

CHAPTER 3

SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN PROVINCIAL AMERICA



DR. WILLIAM GLEASON The American artist Winthrop Chandler painted this image of a doctor examining a female patient in 1780. The doctor obviously considers it inappropriate to view a woman lying in bed, so he takes her pulse as she slips her hand through the curtain obscuring her. (*Ohio State Historical Society*)

THE BRITISH COLONIES WERE, most people in both England and America believed, outposts of the British world. And it is true that as the colonies grew and became more prosperous, they also became more English. The colonists adopted the tastes, styles, and customs of England, bought goods made in England, read books and pamphlets published in England, and modeled most of their political, cultural, and educational institutions on their English equivalents. Some of the early settlers had come to America to escape what they considered English tyranny. But by the early eighteenth century, many, perhaps most, colonists considered themselves Englishmen just as much as the men and women in England itself did.

At the same time, however, life in the colonies was diverging in many ways from that in England simply by the nature of the New World. The physical environment was very different—vaster and less tamed. The population was more diverse as well. Beginning with the Dutch settlements in New York, the area that would become the United States was a magnet for immigrants from many lands other than England: Scotland, Ireland, the European continent, as well as migrants from the Spanish and French Empires already established in America. And beginning with the first importation of slaves into Virginia, English North America became the destination for thousands of forcibly transplanted Africans. At least equally important, Europeans and Africans were interacting constantly with a native population that for many years outnumbered them. Despite the efforts of the colonists to isolate themselves from Indian society and create a culture all their own, the European and Native American worlds could not remain entirely separate.

To the degree that the colonists emulated English society, they were becoming more and more like one another. To the degree that they were shaped by the character of their own regions, they were becoming more and more diverse. Indeed, the pattern of society in some areas of North America resembled that of other areas scarcely at all. Although Americans would ultimately discover that they had enough in common to join together to form a single nation, these regional differences continued to affect their society well beyond the colonial period.

Diverging Societies

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 1636 ▶ Harvard College founded in Massachusetts
- 1640 ▶ Instability in tobacco markets begins
- 1647 ▶ Massachusetts law requires a public school in every town
- 1650 ▶ Population of New England begins to grow by natural increase
- 1662 ▶ Halfway Covenant established in New England
- 1670s ▶ Flow of indentured servants declines
 - ▶ Slave traders begin importing slaves directly from Africa to North America
- 1685 ▶ Edict of Nantes revoked in France; Huguenots begin migrating to North America
- 1690s ▶ Rice production becomes central to South Carolina economy
 - ▶ Slave trade expands as prices decline
- 1691 ▶ Official toleration of Catholics ends in Maryland
- 1692 ▶ Witchcraft trials begin in Salem
- 1693 ▶ College of William and Mary founded in Virginia
- 1697 ▶ Royal African Company monopoly of slave trade broken; slave importations begin to increase
- 1701 ▶ Yale College founded in Connecticut
- 1708–1709 ▶ First major migration of Palatinate Germans to North America begins
- 1710 ▶ Major Scotch-Irish migrations to North America begin
 - ▶ German-Swiss establish settlements in North Carolina
- 1720 ▶ Cotton Mather initiates smallpox inoculations in Massachusetts
- 1734 ▶ Great Awakening begins in Massachusetts
 - ▶ Peter Zenger tried in New York
- 1739 ▶ George Whitefield arrives in North America
 - ▶ Great Awakening intensifies
 - ▶ Stono slave rebellion in South Carolina
- 1740s ▶ Indigo production begins in South Carolina
- 1746 ▶ College of New Jersey founded at Princeton
- 1754 ▶ King's College (later Columbia University) founded in New York
- 1755 ▶ Academy and College of Philadelphia (later University of Pennsylvania) founded
- 1764 ▶ Major ironworks established in New Jersey

THE COLONIAL POPULATION

Not until long after the beginning of European colonization did Europeans and Africans in North America outnumber the native population. But after uncertain beginnings at Jamestown and Plymouth, the nonnative population grew rapidly and substantially, through continued immigration and through natural increase, until by the late seventeenth century Europeans and Africans became the dominant population groups along the Atlantic coast.

A few of the early English settlers were members of the upper classes—usually the younger sons of the lesser gentry, men who stood to inherit no land at home and aspired to establish estates for themselves in America. For the most part, however, the early English population was very unaristocratic. It included some members of the emerging middle class, businessmen who migrated to America for religious or commercial reasons, or (like John Winthrop) both. But the dominant

element was English laborers. Some came to the New World independently. The religious dissenters who formed the bulk of the population of early New England, for example, were men and women of modest means who arranged their own passage, brought their families with them, and established themselves immediately on their own land. But in the Chesapeake, at least three-fourths of the immigrants in the seventeenth century arrived as indentured servants.

Indentured Servitude

The system of temporary servitude in the New World developed out of existing practices in England. Young men and women bound themselves to masters for a fixed term of servitude (usually four to five years). In return they received passage to America, food, and shelter. Upon completion of their terms of service, male indentures were supposed to receive such benefits as clothing, tools, and occasionally land; in reality, however, many left service without anything at all, unprepared and

Immigration and
Natural Increase

Origins



AMERICA IN 1700 This map reveals how tiny a proportion of North America was settled by Europeans in 1700, nearly a century after the first English settlements there. The largest area of settlement was the thin fringe of colonies along the northern Atlantic seaboard. There were additional scattered settlements, almost all of them tiny, in eastern Canada, along the southern Atlantic coast, in the Mississippi Valley, and in the Southwest. ♦ *What would account for the isolated colonies in noncoastal areas of North America?*

For an interactive version of this map, go to www.mhhe.com/brinkley13ech3maps

unequipped to begin earning a living on their own. Roughly one-fourth of the indentures in the Chesapeake were women, most of whom worked as domestic servants. Because men greatly outnumbered women in the region in the seventeenth century, women could reasonably expect to marry when their terms of servitude expired. Male domestic servants, however, usually had no such options.

Most indentured servants came to the colonies voluntarily, but not all. Beginning as early as 1617, the English government occasionally dumped shiploads of convicts in America to be sold into servitude, although some criminals, according to Captain John Smith, “did chuse to be hanged ere they would go thither, and were.” The government also sent prisoners taken in battles with the Scots and the Irish in the 1650s, as well as other groups deemed undesirable: orphans, vagrants, paupers, and those who were “lewd and dangerous.” Other involuntary immigrants were neither dangerous nor indigent but were simply victims of kidnapping, or “impressment,” by aggressive and unscrupulous investors and promoters.

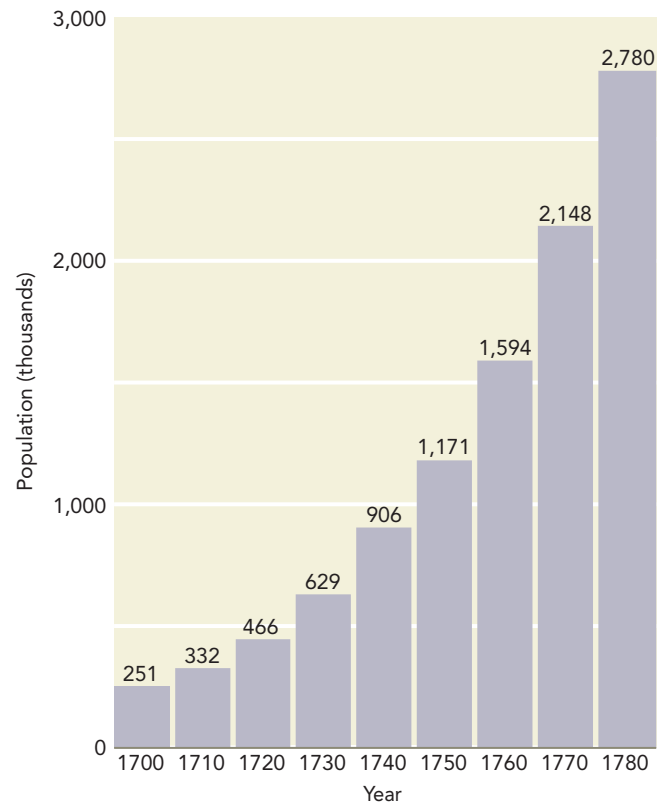
It was not difficult to understand why the system of indentured servitude proved so appealing to colonial employers—particularly once it became clear, as it quickly did, that the Indian population could not easily be transformed into a servile work force. The indenture system provided a means of coping with the severe labor shortage in the New World. In the Chesapeake, the headright system (by which masters received additional land grants for every servant they imported) offered another incentive. For the servants themselves, the attractions were not always so clear. Those who came voluntarily often did so to escape troubles in England; others came in the hope of establishing themselves on land or in trades of their own when their terms of service expired. Yet the reality often differed sharply from the hope.

Some former indentures managed to establish themselves successfully as farmers, tradespeople, or artisans.

Realities of Indentured Servitude

Others (mostly males) found themselves without land, without employment, without families, and without prospects. A large floating population of young single men traveled restlessly from place to place in search of work or land and were a potential (and at times actual) source of social unrest, particularly in the Chesapeake. Even free laborers who found employment or land and settled down with families often did not stay put for very long. The phenomenon of families simply pulling up stakes and moving to another, more promising location every several years was one of the most prominent characteristics of the colonial population.

Indentured servitude remained an important source of population growth well into the eighteenth century, but beginning in the 1670s the flow began to decline substantially. A decrease in the English birth rate and an increase in English prosperity reduced the pressures on many men



THE NON-INDIAN POPULATION OF NORTH AMERICA, 1700–1780

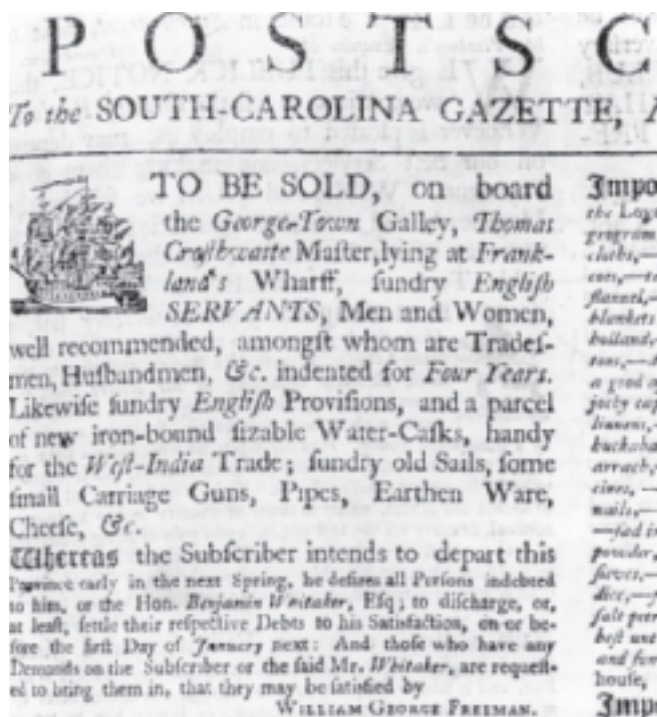
The European population of North America grew much more dramatically in the eighteenth century than it had in the seventeenth, exceeding 2 million by 1770. But unlike in the seventeenth century, the most important reason for this expansion was natural increase (children born in America), replacing immigration from Europe.

◆ *Why would the natural increase have been so much larger than in the past?*

and women who might otherwise have considered emigrating. After 1700, those who did travel to America as indentured servants generally avoided the southern colonies, where working conditions were arduous and prospects for advancement were slim, and took advantage of the better opportunities in the mid-Atlantic colonies, especially Pennsylvania and New York. In the Chesapeake, landowners themselves began to find the indenture system less attractive, in part because they were troubled by the instability that former servants created or threatened to create. That was one reason for the increasing centrality of African slavery in the southern agricultural economy.

Birth and Death

At first, new arrivals in most colonies, whatever their background or status, could anticipate great hardship: inadequate food, frequent epidemics, and in an appalling number of cases, early death. Gradually, however, conditions improved enough to allow the non-Indian population to begin to expand. By the end of the seventeenth century, the non-Indian population in the English colonies



SERVANTS FOR SALE The *South Carolina Gazette* of Charles Town ran this advertisement in November 1749 to announce the arrival of a group of English “indentures”—men and women who had accepted passage to America in exchange for their agreement to sell themselves as servants for a fixed period of years once they arrived. Indentures were the most common form of labor in most of the colonies during much of the seventeenth century, but by 1749 the system was already beginning to die out—replaced in the South by the enslavement of Africans. (*Charleston Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina*)

of North America had grown to over a quarter of a million, of whom about 25 percent were Africans.

Although immigration remained for a time the greatest source of population increase, marked improvement in the reproduction rate began in New England and the mid-Atlantic colonies in the second half of the seventeenth century, and after the 1650s natural increase

Exceptional Longevity
in New England

became the most important source of population. The New England population more than quadrupled through reproduction alone in the second half of the seventeenth century. This was less a result of unusual fertility (families in New England and in other regions were probably equally fertile) than of exceptional longevity. Indeed, the life spans of residents of some areas of New England were nearly equal to those of people in the twentieth century. In the first generation of American-born colonists, according to one study, men who survived infancy lived to an average age of seventy-one, women to seventy. The next generation’s life expectancy declined somewhat—to sixty-five for men who survived infancy—but remained at least ten years higher

than the English equivalent and approximately twenty years higher than life expectancy in the South. Scholars disagree on the reasons for these remarkable life spans, but contributing factors probably included the cool climate and the relatively disease-free environment it produced, clean water (a stark contrast to England in these years), and the absence of large population centers that might breed epidemics.

Conditions improved much more slowly in the South. The mortality rates for whites in the Chesapeake region remained markedly higher than those elsewhere until the mid-eighteenth century (and the mortality rates for Africans higher still). Throughout the seventeenth century, the average life expectancy for white men in the region was just over forty years and, for white women, slightly less. One in four children died in infancy, and fully half died before the age of twenty. The high death rate among adults meant that only about a third of all marriages lasted more than ten years; thus those children who survived infancy often lost one or both of their parents before reaching maturity. Widows, widowers, and orphans formed a substantial proportion of the white population of the Chesapeake. The continuing ravages of disease (particularly malaria) and the prevalence of salt-contaminated water kept the death rate high in the South; only after the settlers developed immunity to the local diseases (a slow process known as “seasoning”) did life expectancy increase significantly. Population growth was substantial in the region, but largely as a result of immigration.

Natural increases in the population, wherever they occurred, were largely a result of a steady improvement in the sex ratio through the seventeenth century. In the early years of settlement, more than three-quarters of the white population of the Chesapeake consisted of men. And even in New England, which from the beginning had attracted more families (and thus more women) than the southern colonies, 60 percent of the white inhabitants in 1650 were male. Gradually, however, more women began to arrive in the colonies; and increasing birth rates, which of course produced roughly equal numbers of males and females, contributed to shifting the sex ratio as well. Not until well into the eighteenth century did the ratio begin to match that in England (where women were a slight majority), but by the late seventeenth century, the proportion of males to females in all the colonies was becoming more balanced.

More-Balanced Sex
Ratio

Medicine in the Colonies

The very high death rates of women who bore children illustrate the primitive nature of medical knowledge and practice in the colonies. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physicians had little or no understanding of

infection and sterilization. As a result, many people died from infections contracted during childbirth or surgery from dirty instruments or dirty hands. Because communities were unaware of bacteria, many were plagued with infectious diseases transmitted by garbage or unclean water.

One result of the limited extent of medical knowledge was that it was relatively easy for people to enter the field, even without professional training. The biggest beneficiaries of this ease of access were women, who established themselves in considerable numbers as midwives. Midwives assisted women in childbirth, but they also dispensed other medical advice—usually urging their patients to use herbs or other natural remedies. Midwives were popular because they were usually friends and neighbors of the people they treated, unlike physicians, who were few and therefore not often well known to their patients. Male doctors felt threatened by the midwives and struggled continually to drive them from the field, although they did not make substantial progress in doing so until the nineteenth century.

Midwives and doctors alike practiced medicine on the basis of the prevailing assumptions of their time, most of them derived from the theory of “humoralism” popularized by the second-century Roman physician Galen. Galen argued that the human body was governed by four “humors” that were lodged in four bodily fluids: yellow bile (or “choler”), black bile (“melancholy”), blood, and phlegm. In a healthy body, the four humors existed in balance. Illness represented an imbalance and suggested the need for removing from the body the excesses of whatever fluid was causing the imbalance. That was the rationale that lay behind the principal medical techniques of the seventeenth century: purging, expulsion, and bleeding. Bleeding was the most extreme of the treatments (and the most destructive), and it was practiced mostly by male physicians. Midwives preferred more homeopathic treatments and favored “pukes” and laxatives. The great majority of early Americans, however, had little contact with physicians, or even midwives, and sought instead to deal with illness on their own, confident that their abilities were equal to those of educated physicians—which, given the state of medical knowledge, was often true.

That seventeenth-century medicine rested so much on ideas produced 1,400 years before is evidence of how little support there was for the scientific method—which rests on experimentation and observation rather than on inherited faiths—in England and America at the time. Bleeding, for example, had been in use for hundreds of years, during which time there had been no evidence at all that it helped people recover from illness; indeed, if anyone had chosen to look for it, there was considerable evidence that bleeding could do great harm. But what would seem in later eras to be the simple process of

testing scientific assumptions was not yet a common part of Western thought. Only with the birth of the Enlightenment in the late seventeenth century—with its faith in human reason and its belief in the capacity of individuals and societies to create better lives—would the scientific method find acceptance.

Women and Families in the Chesapeake

The importance of reproduction in the labor-scarce society of seventeenth-century America had particularly significant effects on women. The high sex ratio meant that few women remained unmarried for long. The average European woman in America married for the first time at twenty or twenty-one years of age, considerably earlier than in England; in some areas of the Chesapeake, the average bride was three to four years younger. In the Chesapeake, the most important factor affecting women and families remained, until at least the mid-eighteenth century, the extraordinarily high mortality rate. Under those circumstances, the traditional male-centered family structure of England—by which husbands and fathers exercised firm, even dictatorial control over the lives of their wives and children—was difficult to maintain. Because so few families remained intact for long, rigid patterns of male authority were constantly undermined. Standards of sexual behavior were also more flexible in the South than they were in England or other parts of America. Because of the large numbers of indentured servants who were forbidden to marry until their terms of service expired, premarital sexual relationships were frequent. Female servants who became pregnant before the expiration of their terms could expect harsh treatment: heavy fines, whippings if no one could pay the fines, an extra year or two of service added to their contract, and the loss of their children after weaning. Bastard children were themselves bound out as indentures at a very early age. On the other hand, a pregnant woman whose term of service expired before the birth of her child or whose partner was able to buy her remaining time from her master might expect to marry quickly. Over a third of Chesapeake marriages occurred with the bride already pregnant.

Women in the Chesapeake could anticipate a life consumed with childbearing. The average wife became pregnant every two years. Those who lived long enough bore an average of eight children apiece (up to five of whom typically died in infancy or early childhood). Since childbirth was one of the most frequent causes of female death, relatively few women survived to see all their children grow to maturity.

For all the hardships women encountered in the seventeenth-century South, they also enjoyed more power and a greater level of freedom than women in other areas (or than southern women in later years).

Midwives

Male Authority
Undermined

Because men were plentiful and women scarce, females had considerable latitude in choosing husbands. (They

Greater Independence
in the South

also often had no fathers or other male relatives nearby trying to control their choices.) Because

women generally married at a much younger age than men, they also tended to outlive their husbands (even though female life expectancy was somewhat shorter than male). Widows were often left with several children and with responsibility for managing a farm or plantation, a circumstance of enormous hardship but one that also gave them significant economic power.

Widows seldom remained unmarried for long, however. Those who had no grown sons to work the tobacco farms and plantations had particular need for male assistance, and marriage was the surest way to secure it. Since many widows married men who were themselves widowers, complex combinations of households were frequent. With numerous stepchildren, half brothers, and half sisters living together in a single household, women often had to play the role of peacemaker—a role that may have further enhanced their authority within the family.

By the early eighteenth century, the character of the Chesapeake population was beginning to change, and with it the nature of the typical family. Life expectancy

was increasing; indentured servitude was in decline; and natural reproduction was becoming the principal source of white population increase. The sex ratio was becoming more equal. One result of these changes was that

Revival of Patriarchy

life for white people in the region became less perilous and less arduous. Another result was that women lost some of the power that their small numbers had once given them. As families grew more stable, traditional patterns of male authority revived. By the mid-eighteenth century, southern families were becoming highly “patriarchal,” that is, dominated by the male head of the family.

Women and Families in New England

In New England, where many more immigrants arrived with family members and where death rates declined quickly, family structure was much more stable than it was in the Chesapeake and hence much more traditional. Because the sex ratio was reasonably balanced, most men could expect to marry.

Women, however, remained in the minority; and as in the Chesapeake, they married young, began producing children early, and continued to do so well into their thirties. In contrast to the South, however, northern



GUIDE TO THE SEASONS Among their many purposes, almanacs sought to help farmers predict weather and plan for the demands of changing seasons. This illustration, part of a “calendar” of farming images, shows a man and a woman tending fields in July, in preparation for the coming harvest. (*American Antiquarian Society*)

Male-Dominated New England

children were more likely to survive (the average family raised six to eight children to maturity), and families were more likely to remain intact. Fewer New England women became widows, and those who did generally lost their husbands later in life. Hence women were less often cast in roles independent of their husbands. Young women, moreover, had less control over the conditions of marriage, both because there were fewer unmarried men vying for them and because their fathers were more often alive and able to exercise control over their choice of husbands.

Among other things, increased longevity meant that, unlike in the Chesapeake (where three-fourths of all children lost at least one parent before the age of twenty-one), white parents in New England usually lived to see their children and even their grandchildren grow to maturity. Still, the lives of most New England women were nearly as consumed by childbearing and child rearing as those of women in the Chesapeake. Even women who lived into their sixties spent the majority of their mature years with young children in the home. The longer lives in New England also meant that parents continued to control their children far longer than did parents in the South. Although they were less likely than parents in England to “arrange” marriages for their children, few sons and daughters could choose spouses entirely independent of their parents’ wishes. Men usually depended on their fathers for land—generally a prerequisite for beginning families of their own. Women needed dowries from their parents if they were to attract desirable husbands. Stricter parental supervision of children meant, too, that fewer women became pregnant before marriage than in the South (although even in Puritan New England the premarital pregnancy rate was not insubstantial—as high as 20 percent in some communities).

For New Englanders more than for residents of the Chesapeake, family relationships and the status of women were defined in part by religious belief. In the South, established churches were relatively weak. But in New England the Puritan church was a powerful institutional and social presence. In theory, the Puritan belief that men and women were equal before God and hence equally capable of interpreting the Bible created possibilities for women to emerge as spiritual leaders. But in reality, religious authority remained securely in the hands of men, who used it in part to reinforce a highly patriarchal view of society. The case of Anne Hutchinson (see p. 48) is an example of both the possibilities and the limits of female spiritual power.

Puritanism placed a high value on the family, which was the principal economic and religious unit within every community. At the same time, however, Puritanism reinforced the idea of nearly absolute male authority and the assumption of female weakness

The Patriarchal Puritan Family

and inferiority. Women were expected to be modest and submissive. (Such popular girls’ names as Prudence, Patience, Chastity, and Comfort suggest something about Puritan expectations of female behavior.) A wife was expected to devote herself to serving the needs of her husband and household.

Women were of crucial importance to the New England agricultural economy. Not only did they bear and raise children who at relatively young ages became part of the work force, but they themselves were continuously engaged in tasks vital to the functioning of the farm—gardening, tending livestock, spinning, and weaving, as well as cooking, cleaning, and washing.

The Beginnings of Slavery in British America

Almost from the beginning of European settlement in America, there was a demand for black servants to supplement the always scarce southern labor supply. The demand grew rapidly once tobacco cultivation became a staple of the Chesapeake economy. But the supply of African laborers was limited during much of the seventeenth century, because the Atlantic slave trade did not at first serve the English colonies in America. Portuguese slavers, who had dominated the trade since the sixteenth century, shipped captive men and women from the west coast of Africa to the new European colonies in South America and the Caribbean. Gradually, however, Dutch and French navigators joined the slave trade. A substantial commerce in slaves grew up within the Americas, particularly between the Caribbean islands and the southern colonies of English America. By the late seventeenth century, the supply of black workers in North America was becoming plentiful.

As the commerce in slaves grew more extensive and sophisticated, it also grew more horrible. Before it ended in the nineteenth century, it was responsible for the forced immigration of as many as 11 million Africans to the New World. (Until the late eighteenth century, the number of African immigrants to the Americas was higher than that of Europeans.) Native African chieftains captured members of enemy tribes in battle, tied them together in long lines, or “coffles,” and sold them in the flourishing slave marts on the African coast. Then, after some haggling on the docks between the European traders and the African suppliers, the terrified victims were packed into the dark, filthy holds of ships for the horrors of the “middle passage”—the journey to America. For weeks, sometimes even months, the black prisoners remained chained in the bowels of the slave ships. Conditions varied from one ship to another. Some captains took care to see that their potentially valuable cargo remained reasonably healthy. Others accepted the deaths of numerous Africans as inevitable and tried to cram as many as

The Middle Passage

THE ORIGINS OF SLAVERY

The debate among historians over how and why white Americans created a system of slave labor in the seventeenth century—and how and why they determined that people of African descent and no others should populate that system—has been a long and unusually heated one. At its center is the question of whether slavery was a result of white racism or helped to create it.

In 1950, Oscar and Mary Handlin published an influential article, “Origins of the Southern Labor System,” which noted that many residents of the American colonies (and of England) lived in varying degrees of “unfreedom” in the seventeenth century, although none resembling slavery as it came to be known in America. The first Africans who came to America lived for a time in conditions not very different from those of white indentured servants. But slavery came ultimately to differ substantially from other conditions of servitude. It was permanent bondage, and it passed from one generation to the next. That it emerged in America, the Handlins argued, resulted from efforts by colonial legislatures to increase the available labor force. That it included African Americans and no others was because black people had few defenses and few defenders. Racism emerged to justify slavery; it did not cause slavery.

In 1959, Carl Degler became the first of a number of important historians to challenge the Handlins. In his essay “Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice,” he argued that Africans had never been like other servants in the Chesapeake; that “the Negro was actually never treated as an equal of the white man, servant or free.” Racism was strong “long before slavery had come upon the scene.” It did not result from slavery, but helped cause it. Nine years later, Winthrop D. Jordan argued similarly that white racism, not economic or legal conditions, produced slavery. In *White Over Black* (1968) and other, earlier writings, Jordan argued that Europeans

had long viewed people of color—and black Africans in particular—as inferior beings appropriate for serving whites. Those attitudes migrated with white Europeans to the New World, and white racism shaped the treatment of Africans in America—and the nature of the slave labor system—from the beginning.

George Fredrickson has echoed Jordan’s emphasis on the importance of racism as an independent factor reinforcing slavery; but unlike Jordan, he has argued that racism did not precede slavery. “The treatment of blacks,” he wrote, “engendered a cultural and psycho-social racism that after a certain point took on a life of its own. . . .



(View of Mulberry (House and Street) by Thomas Coram. Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association)

possible into their ships to ensure that enough would survive to yield a profit at journey’s end. On such ships, the African prisoners were sometimes packed together in such close quarters that they were unable to stand, hardly able to breathe. Some ships supplied them with only minimal food and water. Women were often victims of rape and other sexual abuse. Those who died en route were simply thrown overboard. Upon arrival in the New World, slaves were auctioned off to white landowners and transported, frightened and bewildered, to their new homes.

The first black laborers arrived in English North America before 1620, and as English seamen began to establish themselves in the slave trade, the flow of Africans to the colonies gradually increased. But North America was always a much less important market for Africans than were other parts of the New World, espe-

cially the Caribbean islands and Brazil, whose labor-intensive sugar economies created an especially large demand for slaves. Less than 5 percent of the Africans imported to the Americas went directly to the English colonies on the mainland. Most blacks who ended up in what became the United States spent time first in the West Indies. Not until the 1670s did traders start importing blacks directly from Africa to North America. Even then, however, the flow remained small for a time, mainly because a single group, the Royal African Company of England, maintained a monopoly on trade in the mainland colonies and managed as a result to keep prices high and supplies low.

A turning point in the history of the African population in North America came in the mid-1690s, when the Royal African Company’s monopoly was finally broken. With the trade now opened to English and colonial merchants on a

Racism, although the child of slavery, not only outlived its parent but grew stronger and more independent after slavery's demise."

Peter Wood's *Black Majority* (1974), a study of seventeenth-century South Carolina, moved the debate back away from racism and toward social and economic conditions. Wood demonstrated that blacks and whites often worked together on relatively equal terms in the early years of settlement. But as rice cultivation expanded, finding white laborers willing to do the arduous work became more difficult. The forcible importation of African workers, and the creation of a system of permanent bondage, was a response to a growing demand for labor and to fears among whites that without slavery a black labor force would be difficult to control.

Similarly, Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom* (1975) argued that the southern labor system was at first relatively flexible and later grew more rigid. In colonial Virginia, he claimed, white settlers did not at first intend to create a system of permanent bondage. But as the tobacco economy grew and created a high demand for cheap labor, white landowners began to feel uneasy about their dependence on a large group of dependent white workers, since such workers were difficult to recruit and control. Thus slavery was less a result of racism than of the desire of

white landowners to find a reliable and stable labor force. Racism, Morgan contended, was a result of slavery, an ideology created to justify a system that had been developed to serve other needs. And David Brion Davis, in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (1975), argued that while prejudice against blacks had a long history, racism as a systematic ideology was crystallized during the American Revolution—as Americans such as Thomas Jefferson struggled to explain the paradox of slavery existing in a republic committed to individual freedom.

Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery* (1996) is perhaps the most emphatic statement of the economic underpinnings of slavery. Why, he asks, did the American colonies create a thriving slave labor system at a time when slavery had almost entirely died out in Europe? He concedes that race was a factor; Africans were "different" in appearance, culture, and religion from European colonists, and it was easier to justify enslaving them than it was to justify enslaving English, French, or Spanish workers. But the real reasons for slavery were hardheaded economic decisions by ambitious entrepreneurs, who realized very early that a slave-labor system in the labor-intensive agricultural world of the American South and the Caribbean was more profitable than a free-labor system. Slaveowning planters, he argues, not only enriched them-



(National Maritime Museum, London)

selves; they created wealth that benefited all of colonial society and provided significant capital for the rapidly developing economy of England. Thus, slavery served the interests of a powerful combination of groups: planters, merchants, governments, industrialists, and consumers. Race may have been a rationale for slavery, allowing planters and traders to justify to themselves the terrible human costs of the system. But the most important reason for the system was not racism, but the pursuit of profit—and the success of the system in producing it. Slavery was not, according to Blackburn, an antiquated remnant of an older world. It was, he uncomfortably concludes, a recognizably modern labor system that, however horrible, served the needs of an emerging market economy.

competitive basis, prices fell and the number of Africans arriving in North America rapidly increased. By the end of

Growing Slave Population

the century, only about one in ten of the residents of the colonies was African (about 25,000 in all). But because Africans were so heavily concentrated in a few southern colonies, they were already beginning to outnumber Europeans in some areas. The high ratio of men to women among African immigrants (there were perhaps two males to one female in most areas) retarded the natural increase of the black population. But in the Chesapeake at least, more new slaves were being born by 1700 than were being imported from Africa. In South Carolina, by contrast, the difficult conditions of rice cultivation—and the high death rates of those who worked in the rice fields—ensured that the black population would barely be able to sustain itself through natural increase until much later.

Between 1700 and 1760, the number of Africans in the colonies increased tenfold to about a quarter of a million. A relatively small number (16,000 in 1763) lived in New England; there were slightly more (29,000) in the middle colonies. The vast majority, however, continued to live in the South. By then the flow of free white laborers to that region had all but stopped, and Africans had become securely established as the basis of the southern work force.

It was not entirely clear at first that the status of black laborers in America would be fundamentally different from that of white indentured servants. In the rugged conditions of the seventeenth-century South, it was often difficult for Europeans and Africans to maintain strictly separate roles. In some areas—South Carolina, for example, where the number of African arrivals swelled more

Uncertain Status



AFRICANS BOUND FOR AMERICA Shown here are the below-deck slave quarters of a Spanish vessel en route to the West Indies. A British warship captured the slaver, and a young English naval officer (Lt. Francis Meynell) made this watercolor sketch on the spot. The Africans seen in this picture appear somewhat more comfortable than prisoners on some other slave ships, who were often chained and packed together so tightly that they had no room to stand or even sit. (*National Maritime Museum, London*)

quickly than anywhere else—whites and blacks lived and worked together for a time on terms of relative equality. Some blacks were treated much like white hired servants, and some were freed after a fixed term of servitude. A few Africans themselves became landowners, and some apparently owned slaves of their own.

By the early eighteenth century, however, a rigid distinction had become established between black and white. (See “Where Historians Disagree,” pp. 76–77.) Masters were contractually obliged to free white servants after a fixed term of servitude. There was no such necessity to free black workers, and the assumption slowly spread that blacks would remain in service permanently. Another incentive for making the status of Africans rigid was that the children of slaves provided white landowners with a self-perpetuating labor force.

White assumptions about the inferiority of people of color contributed to the growing rigidity of the system. Such assumptions came naturally to the English settlers. They had already defined themselves as a superior race in their relations with the native Indian population (and earlier in their relations with the Irish). The idea of subordinating a supposedly inferior race was, therefore,

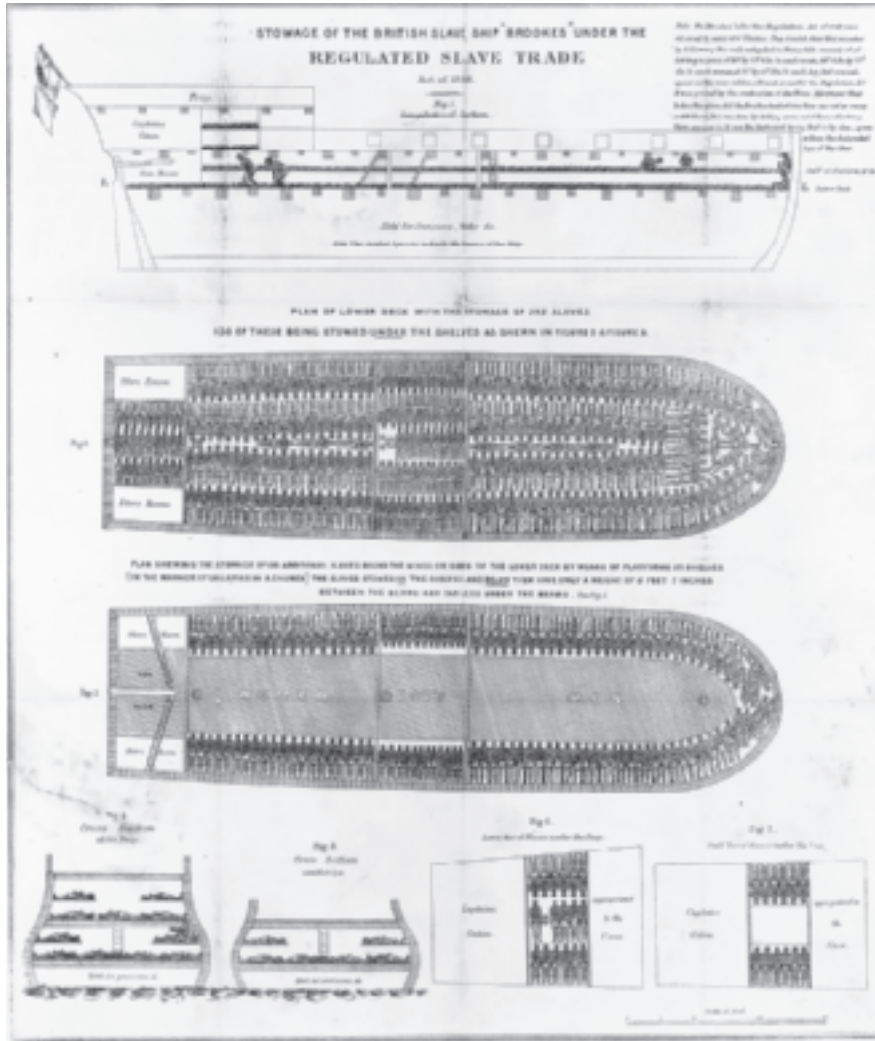
already established in the English imagination by the time substantial numbers of Africans appeared in America.

In the early eighteenth century, colonial assemblies began to pass “slave codes,” limiting the rights of blacks in law and ensuring almost absolute authority to white masters. One factor, and one factor only, determined whether a person was subject to the slave codes: color. In contrast to the colonial societies of Spanish America, where people of mixed race had a different (and higher) status than pure Africans, English America recognized no such distinctions. Any African ancestry was enough to classify a person as black.

Slave Codes

Changing Sources of European Immigration

By the early eighteenth century, the flow of immigrants from England itself began to decline substantially—a result of better economic conditions there and of new government restrictions on emigration in the face of massive depopulation in some regions of the country. But as



THE SLAVE SHIP BROOKES The British slave ship *Brookes* provided this plan of its “stowage” of slaves to conform to 1798 legislation from Parliament. It illustrates vividly the terrible conditions under which slaves were shipped from Africa to the Americas—human beings squeezed into every available space like cargo for the long, dangerous passage during which many Africans died. (*Library of Congress*)

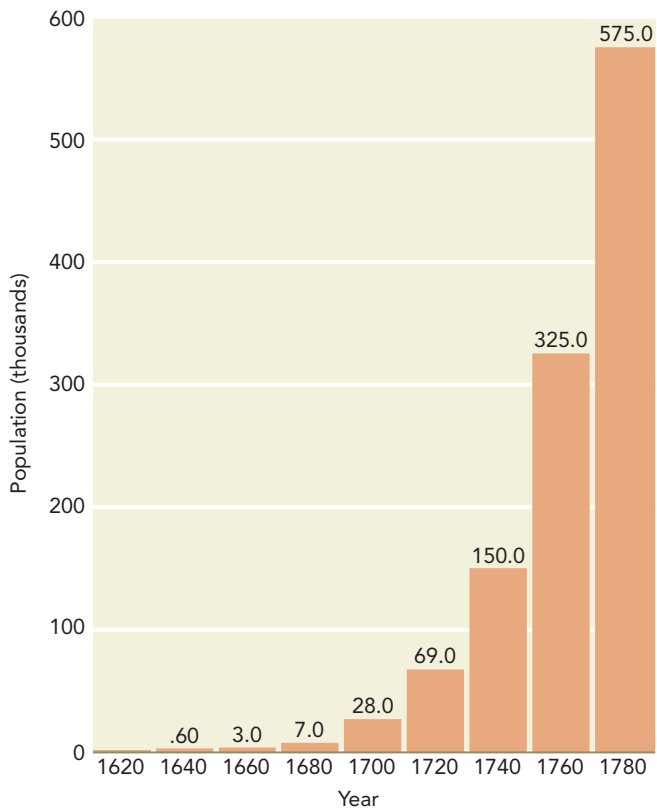
English immigration declined, French, German, Swiss, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and Scandinavian immigration continued and increased.

The earliest, although not the most numerous, of these non-English European immigrants were the French Calvinists, or Huguenots. A royal proclamation, the Edict of Nantes of 1598, had allowed them to become practically a state within the state in Roman Catholic France. In 1685, however, the French government revoked the edict.

Huguenots and Pennsylvania Dutch

Soon after that, Huguenots began leaving the country. About 300,000 left France in the following decades, and a small proportion of them traveled to the English colonies in North America. Many German Protestants suffered similarly from the arbitrary religious policies of their rulers; and all Germans, Catholics as well as Protestants, suffered from the devastating wars with King Louis XIV of France (the “Sun King”). The Rhineland of southwestern Germany, the area known as the Palati-

nate, experienced particular hardships. Because it was close to France, its people were particularly exposed to slaughter and ruin at the hands of invaders. The unusually cold winter of 1708-1709 dealt a final blow to the precarious economy of the region. More than 12,000 Palatinate Germans sought refuge in England, and approximately 3,000 of them soon found their way to America. They arrived in New York and tried at first to make homes in the Mohawk Valley, only to be ousted by the powerful landlords of the region. Some of the Palatines moved farther up the Mohawk, out of reach of the patroons; but most made their way to Pennsylvania, where they received a warm welcome (and where they ultimately became known to English settlers as the “Pennsylvania Dutch,” a corruption of their own word for “German”: “Deutsch”). The Quaker colony became the most common destination for Germans, who came to America in growing numbers. (Among them were Moravians and Mennonites, with religious views similar in many ways to



THE AFRICAN POPULATION OF THE BRITISH COLONIES, 1620–1780

From tiny beginnings in the seventeenth century, the African population of the British colonies grew rapidly in the eighteenth century. The growth of slavery was a result of both supply (a readily available population of African workers in the Caribbean islands) and demand (the growth of tobacco, rice, and cotton cultivation in larger areas of the South). The slave population in the colonies also increased naturally in this period at a far greater rate than in the past, largely because living conditions for African workers improved. ♦ *Why would slaveowners have invested in better conditions for their slaves?*

those of the Quakers.) Many German Protestants went to North Carolina as well, especially after the founding of New Bern in 1710 by a company of 600 German-speaking Swiss.

The most numerous of the newcomers were the Scots-Irish—Scottish Presbyterians who had settled in northern Ireland (in the province of Ulster) in the early seventeenth century. The Ulster colonists had prospered for a time despite the barren soil and the constant, never wholly successful, struggle to suppress the Catholic natives. But in the first years of the eighteenth century, Parliament prohibited Ulster from exporting to England the woolens and other products that had become the basis of the northern Irish economy; at the same time, the English government virtually outlawed the practice of the Presbyterian religion in Ulster and insisted on conformity with the Anglican church. After 1710, moreover, the long-term leases of many Scots-Irish expired; English landlords dou-

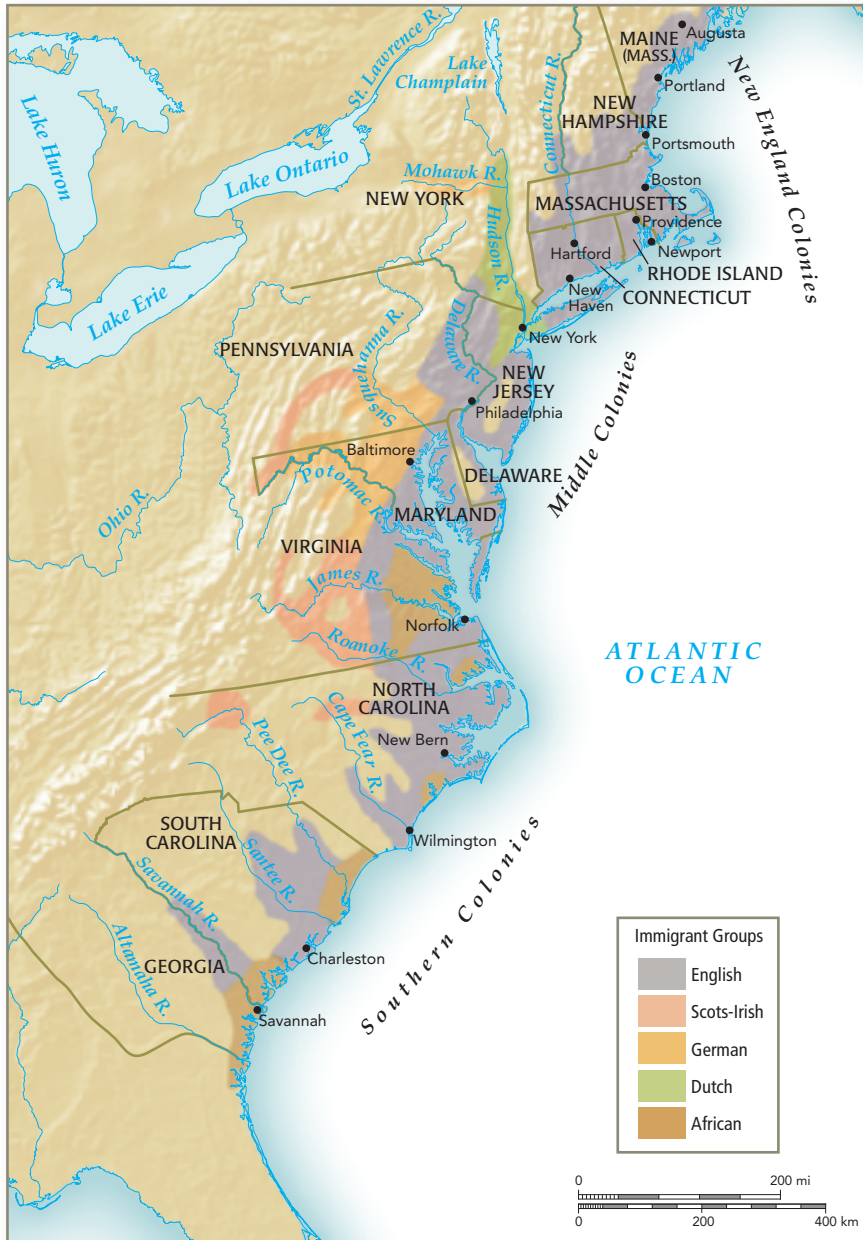


THE PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH This painting of a gentleman in traditional dress depicts a familiar subject of Pennsylvania Dutch folk art in the eighteenth century. The Pennsylvania Dutch were, in fact, German immigrants. They were known to their neighbors in Pennsylvania as “Dutch” because that was how their native word for their nationality (“Deutsch”) sounded to most English-speakers. (Free Library of Philadelphia)

bled and even tripled the rents. Thousands of tenants embarked for America.

Often coldly received at the colonial ports, many of the Scots-Irish pushed out to the edges of European settlement. There they occupied land without much regard for who actually claimed to own it, whether absentee whites, Indians, or the colonial governments. They were as ruthless in their displacement and suppression of the Indians as they had been with the native Irish Catholics.

Immigrants from Scotland and southern Ireland added other elements to the colonial population in the eighteenth century. Scottish Highlanders, some of them Roman Catholics who had been defeated in rebellions in 1715 and 1745, immigrated into several colonies, North Carolina above all. Presbyterian Lowlanders, faced in Scotland with high rents in the country and unemployment in the



IMMIGRANT GROUPS IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1760 Even though the entire Atlantic seaboard of what is now the United States had become a series of British colonies by 1760, the population consisted of people from many nations. As this map reveals, English settlers dominated most of the regions of North America. But note the large areas of German settlement in the western Chesapeake and Pennsylvania; the swath of Dutch settlement in New York and New Jersey; the Scots-Irish regions in the western regions of the South; and the large areas in which Africans were becoming the majority of the population, even if subjugated by the white minority. ♦ *What aspects of the history of these colonies help explain their ethnic composition?*

For an interactive version of this map, go to www.mhhe.com/brinkley13ech3maps

towns, left for America in large numbers shortly before the American Revolution, joining earlier groups of Scots, who had arrived in the late seventeenth century. They became a significant influence in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and helped establish Presbyterianism as an important religion in those colonies. The Catholic Irish migrated steadily over a long period, and by the time of the Revolution they were almost as numerous as the Scots, although less conspicuous. Many of them had by then abandoned their Roman Catholic religion and with it much of their ethnic identity.

Continuing immigration and natural increase contributed to a rapid population growth in the colonies in the eighteenth century. In 1700, the non-Indian population of

the colonies totaled less than 250,000; by 1775, it was over 2 million—a nearly tenfold increase. Throughout the colonial period, the non-Indian population nearly doubled every twenty-five years.

THE COLONIAL ECONOMIES

To those who remained in Europe, and even to some who settled in North America, the English colonies often appeared so small and isolated as to seem virtually at the end of the world. But from the beginning, almost all the English colonies were commercial ven-

Rapid Population Growth

tures and were tied in crucial ways to other economies. They developed substantial trade with the native population of North America, with the French settlers to the north, and, to a lesser extent, with Spanish colonists to the south and west. And over time they developed an even more substantial trade within the growing Atlantic economy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of which they became a critical part.

American colonists engaged in a wide range of economic pursuits. But except for a few areas in the West where the small white populations subsisted largely on the fur and skin trade with the Indians, farming dominated all areas of European and African settlement throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some farmers engaged in simple subsistence agriculture; but whenever possible, American farmers attempted to grow crops for the local, intercolonial, and export markets.

The Southern Economy

In the Chesapeake region, tobacco early established itself as the basis of the economy. A strong European demand for the crop enabled some planters to grow enormously wealthy and at times allowed the region as a whole to prosper. But production frequently exceeded demand, and as a result the price of tobacco periodically suffered severe declines. The first major bust in the tobacco economy occurred in 1640, and the boom-and-bust pattern continued throughout the colonial period and beyond. Growing more tobacco only made the problem of overproduction worse, but Chesapeake farmers never understood that. Those planters who could afford to do so expanded their landholdings, enlarged their fields, and acquired additional laborers. After 1700, tobacco plantations employing several dozen slaves or more were common.

The staple of the economies of South Carolina and Georgia was rice. By building dams and dikes along the many tidal rivers, farmers managed to create rice paddies that could be flooded and then drained. Rice cultivation was arduous work, performed standing knee-deep in the mud of malarial swamps under a blazing sun, surrounded by insects. It was a task so difficult and unhealthy that white laborers generally refused to perform it. As a result, planters in South Carolina and Georgia were even more dependent than those elsewhere on African slaves. It was not only because Africans could be compelled to perform difficult work that whites found them so valuable. It was also because they were much better at it. They showed from the beginning a greater resistance to malaria and other local diseases (although the impact of disease on African workers was by no means inconsiderable). And they proved more adept at the basic agricultural tasks required, in part because some of

them had come from rice-producing regions of west Africa (a fact that has led some historians to argue that Africans were responsible for introducing rice cultivation to America). It was also because most Africans were more accustomed to hot and humid climates such as those of the rice-growing regions than were the Europeans.

In the early 1740s, another staple crop contributed to the South Carolina economy: indigo. Eliza Lucas, a young Antiguan woman who managed her family's North American plantations, experimented with cultivating the West Indian plant (which was the source of a blue dye in great demand in Europe) on the mainland. She discovered that it could grow on the high ground of South Carolina, which was unsuitable for rice planting, and that its harvest came while the rice was still growing. Indigo became an important complement to rice and a popular import in England.

Because of the South's early dependence on large-scale cash crops, the southern colonies developed less of a commercial or industrial economy than the colonies of the North. The trading in tobacco and rice was handled largely by merchants based in London and, later, in the northern colonies. Few cities of more than modest size developed in the South. No substantial local merchant communities emerged. A pattern was established that would characterize the southern economy, and differentiate it from that of other regions, for more than two centuries.

Northern Economic and Technological Life

In the North, agriculture also continued to dominate, but it was agriculture of a more diverse kind. Agriculture, however, did not remain the only major economic activity in the North because conditions for farming were less favorable there. In northern New England, in particular, colder weather and hard, rocky soil made it difficult for colonists to develop the kind of large-scale commercial farming system that southerners were creating. Conditions for agriculture were better in southern New England and the middle colonies, where the soil was fertile and the weather more temperate. New York, Pennsylvania, and the Connecticut River valley were the chief suppliers of wheat to much of New England and to parts of the South. Even there, however, a substantial commercial economy emerged alongside the agricultural one.

Almost every colonist engaged in a certain amount of industry at home. Occasionally these home industries provided families with surplus goods they could trade or sell. Beyond these domestic efforts, craftsmen and artisans established themselves in colonial towns as

Indigo

Tobacco

More Diverse
Agriculture in the
North



PREPARING TOBACCO This 1790 engraving is designed to illustrate the African origins of the enslaved workers who processed tobacco in Virginia. Their “primitive” costumes seemed to the artist, a French visitor to America, to be in keeping with the crude processes they had created for drying, rolling, and sorting tobacco. (*The Stapleton Collection/Bridgeman Art Library*)

cobblers, blacksmiths, riflemakers, cabinetmakers, silversmiths, and printers. In some areas, entrepreneurs harnessed water power to run small mills for grinding grain, processing cloth, or milling lumber. And in several places, large-scale shipbuilding operations began to flourish.

The first effort to establish a significant metals industry in the colonies was an ironworks established in Saugus, Massachusetts, in the 1640s after iron ore deposits had been discovered in the region. Iron technology was already advancing rapidly in England, and the colonists attempted to transfer those skills to America. The Saugus works used water power to drive a bellows, which controlled the heat in a charcoal furnace. As the ore melted, it trickled down into molds or was taken in the form of simple “sow bars” to a forge to be shaped into marketable objects. The Saugus works was a technological success; indeed, it could boast technological capabilities equal to those of any ironworks in Europe at the time. But it was a financial failure. It began operations in 1646; in 1668, its financial problems forced it to close its doors.

Saugus Ironworks

Metalworks, however, gradually became an important part of the colonial economy. The largest industrial enterprise anywhere in English North America was the ironworks of the German ironmaster Peter Hasenclever in northern New Jersey. Founded in 1764 with British capital, it employed several hundred laborers, many of them imported from ironworks in Germany. There were other, smaller ironmaking enterprises in every northern colony (with particular concentrations in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), and there were ironworks as well in several of the southern colonies. Even so, these and other growing industries did not become the basis for the kind of explosive industrial growth that Great Britain experienced in the late eighteenth century—in part because English parliamentary regulations such as the Iron Act of 1750 restricted metal processing in the colonies. Similar prohibitions limited the manufacture of woolens, hats, and other goods. But the biggest obstacles to industrialization in America were an inadequate labor supply, a small domestic market, and inadequate transportation facilities and energy supplies.



COMMERCE IN NEW ENGLAND This late-eighteenth-century painting of the home, wharves, countinghouse, and fleet of a prosperous New England fisherman gives some indication of how commerce was expanding even in such relatively small places as Duxbury, Massachusetts. The owner, Joshua Winsor, was active in the mackerel and cod fishing industry. The painting—evidently an effort to celebrate Winsor's great material success and record it for posterity—was by his son-in-law, Dr. Rufus Hathaway. (*A View of Mr. Joshua Winsor's House, 1793–95. By Rufus Hathaway. Museum of American Folk Art, New York. Promised anonymous gift.*)

More important than manufacturing were industries that exploited the natural resources of the continent. By the mid-seventeenth century, the flourishing fur trade of earlier years was in decline. Taking its place were lumbering, mining, and fishing, particularly in the waters off the New England coast. These industries provided commodities that could be exported to England in exchange for manufactured goods. And they helped produce the most distinctive feature of the northern economy: a thriving commercial class.

Extractive Industries

The Extent and Limits of Technology

Despite the technological progress that was occurring in some parts of America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, much of colonial society was conspicuously lacking in even very basic technological capacities. Up to

half the farmers in the colonies were so primitively equipped that they did not even own a plow. Substantial numbers of households owned no pots or kettles for cooking. And only about half the households in the colonies owned guns or rifles—with rural people almost as unlikely to have firearms as urban people. The relatively low levels of ownership of these and other elementary tools was not because such things were difficult to make, but because most Americans remained too poor or too isolated to be able to afford them. Many households had few if any candles, because they were unable to afford candle molds or tallow (wax), or because they had no access to commercially produced candles. In the early eighteenth century, very few farmers owned wagons. Most made do with two-wheeled carts, which could be hauled by hand (or by horse) around the farm but which were not very efficient for transporting crops to market. The most commonly owned tool on American farms was

the axe, which suggests how much time most farmers had to spend clearing land. But throughout the colonies, the ability of people to acquire manufactured implements lagged far behind the economy’s capacity to produce them.

Even so, few colonists were self-sufficient in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The popular image of early American households is of people who had little connection to the market, who grew their own food, made their own clothes, and bought little from anyone else. In fact, relatively few colonial families owned spinning wheels or looms, which suggests that

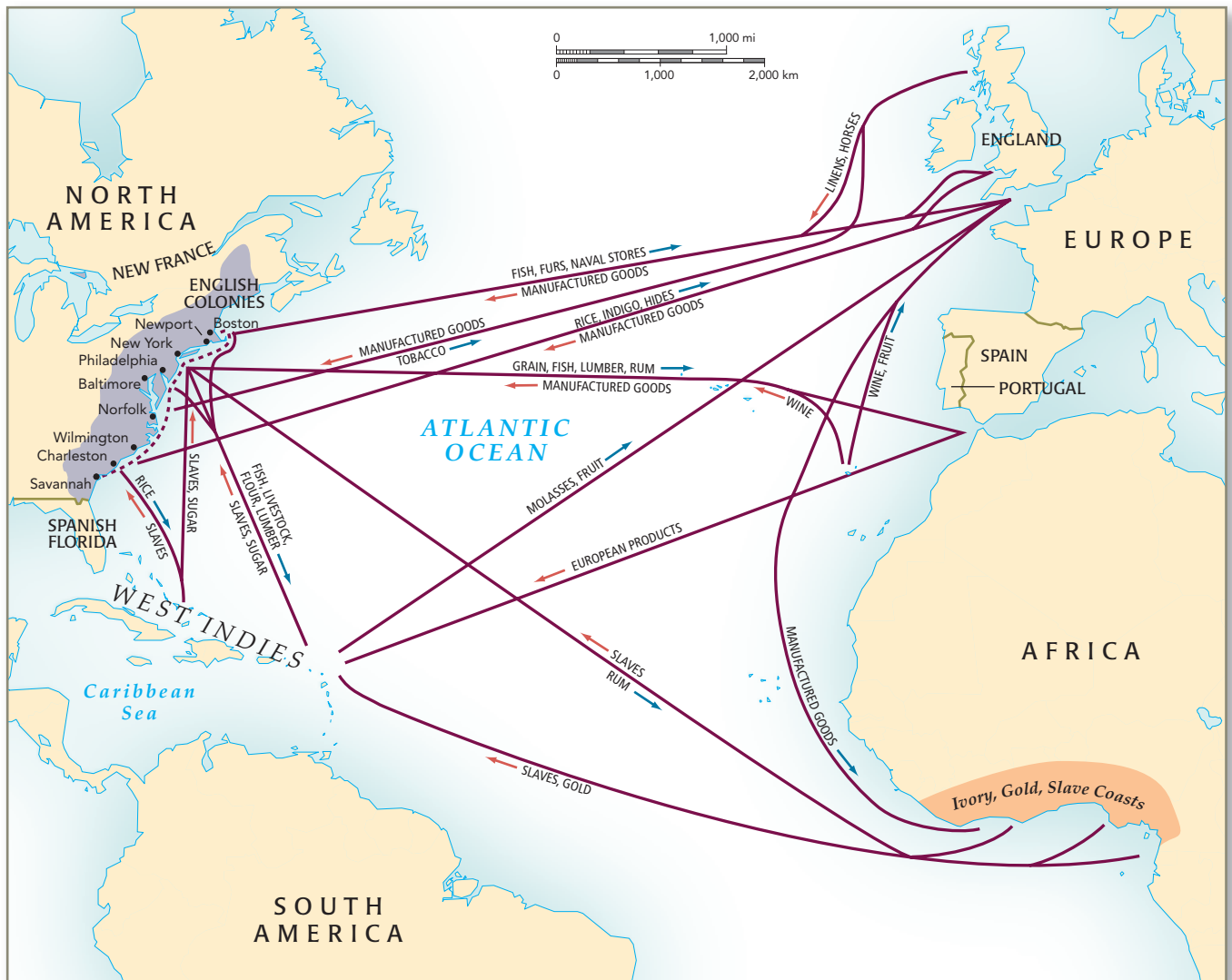
Myth of Self-Sufficiency

who grew their own food, made their own clothes, and bought little from anyone else. In fact, relatively few colonial families owned spinning wheels or looms, which suggests that

most people purchased whatever yarn and cloth they needed, or could afford, from merchants. Most farmers who grew grain took it to centralized facilities for processing.

The Rise of Colonial Commerce

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of colonial commerce in the seventeenth century was that it was able to survive at all. American merchants faced such bewildering and intimidating obstacles, and lacked so many of the basic institutions of trade, that they managed to stay afloat only with great difficulty. There was, first, no commonly



THE “TRIANGULAR TRADE” This map illustrates the complex pattern of trade that fueled the colonial American economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A simple explanation of this trade is that the American colonies exported raw materials (agricultural products, furs, and others) to Britain and Europe and imported manufactured goods in return. But while that explanation is accurate, it is not complete, largely because the Atlantic trade was not a simple exchange between America and Europe, but a complex network of exchanges involving the Caribbean, Africa, and the Mediterranean. Note the important exchanges between the North American mainland and the Caribbean islands; the important trade between the American colonies and Africa; and the wide range of European and Mediterranean markets in which Americans were active. Not shown on this map, but also very important to colonial commerce, was a large coastal trade among the various regions of British North America. ♦ *Why did the major ports of trade emerge almost entirely in the northern colonies?*

Shortage of Currency

accepted medium of exchange. The colonies had almost no specie (gold or silver coins). They experimented at times with different forms of paper currency—tobacco certificates, for example, which were secured by tobacco stored in warehouses; or land certificates, secured by property. Such paper was not, however, acceptable as payment for any goods from abroad and it was in any case ultimately outlawed by Parliament. For many years, colonial merchants had to rely on a haphazard barter system or on crude money substitutes such as beaver skins.

A second obstacle was the near impossibility of imposing order on their trade. In the fragmented, jerry-built commercial world of colonial America, no merchants could be certain that the goods on which their commerce relied would be produced in sufficient quantity; nor could they be certain of finding adequate markets for them. Few channels of information existed to inform traders of what they could expect in foreign ports; vessels sometimes stayed at sea for several years, journeying from one market to another, trading one commodity for another, attempting to find some way to turn a profit. Engaged in this chaotic commerce, moreover, were an enormous number of small, fiercely competitive companies, which made the problem of stabilizing the system even more acute.

Despite these and other problems, commerce in the colonies not only survived but grew. There was an elaborate coastal trade, through which the colonies did business with one another and with the West Indies, largely in such goods as rum, agricultural products, meat, and fish.

Triangular Trade

The mainland colonies received sugar, molasses, and slaves from the Caribbean markets in return. There was as well an expanding transatlantic trade, which linked the North American colonies in an intricate network of commerce with England, continental Europe, and the west coast of Africa. This commerce has often been described, somewhat inaccurately, as the “triangular trade,” suggesting a neat process: merchants carried rum and other goods from New England to Africa; exchanged their merchandise for slaves, whom they then transported to the West Indies (hence the term “middle passage” for the dreaded journey—it was the second of the three legs of the voyage); and then exchanged the slaves for sugar and molasses, which they shipped back to New England to be distilled into rum. In fact, the system was almost never so simple. The “triangular” trade in rum, slaves, and sugar was in fact part of a maze of highly diverse trade routes: between the northern and southern colonies, America and England, America and Africa, the West Indies and Europe, and other combinations.

Out of this complex and highly risky trade emerged a group of adventurous entrepreneurs who by the mid-eighteenth century were beginning to constitute a distinct merchant class. Concentrated in the port cities of the North (above all, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia),

they enjoyed protection from foreign competition within the English colonies—the British Navigation Acts had excluded all non-British ships from the colonial carrying trade. They had access to a market in England for such American products as furs, timber, and ships. That did not, however, satisfy all their commercial

Emerging Merchant Class

needs. Many colonial products—fish, flour, wheat, and meat, all of which England could produce for itself—required markets outside the British Empire. Ignoring laws restricting colonial trade to England and its possessions, many merchants developed markets in the French, Spanish, and Dutch West Indies, where prices were often higher than in the British colonies. The profits from this commerce enabled the colonies to import the manufactured goods they needed from Europe.

In the course of the eighteenth century, the colonial commercial system began to stabilize. In some cities, the more successful merchants expanded their operations so greatly that they were able to dominate some sectors of trade and curb some of the destabilizing effects of competition. Merchants managed, as well, to make extensive contacts in the English commercial world, securing their positions in certain areas of transatlantic trade. But the commercial sector of the American economy remained open to newcomers, largely because it—and the society on which it was based—was expanding so rapidly.

The Rise of Consumerism

Among relatively affluent residents of the colonies, the growing prosperity and commercialism of British America created both new appetites and new opportunities to satisfy them. The result was a growing preoccupation with the consumption of material goods—and of the association of possessions with social status.

One thing that spurred the growth of eighteenth-century consumerism was the increasing division of American societies by class. As the difference between the upper and lower classes became more glaring, people of means became more intent on demonstrating their own membership in the upper ranks of society. The ability to purchase and display consumer goods was an important way of doing so, particularly for affluent people in cities and towns, who did not have large estates with which they could demonstrate their success. But the growth of consumerism was also a product of the early stages of the industrial revolution.

Growing Consumerism

Although there was relatively little industry in America in the eighteenth century, England and Europe were making rapid advances and producing more and more affordable goods for affluent Americans to buy. The new manufacturing was dependent, of course, on customers for its products. In an increasingly commercial society, therefore, there were many people committed to creating a climate in which purchasing consumer goods

could be considered a positive social good. Consumption also grew because of an increasing tendency among colonists to take on debt to finance purchases, and the willingness of some merchants to offer credit.

To facilitate the new consumer appetites, merchants and traders began advertising their goods in journals and newspapers. Agents of urban merchants—the ancestors of the traveling salesman—fanned out through the countryside, attempting to interest wealthy landowners and planters in the luxury goods now available to them. George and Martha Washington, for example, spent considerable time and money ordering elegant furnishings for their home at Mount Vernon, goods that were shipped to them mostly from England and Europe.

One feature of a consumer society is that things that once were considered luxuries quickly come to be seen as necessities once they are readily available. In the colonies, items that became commonplace after having once been expensive luxuries included tea, household linens, glassware, manufactured cutlery, crockery, and furniture, and many other things. Another result of consumerism is the association of material goods—of the quality of a person's home and possessions and clothing, for example—with virtue and “refinement.” The ideal of the cultivated “gen-

Social Consequences

tleman” and the gracious “lady” became increasingly

powerful throughout the colonies in the eighteenth century, and many colonists strove to emulate that ideal. In part that meant striving to become educated and “refined”—“gentlemanly” or “ladylike” in speech and behavior. Americans read books on manners and fashion. They bought magazines about London society. And they strove to develop themselves as witty and educated conversationalists. They also commissioned portraits of themselves and their families, devoted large portions of their homes to entertainment, built shelves and cases in which they could display fashionable possessions, constructed formal gardens, and lavished attention on their wardrobes and hairstyles.

The growing importance of consumption and refinement was visible in the public spaces as well. Eighteenth-century cities—in America as in England and Europe—began to plan their growth to ensure that there would be elegant and gracious public squares, parks, and boulevards. In the past, social interaction in American communities had largely been between neighbors and relatives, or at most among members of church congregations. Now that a wider “society” was emerging within cities, it became important to create not just private but also public stages for social display.



TEA PARTY IN THE TIME OF GEORGE I This painting by an unknown artist dates from the 1720s and shows a prosperous Virginian posing with a fashionable and expensive tea service, some of it from China. His eagerness to display his possessions in this way is a sign of the growing interest in the badges of refinement among colonial Americans of means in the eighteenth century. (*Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*)

PATTERNS OF SOCIETY

Although there were sharp social distinctions in the colonies, the well-defined and deeply entrenched class system of England failed to reproduce itself in America. In England, where land was scarce and the population large, the relatively small number of people who owned property had enormous power over the great majority who did not; the imbalance between land and population became a foundation of the English economy and the cornerstone of its class system. In America, the opposite was true. Land was abundant, and people were scarce. Aristocracies emerged in America, to be sure. But they tended to rely less on landownership than on control of a substantial work force, and they were generally less secure and less powerful than their English counterparts. Far more than in England, there were opportunities in America for social mobility—both up and down.

There emerged, too, new forms of community whose structure reflected less the British model than the realities of the American environment. These forms varied greatly from one region to another, but several basic—and distinctly American—types emerged.

The Plantation

The plantation defined a distinctive way of life for many white and black southerners that would survive, in varying forms, until the Civil War. The first plantations emerged in the early settlements of Virginia and Maryland, once tobacco became the economic basis of the Chesapeake.

In a few cases, plantations were of enormous size—much like some of the great estates of England. The Maryland plantation of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, reputedly the wealthiest man in the colonies, covered 40,000 acres and contained 285 slaves. On the whole, however, seventeenth-century colonial plantations were rough and relatively small estates. In the early days in Virginia, they were little more than crude clearings where landowners and indentured servants worked side by side in conditions so horrible that death was an everyday occurrence. Even in later years, when the death rate declined and the landholdings became more established, plantation work forces seldom exceeded thirty people.

The economy of the plantation, like all agricultural economies, was a precarious one. In good years, successful growers could earn great profits and expand their operations. But since they could not control their markets, even the largest planters were constantly at risk. When prices for their crops fell—as tobacco prices did, for example, in the 1660s—they faced ruin.

Because plantations were sometimes far from cities and towns—which were, in any case, relatively few in the South—they tended to become self-contained communi-

ties. Residents lived in close proximity to one another in a cluster of buildings that included the “great house” of the planter himself (a house that was usually, although not always, far from great), the service buildings, the barns, and the cabins of the slaves. Wealthier planters often created something approaching a full town on their plantations, with a school (for white children only), a chapel, and a large population. Smaller planters lived more modestly, but



AFRICAN POPULATION AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL POPULATION, C. 1775 This map illustrates the parts of the colonies in which the slave population was a large proportion of the whole—in some areas, actually a majority. The densest African population was in Tidewater Virginia, but there were black majorities as well in South Carolina and parts of North Carolina. The slave population was smallest in the western regions of the southern colonies and in the area north of the Chesapeake, although there remained a significant African population in parts of New Jersey and New York (some slave, some free). ♦ *What explains the dense concentrations of slaves in these areas of the South?*

still in a relatively self-sufficient world. In some parts of the South, for example, the region around Charleston, South Carolina, planters often divided their time between the city and their relatively nearby plantations.

On the larger plantations, the presence of a substantial slave work force altered not only the economic but also the family lives of the planter class. The wives of plantation owners, unlike the wives of small farmers, could rely on servants to perform ordinary household chores and could thus devote more time to their husbands and children than their counterparts in other parts of colonial society. But there were also frequent sexual liaisons between their husbands or sons and black women of the slave community. Southern women generally learned to pretend not to notice these relationships, but they were almost certainly a source of anxiety and resentment. Black women, naturally, had even greater cause to resent such liaisons.

Southern society was highly stratified. Within given areas, great landowners controlled not only the lives of those who worked on their own plantations but also the livelihoods of small farmers who could not effectively compete with the wealthy planters and thus depended on them to market crops and receive credit. Small farmers, working modest plots of land with few or no slaves to help them, formed the majority of the

Stratified Southern Society

southern agrarian population, but it was the planters who dominated the southern agrarian economy. Most landowners lived in rough cabins or houses, with their servants or slaves nearby. Relatively few lived in anything resembling aristocratic splendor.

Plantation Slavery

African slaves, of course, lived very differently. On the smaller farms with only a handful of slaves, there was not always a rigid social separation between whites and blacks. But by the mid-eighteenth century, over three-fourths of all blacks lived on plantations of at least ten slaves; nearly half lived in communities of fifty slaves or more. In these larger establishments, Africans developed a society and culture of their own—influenced by their white masters, to be sure, but also partly independent of them.

Although whites seldom encouraged formal marriages among slaves, Africans themselves developed a strong and elaborate family structure. This became possible beginning in the eighteenth century as a result of the increased life expectancy of slaves, the gradual equalization of the sex ratio, and the growth of the population through natural increase. Slaves attempted to construct nuclear families, and they managed at times to build stable households, even to work together growing their own food in gardens



MULBERRY PLANTATION, 1770 This painting of a rice plantation in South Carolina is unusual in placing the slave quarters in the forefront of the picture. The steep roofs of the slave cabins, which were built by the slaves themselves, reflected African architectural styles. The high roofs helped keep the cabins cool by allowing the heat to rise into the rafters. The master's house and adjacent chapel, built in conventional European style, are in the background. (*View of Mulberry (House and Street)* by Thomas Coram, Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association)

provided by their masters. But such efforts were in constant jeopardy. Any family member could be sold at any time to another planter, even to one in another colony. As a result, the black family evolved along lines in many ways different from its white counterpart. Africans placed special emphasis on extended kinship networks. They even created surrogate “relatives” for those who were separated from their own families. They adapted themselves, in short, to difficult conditions over which they had limited control.

African workers also developed languages of their own. In South Carolina, for example, the early slaves communicated with one another in Gullah, a hybrid of English and African tongues, which not only reinforced a sense of connection with their African ancestry but also enabled them to engage in conversations their white masters could not understand. There emerged, too, a distinctive slave religion, which blended Christianity with African folklore and which became a central element in the emergence of an independent black culture.

Nevertheless, slave society was subject to constant intrusions from and interaction with white society. African house servants, for example, at times lived in what was, by the standards of slavery, great luxury; but they were also isolated from their own community and under constant surveillance from whites. Black women were subject to usually unwanted sexual advances from owners and overseers and hence to bearing mulatto children, who were rarely recognized by their white fathers but who were generally accepted as members of the slave community. On some plantations, African workers received kindness and even affection from their masters and mistresses and at times displayed genuine devotion in return. On others, they encountered physical brutality and occasionally even sadism, against which they were powerless.

There were occasional acts of individual resistance by slaves against masters, and at least twice during the colonial period there were actual slave rebellions. In the most important such revolt, the so-called Stono Rebellion in South Carolina in 1739, about 100 Africans rose up, seized weapons, killed several whites, and attempted to escape south to Florida. Whites quickly crushed the uprising and executed most participants. The most frequent form of resistance was simply running away, but for most slaves that provided no real solution either. There was nowhere to go.

Most slaves, male and female, worked as field hands (with women shouldering the additional burdens of cooking and child rearing). But on the larger plantations that aspired to genuine self-sufficiency, some slaves learned trades and crafts: blacksmithing, carpentry, shoemaking, spinning, weaving, sewing, midwifery, and others. These skilled craftsmen and craftswomen were at times hired out to other planters. Some set up their own establishments in towns or cities and shared their profits with their owners. On occasion, they were able to buy their

freedom. There was a small free black population living in southern cities by the time of the Revolution.

The Puritan Community

A very different form of community emerged in Puritan New England, but one that was also distinctively American. The characteristic social unit in New England was not the isolated farm, but the town. Each new settlement drew up a “covenant” among its members, binding all residents in a religious and social commitment to unity and harmony. Some such settlements consisted of people who had immigrated to America together (occasionally entire Puritan congregations who had traveled to the New World as a group).

The structure of the towns reflected the spirit of the covenant. Colonists laid out a village, with houses and a meetinghouse arranged around a central pasture, or “common.” They also divided up the outlying fields and woodlands of the town among the residents; the size and location of a family’s field depended on the family’s numbers, wealth, and social station. But wherever their lands might lie, families generally lived in the village with their neighbors close by, reinforcing the strong sense of community.

Once established, a town was generally able to run its own affairs, with little interference from the colonial government. Residents held a yearly “town meeting” to decide important questions and to choose a group of “selectmen,” who governed until the next meeting. Only adult males were permitted to participate in the meeting. But even among them, important social distinctions remained, the most crucial of which was membership in the church. Only those residents who could give evidence of grace, of being among the elect (the “visible saints”) confident of salvation as a result of a conversion experience, were admitted to full membership, although other residents of the town were still required to attend church services.

The English system of primogeniture—the passing of all inherited property to the firstborn son—did not take root in New England. Instead, a father divided his lands among all his sons. His control of this inheritance was one of the most effective means of exercising power over the male members of his family. Often a son would reach his late twenties before his father would allow him to move into his own household and work his own land. Even then, sons would usually continue to live in close proximity to their fathers. Young women were generally more mobile than their brothers, since they did not stand to inherit land; their dowries and their inheritances consisted instead of movable objects (furniture, household goods, occasionally money or precious objects) and thus did not tie them to a particular place.

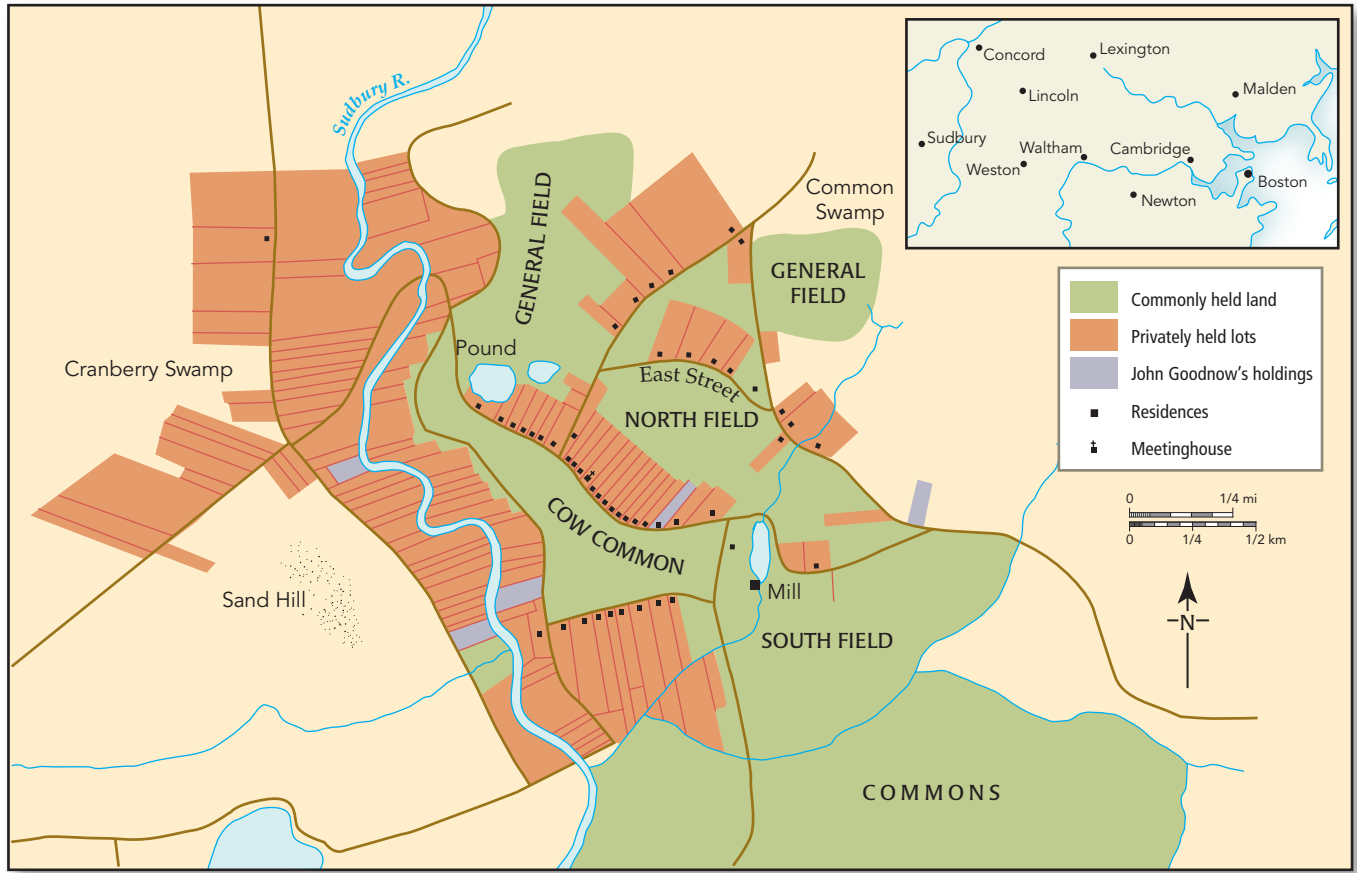
As the years passed and the communities grew, the tight-knit social structure of the Puritans experienced

Slave Culture

Patterns of Settlement

Puritan Democracy

Stono Rebellion



THE NEW ENGLAND TOWN: SUDBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, 17TH CENTURY Just as the plantation was a characteristic social form in the southern colonies, the town was the most common social unit in New England. This map shows the organization of Sudbury, Massachusetts, a town just west of Boston, in its early years in the seventeenth century. Note the location of the houses, which are grouped mostly together around a shared pasture (or “commons”) and near the church. Note, too, the outlying fields, which were divided among residents of the town, even though they were often not connected to the land on which they lived. The map illustrates the holdings of a single resident of Sudbury, John Goodnow, whose house was on the common, but whose lands were scattered over a number of areas of Sudbury. ♦ *What aspects of New England life might help explain the clustering of residences at the center of the town?* (From *Sumner Chilton Powell, Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town*. Copyright © 1963 by Wesleyan University. Reprinted by permission from Wesleyan University Press)

strains. This was partly because of the increasing commercialization of New England society. But it was also a result of other pressures that developed even within purely agricultural communities, pressures that were a result primarily of population growth.

As towns grew larger, residents tended to cultivate lands farther and farther from the community center. Some moved out of the town center to be nearer their lands and thus began to find themselves far away from the church. Some groups of outlying residents would eventually apply for permission to build a church of their own, which was usually the first step toward creation of a wholly new town. Such applications were frequently the occasion for bitter quarrels between the original townspeople and those who proposed to break away.

The practice of distributing land through the patriarchal family structure also helped create tensions in the Puritan community. In the first generations, fathers generally controlled enough land to satisfy the needs of all their

sons. After several generations, however, when such lands were being subdivided for the third or fourth time, there was often too little to go around, particularly in communities surrounded by other towns, with no room to expand outward. The result was that in many communities, groups of younger residents began breaking off and moving elsewhere—at times far away—to form towns of their own where land was more plentiful.

Even within the family, economic necessity often undermined the patriarchal model to which most Puritans, in theory at least, subscribed. It was not only the sons who needed their fathers (as a source of land and wealth); fathers needed their sons, as well as their wives and daughters, as a source of labor to keep the farm and the household functioning. Thus, while in theory men had nearly dictatorial control over their wives and children, in reality relationships were more contractual, with the authority of husbands and fathers limited by economic necessity (and, of course, bonds of affection).

Population Pressure

Generational Conflict

The Witchcraft Phenomenon

The gap between the expectation of a cohesive, united community and the reality of an increasingly diverse and fluid one was difficult for early New Englanders to accept. At times, such tensions could produce bizarre and disastrous events. One example was the widespread hysteria in the 1680s and 1690s over supposed witchcraft in New England.

The most famous outbreak (although by no means the only one) was in Salem, Massachusetts, where adolescent girls began to exhibit strange behavior and leveled accusations of witchcraft against several West Indian servants steeped in voodoo lore. The hysteria they produced spread throughout the town, and before it was over, hundreds of people (most of them women) were accused of witchcraft. As the crisis in Salem grew, accusations shifted from marginal women like the West Indians to more prominent and substantial people. Nineteen residents of Salem were put to death before the trials finally ended in 1692; the girls who had been the original accusers later recanted and admitted that they had made up the story.

But the Salem experience was only one of many. Accusations of witchcraft spread through many New England towns in the early 1690s (and indeed had emerged regularly in Puritan society for many years before). Research into the background of accused witches reveals that most were middle-aged women, often widowed, with few or no children. Many accused witches were of low social position, were often involved in domestic conflicts, had frequently been accused of other crimes, and were considered abrasive by their neighbors. Others were women who, through inheritance or enterprise, had come into possession of substantial land and property on their own and hence also challenged the gender norms of the community. Puritan society had little tolerance for “independent” women. That so many “witches” were women who were not securely lodged within a male-dominated family structure (and that many seemed openly to defy the passive, submissive norms society had created for them) suggests that tensions over gender roles played a substantial role in generating the crisis.

Above all, however, the witchcraft controversies were a reflection of the highly religious character of these societies. New Englanders believed in the power of Satan and his ability to assert his power in the world. Belief in witchcraft was not a marginal superstition, rejected by the mainstream. It was a common feature of Puritan religious conviction.

Cities

Growth of Colonial Cities

To call the commercial centers that emerged along the Atlantic coast in the eighteenth century “cities” would be to strain the modern definition of that



IMAGES OF WITCHCRAFT In the late seventeenth century, Americans and Europeans alike believed that many people in their midst were witches. These illustrations of what witches might do are from a 1681 book, *Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions*, and depict the various ways in which witches could fly and hover. (Houghton Library, Harvard University)

word. Even the largest colonial community was scarcely bigger than a modern small town. Yet, by the standards of the eighteenth century, cities did indeed exist in America. In the 1770s the two largest ports—Philadelphia and New York—had populations of 28,000 and 25,000, respectively, which made them larger than most English urban centers. Boston (16,000), Charles Town (later Charleston), South Carolina

THE WITCHCRAFT TRIALS

The witchcraft trials of the 1690s—which began in Salem, Massachusetts, and spread to other areas of New England—have been the stuff of popular legend for centuries. They have also engaged the interest of generations of historians, who have tried to explain why these seventeenth-century Americans became so committed to the belief that some of their own neighbors were agents of Satan. Although there have been many explanations of the witchcraft phenomenon, some of the most important in recent decades have focused on the central place of women in the story.

Through the first half of the twentieth century, most historians dismissed the witchcraft trials as “hysteria,” prompted by the intolerance and rigidity of Puritan society. This interpretation informed perhaps the most prominent popular portrayal of witchcraft in the twentieth century: Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*, first produced in 1953, which was clearly an effort to use the Salem trials as a comment on the great anticommunist frenzy of his own time. But at almost the same time, the renowned scholar of Puritanism Perry Miller argued in a series of important studies that belief in witchcraft was not a product of hysteria or intolerance, but a widely shared part of the religious worldview of the seventeenth century. To the Puritans, witchcraft seemed not only plausible, but scientifically rational as well.

A new wave of interpretation of witchcraft began in the 1970s, with the publication of *Salem Possessed* (1976), by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. Their examination of the town records of Salem in the 1690s led them to conclude that the witchcraft controversy there was a product of class tensions between the poorer, more marginal residents of one part of Salem and the wealthier, more



(Houghton Library, Harvard University)

privileged residents of another. These social tensions, which could not find easy expression on their own terms, led some poorer Salemites to lash out at their richer neighbors by charging them, or their servants, with witchcraft. A few years later, John Demos, in *Entertaining Satan* (1983), examined witchcraft accusations in a larger area

of New England and similarly portrayed them as products of displaced anger about social and economic grievances that could not be expressed otherwise. Demos provided a far more complex picture of the nature of these grievances than had Boyer and Nissenbaum but like them saw witchcraft as a symptom of a persistent set of social and psychological tensions.

At about the same time, however, a number of scholars were beginning to look at witchcraft through the then relatively new scholarly lens of gender. Carol Karlsen’s *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987) demonstrated through intensive scrutiny of records across New England that a disproportionate number of those accused of witchcraft were property-owning widows or unmarried women—in other words, women who did not fit comfortably into the normal pattern of male-dominated families. Karlsen concluded that such women were vulnerable to these accusations because they seemed threatening to people (including many women) who were accustomed to women as subordinate members of the community.

More recently, Mary Beth Norton’s *In the Devil’s Snare* (2002) placed the witchcraft trials in the context of other events of their time—and in particular the terrifying upheavals and dislocations that the Indian wars of the late seventeenth century created in Puritan communities. In the face of this crisis, in which refugees from King William’s War were fleeing towns destroyed by the Indians and flooding Salem and other eastern towns, fear and social instability helped create a more-than-normal readiness to connect aberrant behavior (such as the actions of unusually independent or eccentric women) to supernatural causes. The result was a wave of witchcraft accusations that ultimately led to the execution of at least twenty people.

(12,000), and Newport, Rhode Island (11,000), were also substantial communities by the standards of the day.

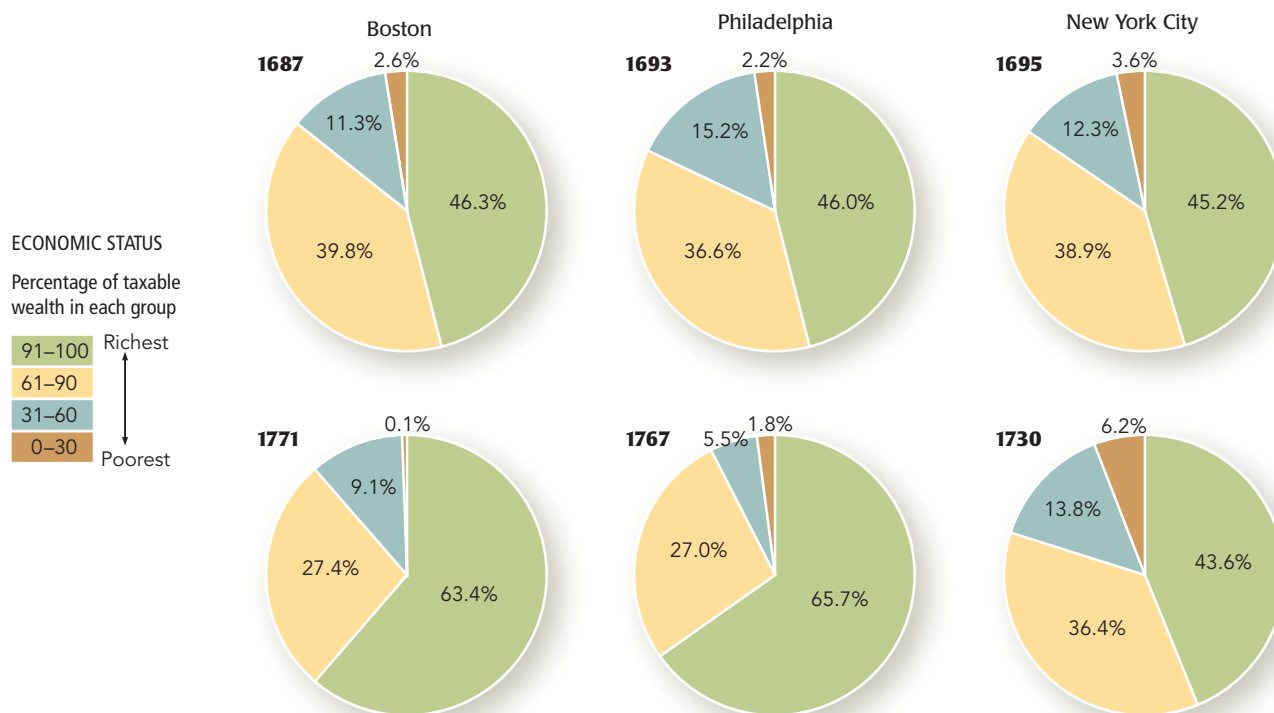
Colonial cities served as trading centers for the farmers of their regions and as marts for international trade. Their leaders were generally merchants who had acquired substantial estates. Disparities of wealth were features of almost all communities in America, but in cities they seemed particularly glaring. Moving beside them were the numerous minor tradesmen, workers, and indigents, who lived in crowded and often filthy conditions. More than in any other area of colonial life (except, of course, in the relationship between masters and slaves), social distinctions were real and visible in urban areas.

Cities were also the centers of much of what industry there was in the colonies, such as ironworks and distilleries for turning imported molasses into exportable rum. And they were the locations of the most advanced schools and the most sophisticated cultural activities, and of shops where imported goods could be bought. In addition, they were communities with peculiarly ur-

ban social problems: crime, vice, pollution, epidemics, traffic. Unlike smaller towns, cities were required to establish elaborate governments. They set up constables' offices and fire departments. They developed systems for supporting the urban poor, whose numbers grew steadily and became especially large in times of economic crisis.

Cities were also particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in trade. When a market for a particular product became glutted and prices fell, the effects on merchants and other residents could be severe. In the countryside, the impact was generally more muted. Finally, and of particular importance for the political future of the colonies, cities became places where new ideas could circulate and be discussed. Because there were printers, it was possible to have regular newspapers. Books and other publications from abroad introduced new intellectual influences. And the taverns and coffeehouses of cities provided forums in which people could gather and debate the issues of the day. It was not surprising that when the revolutionary crisis began to build in the 1760s and 1770s, it was first visible in the cities.

Commercial and Cultural Importance



The growth of commerce (and of great fortune) occurred later in New York City than in Boston and Philadelphia.

WEALTH DISTRIBUTION IN COLONIAL CITIES, 1687–1771 Although the gap between rich and poor in colonial America was not as large as it would become in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the rise of commerce in the early eighteenth century did produce increasing inequality. This chart shows the distribution of wealth in three important commercial cities—Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. The upper pie charts show the distribution of wealth in the late seventeenth century, and the lower charts show how that distribution had changed by the mid- or late eighteenth century. Note the heavy concentration of wealth in the top 10 percent of the population in the seventeenth century, and the even heavier concentration of wealth in Boston and Philadelphia in the eighteenth century. In New York, by contrast, wealth distribution became slightly more equal between 1695 and 1730, because of the breaking up of the great Dutch estates once the colony came under the control of the British. In later years, New York would show the same pattern of growing inequality that Boston and Philadelphia experienced. ♦ *What aspects of colonial commerce helped concentrate so much wealth in the hands of a relatively small group?*

AWAKENINGS AND ENLIGHTENMENTS

Two powerful forces were competing in American intellectual life in the eighteenth century. One was the traditional outlook of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with its emphasis on a personal God, intimately involved with the world, keeping watch over individual lives. The other was the new spirit of the Enlightenment, a movement sweeping both Europe and America, which stressed the importance of science and human reason. The old views supported such phenomena as the belief in witchcraft, and they placed great value on a stern moral code in which intellect was less important than faith. The Enlightenment, by contrast, suggested that people had substantial control over their own lives and the course of their societies, that the world could be explained and therefore could be structured along rational scientific lines. Much of the intellectual climate of colonial America was shaped by the tension between these two impulses.

The Pattern of Religions

Religious toleration flourished in many parts of America to a degree unmatched in any European nation, not because Americans deliberately sought to produce it but because conditions virtually required it. Settlers in America brought with them so many different religious practices that it proved difficult to impose a single religious code on any large area.

The Church of England was established as the official faith in Virginia, Maryland, New York, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Except in Virginia and Maryland, however, the laws establishing the Church of England as the official colonial religion were largely ignored. Even in New England, where the Puritans had originally believed that they were all part of a single faith, there was a growing tendency in the eighteenth century for different congregations to affiliate with different denominations, especially Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. In parts of New York and New Jersey, Dutch settlers had established their own Calvinist denomination, Dutch Reformed, which survived after the colonies became part of the British Empire. American Baptists (of whom Roger Williams is considered the first) developed a great variety of sects. All Baptists shared the belief that rebaptism, usually by total immersion, was necessary when believers reached maturity. But while some Baptists remained Calvinists (believers in predestination), others came to believe in salvation by free will.

Protestants extended toleration to one another more readily than they did to Roman Catholics. Many Protestants in America, like many in England, feared and hated the pope. New Englanders, in particular, viewed their Catholic neighbors in New France (Canada) not only as

because Americans deliberately sought to produce it but because conditions virtually required it.

Roots of Religious Toleration



SINNERS IN HELL, 1744 This mid-eighteenth-century religious image illustrates both the fears and prejudices of many colonial Christians. The idyllic city of Sion, in the center of the drawing, is threatened on all sides by forces of evil, which include images not just of Satan and sin, but also of some of the perceived enemies of Protestants—the Catholic Church (symbolized by the image of the Pope) and Islam (symbolized by Turks). (*The Granger Collection, New York*)

commercial and military rivals but also as dangerous agents of

Anti-Catholicism

Rome. In most of the English colonies, however, Roman Catholics were too few to cause serious conflict. They were most numerous in Maryland, and even there they numbered no more than 3,000. Perhaps for that reason they suffered their worst persecution in that colony. After the overthrow of the original proprietors in 1691, Catholics in Maryland not only lost their political rights but also were forbidden to hold religious services except in private houses.

Jews in provincial America totaled no more than about 2,000 at any time. The largest community lived in

New York City. Smaller groups settled in Newport and Charleston, and there were scattered Jewish families in all the colonies. Nowhere could they vote or hold office. Only in Rhode Island could they practice their religion openly.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, some Americans were growing troubled by the apparent decline in religious piety in their society. The movement of the population westward and the wide scattering of settlements had caused many communities to lose touch with organized religion. The rise of commercial prosperity created a secular outlook in urban areas. The progress of science and free thought in Europe—and the importation of Enlightenment ideas to America—caused at least some colonists to doubt traditional religious beliefs.

Concerns about weakening piety surfaced as early as the 1660s in New England, where the Puritan oligarchy warned of a decline in the power of the church. Sabbath after Sabbath, ministers preached sermons of despair (known as “jeremiads”), deploring the signs of waning piety. By the standards of other societies or other eras, the Puritan faith remained remarkably strong. But New Englanders measured their faith by their own standards, and to them the “declension” of religious piety seemed a serious problem.

Jeremiads

The Great Awakening

By the early eighteenth century, similar concerns about declining piety and growing secularism were emerging in other regions and among members of other faiths. The result was the first great American revival: the Great Awakening.

The Great Awakening began in earnest in the 1730s, reached its climax in the 1740s, and brought a new spirit of religious fervor to the colonies. The revival had particular appeal to women (who constituted the majority of converts) and to younger sons of the third or fourth generation of settlers—those who stood to inherit the least land and who faced the most uncertain futures. The rhetoric of the revival emphasized the potential for every person to break away from the constraints of the past and start anew in his or her relationship with God. Such beliefs may have reflected the desires of many people to break away from their families or communities and start a new life.

Powerful evangelists from England helped spread the revival. John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, visited Georgia and other colonies in the 1730s. George Whitefield, a powerful open-air preacher and for a time an associate of the Wesleys, made several evangelizing tours through the colonies and drew tremendous crowds. But the outstanding preacher of the Great Awakening was the New England Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards, a deeply orthodox Puritan but a highly original



GEORGE WHITEFIELD Whitefield succeeded John Wesley as leader of the Calvinist Methodists in Oxford, England. Like Wesley, he was a major force in promoting religious revivalism in both England and America. He made his first missionary journey to the New World in 1738 and returned in the mid-1740s for a celebrated journey through the colonies that helped spark the Great Awakening. (*National Portrait Gallery, London*)

theologian. From his pulpit in Northampton, Massachusetts, Edwards attacked the new doctrines of easy salvation for all. He preached anew the traditional Puritan ideas of the absolute sovereignty of God, predestination, and salvation by God’s grace alone. His vivid descriptions of hell could terrify his listeners.

The Great Awakening led to the division of existing congregations (between “New Light” revivalists and “Old Light” traditionalists) and to the founding of new ones. It also affected areas of society outside the churches. Some of the revivalists denounced book learning as a hindrance to salvation, and some communities repudiated secular education altogether. But other evangelists saw education as a means of furthering religion, and they founded or led schools for the training of New Light ministers.

Old Lights and
New Lights

The Enlightenment

The Great Awakening caused one great upheaval in the culture of the colonies. The Enlightenment, a very different—and in many ways competing—phenomenon, caused another.

The Enlightenment was to a large degree the product of some of the great scientific and intellectual discoveries in Europe in the seventeenth century. As scientists and other thinkers discovered natural laws that they believed regulated the workings of nature, they came to celebrate the power of human reason and scientific inquiry. Enlightenment thinkers argued that reason, not just faith, could create progress and advance knowledge. They argued that humans had a moral sense on which they could rely to tell the difference between right and wrong—that they did not need always to turn to God for guidance in making decisions. They insisted that men and women could, through the power of their own reason, move civilization to ever greater heights.

In celebrating reason, the Enlightenment slowly helped undermine the power of traditional authority—something the Great Awakening did as well. But unlike the Great Awakening, the Enlightenment encouraged men and women to look to themselves—not to God—for guidance as to how to live their lives and to shape society. Enlightenment thought, with its emphasis on human rationality, encouraged a new emphasis on education, and a heightened interest in politics and government (for through governments, the believers in reason argued, society had its best chance of bettering itself). Most Enlightenment figures did not challenge religion and insisted that rational inquiry would support, not undermine, Christianity. But they challenged the notion of some religious groups that the answer to all questions about human society should, or could, come directly from God.

In the early seventeenth century, Enlightenment ideas in America were largely borrowed from abroad—from such earlier giants as Francis Bacon and John Locke, and from contemporary Enlightenment thinkers in England and Scotland. Few Americans had yet made important contributions of their own to the new age of science and reason. Later, however, such Americans as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and James Madison made their own vital contributions to the Enlightenment tradition.

Education

Even before Enlightenment ideas became common in America, colonists had placed a high value on education, despite the difficulties they confronted in gaining access to it. Some families tried to teach their children to read and write at home, although the heavy burden of work in most agricultural households limited the time available

for schooling. In Massachusetts, a 1647 law required every town to support a public school, and while many communities failed to comply, a modest network of educational establishments emerged as a result. Elsewhere, the Quakers and other sects operated church schools. And in some communities, widows or unmarried women conducted “dame schools” by holding private classes in their homes. In cities, master craftsmen set up evening schools for their apprentices; at least a hundred such schools appeared between 1723 and 1770.

Only a relatively small number of children received education beyond the primary level; but white male Americans, at least, achieved a high degree of literacy. By the time of the Revolution, well over half of all white men could read and write, a rate substantially higher than in most European countries. The large number of colonists who could read helped create a market for the first widely circulated publications in America other than the Bible: almanacs (see pp. 98–99). The literacy rate of women lagged behind that of men until the nineteenth century; and while opportunities for further education were scarce for males, they were almost nonexistent for females. Nevertheless, in their early years colonial girls often received the same home-based education as boys, and their literacy rate too was substantially higher than that of their European counterparts. African slaves had virtually no access to education. Occasionally a master or mistress would teach slave children to read and write, but they had few real incentives to do so. Indeed, as the slave system became more firmly entrenched, strong social (and ultimately legal) sanctions developed to discourage any efforts to promote black literacy, lest it encourage slaves to question their station. Indians, too, remained largely outside the white educational system—to a large degree by choice; most tribes preferred to educate their children in their own way. But some white missionaries and philanthropists established schools for Native Americans and helped create a small but significant population of Indians literate in spoken and written English.

Nowhere was the intermingling of the influences of traditional religiosity and the new spirit of the Enlightenment clearer than in the colleges and universities that grew up in colonial America. Of the six colleges in operation by 1763, all but two were founded by religious groups primarily for the training of preachers. Yet in almost all, the influences of the new scientific, rational approach to knowledge could be felt. Harvard, the first American college, was established in 1636 by the General Court of Massachusetts at the behest of Puritan theologians, who wanted to create a training center for ministers. The college was named for a Charlestown minister, John Harvard, who had died and left his library and half his estate to the college. Decades later, in 1693, William and Mary College (named for the English king and queen) was established in Williamsburg, Virginia, by Anglicans; like Harvard, it was

Traditional Authority
Challenged

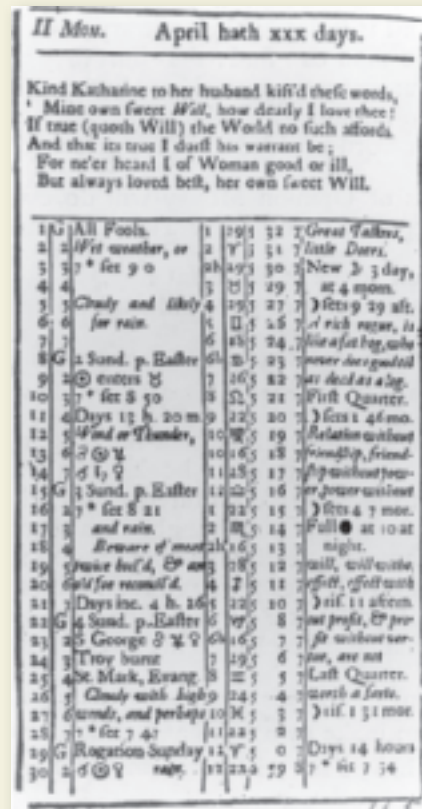
High White Literacy
Rates

COLONIAL ALMANACS

Books were scarce and expensive in colonial America, and many families owned only one: the Bible. But starting very early in the life of the English colonies, men and women had another important source of information: almanacs, the most popular nonreligious literature in early America.

Almanacs had been popular in Europe since at least the mid-sixteenth century. They first appeared in America in 1638 or 1639 when printers in Cambridge, Massachusetts, began publishing the *Philomath Almanac*, which combined an elaborate calendar of religious holidays with information about astronomy, astrology, and, as time went on, other popular interests. By the 1680s, the *Farmer's Almanac* began to rival the *Philomath*. It was a heavily illustrated publication that set a pattern for the future by adding medical advice, practical wisdom, navigational information, and humor. It also indulged in the European custom of prognostication; through a combination of superstition, popular folklore, and astronomical (and astrological) devices, it predicted weather patterns throughout the year, crop yields, and many other things. Almanac predictions were notoriously unreliable; but in the absence of any better alternatives, many people relied on them nevertheless.

By 1700, there were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of almanacs circulat-



POOR RICHARD'S ALMANACK This page from a 1757 edition of *Poor Richard's Almanack* illustrates the wide range of material that almanacs presented to their readers—an uplifting poem, a calendar of holidays and weather predictions, and such scattered pieces of advice and wisdom as “A rich rogue is like a fat hog, who never does good till as dead as a log.” (*New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations*)

ing throughout the colonies and even in the sparsely settled lands to the west and north. The most popular almanacs sold tens of thousands of copies every year. Most families had at least one, and many had several. “It is easy to prove,” one almanac writer claimed in the mid-eighteenth century, “that no book we read (except the Bible) is so much valued and so serviceable to the community.” America was a multilingual society, and although most almanacs were in English, some appeared in French, Dutch, Hebrew, Norwegian, Spanish, German, and various Indian languages. For five years just after the Revolution, Benjamin Banneker of Maryland was the only African-American almanac writer, publishing a book that occasionally included harsh commentary on slavery and the slave trade.

The best-known almanac in the colonies in the years before the American Revolution was published by Benjamin Franklin, a printer's son who ran away from an apprenticeship in his older brother's print shop in Rhode Island and eventually settled in Philadelphia. There, from 1732 to 1758, he published *Poor Richard's Almanack* under the pseudonym Richard Saunders. “I endeavor'd to make it both entertaining and useful,” Franklin later wrote in his autobiography. “And observing that it was

conceived as an academy to train clergymen. In 1701, conservative Congregationalists, dissatisfied with what they considered the growing religious liberalism of Harvard, founded Yale (named for one of its first benefactors, Elihu Yale) in New Haven, Connecticut. Out of the Great Awakening emerged the College of New Jersey, founded in 1746 and known later as Princeton (after the town in which it is located). One of its first presidents was Jonathan Edwards.

Despite the religious basis of these colleges, students at most of them could derive something of a liberal education from the curricula, which included not only theology, but logic, ethics, physics, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek as well. From the beginning, Harvard attempted not only to provide an educated ministry but also to “advance learning and perpetuate it

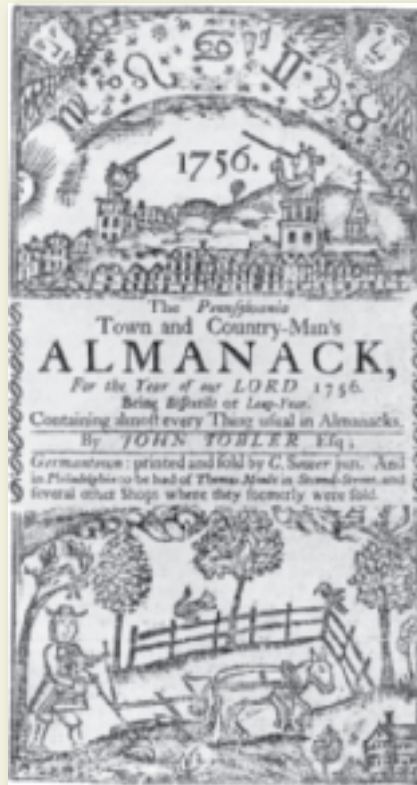
to posterity.” Members of the Harvard faculty made strenuous efforts to disseminate new scientific ideas—particularly the ideas of Copernican astronomy—to a larger public, often publishing their ideas in popular almanacs. By doing so, they hoped to stamp out popular belief in astrology, which they considered pagan superstition.

King's College, founded in New York in 1754 and later renamed Columbia, was even more devoted to the spread of secular knowledge. It had no theological faculty and was interdenominational from the start. The Academy and College of Philadelphia, which became the University of Pennsylvania, was a completely secular institution, founded in 1755 by a group of laymen under the inspiration of Benjamin Franklin. It offered courses in utilitarian subjects—mechanics, chemistry, agriculture, government,

Liberal Curricula

generally read, . . . I consider'd it as a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarcely any other books." In issue after issue, Franklin accompanied his calendars, astronomical information, and other standard almanac fare with "proverbial sentences, chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality." One of his favorite proverbs, which he said illustrated how difficult it was for a poor man always to act honestly, was "It is hard for an empty sack to stand upright." Poor Richard's many sayings became among the most familiar passages in America. Franklin was among many writers who used the almanac to promote the new scientific discoveries of his time and to try to discredit what he considered the backward superstitions that stood in the way of knowledge. He was particularly contemptuous of astrology.

Almanacs were virtually the only widely read publications in America that contained popular humor, and they are one of the best sources today for understanding what early Americans considered funny. Not unlike later generations, they delighted in humor that ridiculed the high and mighty (aristocrats, lawyers, clergymen, politicians), that made fun of relationships between men and women, and that expressed stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups. In the 1760s and 1770s, almanac humor was often used to disguise political ideas, in the way it ridiculed

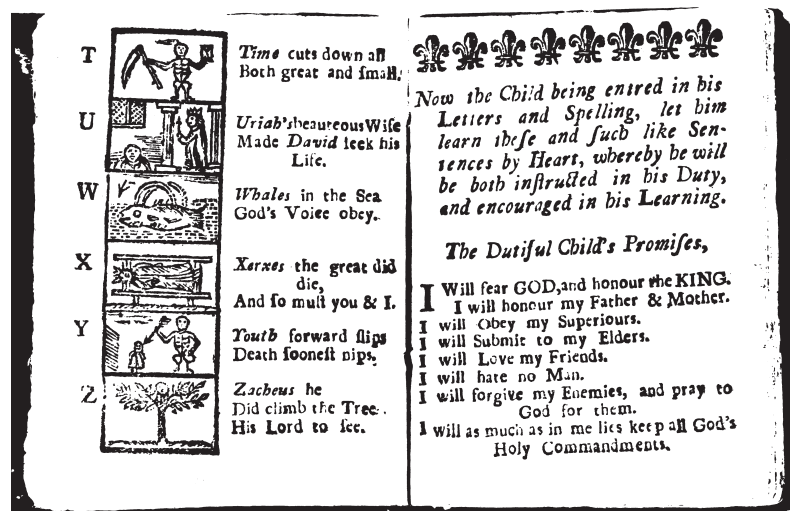


TOWN AND COUNTRY-MAN'S ALMANACK As the population of colonial cities and towns grew, almanacs—originally targeted mainly at farmers—began to make explicit appeal to townspeople as well. (Princeton University Library. Sinclair Hamilton Collection, Graphic Arts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections)

British officials and American Tories. During the war itself, humorous anecdotes about military officers and political leaders reflected the uneasy views of Americans about the long and difficult struggle.

During and after the Revolution, much almanac humor consisted of admiring anecdotes about the man who was by then perhaps the most famous and beloved man in America—Poor Richard himself, Benjamin Franklin. Much less reverential, and probably funnier to readers, was the often ribald ethnic and racial humor in many almanacs. In *Beer's Almanac* of 1801, an Irishman boasted that he had owned a large estate in Ireland before leaving for America. Why, he was asked, had he left it to come to the United States? "Ah," he replied, "It was indeed under a small encumbrance; for another man's land lay right a top of it."

Almanacs remained enormously popular throughout the nineteenth century, and some are still published today. But they had their greatest influence in the early years of European settlement when, for thousands of Americans, they were virtually the only source of printed information available. "A good Almanac," the printer Isaac Briggs wrote in 1798, in a preface to one of his own, "is, like iron, far more valuable (although much less valued) than gold, if we estimate its value by its absolute usefulness to the common purposes of life."



A "DAME SCHOOL" PRIMER More than the residents of any other region of North America (and far more than those of most of Europe), the New England colonists strove to educate their children and achieved perhaps the highest level of literacy in the world. Throughout the region, young children attended institutions known as "dame schools" (because the teachers were almost always women) and learned from primers like this one. Puritan education emphasized both basic skills (the alphabet and reading) and moral and religious precepts, as this sample page suggests. (American Antiquarian Society)

commerce, and modern languages—as well as in the liberal arts. It also became the site of the first medical school in British America, founded in 1765.

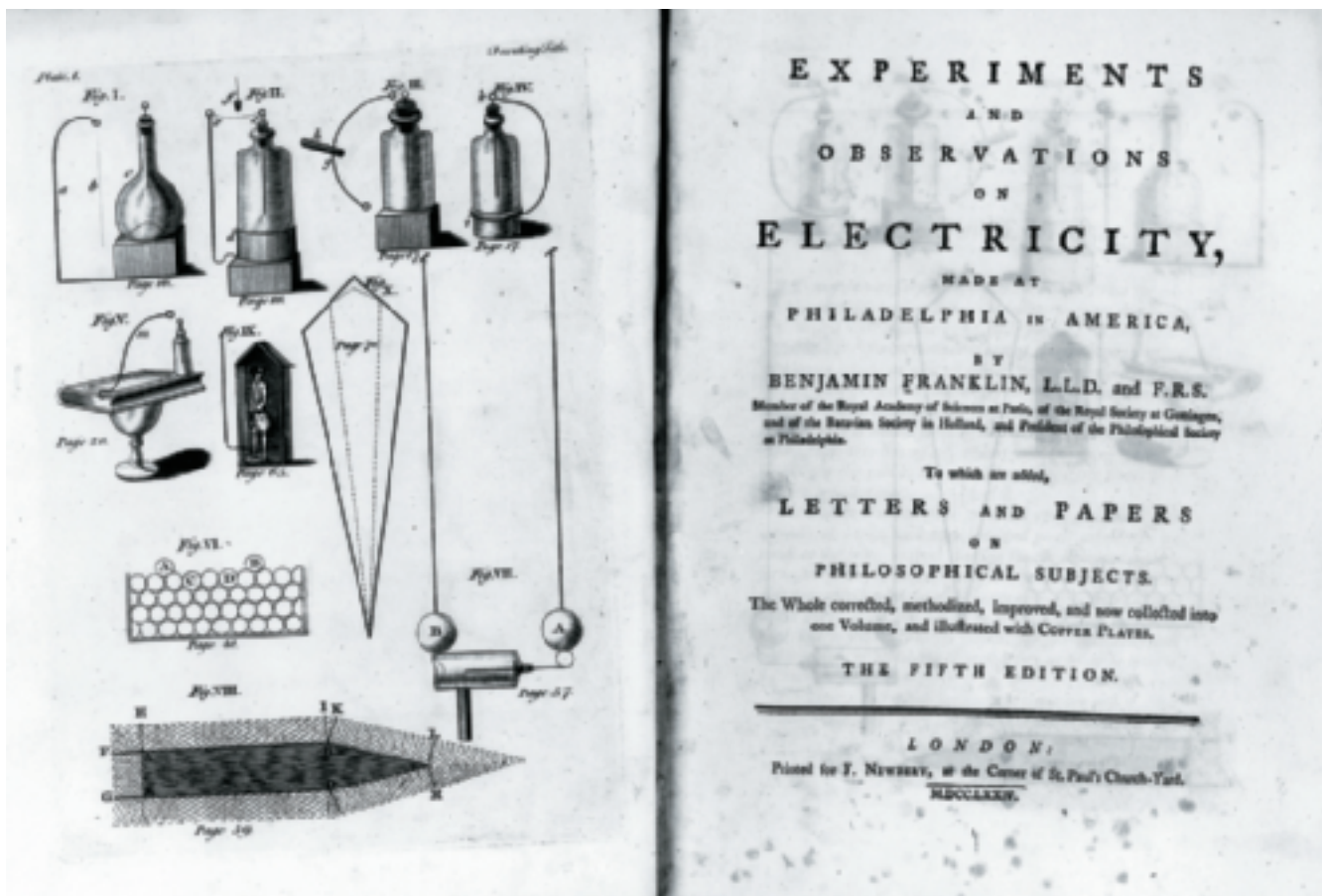
The Spread of Science

The clearest indication of the spreading influence of the Enlightenment in America was an increasing interest in scientific knowledge. Most of the early colleges established chairs in the natural sciences and introduced some of the advanced scientific theories of Europe, including Copernican astronomy and Newtonian physics, to their students. But the most vigorous promotion of science in these years occurred outside the colleges, through the private efforts of amateurs and the activities of scientific societies. Leading merchants, planters, and even theologians became corresponding members of the Royal Society of London, the leading English scientific organization. Benjamin Franklin, the most celebrated amateur scientist in America, won international fame through his experimental proof of the nature of lightning and electricity and his invention of the lightning rod. His 1752 demonstra-

tion, using a kite, of his theory that lightning and electricity were the same was widely celebrated in the colonies.

The high value that influential Americans were beginning to place on scientific knowledge was clearly demonstrated by the most daring and controversial scientific experiment of the eighteenth century: inoculation against smallpox. The Puritan theologian Cotton Mather heard, reportedly from his own slave, of the practice of deliberately infecting people with mild cases of smallpox in order to immunize them against the deadly disease. He learned, too, that experiments in inoculation were being conducted, with some success, in England. Mather was not, certainly, a wholly committed scientist. He continued to believe that disease was a punishment for sin. Yet, despite strong opposition from many of his neighbors, he urged inoculation on his fellow Bostonians during an epidemic in the 1720s. The results confirmed the effectiveness of the technique. Other theologians (including Jonathan Edwards) took up the cause, along with many physicians. By the mid-eighteenth century, inoculation had become a common medical procedure in America.

Smallpox Inoculation



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN ON ELECTRICITY The discovery of electricity was one of the great scientific events of the eighteenth century, even though large-scale practical use of electrical energy emerged much later. Benjamin Franklin was one of the first Americans, and certainly the most famous American, to experiment with electricity. This is the frontispiece for a book, originally published in 1750 in Philadelphia, that describes his “experiments and observations.” The pages shown here are from the London edition, which appeared in 1774. (Getty Images)

Concepts of Law and Politics

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century law and politics, as in other parts of their lives, Americans of European descent believed that they were re-creating in the New World the practices and institutions of the Old. But as in other areas, they managed, without meaning to or even realizing it, to create something very different.

Changes in the law in America resulted in part from the scarcity of English-trained lawyers, who were almost unknown in the colonies until after 1700. Not until well into the eighteenth century did authorities in England try to impose the common law and the statutes of the realm upon the provinces. By then, it was already too late. Although the American legal system adopted most of the essential elements of the English system, including such ancient rights as trial by jury, significant differences had already become well established. Pleading and court procedures were simpler in America than in England, and punishments were different. Instead of the gallows or prison, colonists more commonly resorted to the whipping post, the branding iron, the stocks, and (for “gossipy” women) the ducking stool. In a labor-scarce society, it was not in the interests of communities to execute or incarcerate potential workers. Crimes were redefined. In England, a printed attack on a public official, whether true or false, was considered libelous. In the 1734–1735 trial of the New York publisher John Peter Zenger, who was powerfully defended by the Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton, the courts ruled that criticisms of the government were not libelous if factually true—a verdict that removed some restrictions on the freedom of the press. There was a subtle but decisive transformation in legal philosophy. Some colonists came to think of law as a reflection of the divine will; others saw it as a result of the natural order. In neither case did they consider it an expression of the power of an earthly sovereign.

Even more significant for the future of the relationship between the colonies and England were important emerging differences between the American and British political systems. Because the royal government was so far away, Americans created a group of institutions of their own that gave them—in reality, if not in theory—a large measure of self-government. In most colonies, local communities grew accustomed to running their own affairs with minimal interference from higher authorities. Communities also expected to maintain strict control over their delegates to the colonial assemblies, and those assemblies came to exercise many of the powers that Parliament exercised in England (even though in theory Parliament remained the ultimate authority in America). Provincial governors appointed by the crown had broad powers on paper, but in fact their influence was sharply limited. They lacked control over appointments and contracts; such influence resided largely in England or with local colonial leaders. They could never be certain of their tenure in office; because governorships were patronage appointments, a governor could be removed any time his patron in England lost favor. And in many cases, governors were not even familiar with the colonies they were meant to govern. Some governors were native-born Americans, but most were Englishmen who came to the colonies for the first time to assume their offices. The result of all this was that the focus of politics in the colonies became a local one. The provincial governments became accustomed to acting more or less independently of Parliament, and a set of assumptions and expectations about the rights of the colonists began to take hold in America that policymakers in England did not share. These differences caused few problems before the 1760s, because the British did little to exert the authority they believed they possessed. But when, beginning in 1763, the English government began attempting to tighten its control over the American colonies, a great imperial crisis developed.

Colonial Governments



PUNISHMENT IN NEW ENGLAND New England communities prescribed a wide range of punishments for misconduct and crime in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the more common punishments were public humiliations—placing offenders in stocks, forcing them to wear badges of shame, or, as in this woodcut, publicly ducking them in a stream or pond to create both discomfort and embarrassment. (*British Museum*)

CONCLUSION

What began as a few small, isolated, precarious settlements in the wilderness had evolved by the mid-eighteenth century into a large and complex society. The English colonies in America grew steadily between the 1650s and the 1750s: in population, in the size of their economies, and in the sophistication—and diversity—of their cultures. In many ways the colonies had become more like England by the mid-eighteenth century than they had been during their frail early years. In other ways, life in America and life in Britain had begun to diverge.

Many distinct societies developed in the colonies, but the greatest distinction was between the colonies of the North and those of the South. In the North, society was dominated by relatively small family farms and by towns and cities of growing size. A thriving commercial class was developing, and with it an increasingly elaborate urban culture. In the South, there were many family farms as well. But there were also large plantations cultivating tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton for export. By the late

Regional Differences

seventeenth century, these plantations were relying heavily on African workers who had been brought to the colonies forcibly as slaves. There were few significant towns and cities in the South, and little commerce other than the marketing of crops.

The colonies did, however, also have much in common. Most white Americans accepted common assumptions about racial inequality. That enabled them to tolerate (and at times celebrate) the enslavement of African men and women and to justify a campaign of displacement and often violence against Native Americans that would continue for two centuries. Most white Americans (and, in different ways, most nonwhite Americans as well) were deeply religious. The Great Awakening, therefore, had a powerful impact throughout the colonies, North and South. And most white colonists shared a belief in certain basic principles of law and politics, which they considered embedded in the English constitution, and which in the years after the 1750s would lead to a great imperial crisis.

INTERACTIVE LEARNING

The *Primary Source Investigator CD-ROM* offers the following materials related to this chapter:

- A short documentary movie, **Witchcraft Crisis of 1692** (D1).
- Interactive maps: **The Atlantic World** (M68); **Salem Witchcraft** (M4); and **Settlement of Colonial America** (M5).
- Documents, images, and maps related to society and culture in provincial America, including a sermon from the famous itinerant preacher George Whitefield,

a poem by African-American poet Phillis Wheatley, and various materials depicting life in the colonies and the rise of disputes between the colonial governments and the British authorities.

Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/brinkley13e)

For quizzes, Internet resources, references to additional books and films, and more, consult this book's Online Learning Center.

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

Edward Countryman, *Americans: A Collision of Histories* (1996) includes a vivid picture of the many cultures that encountered one another in early America. Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (1986) reveals the complexity and scope of European emigration to North America. Bailyn's *The Origin of American Politics* (1968) remains an excellent introduction to colonial politics. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (1989) suggests four major folkways for English migrants to America. Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The*

Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture (1986) is a broad portrait of life in early American communities. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1750* (1982) examines women's roles in colonial New England, and Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (2002) explores the role of gender in a sensational seventeenth-century controversy. John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story of Early America* (1994) is a vivid, unconventional

account of the experiences of a New England girl captured by Indians. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998), Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (1998), and Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century New York* (2005) are excellent studies of slavery in the colonial era. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (1997)

includes an important examination of the character of the institution in colonial America. Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (1996) places gender at the center of the development of slavery in the Chesapeake. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1982) uses the methods of cultural anthropology in an influential study of the world of the colonial Virginia gentry.