sailors in addition to affluent merchants that the revocation of the proprietary charter would mean a loss of liberty. Presbyterians and Quakers alike were concerned with threats to their liberty from an established Anglican Church should the colony be placed under royal control.

Election day brought an unprecedented popular upsurge. According to one observer, "never before in the history of Pennsylvania . . . have so many people assembled for an election." In Philadelphia, a line of voters jammed the stairway of the courthouse from nine in the morning on October 1 until three in the afternoon the following day, with balloting continuing all through the night. In the end, aided by a substantial block of votes from Presbyterians and German Reformed, the proprietary party captured five of the eight assembly seats from Philadelphia county.[52]

The principal casualties in the Quaker assembly faction were Franklin and Galloway. As a commentator noted, "Mr. Franklin died like a philosopher. But Mr. Galloway *agonized in Death,* like a Mortal Deist, who has no Hopes of a Future Existence." Franklin did his best to take defeat in stride. He acknowledged that popular feeling had played a significant role in the election; the major cause of his defeat, he believed, was the influx of German voters who voted for his opponents on the basis of a misrepresentation of his position, taken twelve years earlier, respecting the immigration of Germans to Pennsylvania. He had spoken then of "the Palatine *Boors herding* together." Now he was charged with calling the Germans "a Herd of Hogs." "This," Franklin wrote, "is quite a laughing Matter," but laughing matter or not, it helped cost him the election.[53]

Remarks on a Late Protest (Philadelphia, 1764; repr. in Charles Evans's microcard series, *The American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of All Books . . . Printed in the United States . . . 1639–1800 . . .* [Worcester, Mass., 1903–1955], No. 9842); [Hugh Williamson], *What is Sauce for a Goose is Also Sauce for a Gander* (Philadelphia, 1764; Evans No. 9879); *An Answer to the Plot* (Philadelphia, 1764; Evans No. 9581).

[52] Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, eds. and trans., *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenburg in Three Volumes* (Philadelphia, 1945), II, 123; Mr. Pettit to Mr. [Joseph] Reed, Nov. 3, 1764, in William B. Reed, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed* (Philadelphia, 1847), 36–37.

[53] Pettit to Reed, in Reed, ed., *Life of Reed,* 37; Leonard Labaree et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* 27 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1959–), XI, 397.

Statistics bear out Franklin's impression of the popular character of the election. Both sides made unusual efforts to recruit voters; the forty-four pamphlets and broadsides represented the culmination of an upward trend. Between 1755 and 1764, 109 campaign pamphlets were printed in Philadelphia, more than six times the number distributed in either of the previous two decades.[54] The intensified campaigns in the public prints and in face-to-face encounters led to an unprecedented expansion in voter participation. Voter turnout among the taxable male population of Philadelphia County—an expanse stretching well beyond the city itself—had bounced back and forth between 10 and 35 percent during the years from 1727 to 1760; in 1764 it rose to 45.7 percent and in 1765, when many of the same issues were replayed, it rose to 51.2 percent. In the city itself, the percentage of taxables voting soared to 54.5 in 1764 and 65.1 in 1765.[55]

Citizen involvement in Philadelphia elections decreased after 1765.[56] What the elections of 1764 and 1765 showed was the potential for popular mobilization in eighteenth-century America. Philadelphia in particular—with electoral laws that were broadly inclusive, diverse population groups attuned to the need to work aggressively to promote their interests and identities, and a ruling elite insufficiently responsive to those realities—was especially ripe for a popular insurgence. Although that mobilization was initially orchestrated from the top, political leaders soon discovered that the populist impulse was difficult to contain.[57]

REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY AND THE EMERGENCE OF POPULAR POLITICS

Classical republican language, borrowed from the country party tradition of English politics, always conveyed a double message in the American context. On the one hand, fear of the aggressive and oppressive tendencies of power, joined to concern for the fragile and vulnerable state of liberty, could lead to efforts to shift political power from the few to the many. On the other, the tradition's overriding commitment to the preservation and cultivation of virtue—an attribute for which every member of

[54] Nash, "Transformation of Urban Politics," 617.

[55] Ibid., 630–632; Dinkin, *Voting in Provincial America,* 157–161.

[56] Dinkin, *Voting in Provincial America,* 161.

[57] Nash, "Transformation of Urban Politics," 632, describes the election as one in which "internal, local, and intraclass as well as interclass struggles . . . transfigured politics." While there is abundant evidence that popular forces had worked to transform the politics of Philadelphia in 1764 and that voters supporting each side had a clear view of their interests, the rhetoric of social class was strikingly absent from the campaign oratory of either side.

Owen S. Ireland, in a series of important articles on post-Revolutionary politics in Pennsylvania, describes a vigorous popular tradition of politics based not on social class but on ethnicity and religion. See, for example, his "The Crux of Politics: Religion and Party in Pennsylvania, 1778–1789," *WMQ,* 3d. Ser., XLII (1985), 453–475, and "The Ethnic-Religious Dimension of Pennsylvania Politics, 1778–1779," ibid., XXX (1973), 423–448, and Ireland and Wayne Bockleman, "The Internal Revolution in Pennsylvania: An Ethnic-Religious Interpretation," *Pa. Hist.,* XLI (1974), 125–159.

society should strive but which was particularly likely to be found among the natural aristocracy—provided the basis for all of the defenses of a deferential political and social order.

As Bailyn and others have demonstrated, Americans drew frequently and eloquently on the libertarian side of the republican tradition to defend provincial power and prerogative against royal governors and other crown officials. John Peter Zenger's *New York Weekly Journal*. for example, regularly denounced royal governors and their lackeys for instituting "SCHEMES OF GENERAL OPPRESSION AND PILLAGE, SCHEMES TO DEPRECIATE OR EVADE THE LAWS, RESTRAINTS UPON LIBERTY AND PROJECTS FOR ARBITRARY WILL."[58] Massachusetts politicians appealed to republican fears of excessive concentration of power when they lambasted a succession of governors for "increasing the number of officers dependent upon the Crown and thereby influencing elections and destroying the liberties of the people."[59] Pennsylvanians, lacking a royal governor, perceived the main threat in the power of the proprietor. The Pennsylvania colonial charter, argued leaders of the assembly faction, was designed to protect those who "had seen and felt the effects of DESPOTISM AT HOME," and the legitimacy of legislative over proprietary power was defended on the grounds that "the WHOLE legislative power . . . [rested] where it is always safest lodged, *in the hands of the people*."[60]

These recitations of the libertarian aspects of republican ideology were nearly always used defensively, in the face of some direct threat to the political power and autonomy of provincial leaders. They were almost never employed to justify popular government at home in the absence of such threats. Indeed, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, in the same breath that it warned of despotism at home, averred that such attempts at consolidation of arbitrary power "constituted a design almost as wicked as was the attempt to change the English *constitution* into a *democracy*."[61] Republican language, as it was used in the sporadic but often intense jockeying for position that characterized Anglo-American imperial relations in the eighteenth century, was the staple substance of a secular jeremiad, an ideological tradition on which provincial leaders could draw whenever things did not go their way.

While few Americans were willing to invoke the libertarian side of republicanism as a positive justification for democracy, a good many political leaders—especially when they came out on the short end of an election—embraced the elitist, virtue-oriented side of republicanism in attacking populist politics at home. Indeed, they assailed their opponents as rogues and demagogues, guilty of stirring the passions of the people, at least as often as they bemoaned the demise of popular government at the

[58] *New York Weekly Journal*, Jan. 28, 1733/4.

[59] *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, Mar. 31, 1757. For a more general discussion of the colonists' sensitivity—indeed, near-paranoia—about the expansive tendencies of royal power see Bailyn, *Origins of American Politics*, esp. 106–161.

[60] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Mar. 21–30, 1737/8.

[61] Ibid.

hands of a corrupt "Robinocracy" of royal placemen. James Logan, smarting from a series of political setbacks from Sir William Keith in Pennsylvania in the late 1720s, complained that "Keith was so mad, as well as wicked, most industriously to sett up the lowest part of the People; through a vain expectation that he should always be able to steer and influence them as his own Will. But he weakly forgot how soon the minds of such People are changed by any new Accident and how licentious force, when the Awe of Government . . . is thrown off, has been turned against those who first taught them to throw it off."[62] Logan had access to some of the power and patronage that America's leaders so feared, but his provincial opponents, once they had tasted the bitter fruit of popular defeat, sang very much the same tune. Galloway in 1764 played both sides of the classical republican record, accusing his opponents of being corrupted by their passion for "arbitrary Power" while denouncing their popular excesses, which he believed to be fueled by the "Passion of Ambition."[63] Everywhere the story was the same. In Massachusetts, Israel Williams decried the conduct of upstart politicians who, unimpressed by the importance of electing men of virtue, declaimed on the hustings against the conduct of the "great men."[64] In Virginia, wealthy planter gentry such as Landon Carter, convinced of their own superior virtue but nevertheless occasional victims of popular disfavor, railed against the "Adultress Popularity" as the greatest threat to good republican government.[65]

The rhetoric of republican virtue, like that of republican liberty, was very much in the mold of the jeremiad, dusted off and trotted out when one's opponents were using popular electioneering devices and organizing in a partisan fashion. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which politicians, when faced with competition for election, routinely availed themselves of those popular and partisan electioneering tools. Williams, though quick to denounce the presumption of upstart politicians, worked aggressively among the populace to aggrandize his power. The same Galloway who attributed democratic excess to the passion of ambition was active in efforts to convert Pennsylvania to a royal colony. He not only engaged in vigorous, behind-the-scenes politicking but also wrote pamphlets and delivered speeches at rallies where he denounced his opponents as "proprietary hireling[s]" operating in "total disregard for the Rights of the People."[66] Even that model of disinterested virtue, Wash-

[62] Logan to John, Richard, and Thomas Penn, Apr. 24, 1729, Official Correspondence, II, 55, Penn Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[63] Galloway, *The Speech of Joseph Galloway, Esq. . . . in Answer to the Speech of John Dickinson* . . . (Philadelphia, 1764; Evans No. 9671); Galloway, *An Address to the Freeholders and Inhabitants of the Province of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1764; Evans No. 9561).

[64] Williams to Bernard, Aug. 19, 1761, quoted in Taylor, *Western Massachusetts*, 25.

[65] Greene, ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752–1758*, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), II, 1008.

[66] Galloway, *Address to the Freeholders and Inhabitants*.

ington, when facing a tough election, instructed his friends not to stint on the rum, beer, and cider.

One should not be too cynical, but the decision on when and how to employ the rhetoric of classical republicanism in pre-Revolutionary America often depended on whose ox was being gored. We should therefore perhaps pay less attention to the whining of the losers—for whom declarations about the declining state of republican virtue came easily and offered a helpful dose of self-justification and solace—and watch more carefully the behavior of the winners. The winners were concerned not with maintaining republican virtue but with winning elections.

Equally important, winners and losers alike were discovering that voter support frequently depended less on their personal qualities as disinterested public servants than on active and faithful advocacy of their constituents' interests. Political men were learning, however dimly and reluctantly, that the process of political transformation was not going to be controlled wholly from the top. While the transformation of American politics was never simply a struggle between the many and the few, it was a process in which the few would be engaged in alternating relationships of consensus, accommodation, tension, and sometimes outright conflict with the many. In the final analysis, it was the active advocacy and assertion by the many—not the voluntary abandonment of deferential politics by the few—that made democratic government in America a reality.