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REVIEW OF ANDREW R. MURPHY, *WILLIAM PENN, A LIFE* (NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019).

Jon R. Kershner

William Penn (1644-1718) needs little introduction among Quakers. After his convincement in the mid-1660s Penn quickly rose through the Quaker ranks as a prolific author, capable debater, and a staunch advocate for religious freedom. Beginning in 1681, he became a colonizer and traveled widely to recruit emigrants to his colony. While Penn is often touted among Friends, and sometimes reviled for his slave-owning and colonialism, Andrew R. Murphy does a great service in producing a comprehensive biography of Penn that is free from both the ahistorical anxieties and accolades Quakers sometimes resort to when considering this controversial figure. Indeed, Murphy's book, *William Penn, A Life*, shows how controversial Penn was among the Quakers of his own day and in British society in general.

2018 marked the three hundredth anniversary of William Penn's death in Ruscombe, England. In the interceding years since his death, Penn has become a part of Quaker and Pennsylvanian mythology: the noble and idealistic young activist who dealt fairly with Native Americans and established a society on the basis of religious liberty in America. Of course, this mythology glosses over the difficulties Penn faced trying to get his fellow Quakers in Pennsylvania to abide by the economic and political compromises necessary to run the colony. It also overlooks the fact that while Penn did reach out to the Lenape Indians, his overtures were partly diplomatic gesturing. In the end, Penn had little doubt that a charter from the British Crown was all the authority required to establish his colony and begin selling and renting his lands in America. At the same time that Penn advocated for religious toleration and liberty, he enslaved humans. Moreover, while Penn is associated with Pennsylvania, he did not actually spend all that much time there. From 1681, when the colony was established, to 1718, when he died, he was mostly in England.

Murphy's *William Penn, A Life* makes an important contribution to our understanding of the life and legacy of William Penn. Murphy's

impressive 460 page book uses a wide variety of sources, including correspondence, legal documents, and tracts to provide the most comprehensive assessment of Penn since Melvin Endy's *William Penn and Early Quakerism*, which was originally published in 1973, and rang in at a hefty 422 pages.

Murphy is a professor of political science, and he uses his disciplinary background to evaluate the political realities Penn faced and the social and political contributions Penn made. While Endy's earlier work focused more on the religious ideas that animated Penn, Murphy examines Penn's rise as a political thinker and his ongoing struggles with the realities of political leadership.

A work as nuanced and exhaustive as Murphy's cannot be adequately reviewed in the space provided here but in the following paragraphs I will highlight some of the most important arguments in the book, especially those that problematize the myth of William Penn and Pennsylvania in ways that provide a more complicated understanding of the famous colonizer.

Importantly, Murphy's analysis is not a lionization of Penn. Throughout, Murphy shows Penn to be an imperfect–almost tragic–figure who made crucial mistakes and was both widely respected and resisted in his own day. He was often too busy and distracted for his own good and so he didn't give due diligence to his oversight of Pennsylvania. He was also always the aristocrat, which led him to pursue a lifestyle he could not afford and, perhaps, persuaded him that his class, authority, and political standing would foster a deference to his wishes. Murphy's book is, then, an honest biography of Penn that challenges readers to reevaluate Penn and his legacy.

Murphy's biography includes an examination of William Penn's father, Sir William Penn (or Admiral Penn), who's service to the Crown brought with it wealth and access to political power for Sir William and his son. Sir William Penn was on the ship that returned King Charles II from exile and throughout his career was a friend of the royal family (21-22). Young William was sent to Oxford and his father had high hopes that he would become a leading political figure in England; but, Murphy notes that the young Penn had affinities for a more zealous faith, the faith of a religious dissenter, rather than the formalities of the Church of England. Eventually, young Penn left Oxford and travelled to Europe (26-26). Murphy describes the young Penn as having an "introspective spirituality, intense personal piety, and tendency toward self-interrogation and self-examination" (27).

These traits led him into dissatisfaction with the established churches of his day. These religious longings were not unique to young Penn. Many radical Puritans and dissenters of other stripes were also turning to more subjective and introspective forms of spirituality. The history and depth of spiritual radicalism in mid-seventeenth-century England may be one place where Murphy's analysis could have benefitted from additional exploration, to deepen our understanding of the impulses the led William to leave Oxford and, by 1666, to be imprisoned as a Quaker. However, Murphy's description of the turbulent years of plague, the Great Fire of London, and naval defeats experienced in 1664-1666 were a helpful addition to histories of young William's life, and to the socio-political situation faced by Quakers and Britons of the era more generally (32-35, 43).

Murphy foreshadows Penn's difficulties with Quaker colonists by noting that from the beginning of the Quaker movement there was a "tension between the incipient anarchic tendencies of its emphasis on the… Light Within" and a "desire for an organizational structure that would enable Quakers to speak authoritatively to broader audiences and coordinate the activities of its members…" (47). Murphy will return to this tension several times to explain Penn's expectation that Pennsylvania would adhere to his vision of an ordered society, and to the resistance of Quaker settlers to accommodate him.

Penn's travels and work on behalf of friends accelerated in the 1670s. Murphy argues that "during the mid-1670s, William Penn was simply everywhere" (112). He was heavily involved in Quaker ecclesial structures, a petitioner to Parliament and the king, and a public debater and spokesman for Quaker causes. Murphy makes the interesting observation that at this point in the 1670s Penn was so busy on so many levels as a preacher and controversialist that one would have thought his career and legacy would remain in these realms. It was only when Penn attempted to intervene in an intra-Quaker dispute among the proprietors of New Jersey that Penn's attention turned to America (112).

All the while that he was a public Quaker figure, he was also an aristocrat and family man. In 1676 Penn continued an established pattern of living beyond his means when he and his first wife, Gulielma, and their son, moved to a new home that "included a manor house complete with gardens and servants" (120). The move placed a financial strain on Penn and forced him to sell some of his other properties in order to pay for the new home and its ongoing costs

(120). Financial decisions like this one are, perhaps, partly responsible for Penn's motivation to become a colonizer.

Murphy argues that the exact motivations for Penn's decision to pursue a colony in America, as well as the king's decision to grant Penn one, are difficult to understand. Certainly Penn was motivated by both his religious convictions of establishing a land of religious liberty and by his need to bolster his finances. The king, though, had less to gain and at this time the Crown was generally trying to regain control of colonial authority (139-140). Nonetheless, in 1681, Penn would be granted a charter to include much of the land that is now Pennsylvania and thus became a landlord whose financial survival depended on his ability to recruit colonists to rent or purchase land and develop it productively.

However, there were Indigenous people already living on those lands and any attempts to recruit settlers would be dampened by the prospect of moving to contested territory. It is with this motivation that Penn attempts to negotiate treaties with the Lenape that would allow for European settlers to move onto the lands along the Delaware River in exchange for trade relationships with the Lenape. Murphy incorporates into his history of Penn and Pennsylvania recent scholarship on the Lenape from Jean Soderlund, Daniel Richter, and James Merrell (144-146). This biography is not primarily about Penn's engagements with the Lenape, but Murphy carefully corrects some of the previous mischaracterizations of the nature of the relationship between Lenape and the early Quaker settlers. Most often the mischaracterizations tend to glorify Quaker benevolence toward Native Americans and imply that the values of Pennsylvania were solely derived from Quakers. As Murphy shows, Penn was first and foremost a colonizer and his interactions with the Lenape were geared toward legitimizing his claims. Murphy argues that in these encounters Penn used his "Quaker means" for his own advantage, and contends that the Lenapes had a long tradition of peaceful dealings with others before Quakers arrived and may be just as responsible for peaceful negotiations as the other way around (145).

Penn himself was still in England when negotiations with the Lenape began. He did not arrive until 1682. By the mid-1680s Penn was back in England and unhappy with his Quaker colony. He was not being paid rent and he was floundering financially. Back rents were impossible to collect. In the earlier and more idealistic days at the very beginning of the colony he had allowed rents to be paid in produce

instead of in money. With the Pennsylvanian economy thriving in the mid-1680s some colonists continued to pay in produce, despite Penn's urgent need for cash (182).

Penn became dissatisfied with his colony, and the feeling was mutual. Murphy shows how the "Blackwell Episode," where Penn appointed the New England anti-Quaker Puritan John Blackwell as deputy governor of Pennsylvania, invoked the ire of Pennsylvanian Quakers. The experiment lasted only two years, but the waters were poisoned after that (198, 207).

Penn's precarious finances and the decades of struggle he had with his colony led him in 1703 to attempt to resign the government of Pennsylvania to the Crown in exchange for some compensation. His initial overture was one-sided in his favor (303-304), but later negotiations for a considerably less lucrative financial payment were successful and Penn surrendered the government of Pennsylvania to the Crown in 1712 (350).

In 1712, Penn suffered a stroke that would lead him to be impaired until his death. His second wife and executrix, Hannah, essentially took over his business dealings and generally tried to shield him from undue stress. Penn died in 1718. With the passing of time, Penn's rocky relationship with the residents of Pennsylvania were forgotten or minimized and, as Murphy puts it, Penn was enshrined as "a heroic apostle of religious dissent who brought forth a land that served as a beacon for oppressed believers, and who treated the natives with kindness and respect…" (358).

So how are we to assess Penn's "holy experiment"? First off, Murphy is right to argue that it is hard to know what Penn meant when he used the expression "holy experiment" and perhaps it is not a very helpful metric for understanding Penn or the colony. Experiments, Murphy notes, tend to succeed or fail. But did Penn succeed? Did he fail? The answer is more complicated than that. On one hand, Penn was deeply disappointed with the political realities and religious squabbles of his colony. On the other hand, Pennsylvania did provided religious toleration and it thrived economically. Murphy concludes that the multiple dimensions of Pennsylvania in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were just as complex as the legacy it shares with its founder (364).

Andrew Murphy's *William Penn, A Life* is an important contribution to political theory, Quaker studies, Pennsylvania history,

and colonial studies. The book is accessible to general readers, especially those interested in a detailed and complex assessment of Penn's life.