

LEVELERS AND FUGITIVES: RUNAWAY  
ADVERTISEMENTS AND THE CONTRASTING  
POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF MID-  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MASSACHUSETTS  
AND PENNSYLVANIA

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In the early nineteenth century colonial Pennsylvania and Massachusetts had sharply different political economies and labor systems that were only partly blended with violence. These two political economies are reflected in various stories about Benjamin Franklin, who encountered a markedly different labor system when he moved from Boston to Pennsylvania.

Seventeen-year-old Franklin slipped out of Boston easily in 1723 by getting a friend to tell a sea captain that he impregnated a girl and wanted to leave quietly. The mariner thought it was more credible that young Franklin was running from a woman and her family than from a master. Few sought white servant runaways in eighteenth-century Boston. In the year Franklin ran only six runaway-inspired advertisements appeared in the Boston papers. Five masters sought three men of color and three white men.<sup>1</sup> In Boston, Franklin did not arouse suspicion.

Upon arriving in the Delaware Valley, though less than three hundred miles away, Franklin encountered a watchful society

that created and then sought many black and especially white fugitives. Near Burlington, New Jersey, Franklin worried, "I cut so miserable a figure . . . that I found by the questions asked me, I was suspected to be some runaway servant, and in danger of being taken up on that suspicion." A few days later, while eating dinner at the Crooked Billet in Water Street, Philadelphia, "several sly questions were ask'd me," wrote Franklin, "as it seemed to be suspected from my youth and appearance that I might be some runaway."<sup>2</sup>

It made sense to interrogate him. Delaware Valley masters in 1723 were looking for twenty-six white runaways, all of whom had substantial bounties connected to them. Franklin might have been John Amyer or Joffa Bealey, Charles Brown, John Cliff, Thomas Coomes, James Henson, Cornelius Lynch, Dennis McGenouilly, James McCurvey, David Reeves, or Richard Skelton—all advertised white men under twenty-two years of age who fled that year from masters in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware.<sup>3</sup> The Boston youth was now on the defensive. If he was held as a runaway, Franklin would have been sold as a servant by the gaoler for a term in order to pay the costs of his detention. He would need to beg his Boston family to come and bail him out.

Franklin's migration from Boston to Philadelphia bears out two runaway stories, one well known and another hidden. In the known narrative, Franklin left a tired, premodern city and social order, Boston, that ridiculed, resented, and denied his youthful ambition, to resettle in an upwardly progressing, diversified city, Philadelphia, where self-fashioning was available to all white males and where consequently Franklin gained wealth and worldwide fame.

Another story exists, however—as factual and believable—that highlights the power of working people in Boston and their weakness in Philadelphia. Briefly put, when the seventeen-year-old printer's apprentice and prodigy ran from his work brethren and family in Boston to Philadelphia in 1723, he left a society in which labor and work were carefully and politically empowered, protected, and dignified for a society in which laborers had far less political and economic power and were therefore often oppressed by property-holders. Franklin used Pennsylvania's exploitative labor regime, and his Boston education, to create a new persona.<sup>4</sup>

In this version, more complicated than the other, Franklin was less a runaway servant than a hasty, ambitious, and ungrateful adolescent fleeing an unusually organized society of empowered workers, owners, and families who cooperated to block or decelerate his youthful ambitions, just as they had cooperated to educate him and protect his opportunities. After getting a nearly free education in Boston and then apprenticing himself to his printer

brother James Franklin, Benjamin Franklin fell in love with newspaper writing and printing. However, his brother was jealous of his gifts and often beat him. Franklin gained a chance for legal escape when New England magistrates tried to silence his brother for ridiculing them; they placed James in prison and ordained that James Franklin could never again publish a paper called the *New England Courant*. Cleverly, James kept the name of his paper for its commercial value, but changed the ownership, naming his brother Benjamin Franklin as sole owner. In order to make the move legitimate, James tore up Franklin's indentures publicly. At the same time, he wrote a private set of indentures, aiming to keep Ben subordinate.

The new indentures proved worthless. If Benjamin left, James could not admit publicly, much less broadcast widely, that the owner of his controversial *New England Courant* was a runaway apprentice or that he himself had committed perjury. "I took upon me to assert my freedom," Benjamin Franklin noted, "presuming that he would not venture to produce new indentures." James Franklin never did. However, he responded by asking every printer in Boston not to hire his precocious and arrogant, if brilliant, brother. He would never have made such a request, or needed to, if Franklin was legally a runaway servant and therefore unemployable by law. As important, the owners of Boston's newspapers, who had enjoyed educations and apprenticeships like the one Franklin was abandoning, were so powerful and cooperative that they complied effectively with their brother-in-work. Needing employment and squelched by the codes of the powerful guild of Boston's worker-owners, young Franklin left.<sup>5</sup>

These two narratives about America's iconic runaway youth are both largely true. Though not mutually exclusive, they contest each other and complicate current understandings of the northern colonies. The first flatters Philadelphia and the second Boston. Inquiry into their contrast also highlights and partly resolves ambivalences in historians' understandings of northern society. Historians retain in mainstream interpretations and textbooks Pennsylvania's reputation as "the best poor man's country," when valuable study after study in the last twenty years shows that it was a society by 1750 hostile to poor whites.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Massachusetts and New England retain an enduring reputation for oppressiveness and intolerance, when study after study in the last twenty years shows that after 1750 it was arguably the most equitable society in early America and the British empire, a society that provocatively empowered and privileged white male workers and thus threatened the power of Parliament and its English aristocrats.<sup>7</sup>

The tensions or ambivalences in both images emerge more justifiable than problematic when it is realized that New England and the Delaware Valley had dramatically different labor systems and therefore are not so easily compared or judged. Each region had its own workable organization and therefore its own strengths and weaknesses. Such is reflected in the different meanings and treatment of runaways in Franklin's story and also in the dramatic numerical differences of white runaway laborers in the two regions that underlay the two narratives. From 1720 to 1760 the number of "black" and slave runaways was similar in the two regions.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, between 1720 and 1760 Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware masters sought 2,400 white runaways from employers in their region, whereas the New England masters, despite having some eight newspapers and a larger population throughout this period, advertised for a mere 331. In these years there were seven advertised white fugitives in the Delaware Valley compared to every one New England runaway. And, since New England had twice the population of Pennsylvania in 1740 (some 280,000 to 149,000 people), the per capita ratio was on average annually thirteen advertised white runaways in the Delaware Valley to every one advertised white runaway in New England (see fig. 1).<sup>9</sup>

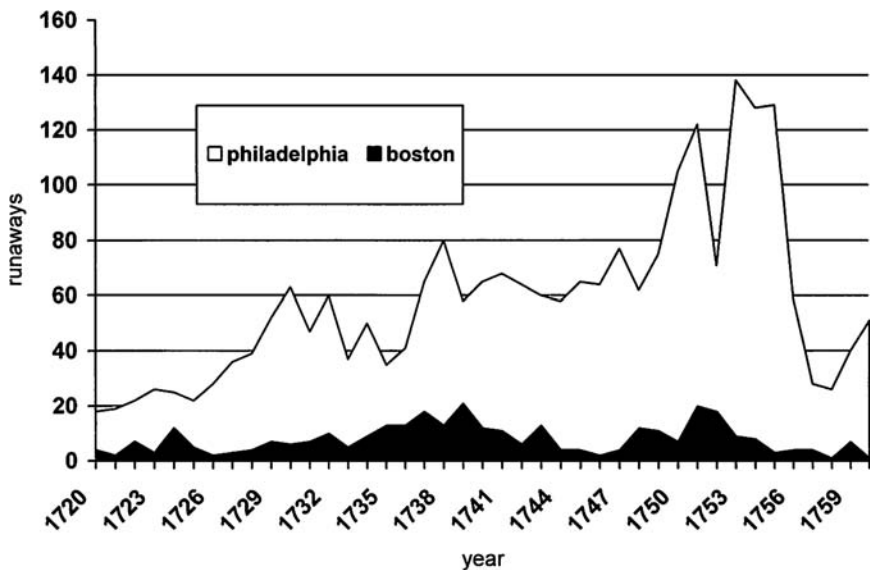


FIGURE 1: White runaways from the Delaware Valley and New England, 1720–1760. Data compiled from *Boston Evening Post*, *Boston Gazette*, *Boston Newsletter*, *Boston Post-Boy*; *New England Courant*; *New England Weekly Journal*; *New Hampshire Gazette*, *New London Summary*; *Weekly Rehearsal*; *American Weekly Mercury*, *Pennsylvania Gazette*; see also n. 8.

The divergence reflects two different economic organizations or political economies, both *sui generis* and both economically successful. Pennsylvania masters were probably not more repellant than their New England counterparts. A much larger group of Pennsylvania servants ran from their masters largely because there were so many more indentured or contracted servants in Pennsylvania than in Massachusetts and other New England locations. Pennsylvania welcomed and thrived upon servants from Germany, Scotland, and Ireland and many came. New England restricted their entry, attracted few servant immigrants, often scorned them, and largely used their own native-born population to do the hardest and most dangerous work.

Before 1750 New England used relatively few indentured servants or redemptioners in its economy while the Pennsylvania economy relied upon them. For example, Marianne Wokeck estimates that 9,173 German and Irish immigrants entered Pennsylvania through Philadelphia between 1763 and 1768. With servants composing about half of these immigrants, no less than 4,500 servants entered the city. Sharon Salinger estimates more conservatively that some 2,036 servants entered Pennsylvania through Philadelphia during these six years.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the reality in this range, a detailed list of immigrants into Boston from the sea between 1763 and 1768 shows that during these years, a mere 300 servants entered Massachusetts through Boston, only 7 percent of Wokeck's estimate for Philadelphia and only 15 percent of Salinger's. Moreover, while servants composed about 55 percent of the Philadelphia immigrants during these years, they composed just 8 percent of the immigrants entering Boston. More free artisans, free single and married women, and far more foreign mariners entered Boston than did indentured servants. While entering ships unloading 200 or more servants were common sights in Philadelphia's port, such a sight was never seen on Boston's waterfront. Between 1763 and 1768 among 838 vessels entering Boston that had any passengers, only four contained more than ten servants, and the most crowded servant vessel was the *Wilmot* from Cork, which contained only seventy-two Irish servants.<sup>11</sup>

Servant immigration into Boston and Philadelphia followed the same trends and ratios before and after these six years. A detailed immigration list exists for Boston for 1716 for ten out of twelve months. Boston was clearly the major North American port at that time. Yet servants composed only some 17 percent of the 453 passengers entering Boston in 103 vessels. In later years, the same ratios persisted.<sup>12</sup> As Bernard Bailyn has shown, between 1773 and 1776 at least 1,414 immigrants from England and Scotland entered Philadelphia (about half or more servants), while during these years

a paltry 77 English and Scot immigrants from the same accounting entered Boston (a ratio of eighteen to one).<sup>13</sup> Clearly Pennsylvania and Massachusetts had different labor systems and political economies.

Unlike the Delaware Valley (or New York or the Chesapeake for that matter) the political economy of New England, though vibrant, was so organized that it neither invited many servants to arrive nor provoked many laborers to run. Settled by Europeans in 1620, with the biggest number coming between 1630 and 1640, New England developed before Pennsylvania and retained a slight lead in population and economic power up to 1760. The Mid-Atlantic region of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware began major European settlement some forty years later, in the 1670s and 1680s. By 1720 the New England colonies had a population of 171,000 people compared to only 66,000 in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. This middle region grew faster after 1720, so by 1760, while New England retained the lead in population, containing 140,000 more people, its lead had declined from over two to one to four to three (449,634 for New England and 310,766 people for Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware). The major cities of the two regions followed the same trajectory. In 1720 Boston population dwarfed Philadelphia by 12,000 to 5,000 respectively. By 1760, however, the population of the two cities was roughly the same size, both with about 15,000 people and Philadelphia was growing much faster.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1760s, the economies of the two regions differed visibly, but the wealth produced per capita by their different systems was probably similar. Between 1768 and 1772 the Middle Colonies' exports (including those of New York in this case) earned on average annually £526,545 (pound sterling). The Middle Colonies possessed excellent farmland, so it is not surprising that the main export commodities were grains and grain products, sold chiefly to the West Indies and southern Europe. These grains composed 72 percent of the Middle Colonies' exports and agricultural products composed 83 percent of the Middle Colonies' exports. Between 1768 and 1772, New England's commodity exports earned on average annually £439,101. New England had stony soil and a shorter growing season. Not surprisingly, grains, grain products, livestock, and other agricultural commodities, sold chiefly to the West Indies and southern Europe, composed only a quarter of New England's exports. New England's export economy came chiefly from nonfarming sources: the leading commodities were fish (£152,155) and lumber.<sup>15</sup>

It appears in proportion to total population that the Middle Colonies were more productive, at least concerning export commodities, and that

the Middle Colonies' bigger economy and energy might explain the much larger number of servants, both entering and running. Such an impression is wrong, however. Not counted by custom-house collectors were services and the containers the commodities came in, the largest and most sophisticated containers being the ships themselves. New England led other regions in regards to shipbuilding and maritime services. Economic historians James Shepherd and Gary Walton conservatively estimate that New Englanders earned £427,000 from the sale of freight and commercial services in overseas trade during an average year between 1768 and 1772. New England earned virtually as much in maritime services and the sale of shipping as it did by export commodities. In 1769 New England produced 70 percent of American oceangoing vessels: these American vessels had captured about a third of the market for mercantile vessels in England, and New England also produced at least 75 percent of all American blue-water mariners.<sup>16</sup> When maritime services and New England's best product, ships, are considered, New England outearned the Middle Colonies £866,101 to £526,545. However, such a figure is misleading. The Middle Colonies had a fledgling shipbuilding industry and it outpaced New England in supplying products, especially flour, to America's growing internal markets. Thus, the average New England worker was probably no less productive in the export and internal sector than the average Delaware Valley worker and vice-versa.<sup>17</sup> The organization and political economy of the respective regions, not productivity of workers, provided the most obvious and dramatic difference among the two regions.<sup>18</sup>

New England's restricted and protected labor system grew from Puritan roots. Massachusetts carefully divided all its land under its charters into incorporated townships so that every developed acre of land in the New England colonies eventually fell under the jurisdiction of an incorporated town. These towns were run by town meetings and their elected selectmen. As a result, the majority of adult male workers held sway. To enter any town as a settler a man or woman had to apply to the town meetings or its representatives, the selectmen. Employers could not hire and retain workers for over a month without the approval of the town meetings or its officers. In most towns, employers seeking to retain outside workers (bound or free) for long periods had to pay a bond freeing the town from all obligations of charity, including the support of "illegitimate" children. Many town people were deemed too poor to hire outsiders. Even those allowed to hire or retain outside labor often had to take out bonds to cover their potential cost to the town. Studies of several towns like Watertown, Dedham, and Boston show that these laws

and practices were closely followed. In brief, an immigrant to Massachusetts needed to negotiate with powerful local town governments ruled by workers jealous of controlling their local labor markets.<sup>19</sup>

These policies were similar to ones that had existed in southeastern English towns and cities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. English town leaders then sought to protect towns and their workforces from wandering vagrants and from declining wages then common in England.<sup>20</sup> Puritan religious ideas were also partly responsible for the adoption of this labor system. Each godly town was, in the eyes of a punitive Calvinist God, responsible for all its members' souls, so work, marriage, literacy, and explanation of God's Word had to be given to all inhabitants at taxpayers' expense. If not, God might well destroy the town as he did Sodom and Gomorrah or inflict a plague or all-consuming fire, common phenomena in England.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the New England founders showed a commitment in England and America to establish political economies that upheld wages in order to make work valuable.

By the eighteenth century, however, English cities no longer restricted immigration or controlled the size of their labor forces. While Puritanism ceased to be the force it had been in New England, the New England town remained a potent political and economic institution. A peculiarity of New England was that each town, including Boston and new towns, was governed by a town meeting, and white male workers held considerable power in all these meetings.<sup>22</sup> Towns continued to enforce settlement restrictions, to warn out interlopers, and even to forcibly remove some from town. As a result, employers continued to face limits when hiring, and laborers were largely confined to their hometown's labor market. It cost entrepreneurs more to hire or rely upon outsiders, and sea captains had to pay steep fees to land immigrants in Boston. Because the restrictions were produced and enforced by local governments, New England's policies could not be altered by the English Privy Council.

If there was any economic compensation for employers, it was that New England's labor force was highly skilled, locally loyal, and, if need be, often daring and/or violent. By colony law, each town spent large sums developing its own town labor force's skills by setting up schools and by supervising families' treatment of children and apprentices. Towns enforced education rules and removed from families children who seemed to be inadequately trained or underemployed.<sup>23</sup> The seaport town schools especially helped New England youth become literate, numerate, and inured to the



traumas of the Atlantic world workplace. While family violence seemed to ebb, schoolteachers continued to thrash and beat their charges in town schools, while boy gangs developed to bully the weak and train the strong.<sup>24</sup> Franklin experienced the basic education and physical violence given working boys in Boston. Not surprisingly, New England men excelled at fishing, blue-water commerce, shipbuilding, and organized fighting and killing—all dangerous pursuits, but valuable economic and political skills.<sup>25</sup>

The town-born dominated most New England town workforces. New England contained many servants and apprentices, but they were chiefly New England-born children on the move.<sup>26</sup> English and Irish servants and Indian and black slaves also played a role in the economy, especially in Boston. By 1760 there were some 12,717 slaves in New England, some 3 percent of the population, working in homes, shipyards, farms, and vessels, laboring alongside the privileged white town-born and some accepted white immigrants.

Each town was, in brief, a kind of self-governing business corporation with its own workforce and army composed mainly of the town-born but also completed by servants and slaves brought in for additional fees. Most rural households had small farms, but also earned money by limiting household labor to work in town industries such as shipbuilding, iron-making, and textiles. The Massachusetts General Court raised taxes not by taxing individuals but by annually assessing the size of each town's economy and assessing each town a proportionate assessment, which was then divided among the townfolk or workforce. New England towns were perhaps the only major corporations or business entities in American history that were effectively shaped, if not controlled, by their own workers.<sup>27</sup>

Pennsylvania's labor system and political economy were more conventional and more liberating for entrepreneurs, property-holders, and many desperate immigrants while more oppressive to white workers. The emphasis on white immigrant labor was its striking feature. Quakers from northwestern Great Britain dominated the early settlement of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Quakers did not set up towns like those in New England. They tended to divide the Delaware Valley into large farms linked together in county governments. In these spaces, energetic men's and women's Quaker meetings supervised Quaker families and also visited outsiders. Quakers also dominated the Pennsylvania Assembly, the major political institution in the colony. Town meetings did not exist with the power and vigor of those in New England and thus economic regulation and local politics generally were comparably limited. Even Philadelphia lacked popular home rule.<sup>28</sup>

The Quaker settlers feared the corruption brought by outsiders as much as did the early Puritan settlers. At first the Quakers got their children to do much work, but their ideals prevented them from using their children as drudges like the Puritans did, much less moving them around so promiscuously. Unlike the Puritans, who thought children needed to be traumatized and shocked to be saved, Quakers saw their children as “tender plants” that required some discipline—even a whipping or two if they lied—but they were to be nurtured, not deeply traumatized. Quakers brought domesticity to America, including women meetings and female ministers, concern for regulating marriages, charming, retentive, and tender homes, and schools that minimized violence. Delaware Valley Quakers did not go to sea.<sup>29</sup> At the same time Quakers had many material desires. To protect them from “the world,” they wanted each son to have a pleasant farm with lots of land and each daughter to possess ample dowry money. They wanted to insulate their families from dependence on the corruptions of “carnal talkers.” They wanted to live in holy homes in a civilized and wealthy society. They needed thousands of outsider workers.

At first Quakers tried to solve their labor problem by importing a large number of enslaved Africans. However, as Jean R. Soderlund has shown, many Quaker meetings objected to fueling their “holy experiment” with African labor.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that blacks and Africans did not remain an important force in Delaware Valley labor. As an alternative or addition, Quaker entrepreneurs found pockets of willing labor in Europe and attracted and accepted large numbers of indentured servants and redemptioners. As Marianne Wokeck has shown, the first group targeted was poor Germans whom entrepreneurs and merchants convinced to immigrate to Pennsylvania. Many peasants hoped to pay their way and to arrive as free people but many became indebted to sea captains who sold them as servants in Pennsylvania. Between 1720 and 1760, Wokeck estimates that some 67,185 German immigrants arrived at the docks in Philadelphia, at least half as servants.<sup>31</sup> A hapless and failed English servant apparently invented the term “best poor man’s country” to describe Pennsylvania, indicating how attractive it was to such European labor irrespective of his personal failure.<sup>32</sup> The lure worked well. Between 1720 and 1760, in addition to the German migration, about twenty ships a year also arrived from Ireland, most packed with servants for sale. A steady flow of English servants also energized the economy. Although there were other forms of labor, Pennsylvanians came to rely on white servants and their descendants. In 1739, during the “War of Jenkins’s Ear, after

Governor John Thomas told servants they would be free if they enrolled in the English army, the Pennsylvania legislature gagged, noting the almost fatal damage done to the annual harvest and demanding large reparations.”<sup>33</sup> Few restrictions existed on the movement and hiring and contracting of white labor in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Delaware. The provincial and local governments, when they existed, were in the hands of the propertied elite, not laboring people.<sup>34</sup>

These two different labor systems and political economies largely explain why the Delaware Valley, not New England, became the home of vintage runaway stories like Benjamin Franklin’s. Pennsylvania’s relatively free-labor market and plantation economy not only attracted more servants but also made it advantageous and necessary for many people to seek indentured servants, for many of those servants to run away as soon as possible, for employers to hire these runaways at low wages, and for many others to run later in what became for some life-long servile laboring careers. Employers and masters in Pennsylvania could virtually get whomever they wanted at the lowest price and they needed to seek the lowest labor costs in order to compete against other local entrepreneurs so privileged. Almost no restrictions existed on whom they could employ and at what price. With good connections and public relations, masters’ reach extended to Europe where many young men and women sold themselves to merchants to be indentured servants in this “best poor man’s country” where cheap land, vast spaces, and good publicity promised a new start. At the same time masters had difficulty controlling their servants, whose dream they had stimulated.

The clash of dreams was largely absent in New England’s restricted labor markets (Benjamin Franklin was a major exception). New England’s labor markets discouraged white runaways by restricting immigration of indentured servants, rewarding foreign and native immigrants for staying long in a town, and penalizing them for illegally fleeing the towns that had accepted them. Internal servants had also best remain where they got settlement. Once settled in a New England town it usually was for the best for whites to stay or at least to follow the rules to immigrate to the northern New England frontier where documented newcomers were often welcome.<sup>35</sup> In whatever town they settled, the value of their future labor was protected from outsiders. Because immigration was restricted, land prices were also low (land was also harder to work and less in demand given high labor costs and poor quality). Work was appreciated and demanded by the empowered townfolk who were or had been workers. Servants lived among workers with political

power and control over their lives, for the town meetings, virtually absent in the Delaware Valley, were run by men with dirty hands, not lifelong gents or privileged and leisured saints.<sup>36</sup>

Accordingly, New England runaway advertisements for whites were comparatively rare and the few white runaways advertised were consistently younger than the many desperate white peons and adventurers in the Delaware Valley. In New England it paid to retain and develop the identity a person arrived with; in the Delaware Valley it more often paid to obliterate the identity a person arrived with, and to invent another one—or two.

The racial composition of the two groups of runaways reflects these contrasting, if previously invisible, labor systems, political economies, and worker mentalities. No matter how poor, settled white workers had privileges in New England, so they tended not to run. New England restricted the immigration of outsiders, so most runaways were native-born New Englanders, though white foreigners clearly existed in some numbers. Although New Englanders extended some unusual privileges like marriage and church membership to Indians, so-called mulattos (biracial people), and blacks, many were still slaves and they had lost their basic freedoms by living in New England. Given the radically different distribution of privileges by race in New England's labor system, more than half the runaways in New England (55 percent) were Indian, biracial, or blacks and only a minority (45 percent) were whites. Among the white runaways, the two largest groups were the native-born (18 percent) and Irish (17 percent).

The racial situation was different among workers in the Delaware Valley, where white workers faced free-labor markets and few privileges. It made more sense for them to run away from their contractual servile obligations. Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of runaways in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey were white (89 percent) and a mere 11 percent black, biracial, or Indian. It was not that slaves did not have reason to run in the Delaware Valley (their total number was comparable with the number who ran in New England) but in the advertisements they were simply overwhelmed in numbers by the fleeing whites. It is also likely that the heightened vigilance in the Delaware Valley to counteract the illegal departure of so many white indentured servants also made it especially daunting for blacks in the Delaware Valley to flee. If Benjamin Franklin was cross-examined at every stop and nearly snatched twice, a black man or woman would certainly be in constant peril.<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, examination of the places from which the servants ran in the respective regions confirms the existence of relatively free labor markets in the Delaware Valley and regulated labor markets in New England. The Boston town-meeting records show almost heroic efforts to enforce laws against Bostonians hiring outsiders without paying bonds or at least notifying the town meeting. Much effort was put into oversight of labor in Boston.<sup>38</sup> House inspections for foreign inmates were common, almost an annual phenomenon. However, Boston was a town of 15,000 people, a port, and a city with a mobile workforce of mariners. Employers could sneak in unobserved workers, especially during wartime. To newly arrived immigrant servants Boston probably looked like other Atlantic ports. It was difficult in such a place to keep the same discipline and control over the labor market that a smaller town like Concord or Hadley visibly maintained. Inequality of wealth was greater. Foreign workers in Boston might well believe that their labor and futures were not as protected and empowered as they might be. Moreover, newcomers and other workers had access to ships that might take them elsewhere. It is not surprising, therefore, that of all the white runaway servants advertised in New England, half ran from Boston.

This is not to say that Boston and Philadelphia were similarly unregulated labor markets. Between 1720 and 1760 some 367 white servants ran from Boston and 728—virtually double the number—ran from Philadelphia. (It should be remembered that Boston was the much larger town throughout almost all of the period studied.) However, Boston dominated the runaway numbers in its region in ways that Philadelphia did not. Outside of Boston, probably more wives ran away than did white servants.<sup>39</sup> From 1720 to 1760 Plymouth County masters advertised for just four servants; Hampshire County ten, and Worcester County just one. Of New England's 300 or more sovereign towns, there were certainly many from which a single white servant had never tried to escape.

In Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey, more servants ran from Philadelphia than from any other locale, but Philadelphia hardly dominated the phenomenon of runaway servants as Boston did in New England. Whereas 50 percent of all the runaways in New England ran from Boston, only 27 percent of the Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey runaways ran from Philadelphia. In the Delaware Valley's less-regulated labor system all white workers were vulnerable to seeing the value of their labor decline and all had an opportunity to obliterate their old identities and then sell their labor elsewhere to the highest bidder.

Thus, running away flourished in the Delaware Valley hinterland. Chester County had some 536 runaways between 1720 and 1760 or 20 percent of the total; New Jersey labor masters advertised for 485 white runaways in Philadelphia newspapers or 18 percent of the total. Contrast the 536 servants running from rural Chester County farms and trades with the 56 servants running from more populated but comparable Middlesex County, Massachusetts, a ratio of ten to one. In New England running away among whites was largely a limited practice in seaports, especially Boston, whereas in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware it was everywhere a common practice.<sup>40</sup>

Thanks to the differing labor systems, runaways in the Delaware Valley were not only more numerous but also older. A sizable minority of the white unfree Pennsylvania workforce consisted of older white servants who despite having talents, as their masters advertised, had little luck in the Middle Atlantic economy. In many cases, these older men and women appear to be pathetic and exploited workers. The age composition of the Pennsylvania and New England pools of advertised runaways reflects the existence of two different labor markets and political economies. Among people of color the ages of runaways in the Delaware Valley and New England were similar, but white runaways were significantly younger in New England (see fig. 2). Some 47 percent of New England runaways, nearly half, ran as minors between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years. Only 19 percent were twenty-five years

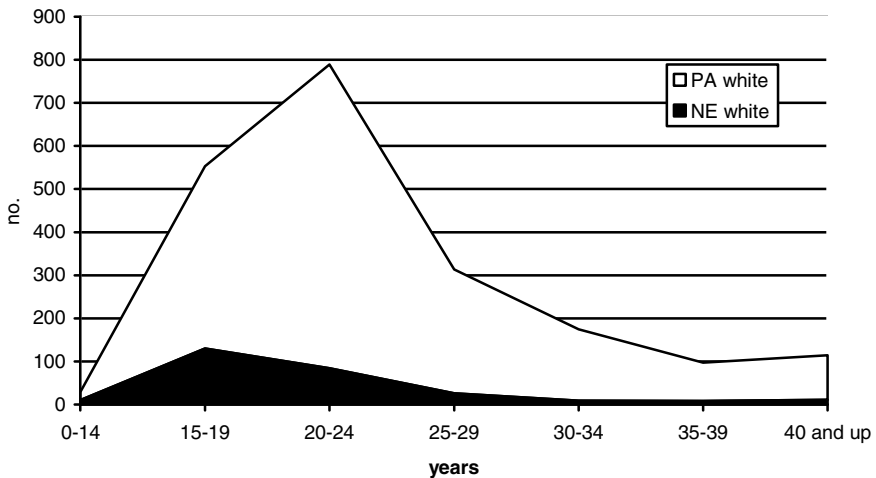


FIGURE 2: Ages of white runaways from New England and Delaware Valley. Data compiled from sources listed in fig. 1.

or older. Philadelphia white runaways also tended to be young. However, well over a third were twenty-five years or older, and a sizable number of Pennsylvania white runaways (358) were thirty years or even older.

Many old white servants had families that had been developed and grown in servitude. In this one regard they were similar to black, Indian, and other "colored" slaves. Of course, some old white runaway families crossed racial lines. In short, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware clearly had a large group of permanently servile whites, people who lived their lives in servitude, and who developed families likely to stay in servitude.<sup>41</sup> Many white children in Pennsylvania grew up in servile families. When Thomas Johnston, age thirty, ran from Thomas Ogle, of New Castle County, Delaware, in 1751 he "took his wife, a little boy, about four or five years of age, with him." Similarly, when an Irish servant, Charles Campbell ran from Henry Hudelson, Plumstead Township, Bucks County, in 1739, he was "supposed to be in company with one Martha Bostuck, a short, well-set woman, with red hair, and pock broken; has a child with her about five years old." In 1741 Benjamin Mifflin of Philadelphia noted that his servant Henry Carpenter "is a great boaster" and "has a son with him of his own name." This son was thirteen years old. Like the stories of the slaves of the old South, many white Pennsylvania servants ran to reunite their families; such servants were not just German redemptioners, seeking to reunite families soon after arriving. In 1746 Rachel Pickering, a thirty-year-old English woman, fled from Matthias Kerlin, tavernkeeper, in Concord, Chester County, Pennsylvania. Kerlin noted that "she had a fat man child with her about 6 months old." Kerlin had information that "she was carried up from Newcastle County to Philadelphia in a boat," and that "she has been heard to enquire of one Timothy Conner, who she says is her husband, but he is only her bastard's supposed father; he served his time with one William Peters, fuller, living near Concord."<sup>42</sup>

The Delaware Valley free-labor market apparently disappointed and defeated many white ex-servants who returned to servitude after gaining freedom from the original labor contract and then decided to run later in life. Historians are beginning to uncover a class of life-long servile white workers and cottagers in the Middle Colonies and these advertisements confirm these findings and this unusual and depressing feature of the Middle Colony labor system.<sup>43</sup> Between 1720 and 1760 over 35 percent of the runaway Delaware white men and women whose ages were specified were older than twenty-four. Some of these were men who arrived at older ages to begin their American adventures, but as the advertisements make clear most had served

several terms of indenture in the Middle Colonies or in Maryland. They had failed to cultivate the discipline or skills of "Poor Richard" to compete well in an unregulated labor market. Some fell into debt or had to sell themselves into servitude contracts again to eat. Pennsylvania's welfare system and its economy rested on the sale as servants of the poorly behaved, undisciplined, and needy, if sometimes highly skilled, men and women. Such a welfare system by white enslavement did not exist in New England where the white poor were nurtured into independence, sometimes harshly, in a town setting.<sup>44</sup>

There is also convincing evidence that the Delaware Valley developed an oppositional runaway subculture, something that did not apparently exist among even fugitive whites in New England. In their advertisements masters reported whether or not a runaway had company in running away. New England runaways tended to be solitaires. Only some 12 percent of New England runaways ran with others. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware masters reported that some 28 percent, over twice the percentage in New England, ran with others. It must be pointed out that the masters could not know everything, and doubtless more servants ran with other fugitives than their masters were aware. With the exception of the Irish runaways, New England runaways were more solitary escapees in every racial or ethnic group in which a substantial number of people ran.<sup>45</sup>

Group escapes had advantages: they helped servants get boats and find the ability to overcome search parties or folk eager for bounties. They also helped fugitives change their identities by changing a single-person portrayal of a new identity into a more persuasive group performance in which one servant would play the role of master and the other of servant or enact a free family. In addition Pennsylvania masters, more often than New England masters, complained that runaways had help from the outside. Doubtless such a perception was fueled by the larger number of ethnic groups in Pennsylvania and the ability of employers to hire workers with few questions asked. In both regions family members were suspected. Jacob Duche in 1754 believed that Hans George Myer, a seventeen-year-old servant, "is supposed to be harbored by one of his sisters at the widow Pennaebaker's in Skippack Township or by the other sister at Calls ironworks."<sup>46</sup>

Many masters thought that other working folk, not just kin, were helping fugitive servants. In 1753, Josiah Davenport was certain that his Irish female servant, Margaret Willey, "has been seen several times about the wharves, vessels, and ill houses in town, and is, without doubt, secreted within the city." Some beleaguered masters felt that the world was full of confederates for their



runaways. Andrew Sinickson of Penn's Neck, Salem County, New Jersey, noted that his runaway Aaron Allen "has a mother and brother living, at or near Princeton, in the Jerseys, his brother's name Moses Allen, it is supposed he is gone there, if not towards Lancaster in Pennsylvania; he possibly may attempt to enlist in his majesty's service, or else get off by sea." In 1748 Sophia Maybury thought that her Spanish Negro man Mona and Negro Ned were harbored in Philadelphia, for as she noted "there are people that encourage her Negroes by giving them liquor and harboring them in houses, to her great detriment and loss." She threatened such miscreants with the law.<sup>47</sup>

Pennsylvania masters especially feared ships in the harbor. In 1746 Hugh Patrick of Lancaster County "supposed" that his runaways Edward Purcell and John Rogharty "intend to come to Philadelphia in order to go on board some ships there, and that they have some confederates, that will assist them in getting off." In 1752 an anonymous person bought a large advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to lecture his or her propertied country men about adopting policies to lessen the alarmingly large number of runaways. The advertiser was particularly concerned about servants hanging around the Philadelphia docks who befriended "the baser sort of seafaring men" in order to seek sanctuary among their fellow workers on board outward vessels. He advised property holders to take action "that suspicious fellows, lurking on board ships or hanging frequently on evenings about them at the wharfs, might meet with such treatment as shall discover to themselves they are suspected and discourage them from visiting in so familiar a manner, and consequently prevent them from commencing shipmates."<sup>48</sup>

Masters also believed that many wagons heading west contained fugitives. In 1754 John Hopkins, tavernkeeper of Pequa, thought his German servant Maria Kelcon was already far away, "as there were several Dutch wagons passing along the road the same time she went, it is supposed she went in one of them." In 1750 Alexander Morgan, Waterford Township, New Jersey, believed his young Irish servant, Edward Oliff, age nineteen, had been seen in Philadelphia, had found help, and is "supposed to have gone in a wagon to place called Sweet Arrow beyond Lancaster town."<sup>49</sup>

In short, a description of the differences between New England and Delaware Valley white runaways not only complicates the Franklin runaway story but also interrogates the known labels—the enigma of why Pennsylvania continues to be known among historians as "the best poor man's country," whatever the accumulated evidence that shows a permanent white subservient class stuck in or near servitude, and the enigma of why Massachusetts

continues to maintain an image as a stodgy and calcified society despite the achieved equity for white male workers and the lack of young and especially older fugitives or so few white fugitives at all.

First, some explanation can be had by simply observing that American historians tend to have a strong classical liberal bias, identifying political interference in the economy to help the poor and the laborer as foreign, pre-modern, medieval, or socialistic, ill-advised, and futile, while championing all emancipations from such governmental or communal interference as modern and progressive, no matter the real results or the lack of any real inquiry.<sup>50</sup> Insofar as Massachusetts and most of New England with their several hundred sovereign worker towns were far more regulated and more obviously political than Pennsylvania, where even Philadelphia lacked a popular government, it makes perfect sense that most historians would identify Pennsylvania as a modern and liberal society, one good for workers, and Massachusetts as a dysfunctional and medieval society, no matter the social and economic facts.

Yet, while historians' ideology explains some of the disparity between the dominant narrative and reality, it hardly explains why eighteenth-century contemporaries, with few exceptions, held the exact same mix of images—identifying apparently brutal Pennsylvania as “the best poor man's country” and equitable Massachusetts as a forbidding and restricting place. As noted, the term the “best poor man's country” was seemingly invented by a servant who failed miserably and persistently in Pennsylvania.<sup>51</sup>

In explaining this phenomenon, the dramatic contrast in the number of runaways can reveal yet another story. If indentured servants often fared badly in Pennsylvania and ran, at least these poor workers were there welcomed both as immigrants and by their future employers as runaways. On the other hand, Massachusetts gained impressive equity for workers largely by restricting and regulating the outside poor. Thus, although widely known as a leveling society in the eighteenth century, Massachusetts was also famous as an unwelcoming, xenophobic place where foreign workers and even gents were scorned by the locals. For example, the popular writer Edward Ward noted from London that in New England “every stranger that comes into the country shall find they will deal with him to this day, as if the Devil were in them.” A West Indian planter observed in 1732 that “the inhabitants of New England, and especially of Boston, always express a Jewish antipathy to strangers, even to their fellow subjects of England.” And he concluded confidently that “hospitality is not in the New England catalogue of virtues, but stands for a vice.”<sup>52</sup> Whatever its achievements in internal equity, by being

hostile to the external poor New England forfeited fame as a good, much less best, poor man's country.

While numbers reveal much about the contemporary perception of the differing labor systems, the content of the advertisements also supply an important clue why Pennsylvania seemed in the eyes of even distressed runaways the more open society. Whatever New England's reputation as the source of American letters, Pennsylvania masters wrote the livelier advertisements. Mid-Atlantic advertisements tended to dramatize the conflict between masters and servants over identity. The advertisements show that imaginative self-fashioning was at play among the poor in Pennsylvania in ways it was not evidently in play in New England (and it was such seemingly extravagant self-fashioning that was a cause of Franklin's desertion).

Pennsylvania runaway advertisements were often efforts to glue an identity on the runaways whose interest and sometimes passion was to obliterate their old identity and create a dramatically new one.<sup>53</sup> In an open labor market, it was in the interest of many servants to erase their old identities. If a worker could make the person in the contract invisible, the person freed from an established social identity need not suffer four years of unpaid work. They could hire themselves under a new name at good wages to eager employers and assert talents so far unappreciated. Shadow identities could spring into exuberant light. Thus, in the Delaware Valley, once a servant became a new man or woman, he or she could enjoy or create an American dream or at least aspire to do so.

The men and women who held their contracts for labor struggled to attach a permanent historical identity on the runaway. However, this was not easy in an age without fingerprints, photographs, Social Security numbers, or credit cards. In the vast spaces of Pennsylvania, a man or woman could disappear without a trace, especially since there were so many invisible borders to cross—ethnic groups and languages. Employers were happy to hire cheap labor if it was plausibly legal. In Massachusetts this drama of vanishing and reappearing identities was largely absent since for whites at least it paid to have a social identity to establish membership in a town and to thereby gain access to education, welfare, able spouses, and labor protection. New England workers wanted to try to prove settlement in a town, while Pennsylvania workers often denied they were ever there.

Pennsylvania advertisements make it clear that the fugitive servants were eager to shed the names on the contract whatever their historical and sentimental meaning to them and to take on any name that was convenient

or plausible. Virtually every Pennsylvania advertisement warned that the runaway would or had changed his or her name, while only one New England advertisement for a white runaway did so.<sup>54</sup> A few Pennsylvania advertisements included no name at all largely because the name was so easily discarded and thus played no useful role in identification. However, most masters, perhaps out of habit, did give names to their servants. In 1737 Richard Noland of Trenton, New Jersey, noted that his runaway Irish servant had the name Arthur Holland, "but very often changes it." Servants often changed their name to exploit available documents to baffle vigilant citizens and constables (discussions of documents in virtually all Pennsylvania advertisements reflect the intensity of the enforcement measures against running away). In a March 1733 advertisement, Philadelphia tanner Edmund Farrell noted that his runaway Irish servant man, Alexander Nelson, age twenty-four, had "the old indentures of one James McDaniel, now free, and the pass of the said McDaniel out of Maryland and probably may use his name."<sup>55</sup>

Masters knew that clothes were more difficult to discard or replace in a preindustrial world and thereby made them a key to making an identity adhesive. The largest section of most runaway advertisements in both New England and Pennsylvania described the clothes the servant wore when last seen. Labor masters remembered vividly and exactly their servants' clothes and they expected their readers to see and remember sartorial detail of working folk with exactitude that would be considered astonishing today. Of course poor people rarely changed outfits. John Read in 1738 noted about his runaway servant James Downing that he "had on when he went away a good felt hat, white quilted cap, an old drab-colored broad cloth coat full trimmed with open sleeves, and not pockets, an old reddish-colored waistcoat without sleeves, old course kersey breeches, two pair of bluish stockings, good shoes and buckles."<sup>56</sup> Such detail was universal. However, the advertisements also indicate that servants invented tricks to baffle textile identification. In Pennsylvania many servants stole the master's clothes or another servant's clothes in order to invent a new identity with a new wardrobe. For example, when John Impy and a Welsh lad fled from Henry Smith of Tulpehocken, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Impy stole his master's clothes and a horse, the implements of gentility. "Tis thought," noted Henry Smith, "John Impy will take upon him to be a gentleman and make the other his man."<sup>57</sup>

In retaliation, Pennsylvania masters used tattoos to keep servants from simply shedding their clothes and thereby their historical identities. In all the New England advertisements not a single white runaway sported a tattoo.

However, some fifty Pennsylvania white runaways had tattoos or brands imprinted on their bodies by their masters or merchant suppliers in order to deter escapes and aid in recaptures. Many servants, particularly from Quaker districts, had the initials of their names tattooed with gunpowder on their hands, usually the left hand near the thumb. Gunpowder tattoos were created by etching or cutting the skin with a needle and plugging the wounded skin with gunpowder. The burning procedure was not intensely painful or so it is said.<sup>58</sup>

For example, Joseph Brittain of Crosswicks, New Jersey, reported that his runaway servant John Henry had "J.H. prickt with gunpowder on one of his hands."<sup>59</sup> Masters tattooed women as well. Abraham Shelley of Philadelphia reported that his Irish runaway Eleanor Cavanaugh alias Plunkett age thirty-five "had E.P. in blue wrote with gunpowder on the back of her left hand, she is a good spinner."<sup>60</sup> In 1785 a visiting Englishman, Charles Varlo, published his careful assessment of Pennsylvania agriculture. Citing that runaway servants were "a public evil" that "has long prevailed, and still seems to gain ground," he advised in his *A New System of Husbandry from Many Years Experience* that the Middle States pass a law making it legal and obligatory to tattoo servants on the upper arm with the name of the master, the servant's year of first contract, and the number of years to serve. He thought such widespread expert tattooing would virtually end running away. Varlo's idea was an elaboration of a practice long in use in Pennsylvania and so the idea would probably not have worked, as the number of fleeing tattooed servants in the newspapers attest.<sup>61</sup>

In reality the identities of both masters and servants was far more plastic than such tattoos could depict. Much of this conversation was lost in New England where work was dignified and well rewarded, but where a restricted labor market, replete with thousands of town officers, while producing such beneficial results, also made social identity far more adhesive and more monotonous. If New England was externally and objectively "the best poor man's country" it was perhaps not internally or psychologically. It restricted the workers' imaginations and limited horizons for their imagined ambitions. Here is where both of the Benjamin Franklin runaway stories overlap.<sup>62</sup>

One of the most attractive features of the Pennsylvania advertisements is the play or contest between the expected appearance and identity of a runaway, the runaways' self-definitions, and the masters' awareness of their servants' radically alternative appearances, self-images, and definitions. Pennsylvania provided servants not only with onerous work but also with

an open labor market, vast spaces, and a host of publicized promises and therefore with the ability to dream of a dramatically new versions of themselves.<sup>63</sup> Such was often the goal of running away—leaving an old name and identity behind. Yet, as masters knew, the new identity was often hatched in servitude. Assertions of value in servitude served both as the beginnings of a new identity, a ruse to fool the servant police, and perhaps as an escape from self. Servants were supposed to be shame-faced (have “a down look”), be bedraggled, illiterate, and untalented. In fact, many runaways were quite different, according to their masters, and, if this displeased their masters, it was ironically the masters who paid attention and then paid good money to broadcast their servants’ talents and eccentricities—often their new and preferred identities. Masters hoped that perceiving and announcing these talents made these runaways more easily identifiable and thus encapsulated them in the stories they told about runaways.

Some of the servants’ inventions were elaborate creations and clearly bogus. William Smith, a shoemaker in Philadelphia, noted in 1733 that John Blowden, a runaway, “has a smooth tongue and sometimes passes for a gentleman, sometimes for a merchant, and sometimes for a doctor.” Blowden appeared at least three times in the Philadelphia newspapers. In 1731 Arthur Wells noted that Blowden, who was both a shoemaker and a maker of artificial flowers, had

once before gone near six months, the greatest part of which time he spent in lurking about from one part of the country to another: when he unaccountably imposed upon the country people in several places and persuaded them to conceal him time after time, and accommodate him with their best victuals, drink, and lodging, by strange invented stories, that he was a rich man’s son in Philadelphia, and was obliged to abscond for a little time while his father made up some differences or trouble he was engaged in, sometimes he said he was a doctor or surgeon.<sup>64</sup>

While some servants took on roles beyond their historical dignity, other servants sought freedom by reducing their historical honor, by using the mask of madness or debility. In 1745 John Cross of New Jersey noted that the Irish runaway James Fitzgerald “appears to be half-witted, but is a sharp fellow, and a good scholar, can write and cipher very well.” In 1752 John McCullough of Lancaster County noted that the Irish runaway John Corry, age twenty-five,

actually wrote a good hand, but “it is thought he will pretend to be silly, and may go a begging.”<sup>65</sup>

In many cases, however, the ruse or invention arguably coincided with reality. John Leadlie noted in 1754 that Conrad Hedrick Earns, a German, “professes to be a doctor, and has cupping boxes of glass, and other instruments for cupping and bleeding, and perhaps may pass for a tailor, knowing something of that business, but little of either.”<sup>66</sup> Clearly Earns intended to be a doctor and perhaps effectively was. A common term in the advertisements was the phrase “pretends to.” Servants, according to their masters, “pretended to” all sorts of skills and abilities, which they supposedly did not have. Here were the suppressed and invalidated aspirations of the servants which the masters had nonetheless to acknowledge and literally advertise in order to help the public recognize the runaways’ most likely new identities.

In order to discover such elusive and plastic servants, masters filled the *Pennsylvania Gazette* with many small biographies of some of the colonies’ most humble, if more talented, productive, and colorful inhabitants. The lives of these servants were complicated and all their histories deserve full exposure, but one example of the history of talented servants must suffice here. Edward Rubie ran from Gabriel Coppner of Salem, New Jersey, in 1757. His master described him as a middle-aged man with a long and varied career:

Says he was bred in the city of Cork and that he served his time in Philadelphia to a ship carpenter: pretends to know something of sawing with a whip saw; has been privateering and in the army and says he was discharged in Cape Breton; has a brother living in the highlands of York, where he taught school some time from whence he ran away and came to Piles Grove, in Salem County, where he also taught school for some time then ran away from his master took a horse with him, forged an order on Captain Cox in Philadelphia, got some money, as advertised in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and put in York goal over Susquehanna from whence he was brought and put into Salem goal, and there became an indentured servant for three years from February 1757.<sup>67</sup>

Rubie’s proven skills, aside from eluding authorities, included military prowess and experience on land and sea, sawyering, carpentry, advanced literacy, and pedagogy.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps because they had literary skills, allowing them to

forge passes easily, labor masters sought several other schoolmasters. The reality that many schoolteachers in Pennsylvania were life-long servants highlights the different cultures of the two regions.

Though many poor white men suffered in Pennsylvania, despite their talents, the advertisements highlight the colony's ability to stir dreams by welcoming the poor and seducing them with the possibilities of new selves. Thus, Pennsylvania had a justified claim to being "the best poor man's country." At the same time, by the mid-eighteenth century Massachusetts and New England generally gained a reputation as a dangerously egalitarian society with an overly empowered group of mechanics and farm laborers.<sup>69</sup>

The differences among the two political economies and labor systems clashed on the ground in the second half of the eighteenth century in north-east Pennsylvania, especially in the Wyoming Valley of the Susquehanna River, in a long and bloody war. Nonetheless, the Yankee-Pennamite wars would eventually assist a partial blending of the two systems.

Looking for more land to settle townships to relieve overcrowded towns in eastern Connecticut, Connecticut Yankees in the 1750s claimed that their charter entitled them to land in Pennsylvania. They founded the Susquehanna Company and the First and Second Delaware Companies to settle the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania—in New England town fashion. These companies purchased large tracts of land along the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers from the Iroquois at the Albany Congress of 1754. New England town settlement of the Wyoming Valley started in the 1760s. This invasion sparked the Yankee-Pennamite wars that raged from 1769 to 1799. Major events included the alliance between the settling Yankees and the notorious Paxton Boys, the massacre of hundreds of New England settlers by Indians in 1778, the kidnapping by New England settlers of Timothy Pickering in 1788, and numerous bloody and fatal affrays that took hundreds of lives and distressed thousands. The Yankee-Pennamite wars threatened to disrupt the American effort against England. Until the 1800s the majority of these new Yankee settlers in Pennsylvania insisted on being under the government of Connecticut and when Connecticut renounced such a claim, the settlers threatened to form a new state. After 1800 the settlers increasingly accepted Pennsylvania land titles, albeit on their own terms.<sup>70</sup>

The initial hatred between the Pennamite landlords and Yankees is hard to exaggerate. As late as 1801, Tench Coxe, assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury, described the Yankee inhabitants of the Wyoming Valley as "men worse than savages or beasts of prey." Earlier Pennsylvania official



William Maclay noted about these settlers that “if Hell is justly considered as the rendezvous of rascals, we cannot entertain a doubt of Wyoming being the place. Burn’d hands, cut ears, and etc. are considered as the certain certificates of superior merit.” Pennsylvania landowners identified the region as the place where the Delaware Valley runaways flocked to join New England levelers. An article in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* described the Wyoming settlers as “miscreants, composed of the dregs of the Colony of Connecticut, Pendergrass’s gang of rioters from New York Government, and horse-stealers, debtors, and other runaways from different Governments.” Governor John Penn called them “the vilest rabble on the face of the earth.” The Yankees presence threatened the Pennsylvania labor system. At the same time, Yankee settlers saw Pennsylvania landlords as Tories, land-jobbers, and monopolists “who wish to destroy the Yankees from the face of the earth that they may enjoy the lands our hands have cultivated and our blood enriched.” This was hardly love at first sight.<sup>71</sup>

Pennsylvanians with Indian allies managed in 1778 to kill and scatter the Yankee settlers and repeated their accomplishment several times thereafter. Nevertheless, Yankees kept arriving in the Wyoming Valley and by the 1790s dominated and developed northeastern Pennsylvania. Their labor and political system prevailed temporarily in an influential section of Pennsylvania. In their system, as noted, landowners and laborers were often the same people; family and town labor systems intermeshed; children were forced to work and be educated, and were rewarded for both; and political power was widely distributed at the local level in town meetings. The New England system provided more labor to transform the frontier, especially on marginal lands, than did the Pennsylvania system, characterized by the recruitment of prosperous Pennsylvania farmers, their tenants, their servants, and distressed laborers. On timber-filled hilly land, the Yankees’ labor provided inexpensive labor and military might.

It was not, as Paul B. Moyer has shown, simply a matter of class warfare. Two hierarchal systems were in play. In northeast Pennsylvania, Yankee proprietors, some self-styled gentlemen, got the upper hand over their Pennsylvania counterparts, and more profit, by offering half their town lands to New England settlers who would work, rule themselves in town meetings, and fight in militias. Silas Pepoon, owner of the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, explained to fellow land speculator Pennsylvanian James Strawbridge that giving half his frontier land to Yankees in return for their settlement would profit him more than seeking Pennsylvania tenants at high rents.

The Yankees' labor, he noted, would make Strawbridge's remaining land far more valuable.<sup>72</sup>

Some Middle State land developers learned the lesson. As Alan Taylor has brilliantly shown, the Burlington, New Jersey, land speculator William Cooper achieved unusual success, fame, and wealth in the 1790s at his frontier town of Cooperstown in hilly central New York at the head of the Susquehanna River by recruiting and tolerating Yankees. "This valuable country is to be settled it appears to me," noted Cooper, "by the heretofore Priest-ridden and oppressed people of New England." Instead of fearing Yankees, he encouraged their settlement and accepted in part the Yankee political economy. In Cooper's view, Yankees were "civil, well-informed, and very sagacious, so that a wise stranger would be much apter to conform at once to their usage than to begin by teaching them better." On land scorned by Pennsylvania farmers, his Yankee settlers established potash works and eventually grew marketable wheat, establishing a viable economy in Cooperstown.<sup>73</sup>

The Yankee labor system and their culture thereby grew on the Pennsylvania and New York frontiers. Transplanted northeastern Pennsylvania Yankees successfully campaigned in 1835 to get Pennsylvania to adopt a version of the New England common school system, bringing popular education to Pennsylvania for the first time.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, inconvenienced and exhausted by the demands of their workers, Massachusetts manufacturers would eventually encourage desperate immigrant labor and Massachusetts Yankees would ungraciously accept them.<sup>75</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the systems blended. Yet it is perhaps more than nostalgia to believe that currently in New England and the Mid-Atlantic regions more than the mere shadows of the once-distinctive, vivid, and conflicting, neighboring eighteenth-century systems of leveling and running still remain.

## NOTES

1. The blacks and Indian ran from Marshfield, Newport, and Woburn respectively and all the white servants from Boston. *Boston Newsletter*, August, 16, 1723, October 10, 1723, November 29, 1723; *Boston Gazette*, July 8, 1723; *New England Courier*, June 6, 1723.
2. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al., 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 73, 77.
3. According to the Philadelphia newspapers, in 1723 at least five blacks and no less than twenty-six whites illegally left their masters and earned advertisements. In 1723 the ratio was nine Pennsylvania white runaways to one New England white runaway and the real ratio

- per population—Massachusetts having been settled earlier than Pennsylvania—was thirty Pennsylvania white runaways to one white New England runaway. The Pennsylvania runaways' notices are all from the *American Weekly Mercury*. They ran from Delaware, New Jersey, and chiefly Pennsylvania masters.
4. For example, once a newspaper owner, he made money from runaway advertisements that he would have not made in Boston. In the 255 issues of the Franklin family's Boston newspaper, the *New England Courant*, the Franklins published only eighteen runaway advertisements at a profit of only a few pounds sterling, while the newspaper Franklin purchased, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, published more than six thousand runaway advertisements from 1728 to 1796, profiting from the massive number of runaways in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, as well as Maryland and Virginia. At seven shillings per advertisement, Franklin gained at least £2135 (many masters advertised two or three times for the same servant). See Farley Grubb, *Runaway Servants, Convicts, and Apprentices Advertised in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728–1796* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992); David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 10–23.
  5. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 53–70.
  6. For an example of the image's retention see James Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), which enjoyed a new edition in 2002. Lemon's depiction of Pennsylvania as a vibrant liberal society is supported by the influential: Jack P. Green, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 137–41.
  7. On Pennsylvania these studies include Billy Gordon Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring Poor, 1750–1880* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Sharon V. Salinger, *To Serve Well and Faithfully: Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania 1682–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jack D. Marietta and G. S. Rowe, *Troubled Experiment: Crime and Justice in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Simon Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (October 1986): 542–69; Lucy Simler, "The Landless Worker: An Index of Economic and Social Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania 1750–1820," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 (April 1990): 113–99. On relative economic and political equity in Massachusetts and Connecticut, see Robert E. Brown, *Middle Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968); Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1970); Edward M. Cook Jr., *The Fathers of the Town* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Gloria Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Land and Culture in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Janet Siskind, *Rum and Axes: The Rise of a Connecticut Merchant Family, 1795–1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); J. M. Opal, *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Barry Levy, *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from Its Founding to the Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

8. This and the following analysis are based on scrutiny of two Delaware Valley newspapers and nine Boston area newspapers between 1720 and 1760. New England— or Boston-area newspapers are *Boston Evening Post*, *Boston Gazette*, *Boston Newsletter*, *Boston Post-Boy*, *New England Courant*, *New England Weekly Journal*, *New Hampshire Gazette*, *New London Summary*, and *Weekly Rehearsal*. Philadelphia or Delaware Valley newspapers include *American Weekly Mercury* and *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Advertisements were included for Boston only if the masters and runaways occurred in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Advertisements for the Delaware Valley were included only if the masters and runaways occurred in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. Between 1720 and 1760 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware masters sought 280 black, biracial, and Indians runaway slaves. New England masters sought 409 black, Indian, or biracial slaves. In 1740 the New England colonies had 8500 blacks and Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware nearly 7500 blacks. The 4-to-3 ratio in favor of New England black runaways was proportionate to population, not evidence of any clear difference in the way the two regions treated or policed slaves.
9. Note that the differential among New England and the Delaware Valley runaways grew as the Delaware Valley population grew, with the exception of the onset of the French and Indian War. Then a rebellion by the Delaware Indians turned the Pennsylvania frontier bloody, slowing immigration, and it became difficult for the eastern runaways to find employment on the western frontier. Pennsylvania servants stayed home during these years. However, by 1760, as the frontier calmed down and new servants arrived in the colonies, whites running away renewed with gusto.
10. Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 40–41, 172; Salinger, *To Serve Well and Faithfully*, 179.
11. *A Volume of Records Relating to the Early History of Boston Containing Miscellaneous Papers*, Twenty-Ninth Report Boston Records (Boston: Municipal Printing Company, 1900), 245–312. This would change with the Irish immigration in the 1840s.
12. *Ibid.*, 230–43.
13. Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 209.
14. For provincial populations, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 1975), 2:1168. For Boston and Philadelphia, Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 409.
15. John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 108, 199. On fishing see Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Another very good account of the New England economy is Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).
16. In 1792 the Inspector General's Office, Custom House, London, attached a table giving an account of the vessels built in the several colonies in the years 1769, 1770, and 1771. In those years, the

- report said the colonies built 64,793 tons of shipping. Massachusetts produced 35 percent of all the American tonnage and New England produced 68 percent of all the ships. The Middle Colonies produced 14 percent of the ship tonnage and the South produced 18 percent of the ship tonnage. Labor systems had much to do with New England's commanding lead, for the best wood for building ships, with the exception of masts, grew south of New England. See H. G. Fassett, ed., *The Shipbuilding Business in the USA*, vol. 1 (New York: Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, 1970), 62–63. For timber, see John G. B. Hutchins, *The American Maritime Industries and Public Policy, 1789–1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 71–102.
17. James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 114–36. The high productivity of the New England economy is also discussed in Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*.
  18. By “political economy” I mean the intersection of politics and the creation and distribution of wealth. An assumption of this essay is that economics and politics cannot be separated. For extended discussion, see Levy, *Town Born*, chap. 1. For another important study of the economic, political, and military impact of the New England town in comparative perspective, see Elizabeth Mancke, *Fault Lines of Empire: Political Differentiation in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, 1760–1830* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
  19. For examples and discussion see Levy, *Town Born*.
  20. A good overview is Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988).
  21. See David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
  22. See Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms*. A detailed discussion of the New England political economy is provided by Levy, *Town Born*.
  23. Ruth Wallis Herndon, “‘Proper’ Magistrates and Masters: Binding Out Poor Children in Southern New England, 1720–1820,” in Herndon and John E. Murray, *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprenticeship System in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009), 39–51.
  24. See Levy, *Town Born*, 153–82; Edward Jarvis, *Traditions and Reminiscences of Concord, Massachusetts, 1779–1878* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), for scenes of school violence.
  25. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 52–53; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 68.
  26. For children's mobility, see Levy, *Town Born*, 237–62.
  27. For the inclusiveness of eighteenth-century New England towns and lack of elite control under the principle of consensus, see Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms*. The economic role of the towns in productivity is discussed in Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*; Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: Norton, 1995); Levy, *Town Born*.
  28. Russell F. Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History* (New York: Norton, 1982), 26, 27, 166.
  29. John Woolman, *The Works of John Woolman* (New York: Garrett Press, 1970). In New England many Quakers were daring seafarers, suggesting that political economy, not just religion, was at play. For Quaker domesticity, see Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley, 1650–1780* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). See also J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York: St. Martin's

- Press, 1973). For childrearing in New England, see Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Knopf, 1977), and Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Knopf, 1991).
30. Jean Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).
  31. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*.
  32. William Moraley, *The Infortunate: The Voyage and Adventures of William Moraley*, ed. Susan E. Klepp and Billy G. Smith, 2nd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 53.
  33. See Alan Tully, *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726–1755* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). The economic benefits of the servant trade included not just the servants themselves but their careers and the careers of their children outside of servitude as tenant farmers, laborers, cottagers, and debtors. There needs to be more research on the structure of labor and social mobility in Pennsylvania.
  34. For an overview of colonial political systems see, Richard Beeman, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Lucy Simler found some town meeting records in Chester County, Pennsylvania, but examination of the town books shows little local activity compared to New England towns. One book had a single entry—the decision to buy a town book. It was apparently a bad decision. See Lucy Simler, “The Township: The Community of Rural Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 106 (January 1982): 41–68. For a vivid and detailed portrait of a protest in the early national period in Pennsylvania against the powerlessness of local populations, even property-holders, see Paul Douglas Newman, *Fries Rebellion: The Enduring Struggle for the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
  35. Levy, *Town Born*, 84–120.
  36. The fate of town less folk in New England is vividly described by Ruth Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). See also Douglas Jones, *Village and Seaport: Migration and Society in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 1981).
  37. In New England 133 runaways were described as white (18%); 128 as Irish (17%); 38 as English (5%); 354 as black or “mulatto” (48%) and 55 as Indian (11%) and the rest were Welsh, Scot, or German (6%). In the Delaware Valley 888 were described as white (33%); 885 as Irish (33%); 298 as English (11%); 202 as German (7%); 270 as black or “mulatto” (10%); and the rest Indians, Scots, and Welsh (6%). For sources see fig. 1.
  38. This will be made especially clear in a forthcoming book by Cornelia Dayton and Sharon Salinger, tentatively titled “Warning Out: Robert Love’s Search for Strangers in Pre-Revolutionary Boston.” I thank Salinger and Dayton for sharing chapters of their book.
  39. Unlike servants, running wives became a major phenomenon; see Mary Beth Sievens, *Stray Wives: Marital Conflict in Early National New England* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).
  40. For sources see fig. 1.
  41. See also Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*.
  42. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 21, 1753, May 3, 1739, June 17, 1742, and December, 23, 1746.

43. Susan Klepp and Billy Smith uncovered and introduced the autobiography of an almost-lifelong Pennsylvania servant, who nonetheless was a literate and talented man. See Moraley, *The Unfortunate*; see also Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*.
44. There is a crying need to compare the welfare systems of the various colonies.
45. For example among blacks, 27 percent ran with others in Pennsylvania, compared to just 10 percent in New England and among those described as white 29 percent ran with others in Pennsylvania compared to only 13 percent in New England. For sources, see fig. 1.
46. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 20, 1754.
47. Ibid., September 6, 1753, June 27, 1755, and July 28, 1748.
48. Ibid., April 10, 1746, and July 2, 1752.
49. Ibid., October 31, 1754, and April 17, 1750.
50. For the dominance of neoliberal thinking in labor history and economics, see Chris Tilly and Charles Tilly, *Work Under Capitalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997). A strongly argued neoliberal text is Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: NYU Press, 1984).
51. See Moraley, *The Unfortunate*, 89.
52. Edward Ward, *Boston in 1682 and 1699: A Trip to New England by Edward Ward and A Letter from New England by J.W.* (Providence, R.I.: Club for Colonial Reprints, 1905), 58; Anonymous, *A Comparison Between the British Sugar Islands and New England as They Relate to the Interest of Great Britain* (London: James Roberts, 1732), 24.
53. There have been many valuable readings of the advertisements. See David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56 (April 1999): 243–72; Newman, *Embodied History*. Emphasis here on political economy and comparative labor systems help read the advertisements within a specific psychological and economic context.
54. Identity creation was common among black runaways in New England, who resembled white runaways in Pennsylvania in their behavior.
55. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 6, 1737, and March 8, 1733.
56. Ibid., March 30, 1738. An important study of American textiles could be done from such advertisements, a testimony to the number of servants who shed their names but not their clothes.
57. Ibid., November 24, 1737.
58. The tattoo was arguably a better and kinder method of securing an investment in a free-labor market than the most popular alternative—an iron collar. In 1755 William Smith of Donegal, Lancaster County, reported that his runaway Irish servant, Francis McNealis, "had an iron collar on when he went away and has been several years in the country." Yet even Smith, who spent time and money fashioning it, did not believe that this vivid identification tag would last long. "'Tis thought he is gone in company with John Hogan . . . a blacksmith by trade," lamented Smith, "and may take off his collar." *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 20, 1755.
59. *American Weekly Mercury*, April 25, 1728.
60. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 26, 1744.
61. Charles Varlo, *A New System of Husbandry, from Many Years Experience* (Philadelphia: printed by subscription by the author, 1785), appendix.

62. The issue of New Englanders' emphasis on gaining comfortable independence for white males as opposed to supporting self-fashioning is discussed with depth and sophistication in Opal, *Beyond the Farm*.
63. The conversations in Pennsylvania taverns may have also played a vital role in these imaginings; see Peter Thompson, *Rum, Punch, and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).
64. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 15, 1733, and March 31, 1731.
65. *Ibid.*, December 15, 1745, and March 3, 1752.
66. *Ibid.*, June 13, 1754.
67. *Ibid.*, September 4, 1757.
68. *Ibid.*
69. Thomas Ingersoll, "'Riches and Honour were Rejected by them as Loathsome Vomit': The Fear of Leveling in New England," in *Inequality in Early America*, ed. C. G. Pestana and S. V. Salinger (Hanover, N.H.: Press of New England, 1999), 46–66.
70. The major work is Paul B. Moyer, *Wild Yankees: The Struggle for Independence Along Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Frontier* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007); see also Frederick J. Stefon, "The Wyoming Valley," in *Beyond Philadelphia: The American Revolution in the Pennsylvania Hinterland*, ed. John B. Frantz and William Pencak (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 133–52.
71. Moyer, *Wild Yankees*, 5, 140–44, 146; Julian Boyd, ed., *Susquehanna Company Papers*, 11 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press for the Wyoming Historical and Genealogical Society, 1962–1971), 3:216, 4:xi, 8:367.
72. Moyer, *Wild Yankees*, 104–5.
73. As quoted, with modernized spelling, in Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 95. However, Cooper's son, James Fennimore Cooper, virtually always depicted Yankees in his novels as villains.
74. Pauline Wolcott Spencer, *The Contribution of Connecticut to the Common School System of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, Pa.: New Era Printing Company, 1915).
75. Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790–1880*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826–1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).