

THE MID-ATLANTIC AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Abstract: This essay explores the mutual effects of the American Revolution and the Mid-Atlantic region on each other, with its principal emphasis on how the Revolution impacted the region, and somewhat less on the obverse consequences. Reviewing previously published and forthcoming arguments about how New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware were a “fabricated” regional entity—a construct of political, economic, and social intention as much as or perhaps more than spatial imagination and geographical expression—it suggests that the cumulative impacts of the Seven Years’ War, the British “imperial crisis” from 1763 to 1775, and the war of the American Revolution itself, uprooted and otherwise destroyed much of the spatial framing systems of the earlier colonial era. Notwithstanding these consequences, the article argues that the region’s structural and functional integrity, as a shaper of both elite and more ordinary experience, largely survived the collapse and peeling away of this colonial “scaffolding.” It offers some tentative suggestions about how that improbable outcome may have obtained, and proposes some areas to which future research attention to the Mid-Atlantic should be paid.

Keywords: Mid-Atlantic historiography; American Revolution; Mid-Atlantic colonies; New York; New Jersey; Pennsylvania; Delaware; Eastern American regions; Mid-Atlantic region

*T*hinking about the Mid-Atlantic region in the Revolutionary and Early Republic eras raises two different, if fairly obvious and

basically symmetrical, questions: how did the region affect the Revolution, and what enduring impacts did that event have on the region? The former question might begin with a few counterfactual imaginaries. What if independence had not been declared (or been only partly declared) because Pennsylvania's voters rejected it in May of 1776 (which they effectively did), and because John Adams and his allies in the Continental Congress, mindful of disorders in Boston during the Stamp Act crisis, considered but finally declined to help a group of radical—but to them dangerous and socially inferior—local agents overthrow an elected provincial government so that the colony's delegates could be instructed to vote "yes"? Or what if New York's delegates, days or weeks late in signing the Declaration and knowing the deep political divisions back at home, had quietly left Philadelphia without acting on the matter?

Adams's fabled 1818 metaphor about the timing of independence might have needed to describe "making *eleven* clocks strike at *more or less* the same time." No declaration of *anything* was required for committed insurgent groups to shift from organizational militancy to armed resistance, but the region's stubborn indifference to growing calls for self-rule from the colonies to its northeast and south should not be dismissed as the colorful death rattle of a doomed *ancien regime*. At the pleasure of kings, generals, and congressmen, the Revolution's war would undoubtedly still have surged into the area between the Hudson and Potomac rivers, but it would have gone there without the presumably energizing legitimization of unanimously proclaimed and well-articulated "self-evident truths."¹

What if General John Burgoyne had packed lightly, marched more briskly, and reached Albany, or if his shrewd extraction of a *convention* treaty after his defeat at Saratoga rather than a traditional surrender had cowed Continental congressmen legislating morosely in York, Pennsylvania? Louis XVI, with the solvent effects of the Enlightenment on his own *ancien regime* illustrated by the approach of the dying Voltaire toward Paris, might have declined to seek revenge against his British counterpart, George III, with a risky American alliance. With no global war against France looming, British ministers might not have abandoned Philadelphia for a quixotic pacification campaign in the Lower South. Historians may savor Benjamin Franklin's reported quip in a Paris salon in late 1777 that Philadelphia had "*taken*" General Howe, but who can read the sullen complaints of congressmen in York that winter and predict the success of a rebellion steered by lawmakers permanently confined to small interior towns, and relying on an inexperienced army to pacify the hinterlands of two port cities still in the hands of Redcoats?²

We tell students that counterfactual analysis is alluring but a hopelessly weak tool for historical understanding. But so is reading back from known outcomes to causal circumstances. Whatever their limitations as analytical methodology, asking such “what if” questions forces us to acknowledge the forbidding terrain offered by New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware to the social, economic, political, and military processes that became “The Revolution.” Members of the region’s divided political classes were comparably educated to the wiggled elites who came to Philadelphia from Savannah, Charleston, Williamsburg, Annapolis, Hartford, and Boston to oppose the Intolerable Acts in 1774–75. They read the same books and pamphlets, consumed the same British exports, worried similarly about the political and moral consequences of that consumption, and debated the same limited array of mostly unattractive remedies. But their merchants had found different niches in the Atlantic economy, their commodities had not been as regulated or taxed as those of the Chesapeake or New England regions, and many of them embraced a “logic of moderation” that balked at confrontation if compromise was possible. In the hinterlands of their seaports, many of the rural commodity producers whom they claimed to “represent” spoke with literally different voices on these and other issues. We might even ask if the region’s diagnostic trait of pragmatic toleration (sometimes without very much real tolerance) in a plural society as a way of maximizing and protecting its longstanding material prosperity can help to explain its leaders’ inclination to make different, and perhaps somewhat riskier, bets on the moral balance between corruption and virtue, or debt and dependence, than did New England minister-magistrates or Chesapeake and Carolina planters.³

It may be wise here to shift to the question of the Revolution’s impact on the region. I have called the Middle Colonies a *fabricated* region. All geographical entities or phenomena, of course, are *constructions* of human consciousness—of habits and vocabularies, of environmental perceptions and perspectives, and of the boundary-making acts that proceed from those things. This must have been so between Connecticut and Maryland, but I have found little evidence—none really—of contemporary articulated consciousness by people living in these places of their being the “Middle” part of *anything*. Thirty-two years ago Robert Gough warned that positing regional characteristics across this terrain would “obscure more than clarify” complex realities on the ground. That assertion drew me into the debate about early American regional structures and I would still reject his wider argument. But it cannot be denied that the spatial mentalities that characterized denizens of

the “Motley Middle” in the eighteenth century were behavioral impulses or predilections more than they were expressive or cognitive phenomena.⁴

To put in a nutshell what I am straining to squeeze into a large book, early Dutch settlers at Manhattan and Fort Orange (Albany), and investors in Amsterdam, by a kind of energetic inadvertence persisting over two generations, created a dispersed, amoebic, spatial entity out of a tertiary continental enclave that, by resonating with similar Indian geopolitics, sustained trade, agricultural, social, and domestic functions, but not very much in the way of politics or government. That entity was easy enough for the restored Stuart regime to conquer in 1664, but it looked deceptively severable to the Duke of York, to his militarized household of retainers, and to his brother, King Charles II. So sever it they did, into New York, Pennsylvania, *two* New Jerseys, and a string of settlements on the lower Delaware, to gratify the expectations of loyal allies and to make the coastline look busy enough on the map to discourage any reconquerors.

The conquest part worked out, sort of, but the severance process faltered from the start. It could not dissuade or prevent colonists on the ground from continuing to pursue their interests across vaguely inscribed new provincial boundaries as if they did not exist. What it severed instead was the jurisdictional ability of infant provinces to constrain, contest, or even effectively respond to such behaviors, making a difficult-to-govern place potentially all but ungovernable. A few able executives in the first decade gamely kept these problems in check. But the surge of Quaker settlers into the Delaware Valley after 1676 ignited explosive development energies that threatened to overwhelm the region and to engulf or destroy its primal province, New York. The response of lesser Stuart governors and functionaries after 1683, to seek a political “*do over*” by annulling these new colonies and reassembling New York in the footprint of New Netherland, also failed. In the decade of the Glorious Revolution, the collapse of the Dominion of New England, and the connections drawn by John Locke between liberty and property as things requisite to each other, no confiscation of the proprietors’ new territorial rights was possible.⁵

Into the breach stepped two generations of regional actors, personified by William Penn, and by men he employed, or by the colonial and imperial agents with whom they transacted. Penn, a radical Whig, utopian pacifist, and businessman, had complex ties to the Stuart regime. He displayed a parental ferocity when interposing himself between his colony and any forces that seemed to threaten it, but he knew that unchecked cross-border

disorders would hurt his interests as much as anyone's. From the day of his arrival at Philadelphia in late 1682 he developed and nurtured complex informal networks of cooperation and measured contestation with imperial and proprietary agents in New York and both Jerseys. He handed these soft assets, by now intangible geopolitical ligaments, to his American surrogate, James Logan, early in the eighteenth century. Logan, as a tactician to Penn's strategist, administered and elaborated them for three decades. From that beginning, the Middle Colonies were characterized by interprovincial structures that had no official governance standing, but that effectively allowed those places to be governable.

Those structures and the processes involved in their creation have been described before, and I intrude too far already on Dan Richter's designated chronological turf, but the anchoring beams of this "fabricated" regional exoskeleton were a royalist hub centered in New York City, a proprietary hearth in Philadelphia, and an indigenous pillar of alliance-making planted at the ceremonial council fire of the Five Nations at Onondaga in Iroquoia. This resilient system of relationships and mechanisms, albeit unauthorized in imperial discourse or theory, mostly worked, and it allows us to recall colonial Mid-Atlantic societies as having been dynamic and even turbulent in character, but never really chaotic and certainly not anarchic or dysfunctional.

The Revolution uprooted and destroyed these beams and shredded many connecting links between them, from Albany to Annapolis, Barnegat to Bedford, and Montauk to Monocacy. In rights-and-property terms, the "biggest losers" of the Revolution were George III, the Penn Family, and the Iroquois Confederacy. British power fled from America from the same spot in Manhattan in 1783 where the Duke of York's conquistadors landed more than a century before. The center of gravity for the Pennsylvania proprietorship was already back in England when the imperial crisis began in 1763. With an inexperienced third-generation governor in America, the Penns barely contested their overthrow in 1776, but rather turned toward liquidating their American interests in return for compensation. The Iroquois learned that there was indeed such a thing as defeat-by-proxy at the hands of triumphant Americans, as there had not been for French-allied Indians at the hands of Anglo-American victors in 1763, and they were driven into exile.

These outcomes were as much the result of the existential fact of the British loss of the Revolution as they were of the specific manner of that loss in the Mid-Atlantic region. But cracks in the skeletal framework of regional stability forged by Penn and others after 1680 began to show by 1750, and

they widened in response to strains put on the region by the imperial crisis. The same geopolitical facts that made the Champlain-Hudson corridor an occult chute to disaster for Burgoyne in 1777 fostered brutal stalemates between French and British forces from 1755 to 1763. Its deceptively passable course from the St. Lawrence Valley to the Atlantic beguiled the strategic imaginations of military planners on all sides in both wars. This made New York the tactical partner of the New England colonies and brought “Yankee” and “Yorker” cultures into fraught contact with each other for the first time since their entanglements dissolved with the Dominion in 1688. Coincidentally or not, New York also joined in intense boundary contests with Connecticut, Massachusetts, and with “Green Mountain” insurgents in these years.

During the same generation, and in the same complex context of the Seven Years’ War, Pennsylvania settled its long border contest with Maryland. That “settlement,” symbolized by Mason’s and Dixon’s survey (1763–1767), however, itself had conflictual implications. If Dutch, Huguenot, and German-infused militias suddenly had to cooperate with alien Yankee provincial units at places like Ticonderoga in a plagued effort to break through to Canada, Pennsylvania’s soldier-cubs became the fortuitous and uneasy partners of culturally remote neighbors from Maryland and Virginia in risky probes into the western country between 1755 and 1758.

These military circumstances mirrored economic and social processes that were warping the Mid-Atlantic’s edges with New England and the Upper Chesapeake. The migration of Ethan Allen and his neighbors from western Connecticut into the Green Mountains coincided with the westward drift of Yankees onto the Highland, Cortlandt, and Philipsburg manors or patents in the lower Hudson Valley, and the incursion of landless Massachusetts farmers onto the Livingston and Van Rensselaer grants farther north. These movements provoked clashes over boundaries and property rights that persisted for generations and helped to draw New York’s geopolitical consciousness back to the north and east, where it had been forged in the seventeenth century. In the Chesapeake, the shift from tobacco to grain cultivation on the Delmarva Peninsula and west along the new Pennsylvania border was punctuated by briefer “wars” between Calvert and Penn title claimants. It made much of the upper Chesapeake a part of Philadelphia’s economic and political hinterland, and it brought into Pennsylvania’s political orbit men who were critical to the Revolution there on both sides, symbolized by John Dickinson and Joseph Galloway.⁶

These centrifugal stresses frayed the Mid-Atlantic core, especially at the juncture between New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. As with an opportunistic infection erupting in a compromised organism, Connecticut's claims based on its 1662 royal "sea-to-sea" charter spawned repeated settlement probes into the Susquehanna Valley of northeastern Pennsylvania. These incursions provoked secondary conflicts in western New Jersey and in adjacent parts of New York, but Thomas Penn in London and his Philadelphia agents were unable to mobilize a coalition of regional interests to resist it, as William Penn or James Logan would have routinely done earlier in the eighteenth century. They instead took passive advantage of the onset of the Seven Years' War in the 1750s, of an Indian massacre in the 1760s, and of the Revolution itself in the 1770s, to hold off or beat back the onslaught of settlers. But the jurisdictional question landed in the lap of the post-Revolutionary Confederation Congress to resolve on national terms.

The Revolution's war built on these early trends, and it ravaged the Mid-Atlantic. Some of the most iconic battles of that war, at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, and Yorktown, came in Massachusetts and Virginia, at the chronological and spatial edges of that war. But the stalemate that developed between those polities festered in local pockets, and it fueled fierce internecine clashes. The Hudson Valley, before and after Burgoyne's debacle, had to be held by the rebellious side. Its lower reaches, near the British-occupied hub of New York City, became a "Neutral Ground," ravaged by bandits, guerrillas, and deserters from both armies. Pennsylvania experienced only one year of military occupation, not seven like New York did. But that episode completed the work of uprooting the old colonial establishment that began with the pragmatic "withdrawal" of strict Quakers from political life in the mid-1750s. Franklin's ill-advised campaign for royal government traced a direct line between the decline of Quaker power and the acquiescent abdication of proprietary authority in 1776. The destruction of Iroquoia can be even more directly attributed to factors and forces intrinsic to the Mid-Atlantic. When the "seat of war" veered south after 1778, commanders-in-chief on both sides remained in the New York City area, facing off but mostly unwilling to engage each other with serious military force. Washington's only real strategic thrust in the north thereafter was led by General John Sullivan into Iroquoia in 1779. As a classic military campaign, the maneuver lacked dramatic clarity, but its destructive effects on the roots of Native society in the region led to Iroquois exile after 1783.

The relevant point here is that the regional edifice assembled by proprietary actors and imperial agents from the debris of Stuart triage after 1680 survived the Revolutionary War's destruction of its system of patchwork jurisdictional repair. Indeed, it barely wobbled in the 1780s as the scaffolding of that system tore loose and fell away. The edifice frayed a little on the Hudson side, where Loyalist exile, land redistribution, tenant resistance, and Green Mountain rebellion plagued New York well into the nineteenth century. And it blurred or smudged a bit to the south, where the legal boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland, the ragged agricultural divisions between declining tobacco and emerging grain cultures, and the differential economic erosion of slavery or the political geography of gradual abolition carved separate, shifting, and overlapping lines where previously there had been none. But the region's center basically held.

Or at least I say it did. The "proof set" for such an assertion is hard to imagine even in abstract terms, and empirical evidence for it based on focused research is barely suggestive yet. The bundle of relationships and relationship-based practices that I described above as a regional "exoskeleton," the handiwork of Pennsylvania officials like William Penn and James Logan, New York–New Jerseyans like Robert Hunter and William Burnet, or interprovincial proprietary functionaries like Lewis Morris, James Alexander, and many Livingstons, matured by the 1720s. During a generation of relative Atlantic peace, from 1715 to 1740, it was interwoven with and reinforced by professional actors, mainly merchants and lawyers working simultaneously across multiple colonies. It began to fray as a result of generational exhaustion and the familial nonreplacement of key members by 1750. Then it was shredded, uprooted, and dismantled by the imperial and military events described above. In its ascent, at its peak, and during its decline, it was "exoskeletal" in the way of an orthopedic splint, cast, or brace, stabilizing fragments of territory sundered by the restored Stuarts while underlying societal bones, organs, and soft tissue institutions bonded, wove, or knit back together into a functional sociocultural whole.

We have barely begun to know or even be curious about how the latter process worked. My own research has mainly hovered over the forest canopy, harvesting readily reached, high-hanging fruit in the abundantly preserved papers of regional elites with the material means to act in their own interests over distances and across provincial lines. The more enduringly critical "organic" work of spatial and cultural fusion done by migrating yeoman families or vagabond middling opportunists is less

likely to have been strategized, blueprinted, minuted, or expressed than the officious data in bureaucratic files, or at gubernatorial council sessions or proprietary shareholder meetings. But we will not know whether that is so until we have looked. And in any case, if the real “chorus” of Mid-Atlantic regionalization and regional consciousness was a work of kinetic behavior rather than linguistic expression, we will have to find or create new ways of “listening” to it, comprehending it, and interpreting its main themes and nuances.

The most fruitful ways to do this may be found in intraregional migration studies, best framed around much heralded but still only vaguely described “big data” “data mining,” or “geospatial” research strategies, and in a cautious but creative resort to the community studies methods that bloomed in early New England a generation ago but that never made much more than tentative appearances west of the Hudson River. By reconstructing, hopefully in vivid chorographical ways, the patterned mobility vectors of large numbers of ordinary people (both individually and in groups) across provincial boundaries but largely within the Mid-Atlantic terrain, and by describing the settlements they created when they reached their often quite temporary destinations, we may learn how the region could have survived functionally even as many of its defining colonial era institutional ligaments or tendons died with the Revolution.⁷

These mobility studies should probably be collaborative enterprises, conducted by teams of scholars with technical competences and access to data gathering and digital mapping tools. They would almost inevitably be substantially Colonial rather than specifically Revolutionary in their chronological focus, although close attention to the impacts of the frequent spatial traumas of Revolutionary events would be necessary and feasible. Community studies might reward more traditional individual investigative efforts, although they could most usefully be arranged in clusters within selected subregional spaces, and shaped around consistent sets of agreed-upon thematic subjects or framing questions. Some of the revealed migration pathways would necessarily be extraregional, crossing into or out of the Mid-Atlantic domain. Settlements knotted along such trajectories would predictably be described by many scholars in terms of the presumed relative contributing character of either the originating or the destination cultures. Such descriptions, however inevitably reductive, would provide starting places to address questions about the very nature or even the existence of separately cognizable regional cultures.

I would suggest a few places where such investigations might usefully begin. We need renewed attention to the Revolution and its long-term consequences in the Lower Hudson Valley. This area had a special place in progressive historians' accounts of the Revolution as a contest over "who should rule at home." Their "consensus" successors rejected this characterization across the colonies and later states, but they never convincingly refuted it for either New York *or* Pennsylvania. Modern scholars of *neo*-progressive bent have renewed the attention, especially to the Upper Hudson. There, where the manorial system survived the Revolution because of the political choices of its landowners, Martin Bruegel and John Brooke have shown, respectively, how a liberal "market society" and a "civil society" evolved into the mid-nineteenth century. Reeve Huston has described how Rensselaerswyck Manor rebounded as a social and economic enterprise, even to the unlikely extent of attracting Daniel Shays, the Massachusetts radical, as a resident, and how it took more than a generation for "anti-rent" forces to do to agricultural tenancy there what the Revolution substantially did in less than a decade downriver. For the middle valley, in Ulster County, Thomas Wermuth has also addressed the "market question," with somewhat more mixed or nuanced conclusions about the degree and nature of changes.⁸

In the cradle of progressive scholarship east of the river in Dutchess and Westchester counties, however, new research for the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary eras has been much thinner in scope or narrower in focus. The collapse of the manorial system because of the Loyalism of members of the Philipse and Van Cortlandt families is widely known as a legal and administrative matter, but how it evolved on the ground in the middle of a combat zone, and its long reach into the nineteenth century, are less well understood. Attention has been paid to the agonizingly slow demise of slavery by a combination of legislated emancipation and grudging private manumission. At the level of glancing allusions in articles and book chapters devoted to the Hudson Valley as a whole—with some essay collections focusing on the lower valley—the Revolutionary experience of the downstate counties has remained in play. But nothing like the overlapping monographic convergence that Brooke, Huston, Bruegel, and Wermuth bestowed on the areas north of Poughkeepsie, Kingston, or New Paltz has appeared in the last generation.⁹

This divergence can be a source of interpretive opportunity as much as surprise or chagrin. There is not much use in asking whether the Revolution here was a struggle over "who should rule at home." That it was seems to be a historiographically stable conclusion for now, although much more

work should be done on exactly how that struggle proceeded. But Orange and Westchester counties, and lower Dutchess County (the Philipse family's "Highland Patent," which became Putnam County in 1812), can provide useful control sites for some of the more sophisticated conclusions of the upriver studies. The probably different nature, degree, and timing of market transition on lands closer to the Atlantic Ocean than those in Albany, Columbia, and Ulster counties, should be measured rather than inferred. The microcosmic character and significance of the shift from manorial to freehold land tenure and communal life wrought by revolutionary confiscation and land redistribution programs rather than glacially slow political success by previously subordinate populations is well worth recovering. In 1965 Beatrice Reubens took an economist's axe to the 1939 findings of Harry Yoshpe about the meaning of that shift at Philipsburgh Manor in Westchester. The literature since has mostly shrugged, but we could instead investigate, or replicate it, on the Philipse Highland patent.¹⁰

In particular, the Lower Hudson offers an opportunity to get the relationship between social history and the "new" military history right. I often tell students that in the late eighteenth century there was not enough war to go around to fill up the Revolution; that contending armies rattled like marbles in a half-empty cereal box; and that unexpected proximity to, or surprisingly abrupt distancing from, actual military institutions and activities had distorting (and disclosing) effects on people's perceptions and behaviors. John Shy told us that much a generation ago. After 1778, the "war" moved into the South and the spaces from the St. Lawrence River to the head of the Chesapeake Bay experienced a different kind of Revolution. But the main armies and their commanders stayed in the north. If we scrutinize the ebb and flow of daily life in the no-man's land of Westchester County, the intra-denominational battlegrounds of Bergen County, or the private feuds of Monmouth County, New Jersey, it seemed enough like war to civilians to have generated behaviors that we need to understand. Continental mutinies in New Jersey and the Arnold treason crisis at West Point stand proxy for this misery in the north. But quotidian anomie, savagery, corruption, and desperation in the Hudson Valley from Hackensack to Fishkill were the contexts for both phenomena. Sung Bok Kim, whose critique of the classic progressive account of manorial life quietly leavened and in some ways facilitated the reception of the new version, used Westchester County to challenge John Shy's account of the relationship between war and Revolutionary social mobilization. The literature, again, mostly just yawned, but we can probably do better by harnessing new data collection techniques to new kinds of questions.¹¹

Finally, efforts should be made to interrogate claims and assumptions about the nature, degree, and significance of repeated intrusions by New England settlers and Yankee “ways” into Mid-Atlantic spaces, beginning as early as the Stuart seizure of New Netherland. The assertion by scholarly partisans that the Middle Colonies “prefigured” or “anticipated” “modern” America, in contradistinction to nineteenth-century claims about the foundational import of New England, is challenged by these migrations. It is perhaps especially mitigated by some scholars’ reflexive invocation of “*New England[s] Extended*,” or “*Yankee West[s]*,” planted by the descendants of Puritans and nurtured by their articulate and relentless willingness to make new “errands into the wilderness” that for generations after 1783 seemingly overran their neighbors to the west.¹²

This narrative trope is almost impossible *not* to caricature in a short essay, but versions of it litter many narratives about early America. Brendan McConville has called the seventeenth-century area southwest of Manhattan “New Jersey’s New England.” Paul Moyer’s account of the Pennsylvania–Connecticut struggle for control of the upper Susquehanna Valley, if only by its title, “Wild Yankees,” may seem to conflate the stories it tells of efforts by yeoman farmers to preserve their personal independence through land ownership with an affirmation of *regional* cultural rather than class attributes. Alan Taylor’s narrative of *William Cooper’s Town* ends with that apostate Quaker community builder’s naïve design to be a “father of the people” frustrated by swarming tribes of post-Revolutionary Yankee voyagers to the west, who imposed their own definitions of communal leadership by “friends of the people” on their hapless patron. And tales about the replacement of Iroquoia—from just west of Cooper’s Otsego County to Niagara—with the “Genesee Country,” settled by emigrants from New England, sound like just such errands. Beyond our subject region, histories of the Western Reserve, or Marietta, or the “Yankee West” that emerged in southern Michigan, offer modestly different versions of the same narrative.¹³

This is not at all to suggest that any of these authors are peddling bad historiographical medicine, but rather that the existence of the stock figure of the resolute Yankee, driving his “patriarchal caravan” west surrounded by family members, livestock, and wagonloads of goods, in efficacious imitation of his 1620s forebears, is almost too available to have needed proving or to be systematically challenged. Who wonders if men like Daniel Shays or George Robert Twelves Hewes became Yorkers instead of Yankees on the New York frontier? Who knew that when the Dutch briefly seized their old colony back from the duke in 1673, the residents of East Jersey towns settled by

migrants from New England swore allegiance to the States General in higher percentages than did the remnant Dutchmen living in Bergen County? Who asks whether the “Connecticut people” settled at Wyoming on the Susquehanna, on the many days when they necessarily were *not* being “Wild,” bothered to be “Yankees” in meaningful ways—relating to farming practices, family formation, religious polity, inheritance customs, or other phenomena that drove the new social history in the 1960s? When Pennsylvania won the sovereignty battle beyond the Delaware after the Revolution, were the Yankee settlements stranded in the “Endless Mountains” more like Paxton than they were like Providence, Prospect, or Pawtucket?¹⁴

Is it relevant that, under the 1801 “Plan of Union” among Calvinist church bodies, Congregationalist communities more often tended to affiliate as Presbyterians? Or that émigré Yankee pastoralists embraced the Chester and Lancaster county staple of wheat culture once settled on the fertile lands of Genesee?¹⁵ Or that some New Englanders arriving in Cooper’s Town willingly became tenants rather than freeholders, despite Mr. Cooper’s criticism of that practice? Or that substantial Connecticut landowners like the Wadsworth family became landlords at Genesee, withholding thousands of their best acres from the market, preferring to lease them to their poorer countrymen for cash and in-kind rents and improvements?¹⁶

Even if we acknowledge, as I think we must, Dan Richter’s wise strictures in the previous essay on the idea of an articulated Mid-Atlantic (colonial) regional “identity,” his doubts about any recoverable “coherence” for the place even as a behavioral entity, and his argument that the Atlantic tsunami and continental tectonic plate shifts of the past generation have forever altered our spatial imaginations, I think the regional “zombie” will walk again through the back wall of the Revolution into Early Republic, perhaps, like Rip Van Winkle, shaking its head in wonder at the exotic icon-creatures that now adorn and illustrate calls for papers and conference programs. Members of human societies, if in very different degrees, inhabit both overlapping and highly divergent spatial layers and planes. We need to comprehend these spaces simultaneously rather than sequentially in our ongoing scholarly practice. Methodological lenses, whether transiently fashionable or evermore acute and useful (but doubtless in some combination of these things) can only disclose, not determine, the underlying human structures they apprehend and recover.

The regional “moment” emerged partly from scholars’ sense that the persistent study of the “little communities of early America” was not adding

up to much even in New England, and working less well everywhere else.¹⁷ The urge to reconstruct the dispersed and far less nodal Chesapeake in the 1970s highlighted the complex areas between those places, and gave regions as early American phenomena their modern weight.¹⁸ My recommendation for a “cautious but creative” return to community studies hints that there is (and will continue to be) a cost for this kind of abrupt categorical shift from one analytical plane to another. The emergent disinclination to dissect localities made it harder to resolve, or even to see, some problems of regional analysis. Mapping the social and cultural geomorphology of the upland places where the Atlantic surge splashed onto and perhaps overflowed the continental thrust-plates of indigenous and non-English imperial America may be similarly impaired if we now archive the study of region—even in its peculiarly if not even defiantly refractory Mid-Atlantic manifestation—as one more form of worthy but ultimately disappointing past practice. We can, and probably should, strip that obdurate beast of any implications of magical analytic utility, and maybe even mute some gauzy claims about its formative, or predictive, role in constructing the modern worlds we take for granted. With that modest retreat, I would submit, we can continue to profit from the effort to put substantive human flesh back on the skeletal spatial remains that I have sketched above.¹⁹

NOTES

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1. Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 173–74; David Freeman Hawke, *In the Midst of a Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961); Charles S. Olton, *Artisans for Independence: Philadelphia Mechanics and the American Revolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1975), 75–77; Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the “Lower Sort” during the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 92–93. The May 1 election in Philadelphia was a by-election, to fill empty seats and to elect representatives to newly created districts, and historians have expressed divergent views about both its representativeness and significance. Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989); John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, February 13, 1818, *Works of John Adams* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1851), 10:282–89, when he recalled that “thirteen clocks were made to strike together” in July of 1776. But see also Adams to Benjamin Kent, June 22, 1776, when, before the fact, and in Revolutionary real time, he acknowledged that “you can’t make thirteen

- Clocks, strike precisely alike, at the Same Second." *Papers of John Adams*, vol. 4, Massachusetts Historical Society, Digital Editions (accessed December 31, 2014).
2. For Burgoyne at Saratoga, see John S. Pancake, *1777: Year of the Hangman* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977); Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014). For the dying Voltaire's trip to Paris from his place of exile in eastern France in February of 1778, see Ian Davidson, *Voltaire: A Life* (New York: Open Road Media, 2010), chap. 33. For the travails and persistent discontents of the delegates to the Continental Congress in York, Pennsylvania, during the winter of 1778, see Paul H. Smith, et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 26 vols. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1976–2000), vols. 8 and 9. The exact provenance and circumstances of Franklin's quip are complex and obscure matters, but for some nineteenth-century expressions of that supposed event, see Benson John Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-book of the Revolution* (New York, 1852), 2:303; Lord John Russell, *The Life and Times of Charles James Fox* (London, 1859), 1:142.
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THE MID-ATLANTIC AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

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