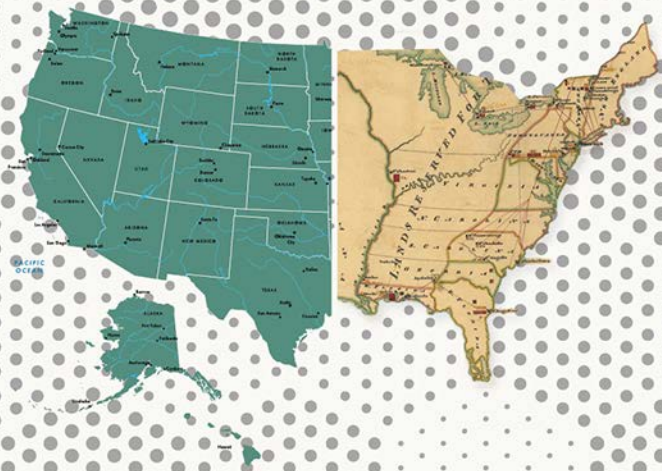


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NINTH EDITION

THE UNFINISHED NATION

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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ALAN BRINKLEY
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3 SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN PROVINCIAL AMERICA

THE COLONIAL POPULATION
THE COLONIAL ECONOMIES
PATTERNS OF SOCIETY
AWAKENINGS AND ENLIGHTENMENTS

LOOKING AHEAD

1. What accounted for the rapid increase in the colonial population in the seventeenth century?
2. Why did African slavery expand so rapidly in the late seventeenth century?
3. How did religion shape and influence colonial society?

MOST PEOPLE IN ENGLAND and America believed that the English colonies were outposts of the English world. And it is certainly true that as the colonies grew and became more prosperous, they came to closely resemble English society. To be sure, some of the early settlers had come to America to escape what they considered English tyranny. But by the early eighteenth century, many colonists considered themselves British just as much as the men and women in Britain itself did.

However, the colonies were quite different from England and from one other. What distinguished the colonies from England was not simply landscape and climate but also the constant engagement with Indians, experimentation with new systems of local government, attempts to establish religious orthodoxy and the rebellions occasioned with them, and efforts to learn about and raise new crops. African laborers and slaves were stitched into the fabric of colonial life almost from the start. Indeed, the English colonies would eventually become the destination for millions of forcibly transplanted Africans. The area that would become the United States was a magnet for immigrants from many lands other than England: Scotland, Ireland, the European continent, eastern Russia, and the Spanish and French Empires already established in America. Indeed, part of the story of the development of the English colonies is just how distinctive they were becoming from England itself.



TIME LINE



THE COLONIAL POPULATION

After uncertain beginnings, the non-Indian population of English North America grew rapidly and substantially, through continued immigration, slave importation, and natural increase. By the late seventeenth century, Europeans and Africans outnumbered the Indians along the Atlantic Coast.

A few of the early settlers were members of the English upper classes, but most were English laborers. Some came independently, such as the religious dissenters in early New England. 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 (or “indentured”) servitude developed out of practices in England. Most were young men who bound themselves to masters for fixed terms of servitude (usually four to five years) in exchange for passage to America, food, and shelter. Their passage to America was a terrible trial of want and hunger. (See “Consider the Source: Gottlieb Mittelberger, the Passage of Indentured Servants.”) Male indentured servants were supposed to receive clothing, tools, and occasionally land upon completion of their service. In reality, however, many left service with nothing. Most women indentured—who constituted roughly one-fourth of the total in the Chesapeake—worked as domestic servants and were expected to marry when their terms of servitude expired.

By the late seventeenth century, the indentured servant population had become one of the largest elements of the colonial population and was creating serious social problems. Some former indentures managed to establish themselves successfully as farmers, tradespeople, or artisans, and some of the women married propertied men. Others found themselves without land, without

employment, without families, and without prospects. As a result, there emerged in some areas, particularly in the Chesapeake, a large floating population of young single men who were a source of social unrest that prompted elites to begin to consider African slaves as a better, more dependable and controllable form of laborer.

Shortly after the arrival of African slaves, planters began to view them as critical to their economic successes. Most importantly, they saw great benefit in having a permanent labor population without hope of freedom, consigned to a life of work and servitude and—planters assumed—accepting of their plight. Accelerating their efforts to import more slaves as well were a series of economic and demographic changes. Beginning in the 1670s, a decrease in the birthrate in England and an improvement in economic conditions there reduced the pressures on laboring men and women to emigrate, and the flow of indentured servants into America slowly declined. Those who did travel to America as indentures now generally avoided the southern colonies, where prospects for advancement were slim.

BIRTH AND DEATH

Immigration remained for a time the greatest source of population growth in the colonies. But the most important long-range factor in the increase of the colonial population was its ability to reproduce itself. Improvement in the reproduction rate began in New England and the mid-Atlantic colonies in the second half of the seventeenth century. After the 1650s, natural increase became the most important source of population growth in those areas. The New England population more than quadrupled through reproduction alone in the second half of the seventeenth century. This rise was a result not only of families having large numbers of children. It was also because life expectancy in New England was unusually high.

Conditions improved much more slowly in the South. The high death rates in the Chesapeake region did not begin to decline to levels found elsewhere until the mid-eighteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth century, the average life expectancy for European men in the region was just over forty years, and for women slightly less. One in four white children died in infancy, and half died before the age of twenty. Children who survived infancy often lost one or both of their parents before reaching maturity. Widows, widowers, and orphans thus formed a substantial proportion of the white Chesapeake population. Only after settlers developed immunity to local diseases (particularly malaria) did life expectancy increase significantly. Population growth was substantial in the region, but it was largely a result of immigration.

The natural increases in the population in the seventeenth century reflected a steady improvement in the balance between men and women in the colonies. 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 than the southern colonies, 60 percent of the inhabitants were male in 1650. Gradually, however, more women began to arrive in the colonies; and increasing birthrates contributed to shifting the the balance between men and women as well. Throughout the colonial period, the population almost doubled every twenty-five years. By 1775, the non-Indian population of the colonies was over 2 million.

MEDICINE IN THE COLONIES

There were very high death rates of women who bore children in the colonial era. Physicians had little or no understanding of infection and sterilization. As a result, many women

GOTTLIEB MITTELBERGER, THE PASSAGE OF INDENTURED SERVANTS (1750)

Gottlieb Mittelberger, a German laborer, traveled to Philadelphia in 1750 and chronicled his voyage.

Both in Rotterdam and in Amsterdam the people are packed densely, like herrings so to say, in the large sea-vessels. One person receives a place of scarcely 2 feet width and 6 feet length in the bedstead, while many a ship carries four to six hundred souls; not to mention the innumerable implements, tools, provisions, water-barrels and other things which likewise occupy such space.

On account of contrary winds it takes the ships sometimes 2, 3, and 4 weeks to make the trip from Holland to . . . England. But when the wind is good, they get there in 8 days or even sooner. Everything is examined there and the custom-duties paid, whence it comes that the ships ride there 8, 10 or 14 days and even longer at anchor, till they have taken in their full cargoes. During that time every one is compelled to spend his last remaining money and to consume his little stock of provisions which had been reserved for the sea; so that most passengers, finding themselves on the ocean where they would be in greater need of them, must greatly suffer from hunger and want. Many suffer want already on the water between Holland and Old England.

When the ships have for the last time weighed their anchors near the city of Kaupp [Coves] in Old England, the real misery begins with the long voyage. For from there the ships, unless they have good wind, must often sail 8, 9, 10 to 12 weeks before they reach Philadelphia. But even with the best wind the voyage lasts 7 weeks.

But during the voyage there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness,

fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably.

Add to this want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety, want, afflictions and lamentations, together with other trouble, as . . . the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages for 2 or 3 nights and days, so that every one believes that the ship will go to the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a visitation the people cry and pray most piteously.

Children from 1 to 7 years rarely survive the voyage. I witnessed . . . misery in no less than 32 children in our ship, all of whom were thrown into the sea. The parents grieve all the more since their children find no resting-place in the earth, but are devoured by the monsters of the sea.

That most of the people get sick is not surprising, because, in addition to all other trials and hardships, warm food is served only three times a week, the rations being very poor and very little. Such meals can hardly be eaten, on account of being so unclean. The water which is served out of the ships is often very black, thick and full of worms, so that one cannot drink it without loathing, even with the greatest thirst. Toward the end we were compelled to eat the ship's biscuit which had been spoiled long ago; though in a whole biscuit there was scarcely a piece the size of a dollar that had not been full of red worms and spiders' nests. . . .

At length, when, after a long and tedious voyage, the ships come in sight of land, so that the promontories can be seen, which

the people were so eager and anxious to see, all creep from below on deck to see the land from afar and they weep for joy, and pray and sing, thanking and praising God. The sight of the land makes the people on board the ship, especially the sick and the half dead, alive again, so that their hearts leap within them; they shout and rejoice, and are content to bear their misery in patience, in the hope that they may soon reach the land in safety. But alas!

When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them except those who pay for their passage or can give good security; the others, who cannot pay, must remain on board the ships till they are purchased, and are released from the ships by their purchasers. The sick always fare the worst, for the healthy are naturally preferred and purchased first; and so the sick and wretched must often remain on board in front of the city for 2 or 3 weeks, and frequently die, whereas many a one, if he could pay his debt and were permitted to leave the ship immediately, might recover and remain alive.

The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried out thus: Every day Englishmen, Dutchmen and High-German people come from the city of Philadelphia and other places, in part from a great distance, say 20, 30, or 40 hours away, and go on board the newly arrived ship that has brought and offers for sale passengers from Europe, and select among the healthy persons such as they deem suitable for their business, and bargain with them how long they will serve for their passage money, which most of them are still in debt for. When they have come to an agreement, it happens that adult persons bind themselves in writing to serve 3, 4, 5 or 6 years for the amount due by them, according to their age and strength. But very young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.

Many parents must sell and trade away their children like so many head of cattle;

for if their children take the debt upon themselves, the parents can leave the ship free and unrestrained; but as the parents often do not know where and to what people their children are going, it often happens that such parents and children, after leaving the ship, do not see each other again for many years, perhaps no more in all their lives. . . . It often happens that whole families, husband, wife and children, are separated by being sold to different purchasers, especially when they have not paid any part of their passage money.

When a husband or wife has died at sea, when the ship has made more than half of her trip, the survivor must pay or serve not only for himself or herself but also for the deceased.

When both parents have died over half-way at sea, their children, especially when they are young and have nothing to pawn or pay, must stand for their own and their parents' passage, and serve till they are 21 years old. When one has served his or her term, he or she is entitled to a new suit of clothes at parting; and if it has been so stipulated, a man gets in addition a horse, a woman, a cow. When a serf has an opportunity to marry in this country, he or she must pay for each year which he or she would have yet to serve, 5 or 6 pounds.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What hardships did passengers suffer at sea? What relief could they hope for upon reaching Philadelphia?
2. Explain the different purchase agreements between passengers and masters. How did the death of a family member affect a passenger's indenture contracts?
3. What do the ordeals of indentured servants tell us about prospects in Europe? What do they tell us about the concept of liberty in the colonies?

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and babies died from infections contracted during childbirth or surgery. Unaware of bacteria, many communities were plagued with infectious diseases transmitted by garbage or unclean water.

Because of the limited extent of formal medical knowledge, and the lack of regulations for any practitioners at the time, it was relatively easy for people to practice medicine, even without any professional training. The biggest beneficiaries of this were women, who established themselves in considerable numbers as midwives. Midwives assisted women in childbirth, but they also dispensed other medical advice. They 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. But their success also reflected their skill and compassion as health-care providers. 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 famous 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 “cholera”), 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 practiced mostly by male physicians. Midwives 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. The assumption that treating illness was the exclusive province of trained professionals, so much a part of the twentieth century and beyond, lay far in the distance in the colonial era.

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 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, 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. That was one reason that 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—was important not just to politics but also to science.

WOMEN AND FAMILIES IN THE COLONIES

Because there were many more men than women in seventeenth-century America, few women remained unmarried for long. The average white European woman in America married for the first time at twenty or twenty-one years of age. Because of the large numbers of indentured servants who were forbidden to marry until their terms of service expired, and that female indentured servants frequently had their terms of service extended, premarital sexual relationships were not uncommon. Children born out of wedlock to indentured white women were often taken from their mothers at a young age and were themselves bound as indentured servants.

White women in the Chesapeake could anticipate a life consumed with childbearing. The average wife experienced pregnancies 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, many women did not survive to see their children grow to maturity. Those who did, however, were often widowed, since they were usually much younger than their husbands.

White women lived under the principle of coverture, in which they had their legal rights assumed by their husbands upon marriage. Whereas an adult unmarried woman could own property and enter into contracts on her own, though often under the care of her father, once she married she lost such legal rights. Widows had a considerable amount of power because in most colonies they could inherit and hold property when their husband's died. High death rates meant that some women gained control of property, making them highly desirable for men seeking wives.

In New England, where many more immigrants arrived with family members and where death rates declined more quickly, family structure was much more stable than in the Chesapeake. The sex ratio was more balanced than in the Chesapeake, so most men could expect to marry. As in the Chesapeake, women married young, began producing children early, and continued to do so well into their thirties. In contrast to their southern counterparts, however, northern children were more likely to survive, and their families were more likely to remain intact. Fewer New England women became widows, and those who did generally lost their husbands later in life.

The longer life span in New England meant that parents continued to control their children longer than did parents in the South. Few sons and daughters could choose a spouse entirely independently of their parents' wishes. Men tended to rely on their fathers for land to cultivate. Women needed dowries from their parents if they were to attract desirable husbands.



(©Bettmann/Corbis)

LIFE IN THE AMERICAN COLONIES This colored engraving shows the domestic life of white Americans during the eighteenth century. Depicted are family members at work in their cozy surroundings. The industriousness they show was a virtue of the era.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF SLAVERY IN ENGLISH AMERICA

The demand for African servants to supplement the indentured or free labor force existed almost from the first moments of settlement. For a time, however, black workers were hard to find. Not until the mid-seventeenth century, when a substantial commerce in slaves grew up between the Caribbean islands and the southern colonies, did black workers become generally available in North America. Just how slavery actually took root and spread has been a source of endless debate among historians.

The rising demand for slaves in North America beginning in the late seventeenth century helped expand the transatlantic slave trade. Before it ended in the nineteenth century, it was responsible for the forced immigration of as many as 11 million Africans to the Americas and the Caribbean. In the flourishing slave marts on the African coast, native chieftains brought members of rival tribes captured in western and central Africa to the ports. A small number were also captured in raids by European slave traders.

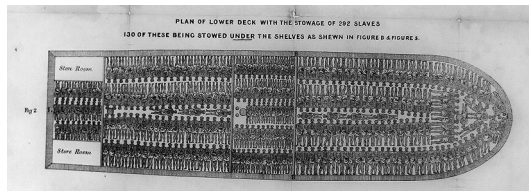
After they were captured and marched to ports along the west African coast, terrified Africans were then tightly packed into the dark, filthy holds of ships for the horrors of the **middle passage**—the long transatlantic journey to the Americas. It took three to four months, during which time up to 600 hundred Africans were chained together in columns deep in the bowels of the ship or stuffed onto shelves running around the hull. So cramped were the quarters that most could not stand up. Men were kept apart from women and children. Food and fresh air were scarce. Many died, their corpses dumped overboard.

Olaudah Equiano, an African from Eboe (present-day Nigeria), was seized by slave traders at the age of 11 in 1745 and sent to the West Indies. He later escaped and penned an autobiography detailing his life, including the middle passage. “I was soon put down under the decks. . . . The closeness of the place, the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died.” Upon arrival in the New World, slaves like Equiano were auctioned off to white landowners and transported, frightened and bewildered, to their new homes.

Most African slaves shipped to the New World landed not in an English colony but the Caribbean islands, Brazil, or territories of the Spanish Empire. From there slaves were sometimes purchased and transported by traders to North America. But not until the 1670s did slave traders start importing blacks directly from Africa to North America. Even then, the flow remained small for a time, mainly because a single group, the Royal African Company of England, monopolized the trade and kept prices high and supplies low. Indeed, only 5 to 7 percent of enslaved Africans were ever sent directly to English North America.

A turning point in the history of the black population in North America was 1697, the year rival traders broke the Royal African Company’s monopoly. With the trade now open to competition, prices fell and the number of Africans greatly increased. In 1700, about 25,000 African slaves lived in English North America. Because African Americans were so heavily concentrated in a few southern colonies, they were already beginning to outnumber whites in some areas. By 1760, the number of Africans in the English mainland colonies had increased to approximately a quarter of a million, more of whom lived in the South than the North.

Initially, the legal and social status of the African laborers remained somewhat fluid. In some areas, white and black laborers worked together on terms of relative equality. Some



(Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-44000])

AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE This image is from a plate from British author Amelia Opie's poem *Black Slaves in the Hold of the Slave Ship: or How to Make Sugar*, published in London in 1826. Opie's poem depicts the life of an African who was captured by slave traders and chronicles his journey to the West Indies on a slave ship and his enforced work on the sugar plantations there. Slaves were fastened and packed like cargo for the long ocean voyage.

blacks were treated much like white hired servants, and some were freed after a fixed term of servitude. But white society eventually determined that slavery promised the most reliable and pliable labor force and beginning in the late seventeenth century began to pass a series of slave codes. In 1662, Virginia declared that slavery followed the condition of the mother, meaning that children of enslaved women were themselves enslaved. Two years later Maryland passed a law stipulating that any free-born woman who married a slave becomes a slave herself. In 1667, Virginia reversed an earlier law and stated that any slave who undergoes the rite of Christian baptism was still a slave. And in 1712 South Carolina announced that "all negro[e]s, mulattoes, mestizo[s] or Indians, which at any time heretofore have been sold, or now are held or taken to be, or hereafter shall be bought and sold for slaves, are hereby declared slaves; and they, and their children, are hereby made and declared slaves."

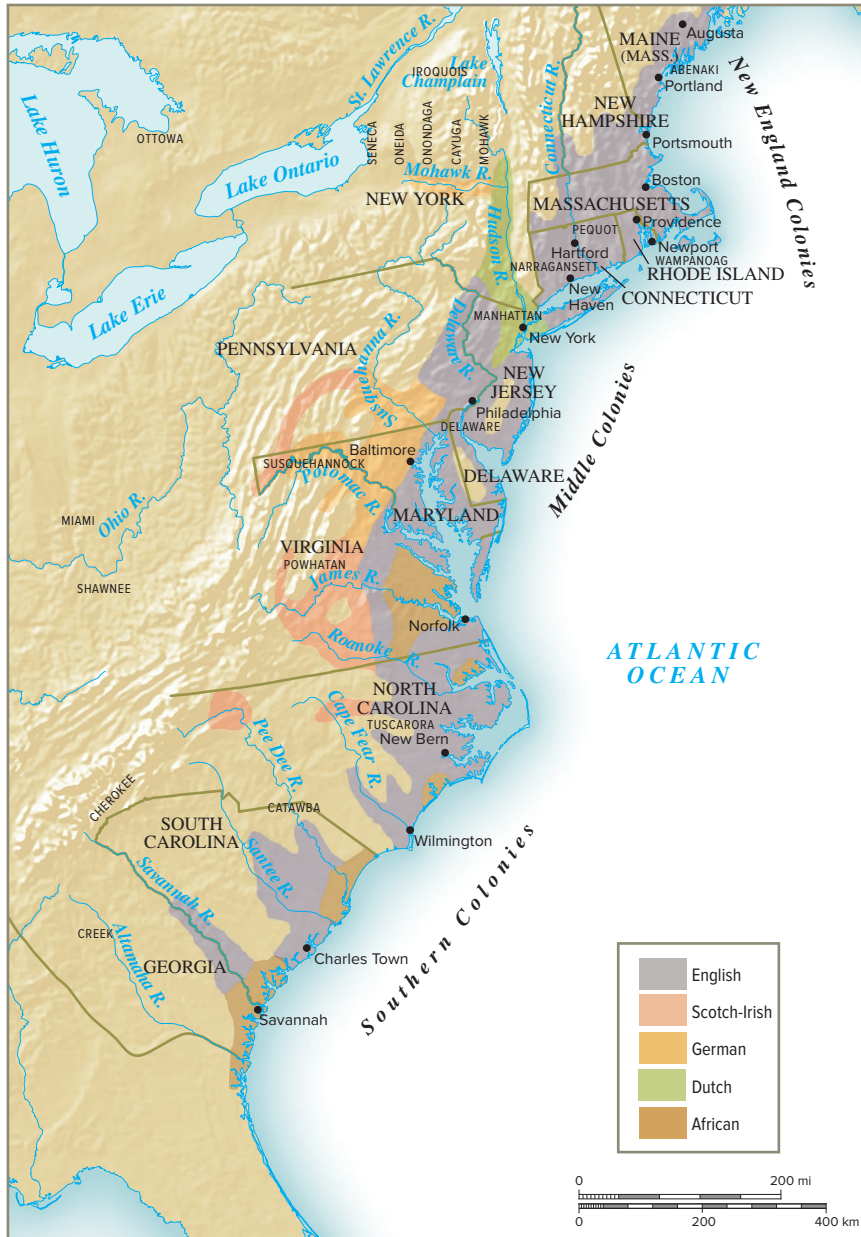
CHANGING SOURCES OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION

The most distinctive and enduring feature of the American population was that it brought together peoples of many different races, ethnic groups, and nationalities. North America was home to a highly diverse population. The British colonies were the home to Native Americans, English immigrants, forcibly imported Africans, and a wide range of other European groups. Among the earliest European immigrants were about French Calvinists (known as Huguenots). The Edict of Nantes of 1598 had assured them freedom of religion in France. But in 1685, the Edict was revoked, driving about 10,000 Huguenots to North America. Germany had similar laws banning Protestantism, driving many Germans to America where they settled in Pennsylvania. They came to be known as the "Pennsylvania Dutch," a corruption of the German term for their nationality, *Deutsch*. Frequent wars in Europe drove many other immigrants to the American colonies.

The most numerous of the newcomers were the so-called **Scotch-Irish**—Scotch Presbyterians who had settled in northern Ireland (in the province of Ulster) in the early seventeenth century. Most of the Scotch-Irish in America pushed out to the western edges of European settlement and occupied land without much regard for who actually claimed to own it.

There were also immigrants from Scotland itself and from southern Ireland. The Irish migrated steadily over a long period. Some abandoned their Roman Catholic religion and much of their ethnic identity after they arrived in America.

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POPULATIONS LIVING 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 nonnative population consisted of people from many places. As this map reveals, English settlers dominated most of the regions of North America. But note the large areas of German settlement in western Chesapeake and Pennsylvania; the swath of Dutch settlement in New York and New Jersey; the Scotch-Irish regions in the western regions of the South; and the large areas in which enslaved Africans were becoming the majority of the population. Note too the presence of multiple Indian nations along the seaboard and interior lands that prefigured the influx of Europeans. They played a vital role in the evolution of the European colonies, sometimes as allies and other times as enemies but always as a key force shaping colonial culture. • *What aspects of the history of these colonies help explain their ethnic composition?*

THE COLONIAL ECONOMIES

Farming, hunting, and fishing dominated almost all areas of European settlement and long-established Indian communities in North America throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even so, no colony was alike. Each developed its own economic focus and character—though all incorporated slavery into the routines of daily life.

SLAVERY AND ECONOMIC LIFE

In every colony, slave labor was essential to economic productivity. Slaves performed different jobs under different conditions depending on their colony of residence, but were an integral and very visible part of every local culture. In Virginia where tobacco was the dominant crop, planters responded to the rising demand from markets in the colonies and Europe by bringing in more slaves to work larger plantations. By the mid-1700s, nearly 150,000 slaves lived in Virginia. South Carolina and Georgia relied on rice production, since the low-lying coastline with its many tidal rivers made it possible to create rice paddies that could be flooded and drained. Rice cultivation was so difficult and unhealthy that many white workers simply refused to perform it, forcing planters in South Carolina and Georgia to grow dependent on slave labor. African workers were highly valued as well because many had lived and worked in rice-producing regions of west Africa and were expert in cultivation techniques and harvesting strategies. In 1765 in South Carolina blacks, nearly all of whom were slaves, outnumbered whites 90,000 to 40,000, and the port of Charleston imported more slaves than any other city in the colonies.

There were fewer slaves in the North, in large part because of the lack of plantation-based economies dominated by a single crop. Slaves in Massachusetts, for example, worked on farms that raised a broad variety of crops, and many served as domestics and tradesmen. The colony was the center of the slave trade for New England and was home to about 4,500 slaves in 1754. The largest slave state in New England, though, was Connecticut. In 1774, nearly 6,500 slaves lived there and about one-half of all ministers, lawyers, judges, and public officials owned slaves.

INDUSTRY AND ITS LIMITS

In northern New England, 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, parts of the South, and the Caribbean. Even there, however, a substantial commercial economy emerged alongside the agricultural one.

Almost every colonist engaged in a certain amount of industry at home which occasionally provided families with surplus goods they could trade or sell. Beyond these domestic efforts, craftsmen and artisans established themselves in colonial towns as cobblers, blacksmiths, rifle-makers, 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 coastal areas, 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. The Saugus Ironworks used water power

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(©MPI/Archive Photos/Getty Images)

TOBACCO PLANT This image clearly links the production of tobacco to the recreational pursuit of smoking. Note that the smoker is white and well-groomed, linking ownership of the tobacco crop to society's elites.

to drive a bellows, which controlled the heat in a charcoal furnace. The carbon from the burning charcoal helped remove the oxygen from the ore and thus reduced its melting temperature. As the ore melted, it trickled down into molds or was taken in the form of simple "sow bars" to a nearby forge to be shaped into iron objects such as pots and anvils. There was also a mill suitable for turning the sow bars into narrow rods that blacksmiths could cut into nails. The Saugus Ironworks was a technological success but a financial failure. It began operations in 1646; in 1668, its financial problems forced it to close its doors.

Metalworks, however, only 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. There were other, smaller ironmaking enterprises in every northern colony, and there were ironworks as well in several of the southern colonies. Even so, these and other growing industries did not immediately 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.

More important than manufacturing were industries that took advantage of 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. 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.

Technological progress, however, did not reach all colonists, even in the North. Up to half of all the farmers did not own a plow, even less a wagon. Substantial numbers of households lacked pots and kettles for cooking and only about half owned guns. Few owned 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. The low levels of ownership of these and other elementary tools were not because such things were difficult to make but because most Americans remained too poor or too isolated to be able to obtain them.

Indeed, few colonists were self-sufficient in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A popular image of early American households is of people 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. Most farmers who grew grain took it to centralized facilities for processing. In general, people who lived in isolated or poor areas owned fewer tools and had less access to advanced technologies than did those in more populous or affluent areas.

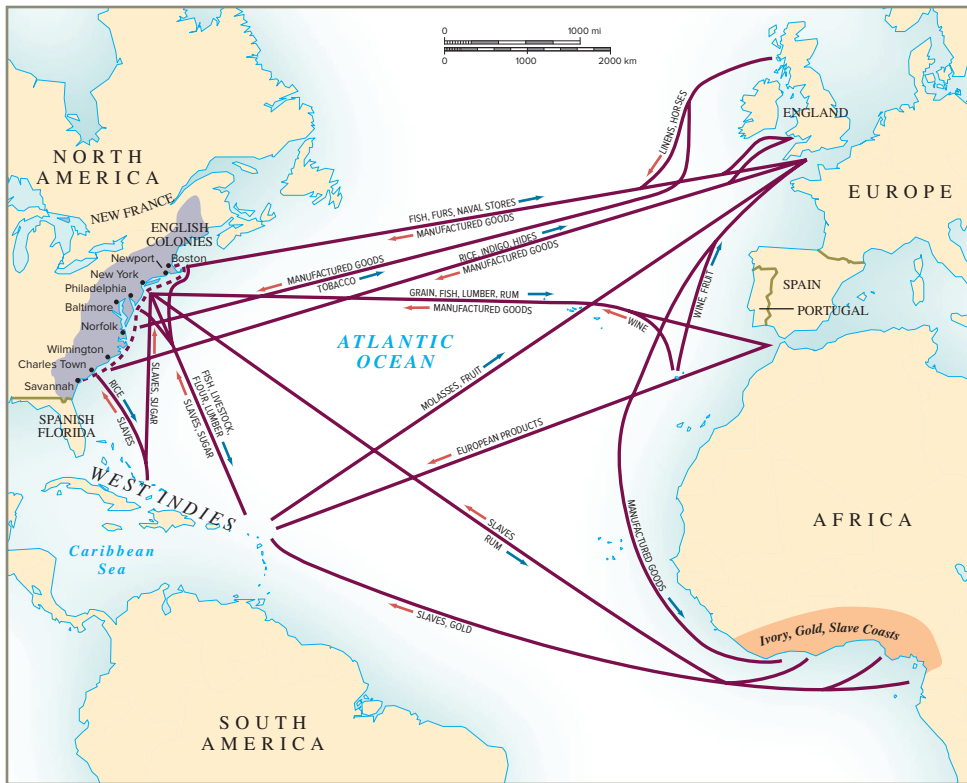
THE RISE OF COLONIAL COMMERCE

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of colonial commerce was that it was able to survive at all. American merchants faced bewildering obstacles and lacked so many of the basic institutions of trade that they managed to stay afloat only with great difficulty and through considerable ingenuity. The colonies had almost no gold or silver, and their paper currency was not acceptable as payment for goods from abroad. For many years, colonial merchants had to rely on barter or on money substitutes such as beaver skins, rice, sugar, or tobacco.

A second obstacle was lack of information about the supply and demand of goods and services. Traders had no way of knowing what they would find in foreign ports; American colonial vessels sometimes stayed at sea for years, journeying from one port to another, trading one commodity for another, attempting to find some way to turn a profit. There was also an enormous number of small, fiercely competitive companies, which made the problem of organizing the system of commerce even more acute.

Nevertheless, commerce in the colonies survived and grew. There was elaborate trade among the colonies themselves and with the West Indies. The mainland colonies offered their Caribbean trading partners rum, agricultural products, meat, and fish. The islands offered sugar, molasses, and at times slaves in return. There was also trade 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 by which 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 reality, the so-called triangular trade in rum, slaves, and sugar

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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. 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?*

was a complicated maze of highly diverse trade routes. Out of this risky trade emerged a group of adventurous entrepreneurs who by the mid-eighteenth century were beginning to constitute a distinct merchant class. The British Navigation Acts protected them from foreign competition in the colonies. They had ready access to the market in England for such colonial products as furs, timber, and American-built ships. But they also developed markets illegally outside the British Empire—in the French, Spanish, and Dutch West Indies—where they could often get higher prices for their goods than in the British colonies.

THE RISE OF CONSUMERISM

As affluent residents of the colonies grew in number, the growing prosperity and commercialism of British America created both new appetites and new opportunities to satisfy them. The result was an emerging preoccupation with the consumption of material goods.

The growth of eighteenth-century consumerism increased the class divisions in the American colonies. 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 wealthy people in cities and towns, who did not have large estates to boast their success. But the growth of consumerism was also a product of the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. 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.

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, 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 “gentleman” and the gracious “lady” became increasingly powerful throughout the colonies in the eighteenth century. In part that meant striving to become educated and “refined” 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.

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. Aristocracies emerged, to be sure, but they tended to rely less on landownership than control of a substantial workforce, and they were generally less secure and less powerful than their English counterparts. More than in England, white people in America faced opportunities for social mobility—both up and down. There were also new forms of community in America, and they varied greatly from one region to another.

SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES

The plantation system of the American South produced one form of community. The first plantations emerged in the tobacco-growing areas of Virginia and Maryland. Some of the early planters became established aristocrats with vast estates. On the whole, however, seventeenth-century colonial plantations were rough and relatively small. In the early days

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in Virginia, they were little more than crude clearings where landowners and indentured servants worked side by side in conditions so harsh that death was an everyday occurrence. Most landowners lived in rough cabins or houses, with their servants or slaves nearby. The economy of the plantation was precarious. Planters could not control their markets, so even the largest plantations were constantly at risk. When prices fell, planters faced the prospect of ruin. The plantation economy created many new wealthy landowners, but it also destroyed many.

Enslaved African Americans, of course, lived very differently. On the smaller farms with only a handful of slaves, it was not always possible for a rigid separation to develop between whites and blacks. But by the early eighteenth century, over three-fourths of all slaves lived on plantations of at least ten slaves, and nearly one-half lived in communities of fifty slaves or more. In those settings, they were able to develop a society and culture of their own. Although whites seldom encouraged formal marriages among slaves, many blacks themselves developed strong and elaborate family structures. There were also distinctive forms of slave religion, which variously blended Christianity with African folklore and sacred practices, that became a central element in the emergence of an independent black culture.

Nevertheless, black society was subject to constant intrusions from and interaction with white society. Domestic slaves, for example, were often isolated from their own community. Black women faced sexual assault from owners and overseers; the mixed-race children of these unions were rarely recognized by their white fathers. On some plantations, black workers were treated with a modicum of humanity, but it was not common. More typically they encountered physical brutality and occasionally even sadism, against which they were virtually powerless.

Slaves often resisted their masters, in ways large and small. The most serious example in the colonial period was the **Stono Rebellion** in South Carolina in 1739, during which about 100 slaves banded together, seized weapons, killed several whites, and attempted to escape south to Florida. The uprising was quickly crushed and most participants were executed. A more frequent form of resistance was simply running away, sometimes to nearby Indian tribes in the hope of finding freedom there. Some Indian groups accepted the runaways, but others practiced slavery themselves and also held African slaves or Indian slaves. More often, runaways were caught and returned to their masters before they could reach a protective community. Subtler, often undetected forms of resistance were practiced within the confines of slavery as enslaved people evaded or defied their masters' wishes through lying, cheating, stealing, and foot-dragging.

Most slaves, male and female, worked as field hands. 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 craftspeople 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. A few were able to buy their freedom.

NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

It is important to note that slaves in the North experienced much of the same degradation and humiliation as in the South. While fewer in number, they still experienced similar barriers to freedom and white presumptions about their unfitness for citizenship and divine appointment as permanent laborers. No town or city in New England was without black slaves, who worked in the fields, in homes, and in shops and barns.



AFRICAN POPULATION AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL POPULATION, CA. 1775 This map illustrates the parts of the colonies in which slaves made up a large proportion of the population—in some areas, a majority. 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 concentration of slaves in certain areas?*

The characteristic social unit in New England was not the isolated farm or the large plantation but the town. In the early years of colonization, each new settlement drew up a **covenant** binding all residents tightly together both religiously and socially. Colonists laid out a village, with houses and a meetinghouse arranged around a shared pasture, or “common.”

DEBATING THE PAST



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 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 era. But at almost the same time, Perry Miller, the renowned scholar of Puritanism, argued in a series of important studies that belief in witchcraft was not a product of simple public excitement 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.

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 was a product of class tensions between the poorer, more marginal residents of one part of Salem and the wealthier, more 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, he 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 scholarly lens of gender. Famously, 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. 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 grew. Accusations of witchcraft and public trials and executions helped publicize and shore up social norms.

The witchcraft trials helped create a greater-than-normal readiness to connect

aberrant behavior—such as the actions of independent or powerful women—to supernatural causes and the result was a wave of deadly witchcraft accusations. •

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. How did the Salem witchcraft trials reflect attitudes toward women and the status of women in colonial New England?
2. Why were colonial New Englanders willing to believe accusations of witchcraft about their fellow colonists?

Thus families generally lived with their neighbors close by. They divided up the outlying fields and woodlands among the residents; the size and location of a family’s field depended on the family’s numbers, wealth, and social station.

Once a town was established, residents held a yearly “town meeting” to decide important questions and to choose a group of “selectmen,” who ran the town’s affairs. Participation in the meeting was generally restricted to adult males who were members of the church. Only those who could give evidence of being among the elect assured of salvation (the “visible saints”) were admitted to full church membership, although other residents of the town were required to attend church services.

New Englanders did not adopt the English system of primogeniture—the passing of all property to the firstborn son. Instead, a father divided up his land among all his sons. His control of this inheritance gave him great power over the 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.

The early Puritan community was a tightly knit organism. But as the years passed and the communities grew, social strains began to affect this communal structure. This was partly due to the increasing commercialization of New England society. It was also partly due to population growth. In the first generations, fathers generally controlled enough land to satisfy the needs of all their sons. After several generations, however, 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 broke off and moved elsewhere to form towns of their own.

The tensions building in Puritan communities could produce dramatic events. One example was the widespread excitement in the 1680s and 1690s over accusations of witchcraft—the human exercise of satanic powers—in New England. The most famous outbreak was in Salem, Massachusetts. Fear of the devil’s influences spread quickly throughout the town, and hundreds of people, most of them women, were accused of witchcraft. (See “Debating the Past: The Witchcraft Trials.”) Twenty residents of Salem were ultimately put to death before the **Salem witchcraft trials** finally ended in 1692. Fourteen were women, all but one of whom was publicly hanged. The other five, including two children, died in prison. Tensions building in Puritan communities could produce dramatic events.

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The Salem experience was not unique. Accusations of witchcraft popped up in many New England towns in the early 1690s and centered mostly on women. Research into the background of accused “witches” reveals that most were middle-aged women, often widowed, with few or no children. Some were also of low social position, were often involved in domestic conflicts, had frequently been accused of other crimes, and were considered abrasive by their neighbors. Still others were women who, through inheritance or hard work, had come into possession of substantial property of their own and thus challenged the power of men in the community.

The witchcraft controversies were a reflection of the highly religious character of New England societies. New Englanders believed in the power of Satan. Belief in witchcraft was not a marginal superstition rejected by the mainstream. It was a common feature of Puritan religious conviction.

CITIES

In the 1770s, the two largest colonial ports—Philadelphia and New York—had populations of 28,000 and 25,000, respectively, which made them larger than most English urban centers of their time. Boston (16,000), Charles Town (later Charleston), South Carolina (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, as marts for international commerce, and locales where thousands of slaves were bought and sold. Cities were the centers of what industry existed in the colonies. They were the locations of the most advanced schools and sophisticated cultural activities and of shops where imported goods could be bought. In addition, they were communities with urban social problems: crime, vice, pollution, traffic. Unlike smaller towns, cities needed to set up constables’ offices and fire departments and develop systems for supporting the urban poor, whose numbers became especially large in times of economic crisis.

Finally, cities were places where new ideas could circulate and be discussed. There were newspapers, books, and other publications from abroad, and hence new intellectual influences. The taverns and coffeehouses of cities provided forums in which people could gather and debate the issues of the day. That is one reason why the Revolutionary crisis, when it began to build in the 1760s and 1770s, originated in the cities.

AWAKENINGS AND ENLIGHTENMENTS

Intellectual life in colonial America revolved around the conflict between the traditional emphasis on a personal God deeply involved in individual lives, and the new spirit of the Enlightenment, which stressed the importance of science and human reason. The old views placed a high value on a stern moral code in which intellect was less important than faith. The Enlightenment suggested that people had substantial control over their own lives and societies.

THE PATTERN OF RELIGIONS

Religious toleration flourished in America to a degree unmatched in any European nation. Settlers in America brought with them so many different religious practices that it proved impossible 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. In parts of New York and New Jersey, Dutch settlers had established their own Calvinist denomination, Dutch Reformed. American Baptists developed a great variety of sects and 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. New Englanders, in particular, viewed their Catholic neighbors in New France (Canada) not only as commercial and military rivals but also as dangerous agents of Rome. In most of the English colonies, however, Roman Catholics were too few to cause serious conflict. They were most numerous in Maryland, where they numbered 3,000. Perhaps for that reason they suffered the most 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 Charles Town, 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.

African slaves brought their own religious heritage. Though from diverse religious environments in West and western Central Africa, they generally shared a central belief in a Supreme Being or Creator and a pantheon of lesser divinities, whom they appeased and sought favor from through prayer, song, dance, and sacrifice. They aimed to create and sustain a harmonious bond with nature and supernatural beings, including not only gods but also spirits and deceased family ancestors. Many strove to continue traditional practices in their new worlds but faced stern scrutiny and even hostility. Masters regularly compelled their slaves to adopt their own sacred beliefs, which led slaves to build hybrid faiths that blended African religions with Christianity and Judaism or to worship in secret, out of sight and earshot of whites.

Slaves from the Kingdom of Kongo, because of early contact with the Portuguese, tended to be Catholic while those from the Senegambia region often included Muslims. As many as 10 percent of African slaves brought to the colonies were Muslim, but they left only traces of their faith. Like other Africans, they struggled to live their native convictions openly and often took to worshiping clandestinely or integrating their beliefs with their master's principles. Ayuba Suleimon Diallo, born in 1700 into a noble family in Bondu (now Senegal), was captured in 1730, packed on a slave ship, and sold in Annapolis, Maryland, where he worked for two years as a tobacco hand. He ran away, was captured, and placed in jail. There he became known as a devout Muslim of royal lineage whose story of bondage won the sympathy of the Royal African Company, which freed him with the hope he might be of service to them in his native country. He later published an autobiography. African Muslim names appear on muster rolls in the Revolutionary War, such as Yusef ben Ali, Bampett Muhamad, and Joseph Sabo. And in 1777 Thomas Jefferson, arguing for an expansive view of religious tolerance in Virginia and quoting John Locke, wrote that "neither Pagan nor Mahamedan [Muslim] nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights for the Commonwealth because of his religion."

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THE GREAT AWAKENING

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 more secular outlook in urban areas. The progress of science and free thought 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. 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 to New Englanders, the “declension” of religious piety seemed a serious problem. By the early eighteenth century, similar concerns about declining piety 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 and reached its climax in the 1740s. It was potentially a subversive force in society, challenging traditions of power and deference. 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 reflected in part the desires of many people to break away from their families or communities and start a new life. Not surprisingly, then, the revival had particular appeal to women (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. Enslaved men and women flocked to hear this message of a new community as well, and even participated, when allowed, in public services.

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 from England, made several evangelizing tours through the colonies and drew massive crowds. He spoke in every colony and multiple times in Massachusetts and Connecticut—so many times, in fact, that it was estimated that every resident heard him preach at least once. But the outstanding preacher of the Great Awakening was the New England Congregationalist **Jonathan Edwards**. 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. But other evangelists saw education as a means of furthering religion, and they founded or led schools for the training of New Light ministers.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Great Awakening caused one great cultural upheaval in the colonies. The **Enlightenment** caused another, very different one. The Enlightenment was the product of scientific and intellectual discoveries in Europe in the seventeenth century—discoveries that revealed the “natural laws” that regulated the workings of nature. The new scientific knowledge

encouraged many thinkers to begin celebrating the power of human reason and to argue that rational thought, not just religious faith, could create progress and advance knowledge in the world.

In celebrating reason, the Enlightenment encouraged men and women to look to themselves and their own intellect—not just to God—for guidance as to how to live their lives and shape their societies. It helped produce a growing interest in education and a heightened concern with politics and government.

In the early seventeenth century, Enlightenment ideas in America were largely borrowed from Europe—from such thinkers as Francis Bacon and John Locke of England, Baruch Spinoza of Amsterdam, and René Descartes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau of France. Later, however, such Americans as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison made their own important contributions to Enlightenment thought.

LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY

White male Americans achieved a high degree of literacy in the eighteenth century. By the time of the Revolution, well over one-half of all white men could read and write. The literacy rate for women lagged behind the rate for men until the nineteenth century. While opportunities for education beyond the primary level were scarce for men, they were almost nonexistent for women.

The large number of colonists who could read created a market for the first widely circulated publications in America other than the Bible: almanacs. By 1700, there were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of almanacs circulating throughout the colonies and even in the sparsely settled lands to the west. Most families had at least one. Almanacs provided medical advice, navigational and agricultural information, practical wisdom, humor, and predictions about the future—most famously, predictions about weather patterns for the coming year, which many farmers used as the basis for decisions about crops, even though the predictions were notoriously unreliable. The most famous almanac in eighteenth-century America was *Poor Richard's Almanac*, published by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia.

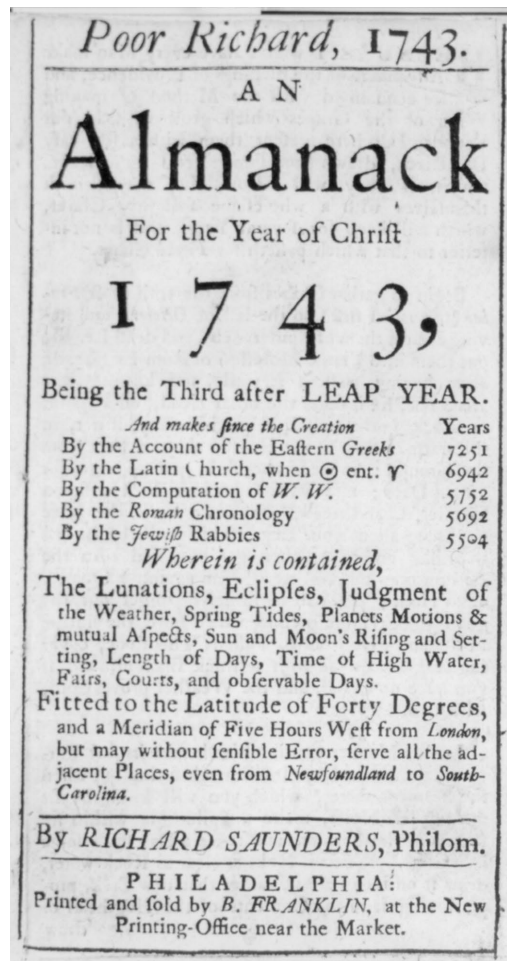
The wide availability of reading material in colonial America by the eighteenth century was a result of the spread of printing technology. The first printing press began operating in the colonies in 1639, and by 1695 there were more towns in America with printers than there were in England. At first, many of these presses did not get very much use. Over time, however, the rising literacy of the society created a demand for books, pamphlets, and almanacs that the presses rushed to fill.

The first newspaper in the colonies, *Publick Occurrences*, was published in Boston in 1690 using a relatively advanced printing facility. It was the first step toward what would eventually become a large newspaper industry. One reason the Stamp Act of 1765, which imposed a tax on printed materials, created such a furor was that printing technology had by then become central to colonial life.

EDUCATION

Even before Enlightenment ideas penetrated America, colonists placed a high value on formal education. 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 that every town support a school; and a modest network of public schools emerged as a result. The Quakers and other sects operated church schools, and in some communities widows or unmarried women conducted

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(Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-58189])

GUIDE TO THE SEASONS Among their many purposes, almanacs sought to help farmers predict weather and plan for the demands of changing seasons.

“dame schools” in their homes. In cities, some master craftsmen set up evening schools for their apprentices.

African Americans had virtually no access to education. Occasionally a master or mistress would teach slave children to read and write; but as the slave system became more firmly entrenched, strong social (and ultimately legal) sanctions developed to discourage such efforts. Indians, too, remained largely outside the white educational system—to a large degree by choice. Some white missionaries and philanthropists established schools for Native Americans and helped create a small population of Indians literate in spoken and written English.

Harvard, the first American college, was established in 1636 by Puritan theologians who wanted to create a training center for ministers. (The college was named for a Charlestown, Massachusetts, minister, John Harvard, who had left it his library and one-half of his estate.) In 1693, William and Mary College (named for the English king and queen) was established

in Williamsburg, Virginia, by Anglicans. And in 1701, conservative Congregationalists, dissatisfied with 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 was located); one of its first presidents was Jonathan Edwards. Despite the religious basis of these colleges, most of them offered curricula that included not only theology but also logic, ethics, physics, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. King's College, founded in New York City in 1754 and later renamed Columbia, was specifically devoted to the spread of secular knowledge. The Academy and College of Philadelphia, founded in 1755 and later renamed the University of Pennsylvania, was also a secular institution, established by a group of laymen under the inspiration of Benjamin Franklin.

After 1700, most colonial leaders received their entire education in America (rather than attending university in England, as had once been the case). But higher education remained available only to a few relatively affluent white men.

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 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 won international fame through his experiments with electricity. Particularly notable was his 1747 theory—and his 1752 demonstration, using a kite—that lightning and electricity were the same. (Previously, most scientists had believed that there were several distinct types of electricity.) His research on the way in which electricity could be “grounded” led to the development of the lightning rod, which greatly reduced fires and other damage to buildings during thunderstorms.

The high value that influential Americans were beginning to place on scientific knowledge was clearly demonstrated by the most controversial scientific experiment of the eighteenth century: inoculation against smallpox. The Puritan theologian **Cotton Mather** credited his onetime slave, whom he had given the name Onesimus after the biblical slave who escaped from Philemon, for teaching him. In a 1716 letter to the Royal Society of London, Mather wrote that Onesimus, after contracting the disease, confided “he had undergone an Operation, which had given him something of ye Small-Pox, & would forever preserve him from it, adding, That it was often used among [Africans] and whoever had ye Courage to use it was forever free from ye Fear of the Contagion.” Despite strong opposition, Mather urged inoculation on his fellow Bostonians during an epidemic in the 1720s. The results confirmed the effectiveness of the technique. Other theologians took up the cause, along with many physicians. By the mid-eighteenth century, inoculation had become a common medical procedure in America.

CONCEPTS OF LAW AND POLITICS

In law and politics, as in other parts of their lives, Americans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed that they were re-creating in the New World the practices and

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institutions of the Old World. But as in other areas, they created something very different. 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 developed in court procedures, punishments, and the definition of crimes. In England, for example, a printed attack on a public official, whether true or false, was considered libelous. At the 1734–1735 trial of the New York publisher **John Peter Zenger**, the courts ruled that criticisms of the government were not libelous if factually true—a verdict that removed some colonial restrictions on the freedom of the press.

More significant for the future relationship between the colonies and England were differences emerging 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 a large measure of self-government. In most colonies, local communities grew accustomed to running their own affairs with minimal interference from higher authorities. The colonial assemblies came to exercise many of the powers that Parliament exercised in England. Provincial governors (appointed by the king after the 1690s) had broad powers on paper, but their actual influence was limited.

The result of all this was that 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 took hold in America that was not shared by policymakers in England. 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 resulted.



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COLONIAL PUNISHMENT American communities prescribed a wide range of punishments for misconduct and crime. Among the more common punishments were public humiliations—placing offenders in stocks, forcing them to wear badges of shame, or, as in this woodcut, binding them into a “ducking stool” and immersing them in water.

CONCLUSION

Between the 1650s and the 1750s, the English colonies in America grew steadily in population, in the size of their economies, and in the sophistication—and diversity—of their cultures. Although most settlers in the 1750s still believed that they were fully a part of the British Empire, they were in fact living in a very different world.

Diversity and difference characterized individual colonies. They developed their own economies, systems of government, ideas about religious toleration, and rules governing interactions with Indians. What they shared was constant engagement with Indians near the areas of their settlements. Those interactions varied from uneasy peace to outright hostility but always were part of each colony's experience. Also shared was a growing commitment to the enslavement of Africans or African Americans. As increasingly numbers of planters, farmers, landowners, merchants, ministers, and public officials determined that the presence of a slave class benefitted them, colonial governments created slave codes and customs that birthed the colonial culture of human bondage. Many participated in the Great Awakening and embraced evangelical religion, leading to the transcolonial spread of Baptist and Methodist churches. And most colonists shared a belief in certain basic principles of law and politics, which they considered embedded in the English constitution. Their interpretation of that constitution, however, was becoming increasingly different from that of the Parliament in England and was laying the groundwork for future conflict.

KEY TERMS/PEOPLE/PLACES/EVENTS

Cotton Mather 79	jeremiad 76	Scotch-Irish 63
covenant 71	John Peter Zenger 80	Stono Rebellion 70
Enlightenment 76	Jonathan Edwards 76	triangular trade 67
evangelist 76	middle passage 62	
Great Awakening 76	Salem witchcraft trials 73	

RECALL AND REFLECT

1. How did patterns of family life and attitudes toward women differ in the northern and southern colonies?
2. How did the lives of African slaves change over the course of the first century of slavery?
3. Who emigrated to North America in the seventeenth century, and why did they come?
4. What was the intellectual culture of colonial America?
5. How and why did life in the English colonies diverge from life in England?

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