Deference in Colonial Pennsylvania
and That Man from New Jersey

On the 16th of July 1776, a New Jersey "gentleman" penned a letter to a friend in Philadelphia. This letter claimed that under certain conditions "the poorer commonalty" embraced the idea that they had no right to have any hand in government. This pronouncement, subsequently printed in the Pennsylvania Evening Post of July 30, has served as the keystone of the argument that deference was a hallmark of politics in colonial Pennsylvania. In fact, this letter provides the principal support for the most sweeping generalizations to explain why elites seemingly dominated Pennsylvania politics. In 1961 David Hawke cited the man from New Jersey and he alone to substantiate the claim that in the Pennsylvania of 1776 "tradition had it that the rich—that is the elite, those with the training, intelligence, and background for public life—ran public affairs. Both the common and uncommon people accepted this as another of the facts of life." In fact, "the common people's aristocratical notions" led them to believe that "the business of running government did not belong to them." While offering this analysis, Hawke carefully presented the letter in the context that it was written by a New Jersey resident and Hawke also quoted what he considered the key passage verbatim.1

In 1969, Gordon S. Wood supported the view that deference marked colonial Pennsylvania by saying that deference toward established leaders was "traditional" among the people of Pennsylvania. To prove the existence of this "traditional deference" in Pennsylvania, Wood's lone reference was to the Pennsylvania Evening Post of July 30, 1776, as cited by Hawke. But Wood failed to add Hawke's notation that a New Jersey resident had written the letter in question. In Wood's hands, the man from New Jersey became an

honorary Pennsylvanian.2 Eric Foner, writing in 1976, agreed that even in the early 1770s "lower-class political life [in Philadelphia] was still permeated by deferential political attitudes." Indeed, said Foner, one could depict the era as "an age of deference." To support this analysis, Foner also cited the man from New Jersey without noting that a non-Pennsylvanian was speaking. However, he added another citation to an essay that also seemed to support the case for deference.3

The assertion that deference characterized the politics of colonial Pennsylvania, and quite possibly of all of colonial America, serves as a cornerstone of the work of historians such as Bernard Bailyn and Wood who challenge the view that colonial America was wracked by class division and class antagonisms.4 However, for deference to support the claim of unity in early America, that deference must have been freely given; it must have been willing deference. J. G. A. Pocock reminded us of this critical fact when he noted that, as used in the "classical" eighteenth-century English and American model, "deference is expected to be spontaneously exhibited rather than enforced." Thus the term deference becomes a false caricature of reality unless deference "is the product of a conditioned freedom, and those who display it freely accept an inferior, nonelite, or follower role in a society hierarchically structured."5 Given this, one is moved to ask whether the evidence

2 Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787 (Chapel Hill, 1969), 89–90, 90n. Wood (p. 38) holds that deference was "customary" throughout colonial America and offers other citations not drawn from Pennsylvania to support his view.

3 Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America (New York, 1976), 52–53, 284. Foner (p. 52) also cites an essay of May 27, 1777, in the Pennsylvania Evening Post signed "Whitlock" which seems to support a view that deference existed. "Whitlock" asserted that "putting the rich and poor on an equal footing is giving the wealthy an amazing advantage. The people in general have a predilection to the great, and are ever fond of bestowing the highest offices upon them." However, this essayist made this claim as part of his case against establishing monetary qualifications to vote and thus his claim may have been used to buttress his argument. And Foner himself (p. 52) questions just how freely "deference" was given in colonial Pennsylvania.


offered in support of the theory that willing deference marked colonial Pennsylvania politics can stand close scrutiny.

One weakness in the case for the existence of "traditional deference" in Pennsylvania stems from the emphasis placed upon the letter of the man from New Jersey. Indeed, the claims of the man from New Jersey and little else have been offered as evidence that deference explains why the rich, the elites, seemed to dominate the politics of the colony. Because it serves as the linchpin of the case for deference, the comments of the New Jersey resident call for closer analysis. The most obvious problem with his letter is that it is but one source and the writer, however sincere and honest, may have been mistaken. Moreover, the letter was written in 1776. Is it safe to assert that this 1776 source proves that willing deference marked all of the colonial period of Pennsylvania history? Furthermore, the New Jersey man did not claim to be acquainted with the intricacies of Pennsylvania politics but rested his assertions on examples drawn from the history of New Jersey. If this analyst had his hand on the pulse of political reality, it was the political reality of New Jersey. Nevertheless, it is possible that his arguments, if accurate, may also hold true for Pennsylvania. And the New Jersey man did seem to be speaking of basic political axioms when, in what is the vital passage for those who cite this letter to support the case for deference, he said:

Although it be granted, on all hands, that all political power originates from the people; yet it is plain, that in those colonies where government has, from the beginning, been in the hands of a very few rich men, the ideas of the government both in the minds of those rich men, and of the common people, are rather aristocratical than popular. The rich, having been used to govern, seem to think it is their right; and the poorer commonalty, having hitherto had little or no hand in government, seem to think it does not belong to them to have any.

This sweeping assertion, that deference existed in colonies where government had always "been in the hands of a very few rich men," loses a good deal of its force when it is placed more firmly in the context of the New Jersey resident's full comments and once it is analyzed more closely. Having offered the often quoted passage, the New Jersey resident immediately added: "From this cause, I
imagine, it came to pass that the New-Jersey Convention, in their charter, made it a qualification for a member of the Lower House of Assembly, that he be possessed of an estate of five hundred pounds, and of a Member of Council, that he have an estate of one thousand pounds." The man from New Jersey detested these provisions—he called them "a hurtful remnant of the feudal constitution"—and he wrote his letter in the hope that Pennsylvania would not embrace such a governmental structure. In fact, he voiced his own rejection of a deferential attitude when he said of these property qualifications: "Why should these be made qualifications? Are not many, who have not these qualifications, as fit to serve their country in either of these [legislative] capacities, as any that are worth the money?" He maintained that "any elector" should have "a right to be elected into any office of the state." Knowing that the New Jersey Constitution rejected this ideal, the man from New Jersey cast about for an explanation of why the "commonalty" were to be kept out of the legislature. He hit upon the idea that, because they had been denied the chance to have any real hand in government, the poorer citizens willingly accepted this state of affairs.

The New Jersey man's support for his view that the poorer people believed they did not have any right to govern, thus rests on two basic points. First, the people came to think they had no right to have a hand in government because they had had none since "a very few rich men" had controlled New Jersey politics "from the beginning." Second, the truth of this point can be seen in the ridiculous property qualifications imbedded in the New Jersey Constitution of 1776. New Jersey does seem to fit the qualification of government having been in the hands of a very few rich men. From at least 1702, when the sections of New Jersey were united into a royal province, the commonalty of New Jersey had little say in who would run the government. The royal governor enjoyed wide powers of appointment which allowed him to select treasurers, assembly clerks, militia officers, sheriffs, coroners and justices of the peace. He also nominated councilors and judges. The men appointed to such posts were, Governor William Franklin said in 1768, "chiefly Men of independent Fortunes." Thus, as Donald Kemmerer noted of colonial New Jersey, "the assembly was the
only organ of the people." But, "even it did not represent the masses." By law, only freeholders who owned 100 acres or who were worth £50 of personal estate could vote for assemblymen. And voting in New Jersey was by voice. More important for the issue of willing deference, to run for the Assembly one had to own 1,000 acres of land or be worth £500 in personal estate. It appears colonial New Jersey did have a government of the rich, by the rich and, quite possibly, for the rich. The structure of colonial New Jersey politics did, as the New Jersey resident suggested, allow the poorer commonalty "little or no hand in government." Given such a governmental structure, was he talking about a political system based on willing deference or about a system of government that systematically kept the less wealthy citizens out of the government no matter what they thought or felt? Willing deference must, as Pocock observed, be "spontaneously exhibited rather than enforced." And in colonial New Jersey, where voters had a chance to elect, they had no choice but to select, via voice, representatives from among the rich. Can it be said that the poorer element "freely accepted" this state of affairs, or is it closer to the facts of the case to hold that the structure of government denied the commonalty the freedom of choice that is the necessary prerequisite for the existence of willing deference?

Examples also exist which challenge the New Jersey resident's assertion that the people, having had little or no hand in govern-


7 Larry R. Gerlach, *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1976), 22-23. Gerlach here notes that it is most difficult to determine who did and did not meet the voting qualifications but suggests the best evidence indicates that a majority of adult white males possessed the franchise. Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy 1760-1860* (Princeton, N. J., 1969), 29, who also notes the difficulty of the New Jersey sources, suggests that between 50 and 75% of adult males could meet a bare freehold qualification and could thus probably vote. Kemmerer (*Path*, 37) gives the older view saying that approximately 40% of the adult, white male population over twenty-one had the right to vote.


9 See e.g., Kemmerer, *Path*, 31-36.
ment, “seem to think it does not belong to them to have any.” As Charles R. Erdman noted of New Jersey, “it had long been the custom for constituents to ‘instruct’ their Assemblymen”; New Jersey citizens were vigilant lest their instructions be ignored; it was customary for the legislators to consult with their constituents on the issues at hand. Although the average citizens had to select their assemblymen from among the wealthier citizenry, not all average people felt they should be denied “any” hand in governing New Jersey.

The theory of deference espoused by the man from New Jersey in July 1776 is further weakened by the fact that at least some New Jersey residents began seeking a more democratic governmental structure shortly after the Revolutionary War began. When the legislative power fell into the hands of the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, the Congress modeled itself on the Assembly and retained the established voting requirements and voting procedure when it passed a basic election law in August 1775. At its October 1775 session, the Congress received several petitions from Sussex and Hunterdon Counties requesting that the vote be extended to taxpayers or to householders. One petition also called for instituting the ballot. On October 25, Salem County moved and Hunterdon County seconded a motion that new elections be held as soon as the session ended and that householders or single men worth £50 be allowed to vote in that election. This motion lost 7 to 6, but the Congress noted that the issue was merely being put off till the next session: “in order that the sense of the colony in general may be known.”

Once the Congress reconvened at the end of January 1776, more petitions arrived. Some requested that the vote continue to be limited to freeholders or asked that the decision on voting qualifications be delayed. But the majority of the petitions concurred with those sent to the October session by urging that the vote should be extended to all taxpayers or to householders. Again, one of these petitions also called for use of the ballot. The Congress

11 Minutes of the Provincial Congress and the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey (Trenton, 1879), 185–186, hereinafter cited as Minutes.
12 Ibid., 202, 207, 220, 221, 228, 231, 232 with quotation at p. 231.
also received a petition from Salem County “respecting representation in Congress.”\textsuperscript{13} It is not clear if the following quotation comes from this petition respecting representation. But it is clear that a petition from Salem displayed a less than deferential attitude when it proclaimed:

Born to the same privileges with the rest of mankind we have a right to the free Exercise of them [our rights] until divested thereof by some Act of our own. We cannot conceive the wise Author of our Existence ever designed that a certain quantity of the Earth on which we tread shou’d be annexed to Man to Compleat his Dignity and fit him for society. Was the sole design of Government either the security of Land, or Money, the possession of either or both these would be the only qualification for its members—But we apprehend the benign intentions of a well regulated Government extend to the security of much more valuable possessions—The Right and Privileges of Freemen for the defence of which every kind of property and even Life itself have been Liberally expended.\textsuperscript{14}

The Provincial Congress refused to go that far.\textsuperscript{15} But it did extend the vote to “every person of full age” with a personal estate of £50 proclamation money.\textsuperscript{16} These illustrations suggest that many residents of colonial New Jersey believed they \textit{did} have a right to have a hand in government.

The second basic point offered by the man from New Jersey to support his thesis that the poorer commonalty embraced what can be called deference is the New Jersey Constitution of 1776's re-

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 340, 346, 355, 358, 365, 372, 373 with quotation at p. 358.

\textsuperscript{14} Quoted in Gerlach, \textit{Prologue}, 318, who places this petition with those presented at the January session which advocated taxpayer suffrage.

\textsuperscript{15} The Congress spent a good deal of time considering the qualifications its delegates should possess as well as considering the suffrage requirements. The Salem petition “respecting representation” may have spurred the consideration of delegate requirements. Or that consideration may have occurred because of the possibly careless drafting of the 1775 election provisions which merely said that congressmen had to be “substantial freeholders.” Or some other considerations may have produced the discussions. The records are silent on what was said about the requirements delegates should possess. In the end, the Congress retained the basic provision of the colonial requirements for serving by saying that members of the Provincial Congress had to be “substantial freeholders” worth £500 proclamation money. \textit{Minutes}, 186, 374, 375, 381, 384, 389, 430.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, 429-435, has the revised election regulations which also required that voters had signed the general Association and had resided in their counties for one year before they could vote for delegates to the Congress. This law promised that annual elections would be held for selecting the Congress. Voice voting was retained.
quirement that Assemblymen be worth £500 and that councilors be worth £1,000. However the “cause” of these provisions was not necessarily, as the New Jersey man suggested, that the people felt they had no right to have any hand in governing. The provincial congressmen who enacted the Constitution had to be worth £500 of personal estate as had been the case with the Assembly in colonial days. When these men worth £500 created a constitution, they merely retained the established wealth requirement which insured that their kind would sit in the lower house of the legislature. And, for good measure, they required that councilors be worth £1,000. Moreover, despite calls for voting by ballot, the congressmen retained voting by voice. The congressmen also failed to put the Constitution to a vote of the people; the delegates merely proclaimed it the organic law of New Jersey on July 2 and on July 3, 1776, ordered it printed. It is hardly convincing to say that the commonalty thought they had no right to have a hand in governing because men worth £500 decreed that only their kind could serve in the legislature. It seems closer to the facts of the case to say that an economic elite worked to retain as much of its power as possible no matter what the people may or may not have wanted.

It is clear, then, that the comments of the man from New Jersey may not accurately describe the politics of his colony. When one

17 See note 15 above.
18 Minutes, 488-490, and the Constitution which is given on 552-558.
19 Both Erdman, New Jersey, 38-49, and Gerlach, Prologue, 340-341, suggest that the Constitution was well received, which might be taken as an indication that the inhabitants were pleased with all aspects of the Constitution. However, the evidence on the response to the document is quite limited and mixed. Strong, general praise for the Constitution did exist. (See Pennsylvania Journal, July 17 and Aug. 28, 1776; Pennsylvania Packet, Oct. 1 and Nov. 11, 1776.) But the first elected Council noted that the document was “not entirely perfect.” (Ibid., Oct. 8, 1776.) The man from New Jersey decried the property requirements needed to run for office and another essayist said that the New Jersey legislature should institute the ballot. (“A well-wisher to Public Liberty,” Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 18, 1776.) Finally, the Constitution of 1776, despite the property qualifications to serve in the legislature, instituted many changes which persons who rejected deference could applaud; this fact may have helped produce praise for the document. Thus it is difficult to determine how much New Jersey citizens did or did not approve of the property qualifications to sit in the legislature.

20 Gerlach, Prologue, 24, presents a similar view to that of the man from New Jersey by holding that “apathy as well as deference politics explains the conspicuous continuity in office-holding in the province.”
moves to the claim that his observations prove the existence of deference in Pennsylvania, the case is even less convincing. For the theory of the man from New Jersey to be applicable to a colony, that colony must from the beginning have been in the hands of a very few rich men, otherwise his theory is irrelevant. The political structure of Pennsylvania was designed to insure that participants in the electoral process possessed a material stake in society. But Pennsylvania offered the citizenry a greater opportunity to participate in the political process than did New Jersey. Pennsylvania's colonial franchise was more extensive. In Pennsylvania, freeholders owning fifty acres with twelve of them being cleared, or freemen worth £50 of personal estate, could vote. And voting in Pennsylvania was by ballot rather than voice.\footnote{Voters also had to meet age, residence, and naturalization requirements. It appears the Philadelphians who possessed any size freehold in the city could vote. The basic election law is in James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, comps., \textit{The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682-1807} (Harrisburg, 1896-1911), II, 212-221, hereinafter cited as \textit{Penn. Statutes}. On the use of the ballot, see Cortland F. Bishop, \textit{History of Elections in the American Colonies} (New York, 1893), 167-171. The number of citizens qualified to vote and thus to hold office in colonial Pennsylvania is still a matter of debate. Estimates range from significantly less than half of the adult males to well over half of the adult male population. It seems safe, however, to conclude that the franchise was at least as extensive in Pennsylvania as it was in New Jersey. See Albert E. McKinley, \textit{The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America} (Philadelphia, 1905), 270-298; Hawke, \textit{In the Midst}, 33-34, 34n; John K. Alexander, "‘A Year . . . Famed in the Annals of History’: Philadelphia in 1776," in Dennis Clark, ed., \textit{Philadelphia: 1776-2076 [=] A Three Hundred Year View} (Port Washington, N.Y., 1975), 26; Williamson, \textit{American Suffrage}, 33-34; Gary B. Nash, "The Transformation of Urban Politics 1700-1765," \textit{Journal of American History}, LX (1973), 63on.} In addition, Pennsylvania voters, unlike those in New Jersey, elected a wide range of officials such as tax assessors, commissioners, coroners, and sheriffs as well as the members of the Assembly. Equally important, Pennsylvania voters were not \textit{forced} to select elected officials only from those worth a substantial sum. In colonial Pennsylvania, anyone eligible to vote was also eligible to run for office.\footnote{\textit{Penn. Statutes}, II, 212-214, and Bishop, \textit{History}, 32, 172-173, 182, 203.} Of course, Pennsylvania did not make it easy or possible for any citizen to run for office. The voting and office-holding requirements did keep many citizens from running.\footnote{See note 21 above.} And the pay that members of the legislature received, which was five shillings per day of service throughout most of the colonial period, made it most difficult for
those without independent wealth to run for the Assembly.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, the governmental system of Pennsylvania was designed to try to reduce the influence the poorer commonalty might have in electoral politics. Still, Pennsylvania did not, as did New Jersey, develop a structure that guaranteed that only the wealthy would run the government. The question then becomes: did a very few rich men, from the beginning, control the government of Pennsylvania in such a way that the poorer commonalty had virtually no hand in government?

It appears, as Gary B. Nash has suggested, that Pennsylvania elites of the colonial period did want to mold, direct, and control politics. However, Nash also demonstrates, at least for Philadelphia politics as they developed to 1765, that the realities of "factional politics" at times forced elites to involve the lower elements in the political process.\textsuperscript{25} Much to the dismay of many elites, before the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, David Lloyd and then Governor William Keith worked at various times to enlist the political support of such groups as lower-class workingmen and newly arrived immigrants.\textsuperscript{26} By the 1750s, even members of the proprietary party went so far as to visit the homes of "the Lowest Mechanics" to solicit their support.\textsuperscript{27} By the same decade, political literature was often depicting warring elites as vile and corrupt persons which surely attacked the ideal that the poorer element should defer to someone merely because he was a member of the upper class.\textsuperscript{28} At least in Philadelphia, it appears that the poorer commonalty did have a hand in governing and that "a very few rich men" did not totally control politics. If this was the case,

\textsuperscript{24} Penn. Statutes, II, 221; III, 380, 38on; V, 178; VIII, 390.
\textsuperscript{26} Nash, "Transformation," 606-607.
\textsuperscript{27} Statement of Joseph Galloway, 1759, as quoted in \textit{ibid.}, 609.
Pennsylvania probably does not meet the conditions the man from New Jersey stipulated for the mass of the citizens to think they should not have any hand in governing.  

Members of Pennsylvania's lower classes were, at least on some critical issues, drawn into the political process as active participants. Nevertheless, it appears that most of the members of the colonial legislature were drawn from the wealthier classes. This fact does not, however, prove that willing deference led to this state of affairs. As noted, the structure of politics made it difficult for the poorer commonalty to serve in the legislature. In addition, political skill rather than willing deference often may have determined who served in elected offices. In 1770, a Philadelphia essayist, who signed himself "A Brother Chip," claimed this was the case. He observed that "it has been customary for a certain Company of leading Men to nominate Persons, and settle the Ticket for Assembly-men, Commissioners, Assessors, &c. without even permitting the affirmative or negative Voice of a Mechanic to interfere. . . ." Denouncing this practice, "A Brother Chip" called upon mechanics to use their numbers to insure that mechanics were elected to office. And more than the skill of "leading men" in selecting slates of candidates worked to insure that political offices went to the wealthier class. At least in Philadelphia, the poorer commonalty, including numbers of mechanics and even artisans, had to be able to obtain recommendations. Persons seeking employment were often required to produce a recommendation "from some respectable person." To obtain a license as a huckster or, on a higher plane, as a tavern keeper, one needed recommendations. Because Philadelphia's trade and general economic activity slowed


31 Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 27, 1770.
in the winter or virtually ground to a halt, inhabitants faced the real possibility of needing private charity at some point in their lives. But private charities of all kinds investigated to see if a person was deserving of aid by being able to produce a "proper Recommendation from respectable Inhabitants." If one could not get the needed recommendations, he faced difficult times. Thus a proper display of deference, or at least seeming deference, might well enhance the possibility of getting recommendations. Certainly one might endanger his chances of getting them if he failed to remember that "We must not be self conceited, nor aim at honours which we never were designed for."\(^{32}\)

The governmental structure of Pennsylvania, the political skill of elites, and socioeconomic forces thus worked to deny the poorer commonalty an opportunity to serve in government and to voice freely their political preferences. Given such considerations, despite his endorsement of "an age of deference," Foner was closer to the mark when he said of Pennsylvania: "the whole circumstances of life of common laborers and the poor made any kind of independent political identity virtually impossible."\(^{34}\) Given the political structure and limitations of Pennsylvania and the socioeconomic restraints on the less wealthy, it does violence to the facts of the colony's political life to assert that the poor commonalty willingly embraced deference. The seeming deference that existed may well have been enforced deference.

The claims that willing deference marked Pennsylvania are also challenged by examples of nondeferential attitudes that deal with or come from the colonial era. Writing in 1778, Thomas Paine analyzed Pennsylvania's colonial franchise requirements and the law that allowed citizens to vote if they took an oath saying that


\(^{34}\) Foner, Tom Paine, 52. Charles S. Olton, who argues that the artisans of Philadelphia displayed deference in politics until the 1770s, struck a similar note when he said "a powerful deferential society structure governed the building trades, and a tradesman would ignore at his peril the dictates of the company." See his Artisans for Independence: Philadelphia Mechanics and the American Revolution (Syracuse, N. Y., 1975), 17, 45-45, 49-50, 52, 54 with quotation at p. 17.
they met those requirements. According to Paine, “the only end” the property and estate requirements “answered was, that of tempting men to forswear themselves. . . .” The simple fact was “every man with a chest of tools, a few implements of husbandry, a few spare clothes, a bed, and a few household utensils, a few articles for sale in a window, or almost anything else he could call or even think his own, supposed himself within the pale of an oath [that he met the franchise requirements], and made no hesitation of taking it.” If Paine accurately reflected the attitude of Pennsylvanians, the poorer commonality did not think they should be denied any hand in governing.35

Some Pennsylvanians clearly believed they had a right to influence legislation and in this way eschewed a deferential attitude. After the fall election of 1772, a “Committee of a Number of Inhabitants of the County and City” of Philadelphia drew up an address to their newly elected representatives to the Assembly. That address noted that the citizens had “the highest opinion” of the assemblymen’s “Abilities and Integrity.” “Permit us, nevertheless,” the address continued, “to recommend to your Attention the following Subjects, as Matters, either directly in themselves, or in their Consequences, most likely to sap the Liberties of our happy Constitution.” The first point offered was phrased in anything but deferential terms. The address asserted that “Acts of Assembly have been passed, without giving the people an Opportunity of hearing the Purport of them, or offering their Objections (if any) . . . and, as we humbly conceive the People have an indubitable Right to know how their Business is transacted in the House, we expect that our worthy Representatives will coincide in Opinion with us, that their Constituents are entitled to have free Access there, or that such Methods should be taken to give them Satisfaction, as to the Wisdom of the House shall seem meet.” Having established this philosophical base, the committee proceeded to offer specific recommendations. The Excise Act of 1771 was denounced as being “oppressive, partial, and unconstitutional.” In place of this “dangerous” act, which was especially oppressive to

35 “A Serious Address,” Pennsylvania Packet, Dec. 5, 1778. Paine’s comment was given as part of an argument against requiring property qualifications to vote and may, thus, misstate the actual number who could vote. Cf. Alexander, “‘A Year,’” 26.
"the middling and poorer Class," the committee suggested that the legislature levy a duty on imported spiritous liquors. The address further asserted that the Act for Stamping Leather, which was as oppressive as the Excise Act, should also be repealed. In addition, no further funds should be allocated for erecting fortifications on Mud Island. But the legislature should support the creation of a land bank. The address concluded with the observation that "Gentleman [of the Assembly], your Candour and good Sense will apologize for the Freedom we have taken, in pointing out these Grievances, which you would otherwise have naturally adverted to, and consequently would have sought Redress:—But we conceived it would give you Pleasure to know the Sense of your Constituents." Despite this diplomatically deferential tone, the substance of the address was anything but deferential. The attitudes of these inhabitants of Philadelphia County obviously challenge the claim that the commonalty felt they should not have any hand in governing.

The existence of such nondeferential attitudes may well have influenced Jacob Duché, a Pennsylvania-born-and-bred analyst. Writing in late 1771, Duché boldly asserted, in flat contradiction to the theory of the man from New Jersey as it is applied to Pennsylvania, that:

LIBERTY . . . is the genius of Pennsylvania. Its inhabitants think, and speak, and act from her immediate inspiration. The poorest labourer upon the shore of Delaware thinks himself entitled to deliver his sentiments in matters of religion or politics with as much freedom as the gentleman or scholar. Indeed, there is less distinction among the citizens of Philadelphia, than among those of any civilized city in the world. Riches give none. For every man expects one day or another to be upon a footing with his wealthiest neighbour;—and in this hope, shews him no cringing servility, but treats him with a plain, though respectful familiarity."

Duché surely overstated the sense of equality that existed in Philadelphia; powerful forces worked to keep poorer citizens in a subservient position. But Duché's analysis raises serious challenge to

36 "The Address of a Number of Freemen of the County and City," Pennsylvania Gazette, Oct. 21, 1772.
the attempt to apply the suggestions of the man from New Jersey to Pennsylvania.

Too much stress has been placed upon his letter; it simply will not bear the weight. Colonial Pennsylvania does not meet his criterion of government having been in the hands of a very few rich men from the beginning. Moreover, Pennsylvania offers many examples that challenge his bold proclamation that the poorer commonalty, because they had had little or no hand in governing, came to believe they should not have any hand in governing. Of course, it seems probable that some Pennsylvanians were willingly deferential in the colonial era. But the letter from the man in New Jersey does not adequately support the all-encompassing assertions that Pennsylvania embraced a "traditional deference" where "tradition had it that the rich—that is, the elite, those with the training, intelligence, and background for public life—ran public affairs. Both the common and uncommon people accepted this as another of the facts of life." Historians who maintain that willing deference was a deeply entrenched aspect of politics throughout the colonial era in Pennsylvania must offer more compelling evidence than they have before their hypothesis can be accepted.

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38 Detailed studies of colonial Pennsylvania have, to a great extent, focused on Philadelphia. Before a decision can be reached on the nature of deference and politics in general in Pennsylvania, much more analysis is needed, especially of the area outside Philadelphia and Philadelphia County.

39 The case that deference marked colonial America as a whole has been built too often on a consideration of the views of the elites without due regard for the actions and possible views of the poorer commonalty. See e.g., Lemisch, "The American Revolution," and Alfred F. Young's comments in The American Revolution, ix-xiv, 449-462.