

## American Colonial Society in the Eighteenth Century

### I. Characteristics of eighteenth-century British colonial America

- A. Enormous population growth: common feature among the 13 colonies
- Demographic changes resulted in a shift in the balance of power between the colonies and England.
    - 1700: colonies had less than 300,000 people; 2.5 million by 1775 (20% black)
    - High fertility rate: ratio of English immigrants for each American-born colonist dropped significantly
      - 20 to 1 in 1700
      - 3 to 1 in 1775
  - Largest colonies were Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Maryland
  - Four major cities: Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Charleston
  - 90% of colonists lived in rural areas in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century; 80% by the American Revolution

### B. America as a melting pot: the "Old Immigration"

- The British American colonies had the most mixed population in perhaps all the world despite being mainly English.
  - South held 90% of slaves
  - New England was least ethnically mixed; predominantly English
  - Middle colonies were the most ethnically mixed.
  - Outside of New England, about 1/2 of the population was non-English in 1775.
- Population breakdown: 1790
  - English and Welsh (66%): English was the dominant language; British institutions dominated the colonies.
  - African: 20% of the population by 1775; mostly concentrated in the South
  - Scots Irish** (and Scots Highlanders): 6%
    - Presbyterian Scots Lowlanders
      - Many became squatters on frontier lands and fought Native Americans for land.
        - Squatters were settlers who move onto land without permission or legal title.
        - Eventually squatters moved south into the backcountry of Maryland, western Virginia, and the western Carolinas.

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- Hated the British for uprooting them earlier from Scotland
  - Most were frustrated and poor
  - Thousands came to America in early 1700s (mostly in Pennsylvania)
  - Scots Highlanders – small population; loyal to the crown; relatively well-off
- d. German (5%)
- Fled religious persecution, economic oppression, and war in the early 1700's
  - Settled mostly in Pennsylvania; comprised 1/3 of its population
  - Primarily Lutheran
  - No loyalty to British crown.
  - Retained German language and customs.
- e. Dutch (2%): concentrated in New York and New Jersey
- f. Irish (2%)
- g. French (0.4%)
- h. All other whites (0.3%) (Swedes, Jews, Swiss)

### C. Structure of colonial society

1. Stratification emerged by the mid-18th century; not as much prior to 1750
  - a. Small Upper-class:
    - Aristocratic plantation owners in the South dominated wealth and influence
    - Merchants, lawyers, officials, and clergymen dominated the North
  - b. Yeoman farmers constituted the majority of the population: small landowners
  - c. Small merchants, manual workers, and hired hands: many did not own land
  - d. Indentured servants and jailbirds: had limited to no influence
  - e. Slaves: 20% of population
2. Americans on average had the highest standard of living in the world.

## II. Commerce and Trade

### A. The British Empire was based on mercantilism.

1. The empire sought economic self-sufficiency and a favorable balance of trade with rival empires.
2. The colonies existed solely for the benefit of the mother country.
3. Parliament passed hundreds of Navigation Laws to regulate its mercantilist empire.
  - a. 1651, the first Navigation Act was passed during Oliver Cromwell's "Protectorate" which sought to prevent Dutch

- trade with the American colonies.
- b. 1660, England banned colonial trade with any other country except England.
  - c. 1663, all goods shipped from Europe to the American English colonies first had to go through England for tax purposes.
  - d. 1673, England imposed taxes on coastal trade among the colonies and appointed customs agents to enforce the Navigation Laws.
  - e. Later laws such as the Wool Act, Iron Act, and Hat Act sought to reduce colonial production and/or exportation of goods that would either pose competition to British manufacturers or evade taxation by the empire.
  - f. Certain "**enumerated**" **articles** like tobacco couldn't be shipped to any other foreign market except England, despite higher prices in other markets.

B. The Atlantic Trade included two major Triangular Trade models

1. **Triangular Trade:** Atlantic slave trade

- a. New England rum was shipped to Africa.
- b. Ships were then filled with slaves and sent to the West Indies.
- c. Molasses and some slaves sailed to British North America where ships were unloaded and reloaded with rum.



2. **Triangular Trade:** classical model (see below)

- a. Britain shipped textiles, rum, and manufactured goods to Africa.
- b. Slaves were transported to the West Indies and North America.
- c. Goods from the West Indies and North America, such as sugar, tobacco, lumber, cotton goods, were shipped to

Britain.



C. Illegal American colonial trade was designed to circumvent England's Navigation Laws

1. A period of “**salutary neglect**” from c. 1713 to 1763 enabled Americans to trade without much regulation by the British Empire.
2. Increased trade
  - a. Growth of the American population created an increased demand for British goods.
  - b. As the American economy grew, Americans sought other foreign markets and resisted the Navigation Acts.
    - Exports to France and the French West Indies brought in money to buy British goods.
    - **Molasses Act, 1733:** Britain sought to stop colonial trade with the French West Indies; the colonists ignored it.
      - The act was typical of how Navigation Laws aimed at the American colonies were often not obeyed.
3. New England exported timber, fish, cotton goods, and light manufacturing to the French Caribbean for molasses.
4. New England ships illegally brought French molasses back home to be distilled for rum production.
  - Rhode Island became the center for rum distillation in the colonies.
5. Rum from New England was shipped illegally to the French West Indies where slave ships that had disposed of their human cargo took rum to the Gold Coast of Africa.
6. Slaves transported via the Middle Passage to the colonies (e.g. Newport, RI) but some of the trade came from non-British ships.

#### D. Manufacturing

1. Secondary in importance to farming.
2. Lumbering, mining, fishing, and shipbuilding became the most important industries during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Small industries existed such as tailoring, shoemaking, baking, metalworking, and furniture making.
  - The Iron Act of 1750 placed further restrictions on colonial metal production.
4. Wool: female spinners and weavers at home produced a large output of cloth.
  - Wool Act of 1699 forbade exportation of colonial wool or wool products and imposed a tax on wool products imported into the colonies.
5. Other enterprises included naval stores, beaver hats, rum, carpentry

#### E. Agriculture remained vital to trade in the Middle and Southern colonies.

1. Grain was exported from the mid-Atlantic colonies (the “bread colonies”)
2. Tobacco from the Chesapeake (Virginia and Maryland) and North Carolina was shipped to Britain.
3. Rice and indigo from South Carolina and Georgia were shipped to Britain or to the Caribbean where rice fed the large slave population that worked in sugar cane fields.

### III. Religion

#### A. State of religion

1. Only 1 in 7 northerners were church members; even less in the South.
2. Toleration came about in large part due to the enormous number of non-church members.
3. The Anglican Church in the South and New York and the Congregational Church in New England were established and collected taxes from all colonists regardless of religious affiliation.
4. Two major issues:
  - a. Rights of dissenters in established churches
  - b. Religious style and conviction during the Great Awakening
5. After the American Revolution, the desire for religious toleration led to the separation of church and state (except in New England).

#### B. Major religious groups

1. **Anglican Church** (Church of England); tax supported
  - a. Official faith in VA, MD, N & SC, GA, and part of NY
  - b. Church was a branch of royal authority

- c. Faith was less intense; more worldly compared to Puritanism.
  - d. Weakened by the lack of a resident bishop in America.
    - Non-Anglicans would see a bishop as a conspiracy to impose royal power.
  - e. Established the College of William and Mary in Virginia to train ministers, 1693.
2. **Congregational Church** (grew out of the Puritan church)
- a. Prominent in New England
  - b. Initially, all citizens, regardless of faith, supported the church through taxes.
    - Eventually, non-members of other well-known denominations protested and became exempted.
  - c. Emphasized Christ's existence in each individual Congregation.
3. **Presbyterian Church**
- a. Closely associated with the Congregational Church -- both were Calvinist
  - b. In contrast to Congregationalists, Presbyterians believed all Presbyterian churches constituted a unified body.
  - c. It was not an official religion in any of the colonies.
4. **Quakers**
- a. Quakers existed in large numbers in PA, NJ, DE, and RI.
  - b. Protested the New England slave trade (e.g., Newport, RI)
    - Became important in the emerging 18th century abolition movement
5. **Jews**
- a. The first Jews arrived in the mid-17th century; located in RI, NY, PA, MD, and SC.
  - b. Approximately 1,500 lived in the colonies by the mid-18th century.

**C. The Great Awakening, 1730s-1740s**

1. First mass social movement in American history
  - Spread principally throughout the middle and southern colonies
2. Main issue was religious style: personal faith, church practice, and public decorum.
  - a. Two primary issues:
    - Crisis within the ministry (to what degree should organizational purity be maintained)
    - Crisis between the clergy and the laity (e.g. ministers' salaries, degree of political control exercised by the Congregation)
  - b. The Great Awakening was a reaction against the elaborate theological doctrines, emotional stagnation, and liberal doctrines (arminianism) of the established churches.

- **Arminianism:** Directly challenged Calvinism's predestination doctrine and was supported increasingly by liberal ministers; stated man is not helpless in achieving salvation; his will can be an effective force in being saved
  - c. Enthusiasts saw themselves as beneficiaries of a direct inspiration from God: became the driving force behind the Great Awakening
3. **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758)
    - a. Credited with starting the Great Awakening in 1734
      - The most influential theological writer and thinker of the movement; some of his sermons were read worldwide.
    - b. Blasted the idea of salvation through free will (arminianism); he believed that dependence on God's grace was paramount.
    - c. Emphasized eternal damnation in his most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741)
    - d. Style was learned and reasoned; not emotional like other "new lights"
  4. **George Whitefield** (1714-1770)
    - a. Brilliant English orator who traveled extensively throughout South (coastal towns), the Middle and New England colonies
    - b. His basic appeal was to the Bible.
    - c. Most influential figure of Great Awakening; founded Methodism in Georgia and South Carolina
  5. **"Old Lights"** vs. **"New Lights"**
    - a. **Old Lights:** orthodox and liberal clergymen deeply skeptical of emotionalism and the theatrics of the revivalists.
      - Believed emotionalism threatened their usefulness and spiritual authority
    - b. **New Lights:** supported the Awakening for revitalizing American religion; used emotionalism to move followers
    - c. Congregationalists and Presbyterians split over the issue.
    - d. **Baptists** attracted believers in conversion who longed for emotion in religion.
  6. Significance of the Great Awakening
    - a. Split denominations thus increasing the competitiveness of American churches
      - By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Baptist and Methodist churches were the two largest in the U.S.
    - b. Converted many thousands of people and brought religion to many who had not had contact with it
    - c. Undermined the powerful older clergy.
    - d. Encouraged a new wave of missionary work among Amerindians and slaves
    - e. Founding of "new light" colleges: Dartmouth, Brown, Rutgers, and Princeton
    - f. Laid the foundation for anti-intellectualism as part of the

American character

7. The Great Awakening had a strong democratic component.
  - a. Unlike Europeans, American colonials had much more choice over religion (a highly American trait).
  - b. It represented another important example of resistance to established authority (the older established clergy).

IV. Education

A. New England was the region most dedicated to education.

1. Stressed Bible reading by community members.
2. Primary and secondary schools were established early in the colony's history (Massachusetts School of Law, 1647).
3. Literacy was much higher in New England than in the Chesapeake region or the deep South where only the privileged enjoyed the benefits of education.

B. Middle colonies

1. Also had primary and secondary education
  - a. Some tax-supported, some privately owned
  - b. Diffuse population made creation of good school systems difficult
2. Many wealthy families sent their sons to colleges in England.

C. South

1. Educational opportunities were limited for most people except the wealthy.
2. Wealthy planters hired tutors to teach their children.
3. Population was highly dispersed; ineffective educational system for common folks.

D. Higher education

1. Primary focus was the training of new clergy, not academics.
  - Emphasis was placed on religion and on the classical languages, Latin and Greek.
2. Higher education improved with the establishment of the University of Pennsylvania
  - a. Benjamin Franklin helped establish it.
  - b. First American college to be free from denominational control
    - Offered a more modern curriculum: modern languages, experimentation, reason
3. Nine important colleges emerged during the colonial period (others existed as well)
  - Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth

## V. Culture and the Press

- A. Most Americans were too busy working to survive to spend time on art.
- Colonial America lacked the high culture of England although a few notable exceptions existed.

### B. **Benjamin Franklin** (1706-1790)

1. Writings had a profound effect on shaping the American character
2. *Poor Richard's Almanack* (edited from 1732-1758)
  - a. Compendium of writings of many contemporary thinkers
  - b. Emphasized thrift, industry, morality, and common sense
  - c. More widely read than any book except the Bible; widely read in Europe as well
3. Franklin's *Autobiography* (1791) is now considered a classic.
  - a. Perhaps the first American literary work taken seriously by Europeans
  - b. Unpublished during his lifetime
4. Franklin was perhaps the only first-rank scientist produced in colonies.
  - a. Experiments with electricity
  - b. Bifocal spectacles
  - c. Franklin stove
5. He started the first privately supported circulating library in America; by 1776, there were about 50.

### C. **Phillis Wheatley** (c.1753-1784)

1. Slave who was taught by her master's mistress to read and write
2. First important African American poet and writer in America
3. Abolitionists would point to her as proof that Africans were not intellectually inferior.

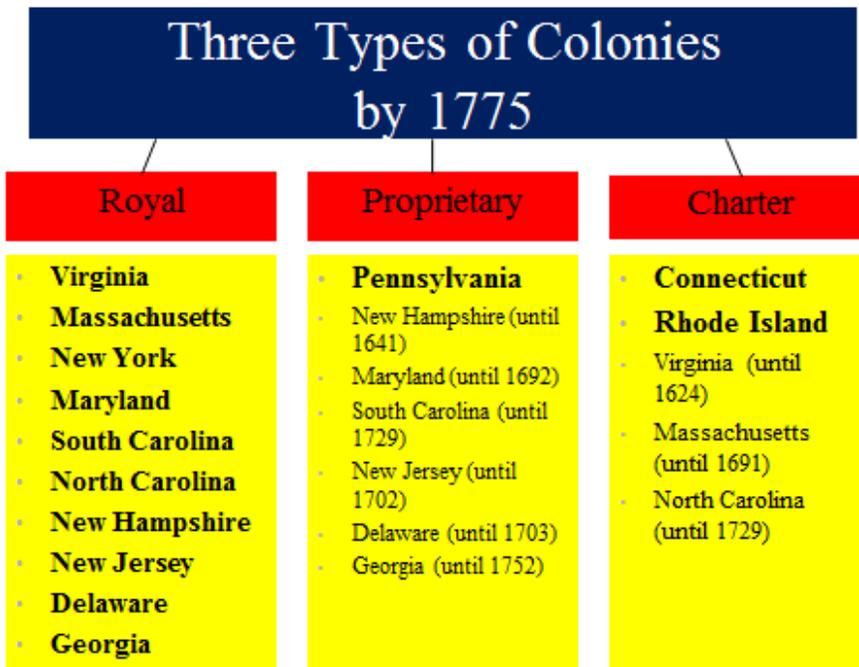
### D. The colonial press

1. Manual printing presses ran off pamphlets, leaflets and journals.
  - Effective for airing social grievances and building opposition to the British.
2. **Zenger Case** (1735)
  - a. The case paved the way towards freedom of expression.
  - b. John Peter Zenger's newspaper had criticized the corrupt royal governor.
  - c. He was charged with seditious libel and brought to trial.
  - d. He argued that he had printed the truth; the royal chief justice ruled that printing was enough to convict, regardless of the truth.
  - e. The jury ruled in favor of Zenger.
  - f. Newspaper editors thus received some freedom (not as much as post-1776).

## VI. Colonial Politics

### A. Structure of the colonies by 1775

1. **Royal Colonies:** Ten colonies had royal governors appointed by the crown and were more closely regulated by Britain.
2. **Proprietary Colonies:** Pennsylvania was the only remaining proprietary colony on the eve of the revolution.
  - Initially, Maryland, Carolina and Georgia had been proprietary.
3. **Charter Colonies:** Connecticut and Rhode Island elected their own governors under self-governing charters.



### B. Development of republicanism

1. **Republicanism:** representative government where people elect their own representatives to protect their interests.
2. Bicameral legislatures were most common among the 13 colonies.
  - a. **Upper house, or Council:** normally appointed by the crown or Proprietor
  - b. **Lower house, or Assembly:** elected by property owners (the people)
    - Voted for taxes to pay the expenses of the colonial government
    - Because there were more property owners per capita in the colonies than anywhere else in the world, the colonies were, in effect, the most democratic region anywhere.

### C. Nature of American politics

1. Colonial governments did not enjoy the power that Parliament enjoyed.
2. Yet, colonial governments were far more reformed than those in England.
  - a. Much more direct representation; the will of the people was more effectively expressed.
  - b. Less corruption
3. Administration at the local level
  - a. New England: **townhall meetings**
  - b. South: county government
  - c. Middle colonies: combination of the above
4. Voting restrictions
  - a. The upper class opposed democracy as they did not trust the common people.
  - b. Property and/or religious qualifications were imposed.
  - c. As much as 50% of white males were disenfranchised.

### D. Governors

1. Legal power (in theory)
  - a. Had authority to exercise veto power over colonial legislation
  - b. Had power to dissolve lower houses of colonial assemblies
  - c. Had power over the judiciary in the colonies
2. In reality, governors were weak in many respects.
  - a. Assemblies often controlled governors' salaries.
    - One governor did not get paid for a dozen years because he governed contrary to the wishes of the colonial legislature.
  - b. The king's orders were often strict and ineffective as Britain was 3,000 miles away.
  - c. Governors suffered from a lack of money from supporters.
  - d. Assemblies had powers to fill government positions in most colonies; this reduced the influence of governors.
  - e. Towns instructed their representatives how to vote which was often contrary to the wishes of governors.

### E. Development of Democratic Ideals in Colonial America

1. Democratic ideal of tolerance emerged
2. Educational advantages higher compared to Europe
3. Equality of opportunity much more pronounced than in Europe
4. Freedom of speech and the press
5. Freedom of assembly
6. Representative government

## VII. Age of the Enlightenment (1720s to about 1790)

### A. Classical Liberalism

1. Liberty -- Individual human rights
  - a. Freedom of religion
  - b. Freedom of speech and press
  - c. Fair and equal treatment before the law
2. Equality -- All citizens should have identical rights and civil liberties. Above all, nobility had no right to special privileges based on accident of birth.
  - a. Equality of opportunity
  - b. Did not mean everyone should be economically equal
3. Human dignity and human happiness
4. Science, progress, and rationality: liberal principles would lead to better government and a better society for all.
5. Representative government (but not democracy): Only those who owned property and had a stake in society could become representatives.

### B. Important Thinkers

1. **John Locke**: *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690) (late 17th century during England's "Glorious Revolution")
  - a. Men set up governments in order to protect their property
  - b. **Natural Rights**: Life, liberty, and property
  - c. **Natural right to rebellion**: A gov't that abuses its power becomes a tyranny. Rebellion can be avoided if gov't respects the right of its citizens and if the people defend their liberties.
2. **Baron de Montesquieu**: *The Spirit of Laws* (1748)
  - a. **Checks and balances; separation of powers** among three branches of gov't
  - b. Despotism could be avoided if political power was divided and shared by a diversity of classes and orders holding unequal rights and privileges.
3. **Adam Smith**: *Wealth of Nations* (1776)
  - a. Most significant work on capitalism ever written; foundation of modern economics
  - b. Formulated idea of a free economy; contrasted mercantilism
    - Free competition, via private enterprise, would result in greater income for everyone, not just the rich.

### C. Deism – Religious or philosophical branch of the Enlightenment

1. Naturalistic view of God
  - Premise: God created the universe and then stepped back; universe ran like a clock—the "Ghost in the Machine"
2. Believed in reason over revelation
3. Deists largely rejected traditional Christianity and the divinity of Jesus

4. Influenced Jefferson, Franklin, Washington & Paine
5. Not a wide-scale movement; popular among certain groups of intellectuals

### XIII. Democratic developments in colonial America

- **1619, Formation of the Virginia House of Burgesses:** First representative assembly in America; beginning of representative government in America.
- **1620, Mayflower Compact:** First agreement for self-government; freemen agreed to majority rule
- **After 1629, New England Townhall Meetings:** Church members discussed political and community issues
- **Colonial Assemblies:** The lower house of colonial assemblies gradually gained political influence; governors had difficulty ruling without the support of assemblies.
- **1639, Fundamental Orders of Connecticut:** First written constitution in America.
- **1643, New England Confederation:** Connecticut, New Haven, Plymouth, and Massachusetts formed an organization for collective security against Indian attacks. This was an important step in creating more unity among New England colonies.
- **1649, Maryland Act of Toleration:** Guaranteed religious freedom to all Christians (but not Jews and atheists)
- **1676, Bacon's Rebellion:** Western Virginia farmers revolted against eastern government; first of several major rebellions where common people are fighting for a more responsive government.
- **1683, New York Chapter of Liberties:** Granted freedom of religion to all Christians and gave all landowners the right to vote. Created to attract more settlers to New York.
- **1691, Leisler's Rebellion:** Jacob Leisler led a rebellion of frustrated poor people and farmers who protested huge land grants favoring wealthy landholders and speculators that left common people with few opportunities to own land.
- **1735, Zenger Case:** A colonial jury found John Peter Zenger innocent of libel against New York's governor. This is an important first step towards freedom of the press.
- **1754, Albany Plan for Union:** Proposed by Benjamin Franklin, the plan would have created an intercolonial congress. It was rejected by Britain for giving too much control to the colonies and rejected by the colonies fearing an oppressive colonial congress.
- **1764, Paxton Boys:** Western Pennsylvanians (Scots Irish) rebelled against gov't believing gov't was not doing enough to protect them from Amerindian attacks.
- **1771, Carolina Regulator Movement:** Frustrated poor people from western North Carolina rebelled against the colonial government (similar to Bacon's Rebellion and Leisler's Rebellion)

- **1713-1763, "Salutary Neglect":** The colonies enjoyed relative autonomy from British rule. Americans became used to regulating their own political and economic affairs (such as Triangular Trade) without British interference. When Britain tried to reimpose control in 1763, the road to revolution began.
- **1740s, Great Awakening:** Americans enjoyed much choice regarding religion. Churches increasingly had to cater to the needs of their parishioners. This was an important democratic step.
- **1720s to 1790s, The Enlightenment:** American political thought was influenced by Locke's natural rights philosophy (including consent of the governed) and Montesquieu's views on checks and balances.

### Terms to Know

"Old Immigration" English (and Welsh) Africans Scots-Irish squatters Germans mercantilism Navigation Laws Triangular Trade Molasses Act Anglican Church Congregational Church Presbyterian Church Quakers Great Awakening Arminianism Jonathan Edwards <i>Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i> George Whitefield "old lights" vs. "new lights"	Baptists Benjamin Franklin Phillis Wheatley Zenger Case Royal Colonies Proprietary Colonies Charter Colonies republicanism upper house, "Council" lower house, "Assembly" townhall meetings Enlightenment classical liberalism John Locke "natural rights" "right to rebellion" Baron de Montesquieu separation of powers checks and balances Adam Smith, <i>Wealth of Nations</i> Deism
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## **Essay Questions**

*Note: The new Curriculum Framework provides extensive coverage of the material contained herein. Thus, this sub-unit is a high probability area for the AP exam. In the past 10 years, 4 questions have come wholly or in part from the material in this chapter. Below are some questions that will help you study the topics that have appeared on previous exams.*

1. To what extent did each of the three regions of colonial America develop a unique and separate society by 1750? (You will need to review notes for Units 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4)
2. Analyze how the Atlantic trade influenced the development of the American colonial economy and society.
3. Analyze the extent to which British mercantilism succeeded in achieving its goals in the Atlantic trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
4. Compare and contrast eighteenth-century colonial American society with seventeenth-century colonial society.
5. Analyze the impact of the Great Awakening on American religion and society in the eighteenth century.
6. To what extent had the American colonies developed a democratic society by the eve of the American Revolution?
7. Discuss the development of the colonial economy in the eighteenth century.

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