From early in their existence, the societies of colonial New York and Pennsylvania were varied, dynamic ones distinguished by a diversity of interests. Traditional thinking, premised on the view that society should be an integrated, organic entity, had only a limited capacity to accommodate such a development and the interest-group conflicts that accompanied it. Ideas centering on corporate distinctiveness, religious identity, and a demarcation between the better and poorer sort proved of limited value to contemporaries trying to comprehend the character of their respective provincial worlds. More promising were the notions some shared about the relevance of self-interest and individualism. But even when coupled with other ideas that we now recognize to be components of a liberal worldview, such perspectives were inchoate and never articulated with the clarity that might have offered New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians greater understanding of the social processes structuring their respective societies.

They did, however, have much greater success dealing with the political rather than the social facets of interest-group proliferation. Competing interests produced partisan politics in both New York and Pennsylvania, a partisanship that public-minded residents of each colony soon came to view as acceptable. Although Anglo-American Whig rhetoric condemned partisan politics, and although many New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians contin-
ued to observe this convention publicly, they simultaneously began to develop an informal discourse of politics that described the existing practices of provincial politics much more accurately, and accepted the partisanship those practices entailed as a normal feature of political life.

In New York, political changes capable of encouraging a distinction between party activities and factional behavior occurred only partially. The perpetuation of a number of features of electoral politics that tended to encourage the factionalism frequently seen as typical of New York tended to retard such thinking. These very circumstances, however, prompted many New Yorkers to view the strife that factionalism entailed as an expected and normal aspect of their provincial affairs. Turning old words to new uses, they developed an informal perspective on their provincial politics that assigned functional value to political conflict and was powerful enough to intrude upon the established formal Whig orthodoxies condemning such behavior. In a different but related process, Pennsylvanians distinguished themselves in an equally innovative way. They developed an informal discourse of politics centering on the recognition of party as a legitimate, nonfactional category of political behavior. A complex of circumstances ranging from the Quaker concern for consensus to the earned integrity of Quaker Party symbols encouraged Pennsylvanians to see first Quaker Party activities and then those of other parties as an acceptable way of addressing the various interests of community members. And in the course of directing their attention toward party politics, Quaker colony residents began to invent the terms of a new political language suitable to their needs. Together, the political experiences of New York and Pennsylvania demonstrated an impressive level of conceptual innovation, providing the foundation for a new level of political understanding that clearly gave expression to the character of an unfolding American society.

Interests, Polity, and Party

One of the most important facets of the socioeconomic development of New York and Pennsylvania from the late seventeenth century through the pre-Revolutionary years was the proliferation of interest groups. As New York matured, local and regional interests became entrenched, and as Pennsylvania grew, sectional and intraregional identities became more pronounced. Colonial records are filled with public demands from specific towns, townships, precincts, counties, and regions.1 Fundamental to the structure of provincial society, too, were various imprecisely defined classes. While contemporaries acknowledged that there were upper, middling and lower classes, they also recognized that most social interaction took place
among a larger plurality of socioeconomic classifications or classes. Merchants, large landowners, ministers, lawyers, and educators inhabited the upper reaches of society.\(^2\) Further down the social scale, city, town, and country artisans constituted a variegated collection of laboring classes.\(^3\) Farmers were another group that might be thought of as a “class,” and even broad, cultural groups such as German Pennsylvanians might occasionally draw that designation.\(^4\) Most frequently, however, religious and ethnic groups were identified simply as such. Denominational, ethnic, national-group, and cultural designations were part of the working vocabulary of all New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians who ventured beyond the confines of their own ethno-religious enclave, or who thought at all about provincial affairs. Finally, there were a large number of local voluntary associations, ranging from the unique (such as Franklin’s Association for Defense) to well-known social organizations (such as the Masonic Temples and the nationality-based charitable associations), various craftsmen’s fraternities (such as those of the joiners and the saddlers), and a plethora of nameless social clubs and local improvement associations that are often only casually remarked upon.\(^5\)

The multiplication of these various socioeconomic groups in New York and Pennsylvania had a profound effect on both the developing stratification and the value systems of the respective colonies. Immigrants knew that rank had been of great importance in the Old World, and some settlers and their offspring continued to give it respect. But in New York and Pennsylvania, legitimate associational groups, drawn together by common interests, could frequently obscure rather than clarify the minutiae of vertical social distinctions. Already weakened by rapid economic growth, the simplification of social distinctions that accompanied first settlement, and the absence of both institutional support and long-standing traditions, the provincial systems of stratification remained ill defined and were easily challenged. A general population not particularly inclined to observe deferential niceties was even less encouraged to do so when the dynamics of interest-group relationships were as important an element in their lives as concerns about rank. On one level, contemporaries solved the problem by referring to the composition of society in the broadest possible terms; the Presbyterian minister Francis Alison, for example, indiscriminately mixed vertical and horizontal social classifications when he addressed his audience as “all ranks and denominations of Christians” in Pennsylvania.\(^6\) But that very indefiniteness could cause problems when more precision was required. In situations in which damages for personal injury were to be awarded in court, “Age, Rank or Office,” were acknowledged criteria, but how were the latter two to be applied in societies that were essentially voluntaristic?\(^7\) No one knew for sure.

Given such circumstances, a great deal of social conflict characterized
both provinces. Within the same two societies that supported powerful oligarchical systems of provincial politics, there were intermittent, cacophonous whirls of contention—frequently marked by a mean-spirited and surly exchange or by shrill shouts, vibrant with nervous anxiety. Status demands might meet with denial and could come into sharp conflict with associational allegiances. Interest groups continually warred over religious or cultural issues, local loyalties, or economic differences. Beneath these various group conflicts lay the heavy commitment of New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians to principles of private interest. James Alexander testified to its great power when he observed reflectively near the end of his life that “Interest often connects people who are entire strangers, and sometimes separates those who have the strongest natural ties.” Not surprisingly, New Yorkers were well known as a collection of contentious and avaricious people; and Pennsylvanians inhabited a world of “many jarring and opposite Interests and Systems” with “Every body here in a Scramble for Wealth and Power.” Recognition of a multiplicity of interests and their frequently conflicting nature became part of a distinctive middle colony outlook.

The major task that thoughtful New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians faced amid the disparate interests of their provincial societies was to come to terms with the “exclusive companies” and “combinations” that pluralism brought to their respective societies. One direction in which they might have been expected to turn for some inspiration as to group behavior was to the strand of Anglo-American thought that acknowledged the legitimacy of corporate power. But they did not. Although legal corporatism had once been strong in England, and continued to be so in New England, in the mid-Atlantic colonies it was on the wane, and few thought it worth reviving. The colonial assemblies, whose imputed origins lay in the medieval English practices of corporate representation, and whose leaders vigorously protected privileges grounded in that tradition, were, of course, the great exception. But some of their privileges were beginning to meet with occasional popular criticism, and eighteenth-century legislators put a great deal more emphasis on the assemblies’ parliamentary character than on their corporate nature, for corporate status implied “a Power of a lower Order.” Corporate rights did remain a bulwark of localism in some of New York’s towns and manors. But once into the eighteenth century, power-conscious governors made few additional grants of corporate privilege to units of local government, and they were very reluctant to grant even the minimal autonomy attendant on the incorporation of religious congregations. In Pennsylvania, only a few incorporations were ever granted, and the most prominent of these, the corporation of Philadelphia, became stigmatized by an association with proprietary privilege. These provincial circumstances, a general disparagement of corporations in English Whig thought, and the
fact that corporatism seemed backward-looking, anchored in a traditional hierarchical world of special status and privilege, rendered it ineffectual as an intellectual tool for exploring the more fluid interaction of interest groups in the middle colonies.17

Another direction in which colonial spokespersons turned to try to account for social conflict was toward religious pluralism. The great diversity of religious groups in both New York and Pennsylvania, the frequent involvement of religious leaders in public disputes, the noticeable impact religious differences had on political debate, and the use of denominational organizations for the mobilization of voters suggested to contemporaries that the character of public affairs might best be understood in terms of rivalries between religious groups. Hence the perception of “Quaker” and “Presbyterian” parties in Pennsylvania and the tendency on the part of some public figures in both New York and Pennsylvania to try both to exploit the potential inherent in denominational differences for partisan purposes and to explain political divisions in those terms.

Seductive though this approach was to explain public conflict in both New York and Pennsylvania, ultimately it was more befuddling than useful. The fundamental difficulty with it was that it offered too narrow an answer to a very broad problem. Although religious divisions were prominent, the matrix of public affairs was composed of numerous variables. Religious identities were subsumed under local loyalties, large issues arose that had little to do with religion, the secular dynamic in colonial society ebbed and flowed, and a multitude of nonreligious interest groups asserted themselves in pursuit of their particular goals.18 Unquestionably, religious stereotyping and sweeping generalizations about the influence of particular denominations provided psychic satisfaction to some contemporaries, for it helped them create a type of orderly world they could encompass. But rarely did such perceptions mesh very well with the ongoing dynamics of political life. And rarely, too, has such an approach led to clear retrospective understanding of the intricacies of colonial politics. It may be demonstrated, for example, that within specific electoral units both intra- and interdenominational rivalry contributed to voter mobilization and partisan behavior, but in such instances religious differences were usually subsumed under, or connected with, broader issues.19 At the same time, no one set of religious conflicts could explain provincial political behavior at the voter or leadership level because each county was its own module of religious dynamics.20 And a narrow focus on religious differences often precludes serious consideration of other conflicts. Although an innovative initiative, efforts to find intellectual grounding for colonial interest-group conflict in religious diversity frequently failed to advance the political goals of contemporaries and have often lacked significant explanatory power in the hands of later historians.
Another strand of thought that New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians tried to apply to their situation came with strong parental recommendation. Like the English they admired, upper-class colonists blamed social conflict on the fact that the civil “better sort” of people like themselves lived symbiotically with the restless ranks of the “lower sort.” According to such logic, the turmoils of society were largely produced by lower-class people who would not keep to their place. The lower orders pushed against social and institutional constraints and defended their economic interests with pugnacious assertiveness. The attractions of this explanation of colonial disorder are plain enough. First, the provincial upper classes felt they strengthened themselves by emphasizing their societies’ cultural similarity to England. Second, by stressing the cultural differences between upper and lower classes in their respective provinces, the colonial leaders felt they were encouraging lower-class deference. Third, by blaming their colonies’ bouts of contentiousness on the poorer sort, the upper classes absolved themselves of complicity in them. Moreover, toward the end of the colonial period, the upper classes’ continuous stress on the distinctions between themselves and the lower sort seemed vindicated when, aided by the growing stratification and economic dislocation of the later colonial years, the bipolar interpretation of colonial society seemed a more appropriate fit than ever before.

However appealing it was for the colonial upper classes’ understanding of their societies, the distinction between the better and the lower sort was far too simplistic to encompass the varieties of sociopolitical conflict in New York and Pennsylvania. In the case of England, there was arguably an organic relationship between earlier forms of social organization and polarization in the early modern era into two classes, creating a bipolar eighteenth-century social matrix from which the middle class emerged. The mid-Atlantic colonies, however, found the past foreshortened and the future hurried. A fundamental feature of New York and Pennsylvania societies was their rapid commercial development and the strength of “the Middling Sort of People,” whether defined by possessions or by attitudes. Contemporaries frequently acknowledged the strength of the middling social element in both town and countryside. Even those wedded to the better/poorer perspective recognized that there was some difference between “the low class” and “the middling People, the Farmers, shop-keepers and Tradesmen.” In New York and Pennsylvania, where as everyone knew, even provincial councillors were “each man [but] a leather apron Lord,” it was not the middle classes but the better sort who had to struggle to assert a cultural identity. In simplified settler societies, the trick was for farmers, millers, entrepreneurs, and merchants aspiring to higher status to distinguish themselves from their middle-class peers. The struggle over clientage, such as it was, was not carried on by the middling people to free
themselves from upper-class dominance, but by the self-proclaimed upper classes to establish some semblance of control over their middling neighbors.

The prominence of the middling elements in New York and Pennsylvania was only one of the most obvious problems with the bipolar perspective. There were other ways in which the theory did not fit at all well. One of the ways in which New York and Pennsylvania distinguished themselves, for example, was by the extent of the divisions among their respective social and political leaders. The upper classes of both colonies were frequently split into contending factions; that condition could not be ignored, for it was a fundamental component of the conflict in each province. But such divisions had no substantial place within the traditional upper-versus-lower-class social model, even when these divisions were perceived to be economic ones. Most telling, however, was the absence of any means of dealing with the great religious, cultural, local, and regional differentiation that was so strongly felt in colonial society. Conflicts arising from such divisions could penetrate all of the various socioeconomic levels of society and were frequently aired with great passion and intensity. The establishment of a proper relationship between upper and lower classes would do little to sort these out in an intelligible manner.

The most direct way in which New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians tried to deal with their fluid, conflicting public worlds was in their piecemeal attempts to come to terms with what historians now recognize as an emerging liberalism. Retrospectively, it is clear that if liberalism had any home in colonial America, it was in the middle colonies. Provincial polities that either embraced liberty of conscience or experienced considerable toleration quickly came to accept voluntarism as an important principle of social organization. Representatives of diverse cultural groups found that they could retain their distinctiveness and still interact as members of one provincial society by finding accommodation, on what many might perceive as rational, pragmatic grounds, around belief in the importance of such notions as individual property rights. Rapid economic development invited acquisitiveness, and emphasis on the promise of the marketplace allowed proud entrepreneurs to claim to be commonwealthmen. Easy, relatively unrestricted access to land encouraged the pursuit of self-interest amid a larger environment of ethnoreligious clustering. And all of these characteristics tended to foster individualism. Such tendencies were reflected, not only in the behavior of New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians, but also in the extent to which they hailed the benefits of free association, appealed to reason, embraced the principle of popular consent in government, incorporated contractual language in their public discourse, expressed political issues in commercial metaphors, openly acknowledged acquisitive concerns, spoke
unabashedly of interest as a “restless Friend,” and repeatedly voiced solici­tude for individual accomplishment, right, and integrity.³⁰

But the problem for those on the ground floor of liberalism in America was that they did not know they were beginning a tradition. Colonists were too restricted in their vision, and too sensitive to their provincial status, to envision a worldly philosophy of such dimensions. There was no overt recognition of the overall coherence of that ideology, no farsighted ability to articulate it as an integrated interpretive tool in contemporaries’ efforts to make sense of their respective societies. Intimately implicated in the creation of the normative conceptual units of political imagination, which would only later be understood as features of a coherent political doctrine, New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians were blinded by their myopic engagement in the processes of innovation.³¹

Which is not to deny that colonists picked up on and elaborated impor­tant strands of British liberal thought. Influenced by the ubiquity and acceptance of interest in public affairs, and by seventeenth-century English free-market thought that emphasized the good consequences of rational, self-interested activities, numerous New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians were prepared to assert that “every passion, every view that men have is selfish in some degree. . . . when it does good to the public in its operation and consequences, it may justly be called disinterest in the usual meaning of that word.”³² Self-interest could occasion beneficence, and could result in harmonious social relations provided it was the product of independent action.³³ And interest could be a legitimate form of influence that individuals could quite properly use to advance their private fortunes and public reputa­tions.³⁴ So thoroughly did the logic of self-interest permeate segments of New York society that the radicals’ agenda of discontent during the pre-Revol­utionary years was deeply imbued with it.³⁵ And it infiltrated the orthodoxies of civil Quakerism so completely in Pennsylvania that Joseph Galloway could not imagine any repository of public power, even the Crown, as being devoid of “private Interest.”³⁶ But at the same time, there were always a number of vocal critics who emphasized the propensity of “Interest . . . [to] Tyrannise” and ideologues like William Livingston who stressed the importance of detached wisdom for good government and castigated “Private interest” as “the Whore of Babylon.”³⁷ For many colo­nists, the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest continued to pose ethical problems of considerable proportions.

Another facet of liberal thought that New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians stressed in their efforts to come to terms with their respective societies was individualism. In neither colony, for example, was there European and English-style “Interest of Privilege”—that is, special entitlements that con­ferred a superior status on some citizens. “In America,” wrote one observer,
“the highest rank is freeman, and any man . . . [able to qualify for the vote] is such.” The high proportion of men who, compared to the English norm, could meet the franchise requirements encouraged the view that the provincial societies were relatively egalitarian. While from one perspective the assembly continued to be a restrictive corporate body, the community it actually represented expanded sufficiently to allow the illusion of inclusiveness on a common footing. In such an environment, it is understandable why even spokespersons for the radical Morris/Alexander faction might conclude that “the Community is but an Aggregate of private persons.” That this statement came from a group of opposition politicians interested at the time in the electoral mobilization of their less affluent neighbors suggests the comment was less an attempt to duck traditional community responsibilities to the poor than a revelation of widely shared philosophical convictions about the character of colonial society. The widespread reverence for freeholder independence, preoccupation with the many private spheres of social life, the centrality of the individual in reformed Protestantism, the vestigial character of crowd activities associated with old-world corporate consciousness, the attenuated and underdeveloped state of new-world clientage relationships, and the attendant atomization of urban, lower-class society, and other circumstances, all contributed to the tendency of colonials to perceive their provincial societies as composites of individuals.

But as in the case of self-interest, emphasis on individualism raised serious problems. As most contemporaries recognized, colonial society was at its most dynamic when individualistic striving coexisted with a larger community ethic. The most vibrant segments of New York and Pennsylvania societies were frequently the religious and ethnic enclaves that were influenced by private, family-oriented value systems, but that allowed their members to move easily back and forth between individualistic endeavors in the larger society and their safe havens of communal support. In such an environment, the scale and intensity of conflict—“Convulsions” as one commentator described them—could be particularly intense. And that was a major impediment to the unqualified acceptance of liberal values. Apparently, individualism exaggerated conflict rather than promoting long-term social harmony. Until colonists could develop new perspectives on that difficulty, liberal social ideas would remain inchoate.

The most innovative way in which New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians came to confront the problem of interest-group conflict was not in social but in political terms. And that innovation came out of the dilemma created by the ongoing juxtaposition of classical republican political standards with the predominant patterns of colonial political behavior. Well represented in the public prints of New York and Pennsylvania are republican demands
that political leaders be disinterested, that only those who could still their selfish desires and rise above the passions of the day were fit for public office. Only those gentlemen whose independence, demeanor, and capacity indicated their predisposition to serve the public good should be elected to political office. And such emphasis on disinterest and independence ineluctably led to a condemnation of faction and party as the political expression of selfish views and servile dependence. Yet the outstanding feature of political life in New York and Pennsylvania was obviously not gentlemanly disinterest, but the partisan character of their respective political cultures. From the establishment of representative institutions until the Revolution, provincial politics were steeped in the kinds of partisanship that produced the very faction and party that the classical republican discourse deprecated.

To a limited extent, the English country tradition of politics could accommodate conflict. Eighteenth-century pamphlets and newspapers are filled with examples of political antagonists seizing the high ground of principled independence and disinterest and castigating their opponents as fomenters of discord. But the conventions of the country tradition also had serious failings. Its extreme polarization of political behavior as either virtuous or corrupt resisted any kind of modulation, and no participant in public debate could avoid periodic tarings at the hands of his antagonists. Most seriously, repeated exchanges of such rhetoric cast doubt on the intrinsic worth of colonial politics. And that simply did not reflect how most colonists thought about their provinces. Popular leaders in both New York and Pennsylvania were generally proud of their societies and confident of their own competence in public affairs. The colonies' experience of growth and expansion, their surfeit of freemen, and their record of protecting rights and extending popular privileges, bespoke sound public mores and vital political cultures.

The inability of the country language to describe, in anything but condemnatory terms, the partisan politics that were integral to societies in the very forefront of English libertarian practice prompted leading colonists to find their own ways of expressing the norms emerging from their political experience. The most revealing evidence of this was their movement in the direction of developing their own informal language of politics, centering on the expression of more positive attitudes toward party politics. There had always been crosscurrents in the main flow of country rhetoric that had acknowledged the salience of party divisions in public affairs. More important, as English historians have come to realize, party allegiances forged in seventeenth-century England continued to play a major role in the structure and language of English county politics through the mid eighteenth century. The point is that English immigrants to New York and Pennsylvania during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had far less
reason to be inhibited, either intellectually or practically, from viewing party as an acceptable aspect of political life than a strict emphasis on the main tenets of country ideology would seem to suggest. Following this lead in their informal discourse of private correspondence and conversation, many New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians began unabashedly to acknowledge that they were partisans in a partisan political world. Unashamedly they spoke of "our party," "my party," "their party," "your party," "our side," "my side," "the other side," "the other party," "your side," "the opposite party," and "our Members" of the assembly, designations that conveyed none of the opprobrium that characterized the formal anti-party rhetoric of the time.\(^47\)

In associating themselves personally with parties, in frankly attributing party allegiances to themselves, colonials indicated that they had passed over a very important divide both in their personal and in their group thinking. Many had come to accept partisan activities expressed through party associations as a legitimate form of political activity.\(^48\)

The willingness of New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians informally to acknowledge the fundamental place of party activities in their respective political cultures was an important development. It accommodated some of the political expressions of liberalism and served as a baseline from which they could work at creating a fuller rationale for their systems of provincial politics. And in this case, as in others, New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians traveled this route by somewhat different paths.

**New York and the Politics of Contention**

In taking the important step of informally acknowledging party activities as an acceptable feature of political behavior, New Yorkers were influenced by various characteristics of their provincial politics. One of the most important of these was the existence of intercounty networks of family, interest, and like-mindedness in public affairs. The long and intergenerational association of popular and provincial Whig factions created a rough, if ill-defined, order in provincial politics that suggested durability and consistency of public purpose. The longevity of, and apparent continuities in, the political differences that divided New York's oligarchy conspired to convince participants that they were more "parties" to ongoing disputes than factions in pursuit of transient goals.

The intercounty dimensions of provincial politics were most clearly revealed during elections. Frequently, friends from surrounding areas would come to their allies' aid in election contests and exert themselves in various precincts or townships where they thought they had some influence.\(^49\)

Actually, the laws governing New York elections encouraged this sort of
collusion, because the sheriffs of the various counties had considerable freedom in setting the election date. This allowed for the staggering of election dates so that prominent city residents, for example, might attend the elections in Richmond, Queens, and Westchester counties as well as their own, or that Albanians might have some say in Rensselaerswyck Manor and Schenectady affairs as well as in the city and county of Albany. Outsiders often had a claim to electoral influence, not just on the basis of their friendship with or relationship to a candidate, or because of their provincial eminence, but because landownership in various counties might entitle them to a vote in each of those electoral districts. The law against nonresident voting notwithstanding, the vote in New York went to all qualified landowners in any jurisdiction, regardless of their place of residence. Electoral custom thus encouraged intercounty cooperation among New York politicians, and whenever the elections of neighboring jurisdictions were scheduled for the same day (the purpose being to weaken the political alliance with the strongest out-of-county support), shouts of complaint echoed through the province.

Despite the interaction among “activists, officials and voters”—a requisite of modern participatory politics—New Yorkers never did fully develop the kind of persisting group consciousness and symbols of political identity essential to the practice of “party” politics. The primary preoccupation of New Yorkers with short-run factional politics rather than with the continuities in the popular and provincial Whig traditions was reflected in the names they used to refer to their political divisions. References to “Morrisites,” “Cosbyites,” and the “Livingston” and “DeLancey” parties tell a tale of personality-dominated, factional politics. By the late 1760s, New Yorkers still had found no clear way to designate such alliances as “the DeLancey’s, Crugers, & Church Interest” beyond describing them in those terms, or using a shorthand version such as the “DeLancey Party” or “Church Party.” At the same time, there was no development of effective party organizations. Although some “management” always occurred, and was particularly noticeable in the relatively complex four-seat riding of New York City and County, it is clear that whatever intercounty electoral cooperation did take place among politicians, it was too intermittent to gain much strength. And while factions did adopt symbols and slogans, there was little carryover from one contest to the next. The reasons for this were both institutional and cultural. Elections were held infrequently. For all anyone knew, there might be a decade—or, after the Septennial Act, seven years—between elections. And the venues were predominantly double- or single-seat constituencies.

The paucity of electoral offices, coupled with the gentry pretensions of provincial politicians, tended to turn elections into contests between a
handful of leading men vying for power and status within their counties. That preoccupation was reflected in the way in which individuals referred in the first person possessive to their respective political followings. Abraham Yates of Albany and Robert Livingston, Jr., for example, came from very different backgrounds and represented very different tendencies in New York political life. Yates was a classic case of a man on the make. He began his employable years as a cobbler’s apprentice, moved on to clerk in an Albany law office, and after serving in some minor town offices, gained appointment as sheriff of Albany County during the later 1750s and early 1760s. Robert Livingston, Jr., on the other hand, was born to the provincial purple and gained as much as his narrow intellect could absorb from a college education and long association with other New York oligarchs. Despite their differences, however, Yates and Livingston shared a common perception of how New York’s party politics worked. Each described electoral competition in terms of “my party” and detailed how their respective loyalists could best achieve their goals in competition with the “parties” of other individuals. What that reflected was the propensity of leading New Yorkers to think in terms of patron/client relationships and to conceptualize both intra- and intercounty political cooperation largely as a convenient coalition of provincial “grandees.”

It was this individualistic and local outlook of New York’s prominent leaders that, more than anything else, militated against the development of cohesive, long-lived provincial parties. Egocentric conflicts between Robert Livingston, Jr., and respectively, John Morin Scott, Philip Schuyler, and John Van Rensselaer, for example, prevented any kind of tight party organization from developing around the “Livingston” interest of the late 1760s. The individualistic focus of provincial politics was both reflected in and reinforced by New Yorkers’ rhetorical use of the “patriot” tradition of English country thought. Patriots were singular men committed to serving the public through disinterested leadership; they were autonomous “Pillars of the Earth,” with “ye world [set] upon them.” And it was in this context of ongoing competition between a handful of self-justifying and influential county strongmen that we can best understand Philip Livingston’s often-quoted comment, “We Change Sides as serves our Interest best.”

The type of highly personalized, county-based party competition that characterized New York politics goes some distance in explaining the penchant of New York politicians, relative to their Pennsylvania neighbors, to controvert election results. This is not to deny the mimetic element in New York’s political culture, which possibly encouraged provincials to imitate defeated politicians in English elections. A very high proportion of losing candidates in England petitioned the House of Commons against the results if there was any chance of disqualifying enough of their opponents’
votes to reverse the decision, or of having the election set aside on grounds of corruption. Nor is it intended to lessen the importance of viva voce voting in explaining the incidence of election petitions. Voting by poll meant that a checklist of voters and their choices was available after the election, and an opponent’s supporters could be challenged on such grounds as inability to meet the property qualification or lack of citizenship. In short, the records of viva voce voting created the best opportunity for a challenge to election results. The motive, however, was frequently competitive excess.

Not surprisingly, there was some clustering of election petitions during times of intense provincial conflict and high legislative turnover. But even during these years, such conflicts as the Ulster and Orange petitions of 1737, or the Schenectady, Richmond, and Queens petitions of 1761, should be viewed along with the more sporadic ones, primarily a result of intracounty rivalry between local and often individual party interests. In elections, local magnates put their influence on the line in a very direct and highly visible manner, and losing was always a blow to their prestige. When the vote was close, of course, petitioning was the next logical step, but when it was not, there were always irregularities in elections that offered the temptation to strike back against an opponent. If nothing else, a petition offered some measure of revenge, for the whole process of assembling and examining suspect voters could be as costly a procedure as a prolonged election poll.

New Yorkers’ recognition that personality-centered group competition was a normal feature of their political life was expressed in the language of party that infused much of their informal political discourse. That language, and the concept of controlled competition within a defined sociopolitical world, came easily to politicians whose lawyer leaders and friends viewed a conflict-filled world of “party” disputes as a perfectly acceptable aspect of social relations. But, paradoxically, that very propensity to understand party in terms of personal and local loyalties militated against the development of a strong provincewide party consciousness. On the provincial level, the conflict between a limited number of strong individuals who led personalized factions seemed to reinforce Viscount Bolingbroke’s view: “Faction is to party what the superlative is to the positive: party is a political evil and faction the worst of all parties.” The tendency to conflate faction and party was so reinforced by the highly visible and nearly continuous conflict in New York’s provincial politics that such anti-party rhetoric continued simultaneously with the personal acceptance and approbation of party activities right through the colonial years. William Livingston and his coterie might at one moment attempt to distinguish between party and faction and at the next, lapse into mimicry of those parts of the English country monologue that stridently asserted the common roots of faction and party and the undesirability of both. Another prominent provincial, Sir William John-
son, was the head of an extensive political family, in which the language of political expression was largely the idiom of partisan politics. But at the same time, Johnson frequently associated himself with country norms by denying that he ever "prostituted" his interest "meerly to party." The predominance of one perspective over the other in respect to New York's partisan politics depended on the inclinations of each individual and his political circumstances of the moment.

But the impetus toward justifying New York's system of provincial politics was much too strong to be stymied by the difficulties in making a clear distinction between party and faction. Rather than spend their intellectual energies drawing overly fine distinctions, New Yorkers turned to confront the characteristic that seemed most to typify both party and factional politics directly. That characteristic was contention.

When Robert R. Livingston set out to examine the relationships that existed between New York's various socioeconomic interests in the mid-eighteenth century, he flatly asserted that they were "always at war." The casual way in which Livingston made this observation, simply positing it as a given in his colony, illustrates the extent to which New Yorkers accepted ongoing sociopolitical conflict as a fundamental feature of their society. Most politically aware colonists believed that "a just clamour" in public affairs was always welcome, while partisans never had trouble convincing themselves that their cause was "just." As Cadwallader Colden retrospectively put it toward the end of his long life, "Opposite Parties have at all times and will exist in this Prov[in]ce."

As New Yorkers became accustomed to the kind of political contention and party rivalry that characterized their province, and as they came to view party competition as normative, they sought for ways both to rationalize and to dignify their politics. One of the two most important of these attempts was rhetorical, narrowly self-justifying, and traditional in its orientation. It involved claiming "patriot" status for partisan politicians. In the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world, a patriot was understood to be an individual free of prejudice, ambition, and avarice whose overriding concern was "to promote the Welfare . . . [of the] Common Wealth." An integral part of the English country tradition, the language of patriotism was itself a party cry, and for this reason, as well as for its content, it appealed to both sides of New York's family of factions. As one New York writer observed, "there is scarce anything so much talked of and so little practiced as Patriotism." Leaving aside the question of practice, the commentator was certainly correct. There was a variety of patriotism for everyone. "Red-hott Patriots," "real Patriot[s]," "zealous Patriot[s]," and "flaming Patriots" were those who pushed to the point of public contention or vociferously advocated popular liberties. Ordinary or "true Patriots" were those who...
more quietly stood up for both the people's rights and "Submission to the Laws." So prevalent did patriotic claims become in mid eighteenth-century New York, that skepticism also began to appear. There were "Pretended Patriots," "modern Pretended Patriots," and "nominal Patriots," whose outspoken concern for liberty was only a "tickling [of the] Ears, with empty sounds." The prevalence of the terminology was not the result of accident or random mimicry. Its attraction was that it offered a label of legitimacy to all the Whig factions of New York. They could, and did, claim that their own actions represented the best of patriotic intentions, while others fell short. The patriot terminology provided politicians with a means of justifying their partisanship and thereby helped to put them at ease with the factional world they created and worked to perpetuate. Most important, the language of patriotism was one that could be openly expressed. It could be publicly used in subtle ways by the political press to couple patriot practices with specific public figures, and to suggest a rationale for partisan behavior. In short, it was an effective, if indirect, means of publicly acknowledging the factional political world with which New Yorkers were becoming increasingly comfortable.

The second strand of New Yorkers' efforts to rationalize their politics was conceptual and highly original. It constituted an effort to appropriate established idioms of traditional Whig discourse to assist them in expressing the innovative ideas that their new attitudes toward party and partisanship had engendered. This was most clear in the way in which New Yorkers drew on the notion of balance that was associated with the mixed and balanced constitution. One of the basic ideas that provincial thinkers shared was that their colonial constitution should replicate the British constitution. Largely ignoring the differences between colony and mother country, provincials never tired of publicly proclaiming how "the Constitution of the Colony ... [was] a Picture in Miniature of that of Great Britain," and how that structure created "balance[d]" government. As New Yorkers became reconciled to their contentious politics, and as they saw political power seesaw back and forth on the fulcrum of electoral competition, they began to transpose the idea of balance into the context of their provincial politics. By coupling party to constitutional ideas of unquestioned value, New Yorkers found a way to redeem themselves and their political parties. Listen for a moment to Peter Van Schaack, writing to his brother Henry:

How do you like the Event of this Election? It is I own very agreeable to me and yet it throws rather too much Weight into a Scale which I wish, indeed rather than any other to predominate; but in general my Sentiments are in Favour of a Ballance of Power—In a Constitution like that of Great Britain, there will be (I wish never to see the Day when there shall not be) Parties—the Bulk of the People, will be divided & espouse one or other Side—from the very Temper of Man when he gets Power he
Respect for colonial ways as well as for English values led Van Schaack to turn traditional thought on its head. Under colonial constitutions modeled after those of Great Britain, what guaranteed liberty was, not public unanimity (for in a society in which interests were constantly at war, peace meant subservience), but the partisanship and party activities that gave expression to political differences.

Peter Van Schaack's wholehearted endorsement of the efficacy of political rivalry was singular in its clarity, but along with the tendency of many New Yorkers to attribute party activities to themselves, it indicated how thoroughly many provincials had internalized new standards of political behavior based on their provincial experiences. The strength of this tradition, and of the informal political discourse that gave it expression, was further revealed by the way in which the new thinking occasionally broke into the formal world of public prints. William Livingston, of course, has often been identified as one author who was willing to write publicly what others were only prepared to write and say privately. In leading the battle against an Anglican King's College, Livingston argued that far from being a desirable state of affairs, political harmony could indicate "a Combination of Roguery." Rather it was "the Jealousy of all Parties combating each other, [that] would inevitably produce a perfect Freedom for each particular Party." But in giving voice to these sentiments, Livingston was not the soloist he was on other occasions. There were others who praised the salutary nature of "parties, cabals, and intrigues." One writer claimed that "some opposition, tho' it proceed not entirely from a public spirit, is not only necessary in free governments, but of great Service to the Public. Parties are a Check upon one another, and by keeping the Ambition of one another within Bounds, serve to maintain the public Liberty." Another argued "that Parties in a free State ought rather to be considered as an Advantage to the Public than an Evil. . . . [They] warn the Public of any Attack or Incroachment upon the public Liberty." By the later colonial years, many New Yorkers clearly thought of their politics in terms of a "contrariety of . . . Interests" and of their provincial constitution as one that "suppose[d] an Opposition."

A fundamental feature of the development of any new political discourse or language of politics is the "borrowing" of concepts from older paradigms and turning them to new uses in contemporary affairs. And that was precisely what New Yorkers did when they shifted the familiar old notion of balance from its traditional, anglocentric constitutional and social matrix to a political context of conflicting parties and interests. Accustomed to the
clash of provincial parties and having accepted their own involvement in party activities, yet deeply respectful of tradition, politically aware New Yorkers were eager to accommodate their political behavior to old verities. By emphasizing their faith in the efficacy of balance, they could still worship at the shrine of English liberty. But they did so according to a liturgy that was a new-world innovation.

**Pennsylvania and the Politics of Party**

Although it shared many similarities with New York, provincial politics in Pennsylvania adjusted to the diversity of colonial society in its own particular way. Whereas New Yorkers tended to perpetuate their factional politics while attempting to organize them, Pennsylvania politics quickly became known by their party character. More than in any other British-American province, Pennsylvania colonists not only structured their political activities along party lines, but also accepted such behavior as normative.

Party consciousness in Pennsylvania began with the notion of “broad bottom.” In the Quaker colony, this was never the kind of “cant word” that it became in the 1740s in Britain, when it was identified with efforts to create a coalition government of various Whig and Tory factions. Rather, it was a means of expressing both William Penn’s policy of religious inclusiveness and a related commitment of popular Quaker politicians to include as many interests as possible within their antiproprietary parties. The Quaker mission was, of course, central to the Pennsylvania experience, and Friends assumed a widely recognized entitlement to preeminence in public affairs. But, as James Logan reminded second-generation Friends, “the Proprietor’s own Invitation was general and without exception.” Penn’s principles and his province’s rich land brought numerous non-Quakers to Pennsylvania, and as part of the body politic, they deserved some representation in public affairs. On the one hand, Quakers were recognized as appropriate political leaders in provincial affairs, and to some extent their sectarian self-assurance made many Friends indifferent to other religious groups. But on the other, politically active Quakers recognized that if they were to maintain their reputations as evenhanded custodians of the public welfare, and continue to tap the electoral support of non-Quaker residents that granted them power, they had to create “broad bottom” coalitions that both reflected and fostered the sociopolitical processes of Quakerization.

The initial vehicle for gathering together the various interests of the Pennsylvania community was the assembly. Because the proprietary was a private interest and Pennsylvania’s governors were proprietary deputies, spokespersons for the assembly asserted that the House of Representatives
was the only institution capable of isolating the public interest. As a “Body,”
the “People” through their representatives could “not be supposed to judge
amiss in any essential Points; for if they decide in Favour of themselves,
which is extremely natural, their Decision is just; in as much as whatever
contributes to their Benefit, advances the real public Good.”93 In practice,
the assembly repeatedly reflected this kind of hubris. For example, its lead­ing
members might arrive unannounced at the governor’s “Chamber” and
demand “to know if he had any . . . [business] to offer them.”94 One gover­
nor’s sarcastic enquiry “whether in this Province, it were the custom for ye
Govr. to call the Assembly, or ye Assembly the Govr.” was no more than a
helpless confirmation of how much Pennsylvanians assumed their legisla­
ture should take the leading role in formulating the public policy.95

By midcentury, these attitudes had become deeply embedded in Pennsyl­
vania’s political culture. Assembly spokespersons emphasized how the
“whole Powers the House were invested with were derived from the People
themselves,” and because of the close ties between representatives and peo­
ple, “we can have no Motive but the good of the People.”96 But by that time,
such sentiments were identified not merely with the assembly as an institu­tion
but with the “Assembly Party.” And that designation was used inter­
changeably with the “Quaker Party.” As divisions opened up in the Pennsyl­
vania community over such issues as pacifism, defense, and Thomas Penn’s
second-generation proprietary policies, the Quaker Party appropriated for
itself the entire popular tradition associated with their assembly and with
William Penn’s idealism. Quakerism was so intimately connected in the
popular mind with Pennsylvania’s well-being that the pejorative connota­tions of “party” were pushed further and further from mind. The wrapping
of the authoritative aura of such words as “Quaker,” “assembly,” the “coun­
try,” and the “people,” around “Party,” through their conjunctive use inev­i­tably worked to make the latter both a respectable ideograph and an accept­
able way of thinking about political relationships.97 In the minds of many,
strong allegiance to the general interest of a Quaker-led community became
synonymous with Party. As Quaker assemblymen retorted when Governor
Thomas charged them with deceiving the people, “the Party we are of is our
Country.”98

Two other prominent circumstances also made important contributions
toward the legitimation of party activities. One of these was the impetus that
religious pluralism gave to innovative thought. By early in the eighteenth
century, spokespersons for Pennsylvania’s various religious denominations
accepted the fact that “by the settlement of Pennsylvania all professions of
the Christian religion . . . [were] to be on the same footing.”99 The result
was that religious parties were ubiquitous and normative, and contempo­
rary usage tended to throw the word “party” into the same heap as “denomi-
nation," "sect," "society," and "nation," as perfectly acceptable expressions of partisan allegiance and concern. The second development was the tendency of Pennsylvanians to dissociate party from faction. The crux of the difference between the two was made clear in a contemporary's definition of factious as "Quarrelsome, Riotous, Rebellious, [or] dissatisfied with the Publick Establishment." To most Pennsylvanians (and unlike the case of New Yorkers, who tended to see both party and faction as fraught with contention), party in the Quaker colony could coincide with peaceful government. This does not mean that there were no times when contemporaries stressed the factious nature of party conflict, nor that there was a total absence of Pennsylvanians who felt with New Yorkers that "constant Debate & faction" was an invaluable source of liberty. But overwhelmingly in Pennsylvania, the Quaker Party was identified with peace. Friends' attitudes toward public affairs were grounded in a discourse of "Love and Unity," which put a high premium on conciliation, "mildness of temper," and consensus. Family relationships were grounded in an ethos of "Holy conversation" that stressed loving relationships. Friends tried to avoid disagreement over unsettled issues, discouraged individual initiatives in public affairs, and fostered unanimity whenever possible. Within the context of Pennsylvania's religious diversity, they saw the Quaker Party as the "balance" wheel serving to keep order among Anglicans, Presbyterians, German church folk, and sectarians of various stripes. Even in contested elections, Quakers were known for making "no stir . . . than by their Votes" and avoiding "heat," "confusion," and "quarreling." In short, the association of the Quaker Party with good government and Friends' preference for quiescence gave the lie to the idea that party meant factional discord. Perhaps the best indicator of how much Pennsylvania's political culture was bound up with party politics is the extent to which the Quaker Party shared the characteristics of more modern parties. The most striking features of the Quaker Party were those previously discussed: an ideology of civil Quakerism that shaped opinion and promoted political cohesion; an ability to transcend policy crises, defections, and generational changes in leadership; a determination to hold power; and an organization sufficiently coherent to achieve success in electoral politics. But there were two other features that were equally significant and that provided important underpinnings for the party itself.

The cooperative dimensions of Pennsylvania politics, which contrasted markedly with New York practices, constituted the first of these. Pennsylvanians never used the term "my party" to refer to a group of political loyalists committed to the support of one individual. There were no county magnates who saw themselves as heads of their own parties and capable of determining political affairs on their own with an opportunistic, short-term
alliance with one or two counterparts. Pennsylvanians thought in terms of “our party,” a larger entity that subsumed individual loyalties, and that had some degree of autonomy and an integrity larger than any cabal of its members. Perhaps the most important reason for the difference between New York and Pennsylvania in this respect was structural. Unlike New York elections, which most characteristically focused attention on twin county seats, Pennsylvania elections involved tickets for assemblymen, county commissioners, assessors, sheriffs, and coroners. The very complexity of negotiating such tickets promoted a more communal approach to politics and discouraged individuals from running their own course with the bit in their teeth. Moreover, the issues of provincial politics were frequently deemed relevant in the election of county commissioners and sheriffs, as well as in the choosing of assemblymen. In such instances, cooperation became the watchword of electoral politics, and cooperation promoted Quaker Party identity.

One indicator of how much more emphasis centered on the Quaker Party rather than on the individuals composing it was the paucity of election disputes. Far more remarkable than the peculiar circumstances of the four election petitions that were drawn up in eighteenth-century colonial Pennsylvania was the simple fact of the losers’ unwillingness to contest the results. Even in closely contested elections, in which the difference between success and failure was a dozen votes, candidates were unwilling to call for a recount. Again there were important structural reasons for this: vote by ballot meant that there were no poll lists for candidates to challenge. But despite that problem, most commentators agreed that there were always grounds for nullifying election results, for voting by the unqualified was undeniable and ballot stuffing occurred regularly in some counties. What militated against election petitions was not simply the vote by ballot but that losers saw their defeat largely within the cooperative context of party relationships. Unlike their New York counterparts, Pennsylvania politicians were guided more by an overarching party ethos, which was in turn reinforced by a Quaker aversion to litigiousness, than by any individual wish for vindication or immediate vengeance.

Finally, there is the question of party identification through “a common name and symbols.” More than any other colonial party (and perhaps more than a number of later counterparts), the Quaker Party maintained a symbolic integrity that brought leaders and followers together. Although the party had three interchangeable names, “the Quaker Party,” “the Assembly Party,” and “the Old Party,” its identity was unalterably rooted in the “plain style” of Quakerism. Everywhere Friends and their Quakerized allies were known as “the Broad Brims of Pennsylvania.” When the Proprietary Party recruited sailors to go after its opponents in the 1741 election, the
mariners had no trouble distinguishing the “Quaker Sons of Bitches.” They were the “Men with broad Hats and no Pockets.” In public affairs, Quaker Party members were always discernable by their “broad brimmed beaver hats, undyed and uncorked,” their plain “shadbelly” coats with few pockets, and an absence of the “deep cuffs, false shoulders, [and] superfluous buttons” that signified pride and showcased sexuality. Shared preferences for muted colors and homespun fabric, the traditional honor accorded leather aprons and breeches, the aversion of upper-class Friends to showy periwigs, and both the melding of Quaker peculiarities with the plain characteristics of other sectarians and the diffusion of that style throughout the broader provincial community, graphically symbolized the common interests that drew Quaker Party leaders and their supporters together.

The “party” perspective that the Pennsylvania Quaker experience produced was one that markedly influenced Pennsylvanians’ approaches to other political groups. With the significant exception of the mid 1760s, the Proprietary Party was never much more than a faction, a loose aggregation of proprietary placemen riven with rivalry and pretension, and with little in the way of consistent and effective leadership. As Isaac Norris pointed out, “it is indeed absurd to call the opposition a party; a few men only compose it.” But call it the “Proprietary Party” or “Governor’s Party” they did. Partly it served the purposes of Quaker Party politicians to emphasize the coherence, and hence, the threat, that the Proprietary Party represented to popular power; but partly, too, it indicated that the proprietors’ private interests could have a legitimate role in public affairs. And that legitimacy, whatever its cost, required acknowledgement as a party interest.

The same kind of judgment underlay the willingness of many Pennsylvanians to recognize the political precociousness of a handful of Presbyterians during the mid 1760s. As soon as a few Old and New Lights attempted to encourage some intercounty political organizing among their fellows, even those Pennsylvanians on the periphery of provincial politics began to see the Presbyterian initiative as an effort “to become a Party.” Like the proprietary interest, the Presbyterian interest had every right to assert itself as an autonomous force in provincial politics. Perhaps the best indication of how persuasive this logic was came from the Pennsylvania Germans. When, in 1772, Philadelphia Germans established a “Political Society” to speak to the perceived public needs of the day, they “openly identified” their association as a “Parthey.” Such terminology clearly demonstrated that party endeavors were an acceptable means of pursuing the public interest.

But the extent to which others accepted the party ethos that Pennsylvania’s popular Quaker politicians pioneered can best be appreciated by looking westward to Lancaster County in the 1760s. There, in loose association with their more erratic eastern counterparts, opponents of the Quaker Party
created a “New Party” or “New Side” to challenge the local “Old Side” chapter of the Quaker Party. The New Side partisans were individuals who had long stood outside the Quaker Party. As spokespersons for traditional mainstream Whig and English country ideas, and as frequent critics of civil Quakerism, they might have been expected to reject vigorously the party thinking of their Quaker opponents. But they did not. Following the lead of their Quaker Party counterparts, they tried to create their own “broad bottom” coalition. They were painstaking in their efforts to balance geographical and religious interests on the complex ballots that elected fifteen officers each year. Steeped in partisanship, the New Siders could deride even those individuals closely connected with their own Proprietary Party who insisted on strutting to the tune of the disinterested gentleman. Such actors were “playing the independent man,” a charge suggesting that in Pennsylvania’s partisan political environment, non-partisanship was widely perceived as artifice. But more important, it was through the prism of party politics that they saw the spectrum of crucial issues in Pennsylvania politics. The campaign for royal government, the authority to tax, the nature and direction of public works, and the splitting up of western counties into new administrative units were all hues on the party palette that made up the Lancaster landscape.

In dealing with these issues, New Side partisans illustrated that they were participants in forging a powerful new discourse of party politics, one that provided a very different context of political understanding from that with which we habitually associate the formal writings of English country ideologues. As we might expect with such a discourse, there were important consistencies in language usage and innovations in terminology. Nowhere in their exchanges about political affairs did the New Side writers mention faction. They did not consider it an appropriate word with which to describe either themselves or their opponents. Both were parties. But their own party was no longer simply “our party”; occasionally it became “the Party,” the definite article suggesting an autonomy and an integrity that outstripped the institutional strength of the organization. Yet there were important organizational developments as well. The party did extend beyond the “principal men” in Lancaster Borough to outlying areas. Township “deputies” were partisan members of their communities who had some weight in party affairs. By designating them “deputies,” New Side spokespersons put to party purposes a term that in New England parlance and early Pennsylvania custom meant the representatives of the people. Amid such partisanship, it should not be surprising that the term “electioneering” came into use to describe the various forms of interest-making that accompanied elections. And although candidates might still “set up” for an election contest, it was not unheard of for others to “run” or “to be
run” for “tickets” their acquaintances put together.\textsuperscript{138} What these innovations illustrate is the ability of Pennsylvania’s party politicians to begin to develop an informal language of party politics by “generating idioms from within the activity of its own discourse” and, in so doing, testify to the normative character of partisan politics in the provincial experience.\textsuperscript{139} New practices and new habits of thought gradually began to forge new forms of political expression, expressions that indicated the revolutionary character of Pennsylvania’s political culture.

\textbf{Toward a New Politics}

In both New York and Pennsylvania, the public response to the development of variegated societies with considerable levels of political partisanship was to develop a new understanding of, and a new set of norms for, political behavior. In their respective ways of doing so, New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians were simply opposite sides of the same coin. Pluralistic societies without powerful, traditional governments and time-sanctioned, social orderings were fraught with interest-group conflict. And in order for what we would recognize as a functional political theory to emerge in such circumstances, contemporaries had to view that conflict in a positive light in its relationship to society’s overarching purposes. In positing that party and factional contention could promote liberty, New Yorkers did just that. But relatively open, pluralistic societies also required the existence of political organizations that were broadly enough based and strong enough in their own right to reconcile different interest groups and give some specificity to public concern for the community’s welfare. In creating a viable tradition of party politics, Pennsylvanians filled that need. The result was that, together, New York and Pennsylvania provided the components of a new type of political understanding, tailored to a maturing American society.

In neither New York nor Pennsylvania was there much structural resistance to the development of these innovative ideas. In New York, royal governors could never carry with them the full prestige of the Crown; that made it easy for local parties to characterize themselves as associations of loyal colonials, advocating constitutional positions that in their minds were expressions of British monarchical government. Because of the remoteness of the Crown, it was easy for New Yorkers to develop an oppositional mode of politics, yet simultaneously to associate that with the maintenance of imperial government and monarchical institutions. In Pennsylvania, the Crown was so removed from the ordinary course of provincial affairs, the proprietary interest was so clearly self-serving, and the governors were so obviously proprietary creatures that the process of refining a public interest
under the aegis of popular political organization seemed entirely consistent with loyalty to the British empire and the Crown. In neither colony was the hurdle of reconciling popular political parties to the notion of a disinterested, evenhanded Crown nearly as high as it was in Great Britain.\footnote{140}

The extent and power of the new paradigms of politics that New York and Pennsylvania offered in their informal discourses of partisan politics have escaped attention. In being overly attentive to colonial expressions of the formal orthodoxies of English country ideas that stressed the standards of disinterested political leadership and equated party with self-serving myopia, historians have frequently slighted the multilingualism of North American colonists. Just as articulate settlers could shift from political to religious discourse, or from one genre of religious thought to another, they could move between varieties of political discourse, depending on their interests and the appropriateness of the audience. William Livingston, for example, asserted in the public prints, with all the righteous fervor he frequently displayed, that he “never was of any Party.”\footnote{141} Yet he nevertheless reported on the fortunes of “our party” to distant friends and embroiled himself in factional conflict over King’s College.\footnote{142} In Pennsylvania, Isaac Norris, Jr., might write to his English correspondents in the cliché-ridden aparty language that his image of old-world politics seemed to require.\footnote{143} But Norris was partisan to the core. In 1756, he caused a public uproar when, from the speaker’s chair of the Pennsylvania Assembly, he made reference to “Our Side.”\footnote{144} Consensus had it that certain forums were inappropriate for the language of partisanship, and Norris knew better than most that the assembly was one of those sanctuaries. In his reflexive flouting of convention, Norris demonstrated just how deeply the informal language of partisan politics governed his ordinary manner of thinking.

Because the language of partisan politics was predominantly an informal discourse, sparsely represented in the public prints of the time, its significance is easily overlooked. But if we carefully examine the evidence, it is plain that this discourse indicated a way of understanding political affairs that was quite prevalent during the last three or four decades of the colonial period. Although much of our best evidence comes from political managers and insiders, it is clear that New York’s and Pennsylvania’s informal language of partisan politics, whether focused on issues, personnel, voter mobilization, or patronage, was also a predominant idiom of tavern and crossroads politics. When an assembly enquiry into Pennsylvania politics in the 1740s revealed the street language of the day, there was not a hint of the kind of aparty linguistic texture that we associate with the country rhetoric.\footnote{145} There is every reason to believe that in their oral contact with each other over public affairs, contemporaries spoke as much in the language of partisan politics as they did in the “ornamental,” high styles of various old-world
Whig discourses. Recognition of colonials’ extensive literacy in the language and conceptions of this informal political discourse is of crucial importance because it renders comprehensible the apparently random intrusion of ideas associated with that discourse into those fortresses of orthodoxy, the public prints. When writers occasionally suggested in the newspapers and pamphlets of New York and Pennsylvania that parties and factions, rather than aparty disinterestedness, were coupled with liberty, such writings were not simply “forays beyond the boundaries of accepted thought” nor “forshadow[ings] of the future.” They were, in fact, evidence that vigorous provincial political cultures were already flourishing, and that a significant element in those cultures was the practice and acceptance of partisan political behavior. Above all else, innovative politics was the measure of mid-Atlantic America.