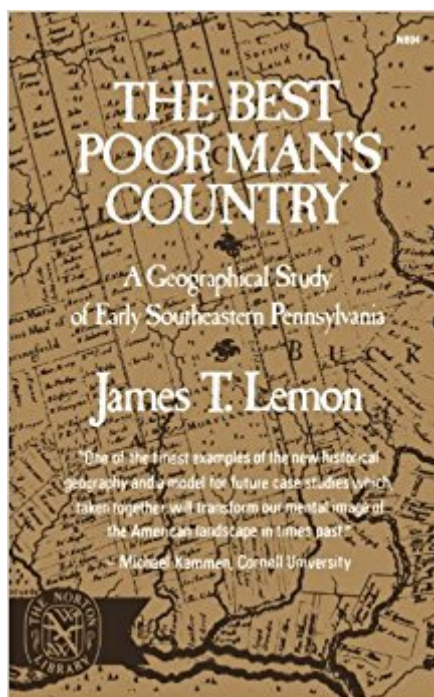


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The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study Of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania (Norton Library)



Synopsis

“This book deserves careful attention. . . . Lemon is a professional geographer, but historians will read his book as an imaginative approach to social history. . . . He demonstrates that geography, quite as much as demography, child psychology, or the sociology of the family, can organize and interpret data that has remained intractable to more conventional methodologies. . . . The Best Poor Man’s Country is a distinguished and important book, a fitting addition to the recent Chesapeake studies of Aubrey Land and the New England efforts of Greven, Lockridge, John Demos, and Sumner Chilton Powell.”

—John M. Murrin, *American Historical Review*

In many respects early Pennsylvania was the prototype of North American development. Its conservative defense of liberal individualism, its population of mixed national and religious origins, its dispersed farms, county seats, and farm-service villages, and its mixed crop and livestock agriculture served as models for much of the rural Middle West. To many western Europeans in the eighteenth century life in early Pennsylvania offered a veritable paradise and refuge from oppression. Some called it “the best poor man’s country in the world.”

The Best Poor Man’s Country was the winner of the Albert J. Beveridge Award of the American Historical Society.

Book Information

Series: Norton Library

Paperback: 324 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company (February 17, 1976)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393008045

ISBN-13: 978-0393008043

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 15 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #752,560 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #70 in Books > Law >

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Customer Reviews

"This book deserves careful attention... Lemon is a professional geographer, but historians will read his book as an imaginative approach to social history. The Best Poor Man’s Country is a

distinguished and important book." (American Historical Review) --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

James T. Lemon is a professor emeritus of geography at the University of Toronto. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

As the title says, this is a geography. To the reader who is familiar with the time and the history of the place the book is very helpful in explaining why the settlers went where they went and did there what they did. I would not suggest it as a reader's first foray into the history of colonial Pennsylvania but it certainly is a valuable tool for rounding out one's understanding.

If you are doing research on early inhabitants of PA this is a great place to start. I'm doing a research paper on the influence of the Scots-Irish in York County, PA and this book had a LOT of helpful information on everything from politics, farming practices to church divisions and land use. Obviously this isn't a sit back at the beach and read for fun book, but if you are looking for historical data on Southeastern PA this is a great place to start!

Excellent!

For those willing to put in some effort, Lemon's book is a very good study that is not at all poorly written and reaches out beyond an audience of academic scholars even while staying within a somewhat restrictive structure. His thesis is exactly what the title indicates: that the settlement and economic development which occurred in colonial southeastern Pennsylvania was the result of the richness of the land, the abundance of social opportunity, and resulting momentum generated by this fortunate "geography," a term that encompasses, as the subject of geography does, a whole host of physical, cultural, and social characteristics that interact with other over time to create a unique landscape in a particular place - in this case, colonial southeastern Pennsylvania. This book is a geographic study, and the language of academic geography is not readily accessible to most Americans, who have no background in true geographic thought, even those with an adequate understanding of and interest in popular geography. For example, Lemon's lengthy academic exercise, wherein he assesses how well settlement patterns and land uses approximate von Thunen's agricultural land use model is a bit of a slog - good academic prose, but a bit arcane of a subject even for today's academic geographers or college students. Certainly, reading The Best

Poor Man's Country is not like reading a book by John McPhee, nor was it meant to be. Lemon does not set out to weave a good yarn, where curiosity-driven diversions are neatly tied together as a piece of creative non-fiction. Instead, he follows a very careful and thorough, albeit somewhat dry, scientific tradition; he wrestles with a lot of data for the purpose of making a convincing and interesting argument, and then makes it again from other angles in subsequent chapters, and perhaps develops it a little deeper, too. He demonstrates that geographic ideas and theories and a lot of historical documents can be used to reconstruct and explain how and why early southeastern Pennsylvania developed in the way that it did. This secondary purpose, common in academic studies, can obfuscate the plainer story summed up in the words of the title.

The author took a wonderful idea (Geography as a factor in growth) and extensive research, and combined them into a book that would have done better as individual articles. The data was extensive, but the structure of the book did not make for a comprehensive read, and left me (as a reader) without a clean understanding of the authors point. A wonderful idea, but a bit hard to trudge through.

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