The "Myth of the Middle Colonies" Reconsidered:
The Process of Regionalization in Early America

In a provocative essay published in 1983, Robert Gough argued that some scholars have moved too hastily to conceptualize a regional entity—the "Middle Colonies"—from the merely contiguous provinces of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.¹ He suggested that, in attempting to redress an old historiographical bias toward colonial New England and the South, these scholars have "assume[d] the uniformity" of those colonies and "project[ed] characteristics" from some onto others, while "overlook[ing] more important regional distinctions within" the very geographical entity to which they hoped to call interpretive attention.² One risk of this process, he argued, was that of reifying a concept that might "obscure more than clarify" the geographical complexity of early American society and culture.³

Gough marshalled an impressive array of evidence in support of his arguments. Addressing cognitive dimensions of the problem, he claimed that perceptive colonial observers—including travel writers, cartographers, political commentators, compilers of almanacs, and architects of the English imperial bureaucracy—did not seem to think that there was (or needed to be) any such thing as a "Middle Colonies" as we now presume to know it.⁴ He sifted through data on such diverse phenomena as soil types, growing seasons, settlement patterns,

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² Ibid., 393-94.
³ Ibid., 394.
⁴ Ibid., 396-403.
demographic behavior, and waterway networks to show the lack of any compelling geographical or cultural basis for such a region. His data might have supported as many alternative schematic groupings of colonies as there were categories of arcana, but Gough chose one involving a “middle section” containing two distinct “regions.” The first included “New York, parts of western Connecticut, eastern New Jersey, and the northeast corner of Pennsylvania.” The other comprised “most of Pennsylvania, part of Maryland, and all of western New Jersey and Delaware.” Perhaps most provocatively, Gough argued that while these “regions” were adjacent they did not embrace or even face each other. Rather, they looked outward, to the north and south, from their point of conjunction in central New Jersey. “What inter-regional contacts they did have,” he claimed, “tended to be with the South, for the Philadelphia-centered region, and with New England, for the New York-centered region.”

Even the most insistent advocates of the importance of the Middle colonies have understood that the region could never be comprehended as neatly or categorically as “Puritan” New England or the “Cavalier” South. Indeed, they have found in its very complexity and contradiction sources both of the region’s importance and of its invisibility to scholars. No critic of this formulation has done a more thorough job than Gough of articulating the substantive anomalies that give the region its slippery character and its kaleidoscopic cast. His analysis, however, displays a disregard for process, and a dependence on morphologic argument, that renders it unsatisfying and ultimately almost ahistorical.

5 Ibid., 404-6.
6 Ibid., 394-95. See also p. 405.
It seems insufficient to show, as Gough does, that the two polar
polities of the area (New York and Pennsylvania) differed in terms
of government form (royal and proprietary); governmental effec-
tiveness (strong and centralized/“impotent” and local); group set-
tlement distribution (“mosaic”/dispersed); prevailing trade patterns
(transatlantic/Caribbean); or a host of other variables, and to assume
that these differences—even if they are valid—prevented regional
integration.\(^8\) One of Gough’s own theoretical models of regionaliza-
tion, after all, stresses the “functional” aspects of that phenomenon,
by which structural differences might actually promote, rather than
preclude, such integration.\(^9\) Whatever the precise “fit” between ma-
terial preconditions to regional development (e.g., soil types, growing
seasons, geophysical barriers or connectors) and their operational out-
comes (e.g., export market shares, urbanization rates, age pyramids,
political cultures), that fit must have been the product of specific
human intentions, or at least mediated by the perception of, and
choice among, alternatives and by the operation of contingency in all
human affairs.

This sense of process, possibility, and evolution, however, seems
largely absent in Gough’s basically static account of American colonial
regionalization. He approaches the phenomenon after the fact, as it
were, as with a cadaver ripe for postmortem. Data for such diverse
economic and social categories as product export destinations in the
1810s, newspaper circulation ranges in the 1770s, religious consocia-
tion boundaries in the 1720s and 1740s, and federal judicial circuits
in the 1790s are mixed promiscuously with more subjective charac-
terizations about such phenomena as “style of politics” and “accept-
ance of religious pluralism.”\(^10\) From this welter of materials, by a
kind of ad hoc balancing of the differences method, Gough’s bifur-
cated and centrifugally tending “section” emerges.

This approach may make sense for (or sense out of) New England
or the South, where the early imposition of unique and uniform crop,
labor, and religious systems by large numbers of similar people on
discrete, thinly inhabited spaces provided, as Gough suggests, a broad

\(^8\) Gough, “Myth of the ‘Middle Colonies,’” 406-10.
\(^9\) Ibid., 395.
\(^10\) Ibid., 407-9, 411-12, 414-15.
foundation on which to arrange divergent empirical evidence. The "Middle Colonies," however, were a fabricated spatial and cultural entity, one erected—to a degree perhaps unique in early American experience—by identifiable parties, agents, and interests from the institutional rubble left by a later era of imperial consolidation and colonial reorganization. The same bewildering array of interests, institutions, and social arrangements that Gough picked through, retrospectively, to delineate his spatial organizational model was already there, prospectively, for early American inhabitants of the Hudson, Delaware, and Susquehanna valleys. Its complexity enabled, indeed compelled, them actively to construct trans-local systems for managing their lives and fortunes. In attempting to understand how they did so, and over what ranges, it will be more useful to observe the process happening sequentially, as in tracing the development of an embryo, than to adopt an almost omniscient, after-the-fact, autopsic viewpoint.

Ironically, in the area where Gough does most implicitly admit this developmental or "process" approach—that of political behavior, broadly construed—his use of evidence seems distressingly partial. He acknowledges, for example, "some interregional connections among middle states politicians," but he illustrates them with a brief allusion to an episode of 1750s cooperation between New York and Pennsylvania factional leaders that he dismisses as something that "remained inchoate before Independence." The latter assertion will not bear close scrutiny of American colonial development during the century before the Revolution. Instances of such cooperation, woven into a dense fabric of territorial competition and even overt conflict among many of the same cooperating parties, began to appear as early as 1682. This fabric became highly developed during the 1680s and 1690s, which period forms the substantive focus of this essay. Building on this tradition of often adversarial but always entangling political interaction, two generations of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York leaders elaborated an important regional public culture during the first half of the eighteenth century.

11 Ibid., 403.
12 The interactive political behavior that Gough saw as only "inchoate" or embryonic by 1760 was thus actually the end product of several generations of evolving regional practice. This elaboration between 1700 and about 1755 will be the subject of a separate essay.
Therefore, the "Middle Colonies," as they have been delineated by such historians as Patricia Bonomi, Douglas Greenberg, Milton Klein, John Murrin, and Michael Zuckerman, indeed did exist and carry both the functional and symbolic importance attributed to them by those scholars. Their integration was based on geographical and cultural preconditions at least as compelling as those that Gough saw militating against that integration. It began to occur after 1680, as the result of the anglicization of New York society and politics and the rapid establishment of Quaker settlements in the Delaware Valley. Of the "process" factors discussed above—intentions, choices, alternatives, contingencies—none were more determinative than those brought to bear by William Penn and the individuals who found themselves on the spot in pursuit of his (and their) American plans and dreams. Gough need not have worried that Pennsylvania would "disappear into 'the middle colonies,'" because the region was itself in large measure an artifact of Pennsylvania.13

The establishment of Penn's colony may well have been a "Holy Experiment," but it was not, like the New England settlements half a century before, an "errand into the wilderness." Indeed, it effected the political closure of the last significant territorial gap on the Middle Atlantic coast and helped to catalyze regional patterns in the area. Like any venture cast into a partly settled environment, the colony was affected by existing cultural and political, as well as physical, circumstances. By 1700 its cumulative responses to those circumstances forged patterns of regional perception and behavior that shaped Middle Atlantic life well into the eighteenth century. Those patterns were complex, but they began with what Wesley Frank Craven called "the strange geographical configuration of the areas over which the New York government at first presided."14

From the outset the fortunes of New York and Pennsylvania became inextricably entwined. The lower Hudson and Delaware valleys were twin sinews of the Anglo-Dutch domain ruled after 1664 by James, the Duke of York, whose patronage helped William Penn to secure his proprietary charter in a Restoration climate of growing imperial centralization. Penn inherited in the Delaware Valley a mixed

13 Gough, "Myth of the 'Middle Colonies,'" 419 (emphasis added).
ethnic population used to receiving law and authority from the Duke's governors at New York. Prior to 1680, however, the Delaware region was itself somewhat peripheral to the ebb and flow of New York life. First the "hearth" of a weak Swedish regime, and then the rim of a marginally stronger Dutch colony, the valley was, after 1664, the closest approximation to a geopolitical vacuum that existed along the Atlantic coast from Virginia to Massachusetts. The lower bay lay at a point of weak convergence between the spheres of interest of Lord Baltimore and York, too remote from the former to be more than hesitantly incorporated, and too far from the latter to be more than tentatively defended. The river itself drained the most peripheral of New York's four sub-economies, the neglected "stepchild" of a centrifugal system of provincial governance.

New York, moreover, bordered politically autonomous and economically expansive New England. For fifteen years after the conquest of New Netherland, James's governors focused on the more critical—and more contestable—issues that resulted from that geopolitical fact. They blocked Albany's attempts to carry on an overland fur trade with the Connecticut Valley and with Boston in defiance of New York City's stranglehold on trade up and down the Hudson River. They fought eastern Long Islanders' efforts to preserve their traditional economic ties to southern New England. They resisted the pernicious influence of Puritan ideas about English rights to representative government on a colony whose proprietor adamantly refused to install such a government. And they upheld the Duke's

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19 Ibid., 61.

20 Ibid., 56, 62, 109-10.

21 Ibid., 47-50, 55-56, 67-68, 90-91, 97-98.
claims to the western half of Connecticut, carried those claims verbally and physically to that province, and even contemplated an armed attack on Massachusetts.  

The flowering of Quaker provinces in the Delaware Valley after 1680 abruptly changed this pattern of regional preoccupation. Their robust economic growth proved more alluring to New Yorkers frustrated by their colony's stagnant monopolies than that of New England ever had. The political ferment of their formative years set precedents even more dangerous for New York dissidents than had those of the Puritan colonies to the northeast. By 1687 Thomas Dongan, James's fourth governor, concluded that the harmful impact of what his people would soon be calling "the new country" (Pennsylvania and New Jersey) was so strong that even New York's annexation to New England was preferable to its continued exposure to that impact.  

As Penn discovered on his arrival in America in 1682, that impact was decidedly a two-way street. His first shiploads of settlers were met by established colonial merchants, many of them from New York, whose seizure of initial commercial advantage absorbed their capital and distorted the economic patterns of Pennsylvania. One result was the early demise of the Free Society of Traders, on whose success Penn had staked many of his political as well as his economic hopes. But Penn was no idle bystander to a predatory colonial environment. Before even meeting his first assembly, he hurried to New York and intervened in the political currents swirling there after the forced departure of Dongan's predecessor, Sir Edmund Andros. Assuring English authorities that he had "perswaded all Parties to let fall their Animositys," he urged New Yorkers to give Dongan an

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23 Craven, Colonies in Transition, 216. Dongan hoped for autonomy for an expanded New York that included the Jerseys and the western half of Connecticut, but when it became clear that this choice was not available, he preferred a New York incorporated into New England to one exposed to Pennsylvania. The phrase "the new country" cannot be documented before 1700, but it is evocative of the perceived impact of the proprietary reshaping of the broader Delaware Valley on the popular imagination. See Lord Bellomont to the Board of Trade, Nov. 28, 1700, quoted in Sung Bok Kim, Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1978), 78.
adequate public revenue, in compliance with James's terms for granting them an elective assembly.\textsuperscript{25} Penn doubtless saw his mission as a personal service to his patron, the Duke, but he also discerned his own interest in the matter, complaining that "I cannot think [Andros] to have been (in my American business) a Frd. to me."\textsuperscript{26} For decades thereafter the disposition of New York governors remained critical to Penn and to his heirs at the head of the Pennsylvania proprietorship.

During his first months in America Penn also visited New Jersey to promote political stability in provinces where he already had made substantial investments. The Jerseys served as more than Penn's "training ground" in matters proprietary, or an object of diminishing concern after he shifted his attention west of the Delaware. Rather, the Penn interest there remained strong throughout the colonial period; indeed, the province had increased importance for the security of Penn's beleaguered proprietorship after the royalization of New York in 1685. Penn's involvement there carried his sphere of interest to the very edge of the Hudson River palisades.\textsuperscript{27}

Despite Penn's intervention on Dongan's behalf, the two men had a strained relationship. Dongan stubbornly and successfully resisted Penn's efforts to annex to Pennsylvania the Susquehanna Valley high into the Iroquois fur territory. In fact, by direct cession from the


\textsuperscript{27} George Heathcote to Penn, Dec 7, 1682, Thomas Rudyard to Penn, Jan 13, 1683, \textit{PWP}, 2 320, 339-41. Penn participated personally in the East Jersey Council and the West Jersey Assembly in 1683 in an attempt to help those provinces adjust to the turbulence inherent in the processes of population growth and political transition. The phrase "training ground" is from Nash, \textit{Quakers and Politics}, 7, but for a similar view, see William R. Shepard, \textit{History of Proprietary Government in Pennsylvania} (New York, 1896), 9. Craven's assessment—that Penn's involvement in New Jersey "spoke also of the broad vision he had gained of an opportunity to dedicate the entire Delaware Valley to the goals of Quaker colonization," and that he showed "no inclination to abandon New Jersey because of his new interest in Pennsylvania"—seems more persuasive. See Craven, \textit{Colonies in Transition}, 189-90. On the continuing development of proprietary "interconnections" between Pennsylvania and the Jerseys, see also Ned Landsman, "The Scottish Proprietors and the Planning of East New Jersey," in Zuckerman, ed., \textit{Friends and Neighbors}, 67.
Iroquois, he personally became claimant to a large parcel of land that fell within the imprecise northern limits of Penn's domain.\textsuperscript{28} He hoped that, despite this irritant, he and Penn could "Joyne heartily together" in the Duke's service. He even sought Penn's advice on how to "proceed" in his new office, but this gesture was complicated by other problems. In 1683 Penn bought East Jersey land rights derived from disputed grants made by Richard Nicolls, James's first governor, to groups of New England claimants. This act confounded Penn's East Jersey proprietary partners, who denied the legality of those grants, and it apparently frustrated Dongan's hopes of getting some of the same lands for himself.\textsuperscript{29}

The Susquehanna and East Jersey issues converged in light of Pennsylvania's steady encroachment on New York's dominance of the Middle Atlantic economy. Philadelphia had already usurped New York's control of tobacco exports from the lower Delaware settlements. Its capture of the region's fur trade by way of the Susquehanna threatened catastrophic economic harm to New York.\textsuperscript{30} Dongan knew that East Jersey's self-proclaimed exemption from New York customs duties might foster market conditions there so attractive to Iroquois fur traders that it would negate his success in resisting Penn's Susquehanna pretensions. He viewed Penn's expansive designs as part of a broad economic threat to New York. His fears prodded the Lords of Trade to resist apprehended efforts by Penn to annex either part of New Jersey to Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{31} Dongan recognized the irony by


\textsuperscript{29} Thomas Dongan to Penn, Oct. 22, 1683, \textit{PWP}, 2:492-94.


which Pennsylvania's economic ascendency was fueled partly by New York's own merchants, who would, he warned, flock toward the Delaware to exploit the boom occurring there. Indeed, he held before the Lords the prospect of depopulation at New York City and Albany unless they checked the economic aggression of the Scots and Quaker provinces.\(^{32}\)

This portrait suggests the degree to which the sudden proliferation of several diverse, partly autonomous English colonies on the Middle Atlantic coast had released forces that seemed sharply to fragment and divide the interests of those entities. It also suggests, however, the truly shared and the truly regional character both of those interests and of the processes that shaped them. Even developments that seemed to affect different parties in opposite ways could proceed from common circumstances and present common problems. The same opportunistic attraction of commerce to capital that Penn found as early as 1682, smothering the fledgling Free Society of Traders and heralding a generation of prosperous instability in Pennsylvania, had accelerated by 1687 to confront Dongan with the specter of an era of impoverished instability in New York.\(^{33}\) Moreover, the strongest remedy that Dongan could think to propose for these circumstances—the reannexation of both Jerseys to New York—seemed inadequate to the dimensions of the problem at hand.\(^{34}\)

Penn and Dongan were struggling with the consequences of regional disequilibrium caused by rapid jurisdictional changes, the influx of populations of diverse origin and interest, and a pervasive, unstable economic dynamism, all compounded by the halting efforts of the English government to find new ways of conceptualizing and managing its American colonies. These factors were not, to be sure, evenly distributed through the region, but this fact only accentuated their imbalancing effects. Pennsylvania enjoyed by far the more expansive economy, and acted consistently as the economic aggressor. Meanwhile, New York—first as James's own proprietary, and then as the

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\(^{32}\) Dongan to the Lords of Trade, [March 1687 (?)], *N.Y. Col. Docs.*, 3:392-393. Dongan went as far as to recommend a fortified barrier between New York and Pennsylvania along the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers.


\(^{34}\) Dongan to the Lords of Trade, [March 1687 (?)], *N.Y. Col. Docs.*, 3:392.
fulcrum for haltingly emergent imperial policies—consistently had better access to the political resources with which to blunt the initiatives of its interloping neighbor.\textsuperscript{35}

Penn scoffed at New York's complaints, recalling the latter's voracious appetite for Quaker specie and blaming New York for its own commercial "decay."\textsuperscript{36} After returning to England in 1684 he continued to meddle discreetly in that province's political affairs. His council president and de facto surrogate in Pennsylvania, Thomas Lloyd, lived in New York City after 1684, a fact about which Penn had decidedly mixed feelings.\textsuperscript{37} Penn relied on friendly and influential New Yorkers for Dutch records useful in his boundary dispute with Maryland, and was in turn seen by them as a source of valuable "interest" at Whitehall.\textsuperscript{38} In frustration at New York's carping he threatened to use that interest to block the confirmation of that province's laws.\textsuperscript{39} He took Dongan's provincial consolidation campaign seriously enough, however, reportedly to consider abandoning East Jersey, or attempting to "sati[e]" New York by trading land along the Hudson River for territorial concessions in the interior. This led Robert Barclay, Penn's friend and East Jersey co-proprietor, to predict astutely New York's probable response to such acts of appeasement. Contending that "the same unjust appetite will recurr again," should Penn try to defend his colony by shedding East Jersey, Barclay argued that "a joint defence [between Pennsylvania and both Jerseys] now seems to me saifest of all."\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{35} See, generally, Craven, Colonies in Transition, chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{36} Penn to Thomas Lloyd, [et al.], Aug. 1685, PWP, 3:48.
\textsuperscript{37} Samuel Carpenter to Penn, Dec. 1684, ibid., 2:610; Penn to Thomas Lloyd, Oct. 2, 1685, in microfilm edition of the William Penn Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania [hereafter, PPM]) Reel 5, frame 286; and Penn to Thomas Lloyd, April 21, 1686, PWP, 3:84-86.
\textsuperscript{38} Nicholas Bayard to Penn, April 16, 1684, PWP, 2:549-50; James Graham to Penn, Dec. 29, 1684, PPM (5:049).
\textsuperscript{39} Penn to Thomas Lloyd, [et al.], Aug. 1685, PWP, 3:48.
\textsuperscript{40} Robert Barclay to Penn, Sept. 12, 1685, ibid., 3:62-63; Barclay to Penn, Oct. 9, 1685, PPM (5:299). We have no direct testimony from Penn on this point. The proprietors of both divisions of New Jersey had been served with writs of quo warranto, signalling the Crown's intent to royalize the province. See John E. Pomfret, The Province of East New Jersey: The Rebellious Proprietary (Princeton, 1962), 256. Barclay feared that Penn might sacrifice his interest in the eastern division of the province in exchange for the annexation
This interprovincial struggle for regional advantage was overshadowed in 1687 by the creation of the Dominion of New England, and interrupted in 1688 by the inclusion of New York and New Jersey in that body. In practice the latter development temporarily diffused the pressure on Pennsylvania implicit in Dongan’s expansive designs, by shifting the center of adversary interest two hundred miles to the northeast. The Dominion proved to be an unwieldy instrument, the power of which ebbed steadily as one advanced outward from Boston toward the Delaware River. It also proved to be a short-lived imperial experiment. In 1689 the Dominion dissolved, leaving New York and Pennsylvania in their already accustomed stance of mutual economic impingement and political suspicion. After a brief and chaotic interval of provisional control by Captain Jacob Leisler, royal authority was restored to New York in 1691.

As Barclay had foreseen, a succession of Tory-connected royal governors—especially, after 1693, Benjamin Fletcher—resumed Dongan’s effort to effect what Craven called “the reestablishment of viable boundaries for New York.” Their themes recalled Dongan’s complaints: the looming depopulation of the province, the erosion of royal revenues, and the impairment of the Anglo-Iroquois alliance. To these they added charges deriving from circumstances new to the 1690s, such as the bad political example set for New York’s fledgling legislators by Pennsylvania’s unruly and penurious Assembly, and the

41 The standard work on the Dominion is still Viola F. Barnes, *The Dominion of New England: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (New Haven, 1923), but for a more recent assessment, with particular reference to its implications for the Middle colonies, see Craven, *Colonies in Transition*, 216-17.


defiant refusal of the Quakers to support imperial defense efforts. More menacing than these complaints themselves were their newly proposed solutions to the problem. Dongan had sought the reannexation of New Jersey and western Connecticut to New York. His successors exploited the exigencies of war and Penn's political eclipse after the fall of James to press for the inclusion of all of the Quaker settlements into what would have been a Middle Atlantic replica of the Dominion, ruled from New York.\textsuperscript{45}

Ironically, King William's War, which gave urgency to these appeals, also tempered the Crown's inclination to change radically the structure of governance of its American colonies. The best that Fletcher could secure was a royal decision to seize Penn's government during the conflict and add it to his own commission as governor of New York.\textsuperscript{46} Penn taunted Fletcher about the temporary and limited extent of the latter's mandate at Philadelphia, warned him to "tread softly and with caution" in governing there, and counseled his own Pennsylvania supporters in a course of temperate resistance to "arbitrary" impositions of external authority.\textsuperscript{47} Fletcher's efforts to subdue Penn's settlers were unavailing. He visited Philadelphia in 1693, where his initiatives were tenaciously blocked by an entrenched Quaker elite. He even found his ability to subordinate New York's Assembly impaired by the defiant example of the Pennsylvanians, and he continued to urge Whitehall formally to annex Penn's colony to his own.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} "Proposals Submitted by Col. [Henry] Slaughter to the Lords of Trade," [1689]; "Address of the Governor [Richard Ingoldsby] and Council to the King," Aug. 6, 1691; New York Council to Mr. [William] Blathwayt, May 30, 1692; Benjamin Fletcher to Blathwayt, Aug. 15, 1693; "Memorial of Col. Lodwick to the Lords of Trade," [1693]; Fletcher to the Committee of Trade and Plantations, March 28, 1694; Fletcher to the Lords of Trade, Nov. 19, 1694 and June 10, 1696, all in \textit{N.Y. Col. Docs.}, 3:622, 796-800, 836-37; 4:37-38, 53-54, 84-85, 113-14, 158-60.


The entanglement between Pennsylvania and New York was significant. Despite their underlying differences, and the largely adversarial relationship that those differences imposed on them, by the early 1690s the two provinces were entering on a thirty-year cycle of political convergence. That cycle was characterized by violent political upheaval in each colony (the “Keithian Schism” in Pennsylvania, “Leisler’s Rebellion” in New York), the emergence of sets of enduring factions in both places, two decades of sometimes chaotic conflict between those factions, and the reestablishment of order under parallel circumstances in both provinces in the decade after 1710. This convergence did not produce anything like formal transprovincial political bodies during this period, but it resulted in some interesting, and ironic, examples of political interaction that prefigured the evolution of regional life.

In Pennsylvania, for example, a second-tier elite of small landowners, “lesser merchants,” displaced officeholders, ambitious artisans, and assorted “political and religious malcontents” saw the imposition of Fletcher on their colony in 1693 as an opportunity to chasten their adversaries in the Quaker establishment. They welcomed Fletcher to Philadelphia and accepted places in his reconstructed government there, despite the fact that he was simultaneously struggling to govern New York through a merchant elite of his own against the resistance of a group—the “Leislerians”—that was in some ways similarly situated to themselves. Penn, meanwhile, who was no supporter of colonial upheaval and who had pragmatically brokered political consensus in New York a decade earlier, sided quietly with the Leislerians. He may even have surreptitiously corresponded with that group, whose members looked to him to help secure Fletcher’s removal.


50 Nash, Quakers and Politics, 156-59, 183-86; Ritchie, The Duke’s Province, 215-21. This is not to argue for a detailed, point-by-point analogy between the structural characteristics of factional politics in the two places. Indeed, Archdeacon, New York City, 108-13, portrays the Leislerian upheaval as more different from than similar to contemporary disturbances in other places. It represented, he argues, the frustrations of a superseded or “bypassed” elite, rather than the aspirations of an emergent but “blocked” or “thwarted” one.

51 We have only indirect evidence for the latter supposition. See Peter De La Noy to
By promising to "repair" to America and align Pennsylvania with imperial trade and defense policies, Penn secured the revocation of Fletcher's supplementary commission in 1694. He then exploited the political resurgence of the English Whigs to mount a concerted attack on Fletcher's position in New York itself. In 1696 he joined with a group of Whig leaders to promote Richard Coote, the earl of Bellomont, for the governorships of New York and Massachusetts. His belief that New York would soon be ruled by an ally rather than an adversary is suggested by his proposal that an interprovincial assembly, presided over by the governor of New York, be created to coordinate colonial defense policy and other matters of special imperial concern. This idea would have been inconceivable at any time in Penn's previous proprietary experience.

Penn's tangled affairs delayed his arrival in America until 1699. On reaching Pennsylvania, however, he moved with alacrity—and with a display of conspicuous deference to Bellomont—to enforce English admiralty law and to suppress the "piracy" for which his province had become infamous. He corresponded regularly with Bellomont and also maintained personal contact with him through his own "cousin," Paroculus Parmiter, the Naval Officer at New

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[William Penn], [June 13, 1695], N.Y. Col. Docs., 4:221. For a brief account of this letter, see PWP, 3:546 and 548n.


54 William Penn, "A Brief and Plain Scheame how the English Colonies in the North Parts of America . . . may be made more useful to the Crown," [read Feb. 8, 1697], Calendar of State Papers, 15:394-95. Some of the intrigue over both this plan and the Bellomont governorship candidacy can be followed in Penn to Coll. [Fitz-John] Winthrop, Dec. 27, 1696; Winthrop to Penn, [ca. Jan. 1697], PWP, 3:473-75; Lord Bellomont to Penn, [ca. Feb. 1697], ibid., 3:481; Bellomont to Penn, [1696-1697], PPM (7:313-316, 323). See also John S. Rainbolt, "The Creation of a Governor-General for the Northern Colonies," New-York Historical Society Quarterly (hereafter, NYHSQ) 57 (1973), 101-20.

55 See, for example, Penn to Bellomont, Jan. 30, 1700, and Dec. 30, 1700, PWP, 3:583, 636-38; Penn to Bellomont, Feb. 27, April 18, 23, and Dec. 9, 1700, all in PPM (8:300, 367, 653); Penn, "Proclamation about Pirates," Dec. 23, 1699, ibid. (8: 175).
In 1700 Penn led the governors of New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia to New York for discussions on a variety of issues of common concern. His proposal for an interprovincial assembly had foundered in London, but his role in this conference suggests the regional perspective he had gained from his American experience. With the immediate threat to his own government over, Penn also resumed the mediating role that he had played in New York's internal political affairs during the 1680s. He worked to reconcile Bellomont with members of the city's merchant community—many of them Fletcher's old allies—who had been alienated by their new governor's economic policies.

Two decades of proprietary experience taught Penn a variety of lessons about Pennsylvania's place in the broader geographic and political context in which it lay. Those lessons pointed squarely toward the centrality of New York, both as a source of critical problems and of the best available solutions to many of them. New York was Pennsylvania's key economic rival in America. As the "lead" colony for imperial trade, defense, and Indian policies, it was also the source of much of the special political vulnerability falling to a predominantly Quaker polity. If Pennsylvania's relationship with New York during their first two decades of coexistence was largely adversarial, however, it was (unlike that with Maryland, in its largely monolithic focus on a boundary dispute) adversarial in a complex, multifaceted, and ultimately an entangling manner. There even had been indications of the basis for compromise, mutual benefit, and interprovincial cooperation. With Penn's deft intervention, a series of hostile New York governors from Andros to Fletcher had yielded to the friendly Bellomont, who offered both practical assistance in meeting specific

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56 Penn to Bellomont, July 4, 1700, PWP, 3:603-4.
57 Bellomont to the Lords of Trade, Oct. 17, 1700, N.Y. Col. Docs., 4:212-26; Penn to Bellomont, Oct. 10, 1700; Penn to the Board of Trade, Dec. 8, 1700, PPM (8:583, 647a). These talks included such subjects as Indian affairs, currency regulation, imperial regulation of timber production, inter-provincial debtor control, judicial appeals to the Crown, and marriage regulation.
imperial demands and a cover of legitimacy for the overall proprietary enterprise.

Above all, Penn learned that New York needed always to be carefully regarded. In the hands of an adversary its initiatives had to be anticipated and diffused; under the stewardship of a friend they could be profitably cultivated. Penn thus became exquisitely attentive to the nuances of New York politics. A timely warning from a resident well-wisher here; the delicately phrased intimation of an exchange of favors or a withholding of "interest" there; surreptitious communication with an out-of-power faction; prudent and widely spaced appearances at New York to mediate internal conflicts—all of these elements and others had a place in Penn's arsenal of techniques for managing his relations with the most consequential corporate entity in what he came to think of as his colonial "neighborhood."

Penn's advice in 1700 to William Atwood, New York's incoming Chief Justice, neatly reveals both his understanding of the province's tangled politics and his methods of dealing with them. Saluting Atwood on his new office, Penn observed that:

In my opinion thou must be upon thy guard the people there where thy post is being both sharp and divided extremly, wherefore a caution rather than a cold deportment till thou art master of ye Clear State of things is I am sure for thy Noble Friend's service and thy reputation. I mean ye Earl of Bellomont.  

This mixture of detailed observation and delicate intervention characterized, and had important implications for, Pennsylvania's relationship with New York and its place in the Middle Atlantic world well into the eighteenth century.

The disintegration in 1700 of the authority of New Jersey's proprietary government, coinciding with Penn's second American sojourn, and the proposed royalization of that government placed those implications into sharp focus and illustrated the growing complexity of regional affairs. Prodded by New Jersey's governor Andrew Hamilton, Penn opposed the inclination of many nonresident proprietors

59 Penn to William Atwood, Dec. 10, 1700, PPM (8:660).
Nevertheless, he recognized the implications of the New Jersey disorders for the security of his larger proprietary interests. During an especially virulent outbreak of popular resistance to government in East Jersey in 1701, Penn threatened to ride personally to Hamilton’s rescue with a dozen “most reputable” Pennsylvanians. He suggested, however, that “New York [should] be obliged to take cognizance” of the disturbance, and he chided that province’s Council for not intervening with force to restore order across the Hudson River. This stance would have been virtually inconceivable before Bellomont’s tenure. Indeed, the episode occurred shortly after Bellomont’s untimely death, and there is something poignantly genuine in the tone of Penn’s condolence to the New Yorkers, which termed the loss “mine as well as yours” and lamented that “you have lost a Governor, but I a friend and an honorable and friendly neighbour.”

The royalization of New Jersey established a new and more complex institutional structure for Middle colony life. Penn continued to question the proprietors’ decision to negotiate with the Crown for the surrender of their government, but in 1701 he wrote a letter of introduction for Hamilton’s protégé, Lewis Morris, who went to London to orchestrate those negotiations. When he left America for the last time in the fall of 1701, Penn named Hamilton as his deputy governor, strengthening the proprietary ties between Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

With the surrender, James Logan, Penn’s real American surrogate, briefly hoped that Lewis Morris would become New Jersey’s first royal governor. The Crown, however, signified its determination to break cleanly with the troubled colony’s proprietary

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60 Andrew Hamilton to Penn, Nov. 14, 1700; Jan. 23, 1701, PPM (8:640, 9:034); Penn to “Esteemed Friends” [the Proprietors of East New Jersey], [March 1701?], PWP, 4:40-41.


past by choosing Edward Hyde, Lord Cornbury, a cousin of Queen Anne, as the joint governor of New York and New Jersey.  

Those colonies would share a governor until 1738, an arrangement that reinforced the already substantial institutional connections between New York and Pennsylvania. With the Penns’ proprietary interests sprawling eastward to the Hudson, and the political responsibilities of the New York executive extending westward to the Delaware, New Jersey would function as an accordion collar for the region’s two dominant geopolitical entities. The provisions secured by the New Jersey proprietors in exchange for their surrender of government—for balanced membership between the province’s eastern and western “divisions” in the Provincial Council and Assembly, and for alternating legislative sittings and Supreme Court sessions at Burlington and Perth Amboy—discouraged the political partition of the colony between its larger neighbors, and especially its de facto annexation to the governor’s preferred seat at New York. From Pennsylvania’s perspective, New Jersey would serve as a buffer against the predations of a hostile New York governor and as an avenue to the interest and assistance of a friendly one.

Because Penn never returned to his colony, the individual to whom it mainly fell to work out the practical implications of this circumstance was James Logan, who as Provincial Secretary, Commissioner of Property, and Secretary to the Council provided continuity to a procession of good, bad, and indifferent deputy governors for nearly four decades after 1701. Even when strong executives dominated provincial politics, Logan kept a firm grip on matters that were strictly proprietary. He never shrank, moreover, from exercising extra-official influence based on his comprehensive knowledge of colonial life and politics. With the governors preoccupied battling against, accommodating with, or surrendering to the demands of Pennsylvania’s increasingly assertive indigenous political elites, Logan usually had the field of the colony’s external relations to himself. He managed those relations by following in, and eventually by substantially extending and elaborating, regional paths and networks blazed primarily by William Penn during the first two decades of Pennsylvania’s existence.

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64 James Logan to Penn, Dec. 1, 1702, ibid. (10:634); Sheridan, _Lewis Morris_, 48-49.
65 Kemmerer, _Path to Freedom_, 18.
There may be several explanations for the divergent conclusions about region reached here and in Gough’s essay. First, different definitions of, or approaches to, the phenomenon of regionalization may yield quite different results on the ground. If we think of early American territorial organization in terms of “functional” regions—for which process, interaction, and “parts work[ing] together as a whole” are the defining criteria—a cohesive “Middle Colonies” spanning and integrating the Delaware and Hudson valleys will seem more plausible to us than to Gough. While he does not choose explicitly among the models of region discussed in his essay, he seems mostly to seek “formal” regions, for the delineation of which, he notes, “homogeneity of the crucial variables throughout the entity is a requisite.”

Alternatively, there may have been multiple spatial realities for individuals and groups differently situated in the colonial society and economy. The analysis here focuses largely on the broadly political activities of major public figures, which may limit its comparability to one encompassing such diverse variables as soil types, housing styles, migration patterns, commodity market flows, newspaper circulation ranges, climatic variations, and political cultures. Regions may, in other words, have been largely phenomena of social status. Elements that defined them for ambitious proprietors, harried royal governors, or other public functionaries may or may not have coincided with those that shaped the territorial experiences of yeoman freeholders, bushloping fur traders, itinerant ministers, or county-seat shopkeepers.

“Region” is an analytical construct, however, and our first task is to find as many of its common denominators as possible. We should not shrink reflexively from the possibly elitist implications of the regionalization “process” suggested here, especially for the earliest decades of settlement and colony building. In a new land with few strong institutions and a pre-democratic public culture, the power to establish regional lineaments probably fell disproportionately to the

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66 See Gough’s brief discussion of theoretical models of regionalization, “Myth of the ‘Middle Colonies,’” 395.
67 Ibid.
elite figures who were simultaneously organizing the provinces that became the building blocks of regions.

At the same time, it would be wrong to presume that the latter figures were being wholly, or even mostly, "proactive" in their intercolonial initiatives. Agents or dependents such as Penn, Dongan, Fletcher, and Bellomont were not simply attempting to facilitate their own designs, or seeking to imprint their own visions on the Middle Atlantic landscape, although they were surely trying to do that. They also were responding—almost helplessly, it must often have seemed to them—to the diverse and often disorderly behavior of the thousands of inhabitants who they were charged with governing, while seeking to reconcile that behavior with the intentions of the powerful Englishmen from whom their charges issued. Our images of Dongan hoping to preempt the ability of Iroquois sachems to "shop around" for a duty-free outlet for their furs; or of Fletcher bewailing the migration of tradesmen and husbandmen from the Hudson to the Delaware Valley; or of Penn calculating the consequences of suppressing anti-proprietary rioters in New Jersey by inviting armed invaders from New York—all reinforce the impression that these officials were largely a reactive elite. To the considerable extent that their transprovincial endeavors involved acquiescing in, coping with, or at best seeking to deflect or shape the geographical consequences of the conduct of their colonists, those endeavors offer a useful, albeit an indirect and hardly an exclusive, index of regional realities beyond the narrow sphere of their own interests.

It is also erroneous to assume that defining a region by means of a matrix of widely distributed cultural variables, of itself, provides more direct access to the geographical experience of a broad range of individuals than one framed on the actions and articulated perceptions of prominent members of the society in question. The small but defining realities of everyday life could be as much artifacts of elite determination as could formally recorded deliberations of state. A small planter living in northern Hunterdon County, New Jersey—near the "shatter belt" of Gough’s bifurcated middle "section"—may have had little more to say about which port his surplus grain products were shipped through, what language his neighbors spoke, or whose newspapers were available for him to read than he did about who sat on the Governor’s Council or where the Assembly met for its next session.
If we are to resolve any substantial number of these difficult questions and to avoid the "projection" of characteristics from one place to another that Gough rightly rejects, then we will need to build strategies for doing so into our work at the research rather than merely the interpretive or synthetic levels. Multiprovincial synthesis of the sort that Gough essays may be a useful corrective to simplistic projection, and to the consequent misconstruction of unduly "large territorial groupings" in the historical past. That approach, however, with its inherent tendency to comparative and contrastive dualisms, carries the opposite danger of misapplied territorial fragmentation. Transprovincial research, which looks not just at the character of comparable phenomena in proximate places, but at the development of those phenomena through the interchange of specific causes and consequences, seems more likely to strike the truest balance between local attachments and wider identifications in the lives of early Americans. It may even be desirable or necessary, if only as an interim step, to dispense altogether with the idea of regions as contiguous bundles of characteristics—whether identical, substantially similar, or merely comparable—and to concentrate on regions as locuses of interactive behavior. However different or diverse its parts may have been, if a constellation of identifiable places "acted" like a region, it just may have been one.

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