One of the important questions about any particular political regime is to what extent deep structural conflicts in society have an observable impact on the political order. In societies such as colonial New York and Pennsylvania, in which representative institutions were so prominent, changes in the personnel and character of popular government can reflect the extent to which contemporaries perceived those social conflicts to be political or to have major political implications. Three of the most prominent indicators of social crisis that historians have identified as having considerable implication for mid-eighteenth-century colonial politics are those of general economic distress, crowd or mob activities, and ineffective courts. Although each of these factors did affect both the short- and long-term conduct of political affairs in ways both obvious and subtle, none had a sufficient impact on the political structures of either New York or Pennsylvania to alter the fundamental character of the colonies' respective regimes.

In retrospect, the most compelling feature of popular politics in both New York and Pennsylvania was its oligarchical nature. This was clearly reflected in the prevailing patterns of provincial representation, as well as in the organization of factional and party politics in the two colonies. What kept these provincial oligarchies secure at the centers of political systems distinguished by a strong commitment to popular politics was more the
accessibility of officeholders within their respective communities of intimate citizenship than any pattern of political deference and/or patronalism. The most successful provincial politicians were well grounded in their local communities and felt many of the same concerns that touched their neighbors. Commitment to the circumscription of capricious power, the pursuit of parsimonious government, the service of community needs, and the maintenance of capable political leadership, along with the need to face periodic reelection, effectively reconciled the oligarchic with the popular in mid-eighteenth-century New York and Pennsylvania politics.

No matter the vitality of this particular sociopolitical hybrid, it was not impervious to change. Alterations in the relationship between the colonies and Great Britain, coupled with increasing social tensions in the provinces themselves, created problems that the old oligarchies were not well equipped to address. In raising fundamental questions about the distribution of power, the Stamp Act protests and land riots in New York and the Paxton riot in Pennsylvania dealt a severe blow to the colonies’ respective oligarchies. Leaders could no longer speak for the most dynamic forces in their society when those forces challenged the oligarchs’ own hegemony, and the recurring extralegal attacks on British authority further undercut oligarchic power. As a consequence, both New York and Pennsylvania regimes became more defensive, arbitrary, and conservative during the last ten years of colonial rule. By the beginning of the 1770s, they were ripe for revolutionary change.

**Political Discontent**

Like their more modern American counterparts, colonialists frequently recognized that politics was confined neither to the legislature nor to the election and appointment of public officials. The purpose of government was to serve the community and thus, when citizens experienced, or thought they experienced, sharp socioeconomic change, or when they felt that they were the victims of an unjust or overly predatory officialdom, they were likely to give political expression to their discontent. We have no clear idea of exactly where eighteenth-century New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians located the boundary lines between what they considered to be political and nonpolitical phenomena. Quite likely there would have been some variety in their answers. In general, colonists had a less expansive view than current generations of what constituted a political statement or agenda. But it is clear that colonials did make important, if erratic, connections between some social and economic dimensions of community life and the course of political affairs.
One of the beliefs that many colonists shared was that government had some obligation to promote the economic well-being of the community. A flourishing provincial economy might be cited as evidence of good government and equitable social relations; a deteriorating one could suggest a political order overrun by the private concerns of self-centered men. Picking up on these concerns, and more particularly on the expressions of socioeconomic grievance that appeared during a few periods of economic distress, some historians have suggested that class conflict engendered a radical political consciousness of significant dimensions. They have argued that an undercurrent of laboring-class mutuality and antagonism toward the selfishness of the rich ran continuously beneath public affairs and on occasion broke to the surface, partly on its own and partly on the invitation of upper-class politicians competing for popular favor.¹

There is no question that voices claiming to speak on behalf of New York and Pennsylvania mechanics did roil the political waters of both colonies during the most acute economic crises. The clearest examples of this occurred during the late 1720s to mid 1730s in New York and the early to mid 1720s in Pennsylvania, when depression hit the economies of the two colonies hard. In both cases, socioeconomic grievances became part of the rhetoric of political discontent.² Political propaganda proliferated as competing factions sought to control the public agenda. In New York City, "Timothy Wheelwright" spoke either to or for the many artisan groups when he complained of hunger amid the "Entertainment[s]" of the rich and the inequities of the law. "Great Men" might flout the law, and if tradesmen complained to the grand jury or county representatives, why "Fiddle faddle, give the Goose more Hay . . . what signifies that? mayn't great Men do as they please for all them and us too? Suppose any great Man should . . . whip you through the lungs . . . or Knock your Brains out, and he should be presented to the Grand Jury, pray what Notice would be taken of it? . . . very little." The best that mechanics could do to improve their situation was to elect "poor honest" or "midling" men rather than "rich Knaves."³ Not to be outdone, advocates for the artisans and farmers of Pennsylvania drew on a strong provincial tradition of egalitarianism, and trained their tongues on the rich with homely turns of phrase. "It is an old saying with us," wrote Roger Plowman, "that we must never grease the fat sow in the Arse, and starve the Pigs."⁴ In both colonies, too, the effects of depressed economies went beyond rhetorical sallies against the rich. New York legislators espoused reforms such as triennial elections, lowering official interest rates, the creation of a loan office, and bounties to stimulate the production of various commodities.⁵ Pennsylvania assemblymen responded to their own situation in a similar manner, and espoused export inspection laws and a paper currency in their efforts to stimulate the provincial economy.⁶
The intensity of the language of class conflict during these times of economic distress suggests that tensions between rich and poor were always present to some degree in the colonies. In western European settler societies in which disparities of wealth quickly appeared, it would be surprising if there were no such burning resentments and if the coals of animosity did not flicker occasionally into flame, as the rich, the middling, and the poor jostled each other in the public places of colonial society. The question, however, is not whether privately and publicly expressed class-related animosities existed or not—clearly they did—but to what extent the resulting tensions determined the patterns of political conflict and political change.

There are several important pieces of evidence from pre-1764 New York and Pennsylvania that bear on this issue. First, there was no necessary connection between hard times and radical politics. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, and again during the late 1740s and early 1750s in both New York and Pennsylvania, for example, depressions occurred. But they created little spontaneous political mobilization among the laboring classes. Moreover, if we look carefully at the major incidents of political change and conflict, they do not correlate particularly well with either structural economic problems or divisions over economic policy. Take, for example, the cases of the greatest political upheaval in assembly membership. The 1759 New York election brought the biggest turnover in the colonial years, over 63 percent. Yet 1759 was in the midst of a period of prosperity in which no particular issue germane to class conflict or prompting a rethinking of the postulates of political economy wracked the province. By the same token, if we look at the four occasions of greatest political change in New York, the principal common denominator was not socioeconomic strain but the longevity of the preceding provincial assemblies. The high turnover following a long provincial assembly is best understood within the context of New Yorkers' political ideas, rather than as their response to short-term economic cycles. The same may be said of political change in Pennsylvania. In 1710, for example, an election occurred that became the standard for every other episode of radical political change. In that year the electorate rejected every incumbent and chose an entirely new assembly! Far from turning on economic issues, this revolution clearly spun on a political and religious axis. In fact, if we look at the major episodes of public conflict in Pennsylvania—the confrontation between popular political leaders and the proprietary in the early eighteenth century, and between the Quaker and Proprietary parties in the early 1740s, the mid 1750s, and the mid 1760s—they all centered on facets of civil Quakerism. Overall, economic depression and inequities in the distribution of wealth were never of more than secondary importance in bringing on either sustained political conflict or considerable political change in the two colonies.
If there is no direct connection to be made between economic hardship and radical politics, the circumstances of the New York and Pennsylvania experiments with radical politics in the 1720s and 1730s are nonetheless revealing. Judging from both colonies’ experiences, the appearance of overt class-based political appeals required both significant splits among the established political leaders and a willingness on their part to tap into the existing reservoirs of economic discontent and class tensions in order to bolster their respective positions. In New York, vigorous competition between the Philipse and Morris/Alexander factions prompted their leaders to seek support among city tradesmen. In Pennsylvania, Sir William Keith wanted to build up his popularity among Philadelphians in order to defy the Penn family and further his hopes of having Pennsylvania royalized under his leadership. Although in each situation leading politicians tried to capitalize on the socioeconomic grievances of the middling and lower-class mechanics and farmers, and claimed to be against the “great men” of their day, in fact, they discouraged anything in the way of outsider political participation other than as voters. In Pennsylvania, the Keithians “engross[ed] ... the Management of ... [elections] into the hands of a small number” of Sir William’s upper-class friends.15 And in New York, the Morris/Alexander crew, often regarded as one of the most radical pre-Revolutionary political factions in the colonies, made an explicit part of their election campaign the caution that electors should choose as representatives those who were not only well affected toward “Liberty” but who also had “a considerable Interest in the Property of this Colony.”16 Clearly electors heeded this advice, for it is hard to imagine a group of New Yorkers more filled with themselves and their upper-class status than James Alexander and his confidants.17 Even in the much-noticed New York municipal elections of 1734, there was little evidence of artisanal precociousness. The socioeconomic backgrounds of incumbent city officials and their challengers were very similar, and their profiles indicate little to suggest they shared, or wanted to share, very much with the working men of their neighborhoods.18

All told, it is clear that “no homogeneous artisan political community” developed in either New York City or Philadelphia to make a distinctive mark in political affairs.19 Small producers there were aplenty, but there is little evidence of a distinctive small-producer mentality that prompted many to seek direct access to the seats of provincial political power. Despite efforts to portray the colonial experience as a tableau illustrating “ordinary people ... striding to the forefront of politics,” the actual politics of conflict left a record of the laboring classes’ political “ambivalence” and fitfulness.20 The primary reason for this was that despite their sizable numbers (as many as half the taxable males in New York and Philadelphia), “at no time were ... [they] a unified body, identifying themselves as a class or united interest
In terms of wealth and status, mechanics ranged all the way from the lower levels of the social structure to the upper middle ranks; because of this, they merged and overlapped with retailers and entrepreneurs of various bents. Classification of artisans in terms of wealth or craft also tends to underemphasize the fluidity of socioeconomic relations in early New York and Philadelphia. Economic and demographic growth, the differential rates at which journeymen could advance to become independent producers, increasing specialization among mechanics, the relative informality of craft organizations, divisions among journeymen, apprentices, and masters, and conflict within artisan groups, as well as among related crafts, created a dynamic social structure in which many of the relationships that might have created class cultures were in considerable flux. In England, economic specialization created craft enclaves such as occurred in Nottingham in 1754, where over one-quarter of local voters were framework knitters. The common experience of such a sizable single-craft fraternity could produce a kind of lower-class cultural milieu impossible to duplicate in the eighteenth-century American experience. In the more fluid, ethnically diverse, and substantially less dense new-world lower-class environment, there was more of a tendency toward the atomization of artisan society than we might expect, and a greater acceptance of such circumstances in the local communities that mechanics and laborers forged.

Despite the absence of any clearly defined artisanal or “lower sort” political consciousness, the laboring classes did have an important impact on colonial politics. Their most significant influence on the structure of New York and Pennsylvania politics was the fact that they shared with many members of the entrepreneurial, professional, retail, and merchant classes a marked prejudice in favor of popular rights. It was artisan votes as much as any that tended consistently to support the New York Whig factions that were the most credible current champions of popular privileges, and anti-proprietary, anti-executive politics in Pennsylvania. Harder to gauge, because it had no verifiable impact on officeholding, was the fact that spokespersons for the lower and middling classes could, and on occasion did, articulate the language of class conflict. The poor did have a case against the rich, and the passions that socioeconomic division could generate were never too far from the surface. Both New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians simply had to live with the obvious, that their respective provincial social orders always possessed a delicate quality along with their considerable strengths.

The activities of colonial crowds are one important illustration of how out-of-doors community activism could generate a sense of fragility in New York and Pennsylvania, notwithstanding the overall political stability of these two societies. Historians who place mobs close to the center of their treatment of political behavior tend to see crowd activities in one of two
ways. The first of these involves an emphasis on mobs in which at least a sprinkling of well-to-do and respected citizens joined with a preponderance of middling and lower-class men and women to assail targets such as local officials or naval press gangs. These mobs claimed to speak for the community, and as such, they have been perceived as an expression of extra-institutional governance rather than as an anti-institutional form of subversive behavior. According to some interpretations, they supplemented, rather than challenged, the existing political order.24

Mob behavior of the second type is seen as taking the form of plebeian riots. In this view, when the "sociological oppositions peculiar to eighteenth-century society" forged a "reintegration" of "fragmented elements of older patterns of thought" among laboring people, a smouldering lower-class consciousness sometimes flared up into "insurgent direct action."25 The crowd defended traditional rights relevant to the circumstances of different laboring groups, tried to protect the common interests of its members as consumers and victims of power, and spoke out for time-sanctioned privileges that symbolized justice to the participants.

One problem with both these hypotheses is that prior to 1764, few crowds in New York and Pennsylvania appear to fall into the designated categories. The most easily classified examples of such behavior occurred in New England, where vigorous local traditions, English homogeneity, considerable isolation, relatively dense concentrations of population, and an atavistic turn of mind encouraged it.26 Some expressions of both all-class and lower-class protest spread west and south into New York and New Jersey, frequently through migrants from New England, but also as part of an old-world emigrant response to the peculiar experiences of each colony. These were sporadic, however, and their impact was marginal.27 Further south in Pennsylvania, they virtually petered out.28

Secondly, even though those who emphasize the classlessness of colonial crowds and those who view mobs as the voice of the lower orders offer very different interpretations of colonial society, they both emphasize the degree to which "their" mobs represented "community." In the former case, the mobs are conceived of as vertically integrated crowds speaking for the community; in the latter case they are depicted as agents of a lower- and lower-middle-class community articulating long-hallowed standards of justice and morality. Both hypotheses tend to see the crucial dynamic of crowd action as a conflict between the mob, representing a community, and the objects of its anger, who, while earning that wrath, defined themselves or were defined as outsiders. In the former case these were most frequently negligent or ill-intentioned officials; in the latter, they were upper-class pariahs who ignored their larger obligations to society.

By choosing to accept the mobs' claims that they represented commu-
nities, and by focusing largely on the mobs’ apparent aims, apologists for both types of crowds ignore the obvious: violence almost always fractured colonial communities in a variety of ways. Just as important as the division between the mob and its objects were the divisions between those who participated in mob activity and those who did not. If we pay attention to the boundaries of the mob, we soon see that many citizens from the same classes as the rioters recoiled from involvement and refused participation. They may have acquiesced to the mob, but there is no reason to assume that acquiescence meant approval. Clearly, too, not all occupational groups were equally represented in the crowd. Members of some occupations were more predisposed to riot in a given situation than others, a behavioral difference that suggests important attitudinal variations.

The problem of cross-community, cross-class divisiveness amid violence is frequently difficult to untangle because of the very few examples of “community” crowd actions that we have in New York and Pennsylvania and because of the sparseness of records surrounding these episodes. But there were a number of other types of mobbing incidents for which we do have better evidence. These illustrate that polarization rather than consensus—but polarization of a non-class specific kind—most frequently attended mob action. Take, for example, the well-known boundary dispute violence in both New York and Pennsylvania. Although a limited class dimension distinguished the conflicts in northeastern New York during the early to mid 1750s, the harassment, clubbings, shootings, and deaths that actually occurred took place largely between prospective neighbors whose chief concerns were how best to advantage themselves in the competition for productive land. The similarities between New York’s rural violence, whether on the Massachusetts or the New Jersey frontier, and that intermittent along the Pennsylvania/Maryland boundary far outweigh the dissimilarities embodied in the different systems of landholding and land alienation procedures in the two colonies. In Pennsylvania, as in New York, competition for cheap land and the violence that accompanied it testified to the fragility of community relations and to the various ways in which communities in the process of formation could be fractured in expanding settler societies. But land issues were, of course, not the only focus of group violence in the two colonies. There was, for example, the violence that occasionally broke out at elections. In York County, Pennsylvania, in 1750, the community split into two warring groups and resorted to “Clubb law” to settle their dispute. In the well-known Philadelphia election riot of 1742, the immediate perpetrators of violence were a crowd of mariners from other home ports, who thought that beating on pacifists would be a fine “Frolic.” The main consequence of their action was to divide the community for years along lines that had nothing to do with differences between the lower and upper classes.
There were other mobbing episodes, too, that exposed more of the fault lines in colonial society. In New York City in 1712, rioting blacks killed several whites and attempted to fire the town. Approximately thirty years later, on rumors of a similar rebellion, whites visited their wrath on suspected black conspirators. Although the courts were the main vehicle whites used in order to go after the suspects, the inquisition had an air of mob violence about it, as thirty-four inhabitants were put to death. Although New York Jews never experienced such intense persecution, they did face considerable harassment. Small groups of New Yorkers included the humiliation of Jews on their list of entertainments and ways to make merry. All told, the preeminent characteristic of mob activity in New York and Pennsylvania was its tendency to fracture local or provincial communities in a variety of ways—but with the exception of the election riots, almost always in ways that had few clear and demonstrable political implications.

The multifaceted nature of colonial mobs, in fact, serves to remind us of how fragile the colonial social order may from time to time have appeared to contemporaries. Not only did most New York and Pennsylvania mobbings signify social divisiveness, but mobs were also unpredictable. The emphasis historians have sometimes placed on the ritualized characteristics of commemorative celebrations and popular holiday activities tends to obscure the capricious side of public events, “frolics,” and “merry” making. When viewed anthropologically, for example, the “rites of passage” license that some communities apparently gave to young men to harass others, or to fight and destroy property, may appear relatively benign. But for participants it was the aphrodisiac of imminent conflict and the excitement of facing the unpredictable that made those forays attractive. For other members of society, regardless of class, it was precisely the element of unpredictability that always lurked around the mob’s perimeter that could be so threatening. There, on the outskirts of the crowd, participant met nonparticipant face to face; there, those with a grievance met the property of those less committed to protest; and there, crowd consensus became frayed—as new recruits joined in and the half-hearted or exhausted dropped out, as alternative agendas came to mind in the swirl of action and events, as personal friendships and hatreds reconstituted themselves under the pressure of social activism, and as differences of occupation, ethnicity, religion, and race found ways of asserting themselves. Whether they were ritualized urban mobs, election riots, or rural confrontations over property rights, crowd mobilization could carry with it a peripheral capriciousness that was frequently of frightening dimensions.

To concentrate too heavily on the disruptive aspects of crowd confrontations, however, is to oversimplify. There is little evidence that the conflict and fears that violence generated put New Yorkers or Pennsylvanians into a continual state of sociopolitical nervousness. Certainly, the ritualized char-
acter of some crowd activities could work to limit anxiety, whether within the larger community or within the potpourri of the colonial laboring classes. But given the low frequency and geographic dispersion of large-scale communal crowd activities in New York and Pennsylvania that is easily overemphasized. Far more important is the simple fact that eighteenth-century colonists were inured to low-level violence. From what we know of criminal justice procedures and the offhand reporting of the use of force, colonials were frequently casual in their attitudes toward incidental fracases. Many were “resigned . . . to living in a violent world” and not particularly interested or concerned about “alter[ing] the violence of their society.” Colonial’s insensitivity to recurring episodes of personal violence suggests that even large-scale mobbings may have telegraphed far less in the way of sociopolitical tension than we sometimes think. Prior to the mid 1760s, there are no clear examples in either New York or Pennsylvania of an episode of mobbing resulting in significant changes in electoral outcome. In a violent age, violence was not invariably freighted with serious implications for political affairs. Connections may have existed, but most were far too subtle for us to pick up at the distance of two and a half centuries.

Questions about the relationship between socioeconomic and political structures in New York and Pennsylvania inevitably raise the issue of the relative political stability of each colony. At first glance, New York certainly appears to have been the more fragile. Strong and idiosyncratic traditions of localism based on geographic, ethnic, religious, economic, and historic differences could work against the political integration of the province. The colony’s partial religious establishment was a compromise that occasionally exacerbated conflict among imperious spokespersons for various denominations. The execution of Jacob Leisler and his friends in the late seventeenth century hung for some time like a pall over New York, reminding eighteenth-century political leaders of how volatile public life could be. The charge of “treason” was one that New Yorkers continued to use in their factional battles as late as the 1730s. The slave rebellion of 1712, followed by the alleged black conspiracy of 1741, suggest a society prone to periodic fits of fright. And the incidence of violence, both in land riots and attendant upon the continuous contact between members of the four independent companies of the British army stationed in the province and various provincial communities, certainly reinforces that perception. Yet Pennsylvania also had its obvious weaknesses: a provincial legislature that appeared to avoid wielding power; a government that refused to sanction warfare in a war-filled century; a dominant sect that maintained its electoral power partially through the underrepresentation of backcountry settlements; and a number of local communities that were occasionally wracked by violence.

In order better to compare levels of governmental legitimacy and the
related sociopolitical resilience of Britain's North American colonies, a number of historians have turned to court and legal records. There has been an especial interest in New York's legal history, and research has turned up some important evidence that strengthens our perception of that colony's social and political order as a particularly fragile entity. Overall, from 1691 to 1775, approximately 37 percent of criminal indictments simply trailed off into inaction, while only 47.9 percent of the remaining cases resulted in conviction. The fact that many of the Dutch apparently disputed the right of court officials to enforce the law, along with the increase in offenses of personal violence in New York City, and riot in the countryside after 1750, suggests a society in which authority was tenuous. There is a difference, of course, between the attitudes of those suspected of criminal activities and the attitudes of the general population toward political authority. But in colonial New York, there were also important connections between court officers and politics. Local law-enforcement officers were partisan political appointees and rejection of their authority could have had political implications. The rapid turnover of court officials that took place in some counties could undermine the legitimacy that frequently attends continuity in officeholding. And the turning of justices of the peace, sheriffs, and other court officers into the political agents of the dominant county politicians seems to have downgraded the quality of those willing to accept such positions. Many of these political appointees had little interest in their office beyond its perfunctory administration and their profits. The results were unenthusiastic courts and disrespect for incumbent officers.

When we turn to civil court actions, which were far more numerous than their criminal counterparts and more revealing of the way in which contemporaries dealt with interpersonal conflict, the evidence is less clear. It is arguable that the high incidence (50 percent) of unresolved civil cases that came before the New York Supreme Court at midcentury simply reflects the same indifferency of, and disrespect for, the courts that the languishing criminal cases apparently indicate. It appears on closer examination, however, that circumstances such as poor recordkeeping, the death of one party to the dispute, out-of-court settlements, or the substitution of private arbitration for further court proceedings may have accounted for many of these unresolved cases. Moreover, the extensive use of arbitrations rather than suits at law, church-sponsored mediation between antagonists, and the relative absence of court actions from the heavily Dutch area of Kings County suggest that local communities were quite capable of handling their disputes internally. In the case of the Dutch communities, there was little incentive to go to court, because the "tedious Examinations, by Interpreters" made the process very costly both in time and money. No matter how many criminal actions remained unresolved, there is much evidence that
New York society retained considerable coherence, and that local community members were adept at resolving civil disputes among themselves, the vagaries of the province's court system notwithstanding.

Unfortunately, we do not have the same quantitative evidence for Pennsylvania as for New York, and that makes comparison more treacherous than it might otherwise be. In the early years of Delaware Valley settlement, county courts and Quaker meetings teamed up very effectively to promote social order and to draw the settler population into a willing recognition of governmental legitimacy.\(^{53}\) Certainly, there are indications that the courts in the older settled areas of the Quaker colony continued their early colonial activism in criminal matters into the mid eighteenth century.\(^{54}\) And Quaker meetings in particular, but also other churches as well, were bulwarks of social order, in that they frequently arraigned their members for breach of discipline.\(^{55}\) Arbitration was such an integral part of Friends' approach to social relations that it significantly influenced the judicial system,\(^{56}\) and there is every reason to believe the practice became widespread, a highly visible product of the Quakerization process. Andrew Hamilton, for example, is alleged to have done something no one ever suggested his New York counterparts even contemplated—that is, spend "more time in hearing and reconciling Differences in private, to the loss of his Fees, than he did in pleading Causes at the Bar."\(^{57}\) Among Presbyterian leaders, there were numerous efforts to discourage their "People" from "going to the Civil Magistrate & to Issue such personal Injuries and affronts, as may be among them."\(^{58}\)

But the Pennsylvania court record is by no means unambiguous. There is evidence that local officials exercised a great deal of discretion in carrying out court orders, even to the point of ignoring judgments.\(^{59}\) This would suggest that the number of unexecuted judgments and unresolved cases may have been far closer to the New York figures than first impressions suggest. Just as in New York, ethnic tensions could discourage local officials from doing the courts' bidding, but in Pennsylvania such circumstances were not quite as simple as the Dutch-English confrontations on the Hudson. There were incidents of Welshmen standing off the English, and of the Scotch-Irish defying Germans.\(^{60}\) In Lancaster County, for example, the election of a German, John Barr, as sheriff produced protest:

The Irish Presbyterians being disappointed in not having one of themselves elected to that office, refused to serve on either Grand or Petty Juries, tho' regularly summoned by the sheriff, because he was a Dutchman. So that there was a failure of justice last term in that county. The sheriff, in endeavoring to serve a process on one of those people, was violently assaulted, had both ears of his horse cut off, and was obliged to fly to save his life.\(^{61}\)

Of course, Pennsylvania's courts did not suffer from the same cheapening of justice of the peace appointments that took place in New York and under-
mined the court's prestige there, but Quaker colony judges had their own problems. Invariably, "any other magistrates except Quakers . . . [were] thought to be dependants on ye proprietaries"—that is, partisan appointments. And that meant that their authority was periodically undermined by the waves of antiproprietary sentiment as they washed through the colony.

All in all, it may well be that there was slightly more tension over the legitimacy of provincial and county government in New York than in Pennsylvania. Even if this is so, it is nonetheless possible that the former had more potential for flexibility than the latter in the event of any serious crisis challenging the existing colonial regimes. But throughout the mid eighteenth century, there were no such crises. Socioeconomic disturbances were limited in their impact, class conflict was sporadic and inconsistently expressed, and the provincial courts worked adequately, if not perfectly, amid both cynicism and supplementary, informal methods of resolving disputes. In short, the socioeconomic weaknesses and the testing of authority that occurred in New York and Pennsylvania are unlikely to have been more severe than occurred in other reasonably stable colonial societies, and the political oligarchies in each of the two colonies enjoyed a relatively free hand to exploit their respective strengths.

Accessible Oligarchies

Popular political leadership in both New York and Pennsylvania was unquestionably oligarchical. In both societies, relatively small groups of individuals and families wielded political power throughout the colonial years. For much of the eighteenth century, New York and Pennsylvania had the smallest number of assembly representatives per adult white male of any of the British colonies in North America and the West Indies. From 1700 to 1734, New York's assembly expanded from twenty-one to twenty-seven seats, where it remained through 1773. During that same three-quarters of a century, the province's population multiplied almost ten times. Pennsylvania had twenty-six provincial representatives from 1701 through 1729; thirty from 1729 to 1749; and thirty-six from 1752 to 1771. The Quaker province's population multiplied approximately fourteen times during that same period. The degree of tight political control that members of these relatively small legislatures exercised is emphasized by the low turnover rate in their ranks. The most complete study we have of this aspect of politics is of Pennsylvania, and there the proportion of assembly seats filled by incumbents and veterans from earlier sessions appears very high. Although we have no comparable statistics for New York, it is likely that the entrance of newcomers into the assembly was even more restricted
than in Pennsylvania. Between 1726 and 1758 only 62 new members sat in New York's House of Assembly; that was exactly one half the number of neophytes who entered the Pennsylvania legislature between 1726 and 1754.71

There were several other circumstances that emphasized the exclusivity of legislative office in the two colonies. Physically, for example, the small size of the assembly halls encouraged intimacy and a clubbish sense of fraternity. Picture the New York House of Assembly as James Duane briefly described it, an "ornamented" "Chamber" "on the first Floor of the City hall . . . [with] the Members tak[ing] . . . their place round a Table fixt on the Floor . . . [and] occupi[ng] . . . about two thirds of the Room"; or the Pennsylvania assemblymen sitting in Quakerish silence waiting for inspiration.72 Comfortable in their cocoons, both New York and Pennsylvania representatives tried to insulate themselves from outside pressures as best they could. There were no visitors' galleries (although visitors were occasionally admitted to hearings involving members of the public), and unlike those of the Chesapeake colonies, the New York and Pennsylvania assemblies kept the door shut to outside auditors until just before the Revolution.73 They emphasized the extent to which the assembly was a corporate body representing the entire colony and tried to prevent the use of the public record against themselves by only infrequently publishing division lists.74 To most assemblymen, their office was an "Exalted . . . Station," and once elected, many found it difficult to "shake off" what one disgusted conscientious Quaker termed their "Raggs of Imaginary honor."75 Because of the closed, consensual orientation of the Quakerized Pennsylvania Assembly, it was somewhat more of a "Conclave" than the New York legislature, but both were self-conscious bodies, whose occasional imperiousness reflected the success they had enjoyed in checking governors and in building up their own power.76

The primary means by which assembly incumbents kept themselves and their friends in the seats of power was their control of the nomination of candidates. Those who were in the forefront of politics and who saw themselves as political leaders and power brokers were always quick to seize the initiative in organizing electoral affairs. And once they were active, their agreements and disagreements determined the character of the ensuing contest. In New York, the most frequent method of nomination was the candidates' own announcement of their intentions. In New York City, that might be by newspaper advertisement, while in the counties it might simply be by peremptory public announcement. In Albany, in 1761, one individual asserted that the "old Candidates" were about to announce their intentions to stand for election "without the advice of any of the Citysens."77 To many outside observers, nominations may have appeared that cut-and-dried, and
in the manors and during quiet times in Suffolk and Kings counties, they may have been. But in most of the constituencies there was a good deal of interest-making behind the scenes, to which only a few were privy. In New York City, there was little taste for the kind of divisive contest that split the electorate in 1737, and in most elections, both before and after that contest, a nucleus of assemblymen and their close friends worked to establish an orderly succession or limited contest when any of the incumbents died, retired, or became an electoral liability. When David Clarkson died in 1751, for example, those in the know “talked of” two possible successors, John Watts and William Walton. But there was no immediate announcement of candidacy, and the two reached an agreement that prevented a contest. Walton got Clarkson’s place and Watts gained a preeminent claim to the next vacancy on New York’s four-person delegation.

It is impossible to know how many brokers were involved in the Walton/Watts negotiations, and thus in the related nomination procedures. But evidence from elsewhere is suggestive. We know that Henry Beekman could settle his own candidacy in Dutchess County, for example, in consultation with not more than a half dozen people. And for the 1761 Albany election that William Johnson’s informant judged settled by the impending announcement of two candidates, we have a detailed account. In that case the two “Old Candidates” did not initially act in concert as the first observer surmised. Ultimately, three autonomous candidates appeared, and the major reason for the contest was that negotiations between the seven or eight major power brokers in the area were fraught with intrigue, indecision, and deceit. The three eventual candidates jockeyed for the best possible position vis-à-vis the other two; Sir William Johnson and Robert Livingston, Jr., were unclear as to what their full intentions were; and one major player who “made a Low Bow in token of Consent” when one candidate asked for his “vote and interest,” apparently broke his word. It is possible that Albany (and, one might add, Schenectady) politics were perpetually more byzantine than anywhere else. Agreement over nominations may have been more easily arrived at elsewhere, or alternatively the fissures between leading politicians may have been more consistent and sharply defined. But the Albany record is the best evidence we have of the extent of meaningful participation in the nomination procedure. Key players were the “principal people” of the county, and that select group is unlikely to have gone much beyond a dozen or so individuals, even in New York City.

Just as in New York, nomination procedures in Pennsylvania were restrictive processes. The most convincing evidence of close political control
comes from the crises of 1710 and 1755–1756, when the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting directly addressed provincial politics and clearly had some impact on the selection of candidates in the three original counties and in Philadelphia. But those situations were exceptional. The counties varied considerably in political temperament, and in normal times each protected its own autonomy. Ticket selection was up to the political activists in each county, not imposed from above.

When we turn our attention to the respective counties, the most surprising observation may be that what frequently passes for the most radical political faction in early Pennsylvania, the Kcithians, may well have practiced the most tightly controlled nomination procedures of any of colonial Pennsylvania's factions or parties. A distinguishing feature of Keithian politics was the way in which "a small number of Philadelphians," "a select Club" "engross[ed] . . . the Management of elections." They acted as though they had been "appointed by Law to make the Tickets, and the People had only a Right" to confirm that choice.

In comparison with both the practices of the Kcithians and the county politics of New York, Pennsylvania's Quaker Party certainly canvassed a greater number of people. In Philadelphia, there were relatively large numbers involved in choosing the main county slate for the 1739 election, and in the early 1750s, the politician John Smith admitted attending meetings "of a pretty many people" to settle the assembly ticket. In Chester County, nomination meetings were large enough and open enough to be held at taverns. One activist identified a group of "the Buisy friends," a collection of "Modern [Moderate?] and Sensible Quakers," a subset of that group who formed a "Clubb," and several influential individuals, all of whom felt they should have some say in the county ticket for 1743. Yet there also could be exceptions outside the three old counties. When in the early 1740s, "Friends at the River" (namely, Samuel Blunston, John Wright, and the latter's offspring, Susanna, James, and John) sang out the names of their preferred candidates for Lancaster County, the local notables usually joined in with a strong supporting chorus.

To the extent that broader participation in the nominating process occurred in Pennsylvania than in New York, and the evidence does suggest such a conclusion, it was prompted by two circumstances. The complex tickets that needed to be cobbled together were the most obvious of these. Unlike New Yorkers, who most frequently voted for one or two assemblymen in isolation, most Pennsylvanians voted on the same day for four to eight assemblymen, three county commissioners, and six assessors, as well as for county sheriffs and coroners. The numbers and variety of officers invited participation on behalf of numerous interests. If a given geographical area could not get an assembly nomination, perhaps it could get a
commissioner or assessor; if five or six assemblymen were agreeable to all, there was room for disagreement over the last two or three. When we add to these practical considerations the Quaker-inspired strand of equality that wound itself through Pennsylvania's cultural fabric, we can understand why political management could have a broader participatory dimension than existed in New York.

But absent one important caveat, that conclusion can also be misleading. Despite their various efforts to include Quakerized Pennsylvanians within their ranks, most Quaker Party fixers also gave strong political expression to their cultural tribalism. The old first purchasers and prominent contemporaries of William Penn were revered in memory as they rarely had been during their lives. And that reverence was a legacy their sons and daughters inherited. James Wright, for example, may occasionally have raised his fellow legislators' hackles because of his willingness to put farming before politics, but despite that, his public reputation was assured not only "by his own merit" but also "in gratitude to the memory of his father, who serve[d] . . . [the province] diligently and faithfully." Mordecai Lloyd deserved the office of sheriff in part because he was the son of a first purchaser, Thomas Lloyd. A Chester County candidate for sheriff was questionable because he had "no Claim to Such an Advancement from the merritts of his Progenitors," and his election to that post would be "the highest Injustice" to many "Gentlemen of Probit[y] and Approved fidelity . . . (the descendents of the ancient Settlers who merritted much in their time) . . . [who were] So Very Capable of Serving." This broadly shared concern to keep what Pennsylvania Quakers called "Mussroom" politicians from gaining too much influence in the county areas of concentrated Quaker settlement inevitably constrained the range of candidates that even sizable groups of Quaker Party nominators might offer the electorate.

Whatever their differences in nominating procedures, the political results in New York and Pennsylvania were quite comparable. In New York a small handful of "principal men," often including the incumbent assemblymen, had to set their imprimatur on aspiring candidates in order for the electorate to take them seriously. In Pennsylvania, pre-election consultation may have included a greater number of people, but ultimately political control was just as constricted. The clusters of "merchants, lawyers, millers and farmers" who controlled Pennsylvania's political affairs were formidable in their dominance, for as one Philadelphia witness testified in 1770, it was "customary" for "a certain Company of leading Men to . . . settle the Ticket for Assemblymen without ever permitting . . . a Mechanic to interfere." Because of their Quakerism, Pennsylvania's political leaders had less of the pretension, showiness, and ostentatious vencer of a gentry political style that characterized Anglophile New Yorkers. But despite their differing val-
ues, procedures, and styles, both groups were intuitively oligarchical and instinctively tenacious of their political power.

Given the oligarchical nature of politics in provincial New York and Pennsylvania, the question that has bothered generations of "democratically" conditioned historians is why the colonial electorate tolerated such circumstances. Because of the relatively wide distribution of wealth and low property qualifications for voting, anywhere from 50 percent to 80 percent of white adult males may have been eligible to vote. That was approximately three times higher than the percentage of eligible voters in England during the eighteenth century. Why did such a large number of colonists with unparalleled access to voting rights willingly acquiesce to oligarchical rule?

The fashionable answers to that question for the past three decades have been "deference" and "patron/client" power relationships. To take the former first, historians have placed a great deal of emphasis on the ideas of hierarchy and order that prevailed in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American intellectual world and reputedly found strong expression in the sociopolitical behavior of the colonists. In particular, the classical theory of deference, which was an integral part of the English country ideology that allegedly suffused the colonies, demanded that deference "be spontaneously exhibited." The division between "the elite" and "non-elite" should take place "naturally, voluntarily and spontaneously," largely inspired by the recognition of the non-elite that the elite were "of a superior status and culture of their own"—clearly a "better sort" of people. The "wealth and birth, leisure and property, liberality and education" that distinguished upper-class "culture . . . [should] be recognized by the demos as part of the superior natural capacities" that qualified citizens for political leadership. In this theory of deference, two features stand out: the onus was firmly on the non-elite to thoroughly and naturally recognize the superior qualities of members of the upper classes, and social deference was inextricably intertwined with political deference.

Problems with this theory of deference as an explanation for colonial political behavior begin right there. In New York and Pennsylvania, those who were the most strenuous advocates of "better sort" superiority were always of the upper classes. But even among their ranks, there were those who occasionally invited questionable characters to share in the exercise of political power. And if we survey the multiple borderlands in which contact between the upper classes and their lesser neighbors took place, we see a great deal of evidence irreconcilable with a pervasive deferential political ethic.

In both New York and Pennsylvania, the extensive articulation and demonstration of anti-authoritarianism suggests far more attenuated notions of
deference than the classical model prescribed. In New York, the authority of government was repeatedly challenged by those who "did not value the Courts . . . order[s] a fart." And the expected recognition of a natural order in society was undermined by the "levelling Sentiments of the People" and the rough "equality in point of condition" of so many countryfolk. Perhaps the most revealing examples of the weakness of deferential attitudes among New Yorkers took place in the case of an individual often perceived as exemplar of deferential politics. Robert R. Livingston was a classic case of the man who had it all—intelligence, presence, personal warmth, professional accomplishment, religious sensibilities, and "Something of the Gentleman" in his manners. He was also a large landowner with many tenants, and he possessed a family pedigree second to none. Yet Livingston never received the kind of deferential reverence in Dutchess County that his station seems to have demanded. When his friends first suggested him as a candidate for the assembly, others objected that his city upbringing had made him "ignorant of the affairs of the Country." Service to the county was of crucial importance to them, not Livingston's array of entitlements to social deference. For a while Dutchess County residents did swallow their reservations and elect Livingston to represent them, but a revulsion against landlords, punitive judges, and Anglicanism, on top of reservations about Livingston's ability to represent county needs, soon swept him from office. Of course his opponents were no lower-class radicals, but they did not have the same array of deference-inspiring attributes that Livingston clearly possessed.

The same sort of indifference to deferential entitlements also existed in Pennsylvania. In July of 1763, Joseph Shippen, the secretary to the Provincial Council, desperately needed to get supplies to Fort Augusta, and he ordered a wagoner to redirect the goods the carter was hauling, originally destined for Harris's Ferry, to the fort. Although Shippen made his demand in the governor's name, the teamster "did not seem to regard that much" and simply turned around and went home to Germantown. Such attitudes were particularly strong in Pennsylvania, because Quakers invited egalitarianism by discouraging any words or signs of respect tainted by artificiality or insincerity. Their political leaders made a point of denying the overt deference that various status-conscious officials felt was their right. Picture David Lloyd, hat on, in the midst of a conference with the governor and council, refusing "to stand when speaking as all others there did." When Governor Evans rebuked his behavior as "affrontive" to his authority and demanded "a due Deference," Speaker of the Assembly Lloyd refused. As he continued to slouch in his chair, Lloyd argued that the "mouth of the Countrey" deserved an "Equality" the governor denied. Friends' refusal to use flattering ornamental language, their determination not to offer "hat
honor,” and their unwillingness to pay particular regard to proprietary officials indicated a commitment to an expansive culture of common humanity as much as their quiet respect for their ancestors and commercial success communicated approval of an ordered society.

Among the upper-class members of the two provincial societies, Pennsylvanians were clearly more at ease with anti-authoritarian attitudes than their New York counterparts. On one occasion Charles Norris laughingly recounted to Susanna Wright how “our poor little G——r, the other day, had like to have got a drubbing on the High way by a rude Carter who would not turn out of a deep & hollow road, or more properly turn back, for he could not get up the sides with his loaded waggon.” Norris was not at all alarmed by the carter’s “uppityness,” nor did he suggest that the dryman’s assertiveness was exceptional. Norris’s humor turned on the juxtaposition of a new governor, accustomed to old-world standards of propriety, with the relatively egalitarian ethos of Pennsylvania society. Compare that incident with a similar situation in New York: Governor Cosby, “out in his Coach & meeting a loaded Waggon in which one of the Planters sat with his Wife . . . order’d his Coach man to whip him because the man did not drive so quickly out of his way as he expected.” Cosby symbolized the attitude of many upper-class New Yorkers who, rather than accept the assertiveness or offhand indifference of their less prominent fellow citizens, tried to command deferential behavior by their assertion of power, swagger of personal intimidation, and purchase of political support. Cosby was only the best-known New Yorker quick to reach for his whip. During Chief Justice James DeLancey’s days, Governor Clinton charged James’s brother, Oliver DeLancey, with “carrying his Elections by the Numbers he has horse-whipped in ye City.” And the mercurial Peter Livingston well understood that one way to enhance his personal political fortunes was to have “Brusers” at his beck and call. Also, it should be no surprise that in a society in which the commercial ethic was so strong, in which wealth was both revered and coveted, in which administrative officers frequently demanded payoffs, and in which governors could sell political offices with impunity, the province’s political leaders viewed “money . . . [as] the Scnues of [political] war.” The important thing for New York’s highly self-conscious, politically involved gentry was to show up at elections with an entourage. The means of mobilization was less important than the fact of a following. Like the proverbial emperor’s suit of clothing, pecuniary-induced political support might be paraded as deferential finery. The issue was how the political leaders saw themselves.

The classical model of deference, then, was no more than a set of ideal relationships that some members of the upper classes felt should inform their provincial worlds. In reality, colonial politics took place in a far more com-
plicated behavioral and ideological matrix. To begin with, the political arena was dominated by those who sought out political power. They were a self-selected group that increasingly became recognizable in the eighteenth century as the politically engaged, in contradistinction to various clusters of prominent economic and social leaders who either stayed out of politics or remained on the political periphery. What determined political success was not some relative ranking of deference entitlements, but rather a wide variety of peer-group and constituent considerations. An individual's willingness and ability to pursue commonly agreed upon political goals, his abilities (or "capacity" as contemporaries would have said), the nature of his personal connections with established families and prominent economic interests, his experience in public affairs, his place of residence, his personal drive and commitment, his sense of integrity, the nature and extent of his resources, the reach of his detractors, and whether or not his name was worn "smooth Enough to go down in a General way," all played a part in the process of political selection. Multidimensional, reciprocal, and developmental relationships among individuals (as agents) and the existing power structures—that is, among various political, religious, economic, and social agglomerations of power—determined the peculiar character and evolution of each colony's oligarchical political system.

Which is not to say that deference did not exist. Clearly, respect for such characteristics as the aforementioned was an important and dynamic part of the colonists' social relations. (It is, in fact, impossible to imagine a relatively complicated Western society operating peacefully without some expressions of social deference.) And those deference entitlements played a part in politics as well. Those who enjoyed upper-class advantages, and who had the inclination to assert them in the competition for political power, could preempt the field. But as William Smith, Jr., testified when he described the New York legislators as "plain, illiterate husbandmen, whose views seldom extended farther than to the regulation of highways, the destruction of wolves, wildcats, and foxes, and the other little interests of the particular counties which they were chosen to represent," and as an anonymous Pennsylvanian pointed out when he identified the Quaker oligarchy as one of "merchants, lawyers, millers and farmers," there was no widespread belief that gentry "culture," "property," and lifestyle were the essential requisites of political leadership. Frequently, constituents felt "in mighty dread" of political power in the hands of those of polished gentry style, whose manner and leisure concealed larcenous hearts; given a choice they frequently preferred representatives conversant with "Piggs and foul / What bigness Stallions out to Strou'l." Witness how "Haytime & Harvest" either shut the legislatures' doors or left numerous seats empty. Moreover, as both the statements and the political behavior of numerous lower-class and mid-
dling colonists illustrated, there was always considerable “ambivalence” toward the existing authority figures.124 “Acceptance [of the existing order] and alienation [from it] exist[ed] very often in the same persons.”125 A carter or farmer might acquiesce to authority in one situation and respond with rudeness in another. There was simply no deep and consistent commitment to the kind of hierarchical society that traditional ideas of deference implied. That fact was underlined in politics, for although the same carter or farmer might on one occasion support the unanimous reelection of an influential gentleman legislator, at the next opportunity he might vote for a less imposing figure. At the heart of New York and Pennsylvania politics was partisanship based on ideology, issues, local service, and traditional factional divisions. The very salience of such considerations diminished the importance of the deference entitlements that were the bedrock of any system of deferential politics.126

A second and related way of explaining the electoral support New York and Pennsylvania voters gave to their respective oligarchies is to emphasize the strength of patron/client relationships. Large landowners, merchants, and entrepreneurs, the argument runs, recruited their political support from among those over whom they had “an ascendant”—that is, their tenants, the artisans and laborers they employed, and the retailers and professionals with whom they dealt.127 In its softest form, this argument posits that acceptance of patronal political leadership was one part of the unstated contract that bound principals and dependents together in a network of reciprocal obligations.128 Dependent on their patron for various social and economic favors, clients would acquiesce to his wishes in political matters. The harsher version of this position argues that in societies of relative scarcity, dependence fostered a coercive relationship in which landlords and merchants used their economic power to force their clients to accept upper-class political suzerainty.129

It is in New York, of course, where this model is most applicable, but also where the limitations of that interpretation become most clear. It is possible, for example, to cite occasions when tenants trotted to the polls in support of their landlords.130 Clearly at times there was an appearance of great landlord/tenant comity. But there were also many important examples of tenant independence. Robert R. Livingston lost the 1768 Dutchess County election overwhelmingly, “tho’ he had every thing in his favour, which power could give him.”131 Again in 1769, Livingston met defeat at the hands of his and his relatives’ tenants, “notwithstanding all the pains . . . [he took] with them.”132

There were several reasons why such a repudiation could take place, beginning with the weakness of the patronal system in rural New York. The principal foundation stone of strong patron/client relationships in any new
society is a close and continuous connection, expressed in frequent face-to-face dealings between patrons and clients. While that may have been the norm in one or two instances, such as Philipsburgh Manor, it was far from the case elsewhere in New York. The entrepreneurial Livingstons made a practice of distancing themselves from their tenants, impersonalizing much of their manor business and failing to encourage the development of the kind of community infrastructure necessary to consolidate themselves as "legitimate local leaders." And Robert R. Livingston and Henry Beekman demonstrated the tendency of the large landlords to emphasize their status by insulating themselves rather than constantly cutting a figure in the county. Robert R. was always more a big-city lawyer than a county magnate; despite his openhanded election-time treating, even the attentive Beekman waited years before courting the "principal and most Leeding [Quaker farmers] ... in . . . [Dutchess] County." In eighteenth-century English society, in which the feudal past had etched traditions of "obligation," "favour," and "acknowledgement" into the country landscape, and where the ripe scent of privilege laced every breeze, the gentry may have benefited from distancing themselves from their tenants. In sequestering themselves behind the "high palings" of large estates, in dealing with tenants and tradesmen through intermediaries, and in carefully orchestrating their public appearances, the English gentry masked both their rapaciousness and their disdain for many paternal responsibilities. But in a new land like New York, only persistent personal attention to the patron-client relationship could ward off the corrosiveness of a liberating social and physical environment.

A second support that was crucial to the strength of the patron/client relationship was the church. But again in New York any church/landlord connection was relatively weak. In England, parsons belonged to the county magnates, and the clergy were among the most important local figures in conditioning farmers and tenants into obeisance, in persuading farmers that civil and religious authority were closely connected, and in pressuring voters to turn out in support of their patron. In New York, the multiplicity of religious groups and the distance between church and state in the Hudson Valley counties simply made impossible any such continuous prostitution of religious influence to patronal purposes.

In the midst of these structural impediments to the development of strong patron/client relations were ideas that had the same effect. Dependence, which was at the heart of the patron/client relationship, was excoriated in public thought, while independence was held up as an individual's most prized possession. One of the hallmarks of independence was an ability to form an opinion on public affairs. That produced differences and encouraged partisanship. And partisan politics in turn undermined the
political deference that accompanied the patron/client dyad. Unlike the case in England, where many tenants “would not think of selling their landlord,” New York farmers periodically raised the question of why they should give their political allegiance to their landlords rather than to someone else. The mere asking of that question pointed out the attenuated character of patronal power in the Hudson Valley.

When we shift attention from the countryside to New York City, it is clear that a case may be made there for the political salience of a harsh, exploitive variety of economic clientage. In the city, merchants, entrepreneurs, and professionals would apparently bully, bribe, or flatter those over whom they had any kind of economic leverage in order to achieve their political goals. There was a raw element to all this (matched in the countryside by the bald purchase of votes) that was alien to the more subtle behavior and quieter language of traditional patron/client relationships. Contemporaries recognized this, for already in the mid to late eighteenth century, New Yorkers were beginning to use the term boss. Usually associated with the patronage-ridden and corrupt politics of the next century, its origins lay in eighteenth-century New Yorkers’ need to describe those who held masterful power over their employees and associates, and more particularly those grandeurs who exploited their various sources of power for political purposes. But however heavy-handed some of these New York politicians became, the important thing was that there was too much slack in the existing social and economic system for exploitive economic clientage to determine political affairs. The mid-Atlantic New World had nothing like England’s intricate web of dependency relationships. Moreover, there were many bosses in local areas, frequently in competition with one another, and their economic dependents were quite adept at shopping around for a better deal. There were always, too, a good number of professionals, merchants, and businessmen whose “thoughts . . . [were] confined to the Scripture & the Selling of Goods” and who stayed out of politics. On occasion they could provide alternative sources of employment and credit. The very fluidity of a growing city like New York meant that the ties of economic dependency were frequently loose and obscure, and consequently difficult to exploit in the short periods before elections. Finally, critical issues did have a marked effect on factional allegiances. In 1768, for example, the New York City merchant Philip Livingston was acknowledged to be the strongest politician in his constituency. A year later his support plunged and he failed election to the assembly. In that short year, it was not Livingston’s position as a boss that had changed, it was his failure to meet community demands with regard to the issues of the day.

If patron/client relationships were less important to New York politics than we have sometimes thought, they were of even less significance in
Pennsylvania. Tenants and farmers were known for their independence, and voting by ballot protected them against the worst excesses of political pressure. Some Philadelphia merchants undoubtedly tried to influence the votes of their employees, but there were few complaints of this and no overt political actions that testified to its prevalence.150 The chief distinguishing feature of Pennsylvania politics was its party character, and that was antithetical to the whole cluster of dependency relationships that distinguished the eighteenth-century Anglo-American model of patron/client politics.

If deference and/or patron/client relationships do not explain the longevity of the New York and Pennsylvania oligarchies, what does? The answer is a straightforward one, yet one that rests on a complex set of social and political circumstances and imperatives. Simply put, the two provincial oligarchies were accessible. Both were open to community influence, both reflected important elements of community opinion, and both made selective efforts to respond to many of the major political concerns of their constituents.

In order to understand how such conditions could obtain, we must first comprehend how political relationships in colonial New York and Pennsylvania were shaped by the broadly shared circumstances of "intimate citizenship" that characterized colonial society.151 No matter the conflicts of class, the segregation of socioeconomic stratification, the separation of ethnic enclaves, or the pretensions of leadership, the character of life in interconnected, developing, and (by modern standards) relatively sparsely settled colonial communities fostered certain important, widely shared perspectives. Take the issue of power. Most eighteenth-century colonists wanted to be free of what they regarded as the arbitrary power of, and excessive taxation by, monarchical governments. Colonial prejudice against prerogative power was so pervasive that the advocacy of popular, antiprерogative measures was essential for sustained influence as an elected politician.152 And the cry for public frugality was so unremitting that it could never be ignored.153 New York and Pennsylvania politicians were sensitive to such demands, not only because they were forced to seek periodic reelection, but also because, as products of their provincial communities, they had internalized the same prejudices as their constituents. In New York, county leaders such as Henry Beekman were quick to cry out against "Arbitrary power," while in Pennsylvania, Quaker assemblymen made a sustained effort to finance their provincial government without resort to any direct levies on the bulk of the provincial population.154 The results of such thoroughgoing commitment to popular policies was evident in each case. Because of its tradition, and the long-standing competition between factions to champion that tradition, New York was in the forefront of colonial opposition to British attempts to curb provincial autonomy and tax without
As for Pennsylvania, the legislative leaders tried to push the proprietor as far from governmental powers as possible, and “oppose[d] everything that . . . Governor[s] or . . . [their] friends propose[d].”

By expanding their assembly powers and confining prerogative privilege, by the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Pennsylvania legislators had come as close as was practically possible to building a republican colony within a monarchical empire.

Another imperative that tended to keep both the New York and Pennsylvania oligarchies accessible was their concern for community service. Each colony’s oligarchy began with the self-promotion of a small number of individuals who, having asserted themselves as provincial leaders and insiders, entrenched themselves in power. They then passed on the torch (sometimes willingly, sometimes with reluctance) both to family members and to unrelated associates who constituted self-selected groups of the next generation’s politically minded leaders. But what made this oligarchic succession possible was legislators’ recognition either of the prudence of listening or of an obligation to listen to their constituents. On one level that commitment showed up in assembly concerns about executive power and parsimonious government. On another, however, it reflected the place county politicians felt they occupied on the public stage. And that perspective was different in New York than in Pennsylvania.

In New York, the same strong traditions of localism that affected the structure of provincial government also conditioned many county magnates to identify themselves with their county’s particular needs and to try to strengthen their individual claims to local preeminence by providing “Service for their Respective places.”

Political leaders frequently saw themselves in the patron role, no matter the weakness of deferential attitudes and patron/client ties, and they tried to act accordingly. They wanted to be able to claim responsiveness to parochial needs, even if they preferred to gather local opinion through agents rather than through their intensive personal canvassing of county communities. What reinforced this predilection for attentiveness was that it was often easy for a legislator to promote his personal interests along with those of county communities. Government services were frequently directed toward the development of the counties, and with a little guidance, a well-connected legislator could ensure that the process of settlement and growth benefited himself as well as parts of the larger community. Power brought demands for service, but service could substantially augment power.

The same concerns for service to the community occurred among Pennsylvania politicians, but there it wore a somewhat different face. Because of their belief that political leaders should serve a broadly rather than narrowly defined community, Quakers gained an enviable reputation throughout the
Delaware and upper Chesapeake regions as public custodians. Following this lead once the “Holy Experiment” began in Pennsylvania, Quaker leaders there put emphasis not just on parochial county needs but increasingly on a civil Quakerism capable of fulfilling the larger needs of the colony’s diverse peoples. The confidence the Quaker oligarchy soon had in its provincial establishment, and in its ability to articulate policies, adopt administrative structures, and establish provincewide regulations that would satisfy large numbers of Pennsylvanians, was reflected in the case with which its members interacted with their constituents. The records are filled with evidence of legislative intent to seek “the Minds of . . . [their] Constituents” either in forming some policy or for retrospective judgment. That the sense of obligation was intense is evident from the Quaker assemblyman David Cooper’s pledge “to study the good of my Constituents (& next to my duty to my Maker) preserve it with all my Might.” When challenged, Cooper’s counterparts put the issue directly to their critics: with “anniversary [i.e., yearly] Elections,” assemblymen found themselves regularly “mix[ing] with the People”; if their “Constituents” felt legislator “Conduct . . . [to be] inconsistent with their Sentiments, they . . . [would] supply [the incumbents’] Places” with new representatives. Much of the strength of Pennsylvania’s civil Quaker ideology rested on the fact that it did speak to what many non-Quakers felt were their public needs. Which in turn meant that its partisans could strengthen that ideology further by making overt and repeated solicitations of constituent opinion a ritualized part of what was, in reality, oligarchic politics. Such circumstances gave the language and idea of constituent service a prominence in Pennsylvania that New York’s localism and efforts at patronalism could not quite match.

Finally, there was the issue of political competition, both within parties and factions and within the larger community itself. Political rivalry meant that the performances of incumbent politicians were always subject to critical review. And that meant that members of both the political establishment and the electorate were always looking for the “fittest” individuals, those of “capacity,” “extraordinary Genius,” “Integrity and Public Spirit,” and “Wisdom and Ability,” who might bolster the fortunes of a faction and strengthen the legislative leadership of the two colonies. Great advantage lay with the politically ambitious relatives and close friends of existing leaders, but the door was never closed to the self-educated, or to those “tho’ not learned, of Strong Natural Parts.” Accessibility, then, meant some degree of openness, not just to the concerns of the community but also to individuals of considerable ability who could reinvigorate the connection between political leaders and the body politic.

In their efforts to pay some attention to community opinion, both New York and Pennsylvania politicians quickly found out that, in fact, most
colonials wanted very little positive legislation from government. Settlers were preoccupied with their private lives; what they wanted most from their assemblymen was a commitment to protect or enlarge the spheres of social and economic activity that were immune from capricious, expensive, or enervating public demands.\textsuperscript{166} Given that protection and a minimum of facilitative encouragement to order and develop their communities, many colonists were content to remain politically apathetic. None of the waves of Dutch, English, German, or Scotch-Irish immigrants carried traditions of broad political participation into the middle colonies, and as long as legislators reflected their fundamental opinions about the shape government should take, settlers had no particular or sustained incentive to become a highly mobilized electorate. Yet they were quite capable of becoming so. And did so frequently enough (if episodically) to reinforce commitment to both particular principles and practices of popular government, thereby continually strengthening the foundations of what was becoming a formidable and distinctive early American political culture. Nor was that development impeded in any crucial way by the occurrence of voter apathy. The popular political rhetoric of the colonial oligarchies and the strong institutional basis of participatory politics militated against such results. Of additional importance was the way in which colonials both extended and elaborated their sociability through the activities and organization of voluntaristic groups. Ranging from neighborhood associations and religious organizations, through community libraries, fire companies, and craft associations, to Masonic lodges, fraternal benevolent orders, and urban improvement societies, these groups promoted a sense of civic-mindedness throughout provincial society. And exercising both power and restraint in the capacious social expanse that lay between the governmental and the strictly private, their members continually practiced politics without being overtly political. Infused with the politics of voluntaristic and civic consciousness, numerous colonial citizens found it easy to transform themselves, when occasion demanded, into the politicized participants of provincial election campaigns. The movement from apathy to political involvement was less elite than a side step from one expression of community and civic consciousness to another.\textsuperscript{167}

Needless to say, existing political oligarchies tried to insulate themselves from future episodes of electoral activism. They used their monopolies over information to advantage whenever possible in order to extend their political hegemony; they used patronage to try to entrench themselves in power; they exploited their experience and their traditions of service; and they frequently tried to force a strengthening of deferential attitudes and patron/client bonds. But the fundamental issues of protecting provincials from capricious public power, ensuring parsimonious government, serving
community needs, and maintaining a capable political leadership prevented accessible oligarchies from turning into intolerably oppressive ones.

The character of New York's and Pennsylvania's oligarchies is perhaps best symbolized by colonial ambivalence over the relationship between assemblymen and constituents. Assembly apologists very carefully defended the institution as a corporate body "representing the Whole" body politic.\textsuperscript{168} Within that institution, representatives were to follow the "dictates of...[their] own Conscience & Understanding," not that of any group of "leading men" within the assembly or any "active" out-of-doors lobby.\textsuperscript{169} But there was also a countervailing strand of thought that ran strongly through the political cultures of both New York and Pennsylvania. As David Lloyd put it (drawing on William Penn's writings from earlier times), there was "no Transessentiating or Transsubstantiating of Being, from People to Representative."\textsuperscript{170} Representatives were simply individuals responsible to their constituents. As the Long Islander Benjamin Hinchman put it, "I think it but...[the assemblymen's] reasonable duty when they know our minds, to do it."\textsuperscript{171} In the sporadic sparring that took place between the champions of assembly corporatism and constituent instruction, colonials acknowledged that their provincial political cultures were no havens of rational consistency.\textsuperscript{172} But the tensions that they generated were frequently creative. The occasional challenges that constituent spokespersons directed toward assembly pretension served as periodic reminders to the political leaders of both New York and Pennsylvania that their long-term oligarchic survival depended on continued accessibility.

**The Limits of Colonial Oligarchy**

By the mid 1760s, the two oligarchies that had served their provinces and themselves so well during earlier decades began to show their limitations. Structural changes in the relationship between the colonies and Great Britain, and within each provincial society, created problems that the old oligarchies could not effectively address. As will frequently happen in such situations, conflict appeared at the weakest point in each society.

In New York, the 1760s brought threats to various old land patents, a postwar recession that caused considerable hardship, and attacks on the basic English rights of trial by jury and self-taxation. The resulting social tensions appeared most clearly in New York City in the Stamp Act crisis of 1765. When Lieutenant-Governor Cadwallader Colden seemed determined to enforce the Stamp Act on the eve of its November 1 implementation date, his authority was instantly challenged in what began as a classic case of pre-Revolutionary, all-class community mobbing. Over the years, the long-lived
lieutenant-governor had alienated almost everyone of note, and members of the city’s upper and middle classes were happy to get at the “old man” who preferred prerogative and parliamentary power to provincial rights. \textsuperscript{173} But in the course of the rioting that followed, prominent New Yorkers began to feel the warmth of lower-class resentment of wealth and privilege, and of an oligarchy of political leaders who seemed increasingly ineffective in guarding traditional rights and unsympathetic to the working poor in tough economic times. \textsuperscript{174} Although members of the upper classes did retain a great deal of influence in the days ahead by means of their judicious cultivation of various middling street politicians, they had never felt so vulnerable. Once the class consciousness of the politically marginalized gained lucid, if intermittent, expression, New York’s political oligarchy began to lose credibility as spokespersons for the entire society.

The specter of class conflict was most apparent, however, not in the streets of New York City but in the Hudson Valley. There a small number of avaricious manor lords were determined to have every acre they could possibly screw out of the imprecise wording of their families’ first patents. \textsuperscript{175} Much of this land was on the eastern boundaries of New York, and groups of New England settlers and speculators, who found encouragement among Massachusetts officials, periodically tried to claim title to the same acreage on legal grounds frequently as tenuous as those of the New York magnates. Squatters from both New England and New York, as well as tenants upholding various landlord claims, moved into the contested areas, and some had carved out valuable improvements there by the mid 1760s. At that time, a number of New York landlords began to try to bring the eastern reaches of their putative claims under control. They mounted a serious effort to throw the alleged squatters off their improvements and replace these recalcitrants with tenants beholden to themselves. These ejections met with serious resistance in southeastern Dutchess County in the fall of 1765, and thereafter the anti-landlord movement spread until it became the “Great Rebellion” of 1766. \textsuperscript{176}

In late 1765, those who felt most aggrieved against their landlords were encouraged to voice their discontent by three circumstances. The first was the success of a group of Dutchess County squatters in controlling the eastern section of Philipse Highland Patent and holding at bay landlord claimants; the second was the success of the Stamp Act rioters in the cause of “Liberty”; and the third was the belief that the Stamp Act defiance had cast the normal procedures of law enforcement into abeyance. “The people are [of the] opinion that there is no Law and very freely Say So upon account of the Ditestable Stamp Act,” wrote one observer who was well acquainted with county affairs. \textsuperscript{177} Abruptly, tenants on Cortlandt Manor in upper Westchester County, who had long been plagued by particularly odious
estate-management practices, raised the flag of rebellion. Toward the end of April 1766, the combined forces of the Westchester and Dutchess County insurgents marched on New York City to force John Van Cortlandt to “grant forever” the Cortlandt Manor lands, to rescue a few Dutchess County dissidents from the city jail, and to seek an alliance with the city’s Stamp Act rioters in order to inaugurate a new, just provincial era under the aegis of rural and urban “Sons of Liberty.”178 A month later, tenants and squatters on the eastern boundaries of Livingston and Claverack Manors, who had gone through a long period of the same sort of border-related, New England versus New York conflict that their Dutchess County counterparts had experienced, also asserted themselves. They marched on the manor house of Robert Livingston, Jr., and tried to terrorize tenants loyal to John Van Rensselaer. In all cases the rebels soon fled the field. Meeting a New York City determined to fight off the rural marauders, and urban Sons of Liberty convinced that “no one . . . [was] entitled to Riot but themselves,” the main concentration of some five hundred farmers straggled back to their homes.179 Subsequently, Governor Moore ordered civil magistrates to enforce the law, called upon the British military to hunt down the offenders in both southern and northern centers of rebellion, indicted over sixty protesters for riotous behavior, and struck a special court of oyer and terminer to sentence to death a later-pardoned leader of the Dutchess County traitors, William Pendergast.180

The Great Rebellion is a difficult event to interpret because of the complexity of New York society. To begin with, the conflict was no thoroughgoing replica of old-world class conflict between poor tenants and gentry. The New York rebels were not “peasants” in any meaningful sense. Some were poor, but others were reasonably well-off farmers, so long as they could make good their property claims.181 And those of tenant status in any manor or county were always divided about how they could most efficaciously protect what their sweat had earned. Some were prepared to work with their landlords, while others opted for confrontation.182 For their part, the landlords whose interests were directly involved in the riots were hard-driving, profit-conscious entrepreneurs who kept their tenants at a distance, hired unforgiving estate managers, and, where they had some prospect of success, were as intent on establishing land claims in the conflict-ridden no-man’s-land between New York and Massachusetts as were their farmer opponents.

Despite the fact that the motives of the contending parties were not as far apart as we might at first think, the battle still had all the intensity of a class confrontation. Many Hudson Valley tenants may have been “petty landed bourgeois,” but most also believed that “no matter how good the terms, leaseholding was not as desirable as freeholding.”183 Because of that belief,
the landlords were right: tenant protest threatened not just isolated parts of their manors but, given the weakness of their original titles and the willingness of some royal officials to challenge their claims, "the entire tenancy system." ^184 And despite their acquisitive predilections, rebelling tenants appeared to echo the moral overtones of English lower-class rioters against gentry authority. ^185 "Poor Men were always oppressed by the Rich," and in this case the landlords only too frequently "turn[ed] . . . people out of possession . . . [because the tenants] had an equitable Title but could not be defended in a Course of Law because they were poor." ^186 As for the landlords, they had little enough of the gentry in their backgrounds, but they were determined to develop what they could of a patrician status by defending a large-scale, landlord/tenant system that might sustain their pretensions. In doing so, the large landlords contributed to perceptions of themselves as an oppressive class, for manor life rested on the privilege of such extensive landownership and collateral civil power that it appeared to deprive less fortunate families of the kind of freehold ownership and independent citizenship many viewed as the right of those who applied their labor to uncultivated land. ^187 Most commonly in the colonies, polarization between agrarian dissidents and landlords was either marginalized by its peripheral geographical location, and/or small scale, or mediated by the complexities of a more developed social structure. But in New York the historic prominence of the manorial system and the strategic nature of the Hudson Valley corridor exaggerated its impact. ^188 Idiosyncratic in its morphology, and restricted in actual scope, the rebellion of 1766 signified much more than its actual events entitled it to.

Unlike in New York, the fundamental weakness that showed up in Pennsylvania was not class division. Rather it was the peculiar nature of the Quaker regime that had dominated the Delaware River colony since its inception. And that weakness had two primary characteristics. The first was the way in which Quaker strength was delimited by residential patterns. Because Friends did not move into backcountry areas in any strength, Quakers denied themselves the organizational base and attendant influence they had in the east. And because they were weak in the newly settled areas, Quakers cut off the new counties they created from anything approaching proportional representation in the assembly. That circumstance in itself was not a fatal flaw, for many backcountry settlers could still easily identify with the Quaker Party, and Friends acknowledged an obligation to serve the fundamental development needs of the west. But there was a second and related weakness in the Quaker regime. The bulk of western settlers did not take pacifism seriously, particularly in any conflict with Indians. When colonial expansion into the interior triggered the French and Indian War and Pontiac’s Rebellion, even the loosely defined pacifism of civil Quakerism
seemed an inadequate answer to the western settlers' requests for defense. And when the strident voices of Quaker reformers called for a new strict pacifism among members of their sect, numerous Westerners were convinced that the Quaker system was in need of change.

The chief manifestation of Pennsylvania's sectional weakness was, of course, the Paxton Rebellion. The march of the frontiersmen on Philadelphia to assert their right to better representation of their interests in future frontier wars was just as frightening for the Quaker leaders as New York's Great Rebellion had been for its grandees. Just as in New York's case, Pennsylvania's rural rebels met with preparations for self-defense rather than sympathy in the capital city. But unlike their New York counterparts, the Paxton rebels did gain a hearing, and none met with prosecution. These circumstances may be explained by the more conciliatory tone of Pennsylvania society, the peculiar nature of the colony's party politics, and the fact that in this instance, sectional feelings rather than class bias predominated among the personnel of the county courts. Yet the rebellion was a great shock, a frightening challenge to the Quaker oligarchy. As Richard Peters observed, many Paxton apologists questioned the legitimacy of the old regime: "the Government failing to give the people that protection they were bound to do; the Compact between them, is broke."

The rebellions in New York and Pennsylvania were important events because they thoroughly frightened members of the existing oligarchies and threatened them in ways that they could not effectively address. Both regimes had been able to maintain their place because their constituents accepted the leadership they gave and had never questioned the premises of oligarchic power. Once the rebellions raised the issue of the distribution of political and socioeconomic power in the two colonies, the existing regimes were on the defensive, for they could not act as spokespersons for forces that challenged their hegemony. At the same time, they lost the ability to take the lead in imperial politics. When the British instituted policies that could be effectively resisted only by extralegal means, the New York and Pennsylvania oligarchies were placed at a severe disadvantage. Previously, they had been able to draw on the unpopularity of arbitrary British acts to shore up the institutional basis of their power. But sustained extralegal activism undercut the very system that had produced and protected them. And repeated attention to questions of right and power, in the circumstances of the late 1760s and early 1770s, inevitably raised questions, not only about the legitimacy of British rule, but also about the right of the provincial oligarchy to continue to monopolize legislative office.

Not surprisingly, given their peculiar characters and the different threats they faced, the two oligarchies responded to their respective late colonial crises in slightly different ways. One reaction of New York's provincial
leaders was heavy-handed intimidation. They used the courts to punish many of the 1766 rebels and showed no constitutionally based reservations about calling out the British army to hound rioters from the province and terrorize the communities that gave them support. In New York City, upper-class politicians tried to keep control over their neighbors on some issues by personal canvasses, in which they could face down dissenters, rather than allowing open challenges in public meetings. In circumstances of threatened violence, community leaders might mobilize “the discreet Inhabitants” to patrol the streets in the cause of civil order. And when Alexander MacDougall, a ship’s captain, published a broadside charging the colony’s legislators with betraying New York by voting to supply royal troops in late 1769, the assembly threw him in jail and initiated prosecution for libel. At the same time, the long-standing factional character of New York politics prompted competing parties to try to use what they could of the issues of the day for partisan purposes. The main thrust of that activity was negative, as each set of New York’s provincial politicians tried to characterize the other as the greatest threat to colonial liberties. So virulent did that competition become at one point, that the DeLancey-led coalition starkly revealed its essentially nouveau character, which both it and its oligarchic opponents had tried to keep concealed beneath their upper-class finery. When the DeLancey faction began to enquire into the right of Livingston Manor to representation, it threatened the thin cloak of new-world prescriptive rights in a way that seriously jeopardized old-world norms. But the impetus that partisan politics gave to upper-class radicalization through such incidents was halting because it was insincere. By 1768, the New York oligarchy’s attitude toward imperial affairs was “the quintessence of moderation,” and “the only leadership it subsequently manifested [against Britain] was in the movement to abandon . . . [resistance] by being the first colony to relinquish [the intercolonial] nonimportation [agreement].” The oligarchs’ ultimate concern was to save as much of their power as they possibly could.

Like their New York counterparts, Pennsylvania’s political leaders reacted strongly to the threats they faced, but they did so in their own way. Rather than strike out at their opponents, they tended to withdraw, to circle the wagons as it were, around their traditional areas of strength. When the Stamp Act crisis began to break, Quaker Party leaders showed their colors by calling together, neither the entire legislature nor spokespersons for various interest groups, but the assemblymen from the old eastern areas to give their informal opinions on the legislation. And once Joseph Galloway took over leadership of the Quaker Party in 1766, he began to isolate the party in unprecedented fashion. As speaker of the assembly, Galloway con-
centrated more and more of the legislature's power in the hands of Quaker politicians from Chester and Bucks counties, paid less and less attention to radicals from Philadelphia and critics from the west, and gave no thought to the important role that Quakerization had played in the party's success in prior decades. At the same time, rather than flirting with the new forms of anti-British politics, the Quakers followed the logic of their own brand of traditional radicalism by seeking the end of proprietary government. The result was that the Old Party spent much of its waning influence on the hopeless task of trying to protect Pennsylvania's peculiar provincial constitutional rights through appeasement. Because of the antiproprietary logic of Quaker politics, the inability of the pacifist ethic to accommodate popular demands for aggressive resistance to imperial reform, and Friends' intuitive impulse "to preserve the appearance of an union in ye Society of Pennsylvania" above all else, the Quaker oligarchy withdrew into its existing political fortresses and hoped to wait out the forces of change. It was not by accident that the strongest stand the Quaker Party took against the British was not on taxation but on Lord Hillsborough's threats to adjourn the Pennsylvania legislature. The assembly was the principal symbol of the province's Quaker-built system of government.

The unfamiliar ghettoization of the Quaker Party occasioned results that compounded the oligarchy's problems. One of the most important features of earlier Quaker politics had been the easy commerce between representatives and constituents. Quakers knew that they served the community well, that they were popular, and that, consequently, they could invite constituent judgment and advice. But once the Quaker oligarchy refused to take a leading role in the politics of protest against imperial reform, it could no longer play the role of a receptive legislature. Rather than inviting constituent activism, Quakers found themselves discouraging it, lobbying against town meetings and quietly canvassing in favor of political quiescence. Constituents, long used to invitations to speak out to their representatives on community affairs, were angered by these changing attitudes precisely when, in the minds of many, the times demanded outspoken political participation as never before. As more Pennsylvanians perceived the Quaker leaders to have forsaken their traditional role and to have become increasingly preoccupied with the retention of oligarchic power, class-based objections to the old regime began to surface. And the Quaker response to these, which was to reach out for support to their old proprietary enemies, only reinforced the impression that the Quakers were putting class before community. The demoralization and creeping paralysis that afflicted the old Quaker oligarchy were clearly reflected in the assemblymen's response to the kind of libels that had made earlier legislatures bridle and landed offenders in jail.
When Joseph Galloway was harshly criticized in the press for his politics in 1771, the assembly merely responded with a statement that the charges were “false, scandalous, & malicious, a daring insult to & a breach of the Privileges of . . . [the] House.” Once among the most prickly of political establishments in British North America, by the late colonial years, the Quaker oligarchy had become a demoralized, if still powerful conservative force.

Beginning in the mid 1760s, the colonial worlds that had proven so friendly to the New York and Pennsylvania oligarchies quickly developed a momentum inimical to their interests. Violence was not restricted to the Stamp Act crisis, the landlord/tenant riots, and the Paxton Rebellion. During the last decade of colonial rule, there was a proliferation of both all-class riots and their class-oriented counterparts. The French and Indian War increased the number of indigent in the densely settled areas, while sharp fluctuations in economic cycles fostered feelings of vulnerability among all manner of colonists. The conflicts between and among various socio-economic groups and geographical groups were unprecedented. Accompanying these conflicts was an increased politicization among the colonial populace. Although there is no way to measure this development accurately, it seems likely that given the proliferation of town meetings and the development of committees to meet the various crises in imperial affairs, and an increase in the outpourings of the press, that political awareness increased considerably.

All of these developments posed insuperable problems for the New York and Pennsylvania oligarchies. As the range of public activities that people perceived as political increased, as disagreements took place over what the important public issues were, as the purview of political opinion broadened on those issues, and as various groups held more intensely to their own viewpoints, the ability of the old leaders to serve large numbers of the community diminished significantly. That was most clearly evident in the elections of the late colonial years. Through Herculean efforts, voter turnout in Philadelphia was higher in 1764 and 1765 than it had ever been. But thereafter in Pennsylvania, and despite the fierce factional competition in New York, also in that province, voter participation in colonial politics declined from earlier highs. The colonial population was undoubtedly more politicized than it had ever been, but the establishment politics of the existing provincial oligarchies increasingly failed to speak to colonial concerns. That fact was underlined by increased citizen demands for constituent instructions and for candidate pledges to respond to particular socio-economic and political needs. Most important, an ominous popular note resonated through local communities with far greater intensity than ever before. “The Good People of this Province,” wrote John Harris, “will not
suffer Tamely their Liberty's & Privilidges to be Taken from them, By their Representatives. The enemies of the colonists were not simply the old bogeymen—neither the governor, nor the proprietor, nor influence run riot. They could on occasion be the legislative oligarchies, who in the bright glare of crisis-lit America, seemed more preoccupied with protecting themselves than with the welfare of their provincial communities.