

Colonial Society in the 18th Century

- A. Characteristics of 18th Century British American Colonies
1. Enormous Population Growth
 - a. Common feature of all colonies
 - b. High Fertility Rate
 - c. VA, MA, PA, NC, MD largest colonies
 - d. Only 4 major cities: Philly, NY, Boston, Charleston
 - e. 90% lived in rural areas
 - f. Demographic Changes resulted in
 - i. Shift in balance of power from England to colonies
 - ii. 1700 = less than 300K people
 - iii. 1775 = 2.5 million people (20% slaves)
 2. The Great American Melting Pot
 - a. Most mixed population in the world despite most being English
 - i. South had 90% of slaves
 - ii. New England least ethnically mixed
 - iii. Middle colonies most ethnically mixed
 - iv. By 1775 - outside NE, ½ of population non-English
 - b. Population Breakdown by 1790
 - i. English & Welsh – 66%
 - ii. Scots Irish (and Scots Highlanders) – 5.2%
 - a. Presbyterian Scots Lowlanders
 - b. Transplanted to Northern Ireland for promises of land
 - c. Hated the British for uprooting them from Scotland
 - d. Most were frustrated and poor
 - e. Mostly in PA
 - f. Squatted on frontier land
 - g. Fought with Indians
 - h. Moved to backcountry of MD, VA, SC, NC
 - i. Led armed marches against wealthy easterners
 - i. Carolina Regulator Movement (1739)
 - ii. Paxton Boys in PA (1764)
 - j. Scots Highlanders
 - i. Smaller in number
 - ii. Loyal to the crown
 - iii. German – 4.5%
 - a. Fled religious persecution, econ oppression, & war
 - b. Mostly in PA (1/3 of PA population)
 - c. Primarily Lutheran
 - d. No loyalty to the crown
 - e. Retained German language & customs
 - iv. Dutch – 2%
 - a. Concentrated in NY & NJ
 - v. Irish – 1.6%
 - vi. French – 0.4%
 - vii. All other whites – 0.3%
 - a. Swedes, Jews, Swiss
 - viii. African – 20%
 - a. Concentrated in the South

B. Four Major Regions

1. Plantation South
 - a. Tidewater Region
 - i. Wide coastal plain
 - ii. Wide rivers
 - iii. Rich soil – tobacco
 - iv. Demand for slaves increased by 1776
 - a. Indentured servants harder to obtain
 - b. Only planters educated their children
 - c. Plantation owners became leading econ, political & social force
 - d. Democracy limited to wealthy landowners
2. Middle Colonies
 - a. Farming, manufacturing center
 - b. Three large rivers – Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna
 - c. Large number of immigrants
 - i. Dutch in Hudson Valley
 - ii. Germans in PA
 - iii. Scots-Irish in PA
3. New England
 - a. Rapid rivers, rocky soil
 - b. 95% of English immigrants
 - c. Came in groups & settles in self-governing towns
 - d. Town meeting was center of power
 - e. Occupations
 - i. Farming (scarce labor, tough conditions)
 - ii. Fishing
 - iii. Commerce
 - iv. Shipbuilding
4. Frontier/Backcountry
 - a. “The West”
 - b. Large families
 - c. Exhausted soil encouraged westward movement
 - d. Refuge for:
 - i. Religious dissenters
 - ii. Immigrants
 - iii. criminals
 - e. Vigorous spirit of democracy
 - f. Emphasis on individual freedom
 - g. Strong objection to any governmental interference in daily life
 - h. Anti-aristocratic tradition & resentment of urban East

C. Religion

1. Different Denominations
 - a. Anglican Church
 - i. Official faith in VA, MD, NC, SC, GA & part of NY
 - ii. Branch of royal authority
 - iii. Faith was less fierce than Puritan faith
 - iv. Weakened by lack of Bishop in the colonies
 - a. Attempted to install Bishop
 - b. Met with intense protest by non-Anglicans
 - c. Saw it as a conspiracy to impose royal power
 - v. Est. College of William & Mary (1693) to train ministers

- b. Congregational Church
 - i. Grew out of Puritan church
 - ii. Formally established in all New England, except RI
 - iii. Initially all citizens supported church through taxes
 - c. Presbyterian Church
 - i. Closely associated with Congregationalists
 - ii. Both Calvinist
 - iii. Not an official religion in any of the colonies
 - d. Quakers
 - i. Existed in large numbers in PA, NJ, DE, & RI
 - ii. Avid protesters of NE slave trade
 - a. Newport, RI was a center of trade
 - b. Became important in 18th century abolition movement
 - e. Jews
 - i. First arrived in mid-1600s
 - ii. Located in RI, NY, PA, MD, & SC
 - iii. Approx. 1500 in the colonies by mid-1700s
2. The Great Awakening
- a. 1730s – 1740s
 - b. First mass social movement in American history
 - c. Jonathan Edwards
 - i. Credited with starting the Great Awakening
 - ii. In Northampton, MA 1734
 - iii. Most influential theologian of the movement
 - iv. Through faith in God one could attain salvation
 - a. Blasted the idea of salvation through good works (Arminiansim)
 - b. Dependence upon God's grace is paramount
 - v. Emphasized eternal damnation
 - vi. His style was learned and reasoned, not emotional
 - d. George Whitefield
 - i. Brilliant English orator
 - ii. Made 7 trips to the colonies
 - iii. Traveled extensively
 - iv. Enthusiastic, emotional preacher
 - v. Most influential figure of the Great Awakening
 - vi. Founded Methodism in GA & SC
 - e. Old Light v. New Light
 - i. Old Lights
 - a. Orthodox & liberal clergymen
 - b. Deeply skeptical of emotional & theatrical antics of revivalists
 - c. Believed emotionalism threatened their usefulness and spiritual authority
 - ii. New Lights
 - a. Supported the Awakening for revitalizing American religion
 - b. Used emotion to move followers
 - iii. Results
 - a. Created schisms in denominations
 - b. Increased competitiveness in American churches

- c. Brought religion back to many who had lost touch with it
- d. Undermined the older clergy
- e. Encouraged new missionary work among Indians & slaves
- f. Founded New Light Colleges
 - i. Dartmouth, Brown, Rutgers, Princeton
- g. Laid foundation for anti-intellectualism as part of American character
- h. Prepared Colonies for War of Independence
 - i. Revivalism taught people they could be bold when confronting authority
 - ii. When churches weren't living up to the believers expectations, people could break off and form new ones
 - iii. Realized religious power resided in their own hands, not the Church of England
 - iv. Two generations later, colonists realized the same held true for political power
 - v. By 1775 Colonists of various denominations shared a common vision of freedom from Britain
 - vi. Great Awakening created a climate which made the American Revolution possible

D. Culture & the Press

1. Phillis Wheatley (c.1753-1784)
 - a. First Important African American writer in America
 - b. Slave
 - i. Brought from Africa in 1761
 - ii. Taught by master's mistress to read & write
 - c. Abolitionist
 - d. Used her intelligence to disprove blacks were inferior
2. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)
 - a. Writings had profound effect on shaping American Character
 - b. Poor Richard's Almanac
 - i. Edited from 1732 – 1758
 - ii. Compendium of writings of many thinkers of the day
 - iii. Emphasized:
 - a. Thrift
 - b. Industry
 - c. Morality
 - d. Common Sense
 - iv. Second most widely read book, widely read in Europe too
 - c. Autobiography is a classic
 - d. Scientist
 - i. Only first class scientist in the colonies
 - ii. Bifocal spectacles
 - iii. Franklin stove
 - iv. Library
 - a. Started first privately supported circulating library in America
 - b. By 1776 there were about 50

3. Colonial Press
 - a. Hand-operated Printing Presses
 - i. Ran off pamphlets, leaflets, & journals
 - ii. Effective for airing social grievances
 - iii. Helped build opposition to British rule
 - b. John Peter Zenger Case (1735)
 - i. Zenger's newspaper criticized the corrupt royal governor
 - ii. He was charged with seditious libel
 - iii. Brought to trial
 - a. He argued he printed the truth
 - b. Royal chief justice ruled printing was enough to convict, regardless of truth
 - c. Jury ruled in favor of Zenger
 - iv. Newspaper editors thus received some freedom
 - v. Not as much as post-1776
 - vi. Case paved the way for freedom of expression & the press

E. Politics

1. Structure of Colonies by 1775
 - a. Royal Colonies
 - i. 8 colonies had royal governors appointed by the crown
 - ii. MA, NH, NY, NJ, VA, SC, NC, GA
 - b. Proprietary Colonies
 - i. Proprietor: person to whom the king made a grant of land
 - ii. 3 colonies led by proprietors who themselves chose governors
 - iii. MD, PA, DE
 - c. Charter Colonies
 - i. 2 colonies elected own governors under self-governing charters
 - ii. CT & RI
2. Bicameral Legislatures most common
 - a. Upper House
 - i. Council
 - ii. Normally appointed by crown or proprietor
 - b. Lower House
 - i. Assembly
 - ii. Elected by property owners
3. Governors
 - a. Legal Power
 - i. Had Veto power over colonial legislation
 - ii. Had prerogative power to dissolve lower houses of leg
 - iii. Had power over judiciary
 - iv. Had powers King no longer had over Parliament & courts
 - b. Checks on Power
 - i. Assemblies controlled Governors' salaries
 - ii. Strict instruction from crown impeded flexibility
 - iii. Assemblies had power to fill gov't posts in most colonies
4. Nature of Colonial Politics
 - a. Colonial governments didn't have powers of Parliament
 - b. Colonial governments far more reformed than those in England
 - i. Much more direct representation
 - ii. Will of constituents higher
 - iii. Less corruption

- c. Administration at Local Level
 - i. New England – townhall meetings
 - ii. South – county governments
 - iii. Middle Colonies – combination of above
- d. Voting Restrictions
 - i. Privileged upper class wary of democracy “mob rule”
 - ii. Property &/or religious qualifications were imposed
 - iii. As much as 50% white males were disenfranchised
- 5. Democratic Foundations Established
 - a. Ideals of tolerance emerged
 - b. Education valued and available
 - c. Equality of opportunity
 - d. Freedoms of speech & press
 - e. Freedom to assemble
 - f. Representative government
- F. Commerce & Trade
 - 1. Mercantilism
 - 2. Triangle Trade
 - a. Illegal trade to circumvent Navigation Acts
 - b. Molasses Act (1733)
 - i. British sought to stop colonial trade with French WI
 - ii. Colonists ignored it
 - c. New England exported timber, fish, cotton goods, light manufacturing to French Caribbean for molasses
 - d. New England ships brought molasses back
 - i. Molasses distilled into rum
 - ii. RI became center for rum distilling (1763)
 - e. Rum shipped to West Indies where slavers took rum to Gold Coast
 - f. Slave traders bartered with chieftains for slaves
 - g. Slaves transported on the Middle Passage to the colonies
 - h. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was the largest movement of people in history
 - i. Between 10 and 15 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic between 1500 and 1900
 - j. Figure grossly understates the actual number of Africans enslaved, killed, or displaced as a result of the slave trade
 - k. At least 2 million Africans - 10 to 15 percent - died during the infamous "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic
 - l. Another 15 to 30 percent died during the march to or confinement along the coast
 - m. Altogether, for every 100 slaves who reached the New World, another 40 had died in Africa or during the Middle Passage