



A New World of Many Cultures, 1491–1607

Thirty-three days after my departure from [the Canary Islands] I reached the Indian Sea, where I discovered many islands, thickly peopled, of which I took possession without resistance in the name of our most illustrious monarch, by public proclamation and with unfurled banners.

Christopher Columbus, *Select Letters*, 1493.

The original discovery, exploration, and settlement of North and South America occurred at least 10,000 years before Christopher Columbus was born. Some archeologists estimate that the first people to settle North America arrived as many as 40,000 years ago. Waves of migrants from Asia may have crossed a land bridge that once connected Siberia and Alaska (land now submerged under the Bering Sea). Over a long period of time, successive generations migrated southward from the Arctic Circle to the southern tip of South America. The first Americans adapted to the varied environments of the regions that they found. They evolved into hundreds of tribes, spoke different languages, and practiced different cultures. Estimates of the native population in the Americas in the 1490s vary from 50 million to 100 million people.

Cultures of Central and South America

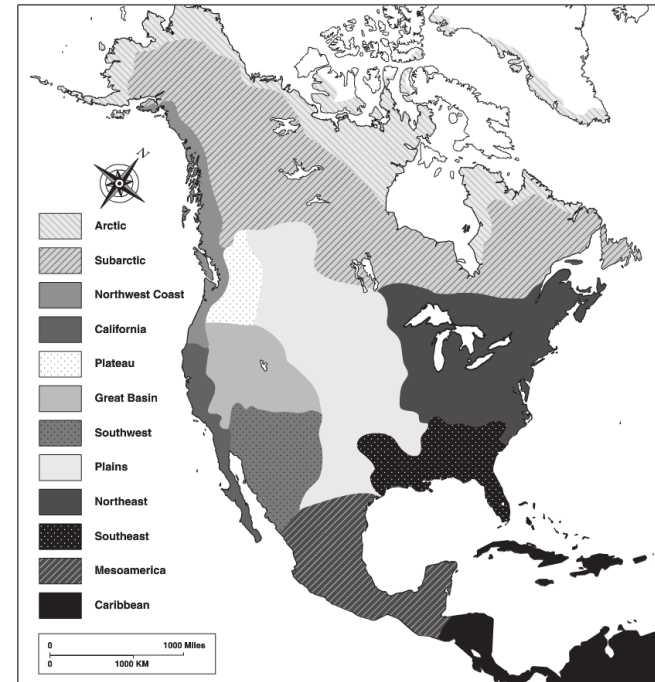
The native population was concentrated in three highly developed civilizations. Between A.D. 300 and 800, the Mayas built remarkable cities in the rain forests of the Yucatán Peninsula (present-day Guatemala, Belize, and southern Mexico). Several centuries after the decline of the Mayas, the Aztecs from central Mexico developed a powerful empire. The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, had a population of about 200,000, equivalent in population to the largest cities of Europe. While the Aztecs were dominating Mexico and Central America, the Incas based in Peru developed a vast empire in South America. All three civilizations developed highly organized societies, carried on an extensive trade, and created calendars that were based on accurate scientific observations. All three cultivated crops that provided a stable food supply, particularly corn for the Mayas and Aztecs and potatoes for the Incas.

Cultures of North America

The population in the region north of Mexico (present-day United States and Canada) in the 1490s may have been anywhere from under 1 million to more than 10 million. In general, the native societies in this region were smaller and less sophisticated than those in Mexico and South America. One reason for this was the slowness of the northward spread of corn cultivation from Mexico.

Some of the most populous and complex societies in North America had disappeared by the 15th century, for reasons not well understood. By the time of Columbus, most people in the Americas in what is now the United States and Canada lived in semipermanent settlements in groups seldom exceeding 300 people. The men spent their time making tools and hunting for game, while the women gathered plants and nuts or grew crops such as corn, beans, and tobacco.

NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE AMERICAS, 1491



Language Beyond these similarities, the cultures of American Indians were very diverse. For example, while English, Spanish, and almost all other European languages were part of just one language family (Indo-European), American Indian languages constituted more than 20 language families. Among the largest of these were Algonquian in the Northeast, Siouan on the Great Plains, and Athabaskan in the Southwest. Together, these 20 families included more than 400 distinct languages.

Southwest Settlements In the dry region that now includes New Mexico and Arizona, groups such as the Hohokam, Anasazi, and Pueblos evolved multifaceted societies supported by farming with irrigation systems. In large numbers they lived in caves, under cliffs, and in multistoried buildings. By the time Europeans arrived, extreme drought and other hostile natives had taken their toll on these groups. However, much of their way of life was preserved in the arid land and their stone and masonry dwellings.

Northwest Settlements Along the Pacific coast from what is today Alaska to northern California, people lived in permanent longhouses or plank houses. They had a rich diet based on hunting, fishing, and gathering nuts, berries, and roots. To save stories, legends, and myths, they carved large totem poles. The high mountain ranges in this region isolated tribes from one another, creating barriers to development.

Great Plains Most people who lived on the Great Plains were either nomadic hunters or sedentary people who farmed and traded. The nomadic tribes survived on hunting, principally the buffalo, which supplied their food as well as decorations, crafting tools, knives, and clothing. They lived in tepees, frames of poles covered in animal skins, which were easily disassembled and transported. While the farming tribes also hunted buffalo, they lived permanently in earthen lodges often along rivers. They raised corn, beans, and squash while actively trading with other tribes. Not until the 17th century did American Indians acquire horses by trading or stealing them from Spanish settlers. With horses, tribes such as the Lakota Sioux moved away from farming to hunting and easily following the buffalo across the plains. The plains tribes would at times merge or split apart as conditions changed. Migration also was common. For example, the Apaches gradually migrated southward from Canada to Texas.

Midwest Settlements East of the Mississippi River, the Woodland American Indians prospered with a rich food supply. Supported by hunting, fishing, and agriculture, many permanent settlements developed in the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys and elsewhere. The Adena-Hopewell culture, centered in what is now Ohio, is famous for the large earthen mounds it created, some as large as 300 feet long. One of the largest settlements in the Midwest was Cahokia (near present-day East St. Louis, Illinois), with as many as 30,000 inhabitants.

Northeast Settlements Some descendants of the Adena-Hopewell culture spread from the Ohio Valley into New York. Their culture combined hunting

and farming. However, their farming techniques exhausted the soil quickly, so people had to move to fresh land frequently. Among the most famous groups of American Indians in this region was the Iroquois Confederation, a political union of five independent tribes who lived in the Mohawk Valley of New York. The five tribes were the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk. Multiple families related through a mother lived in longhouses, up to 200 feet long. From the 16th century through the American Revolution, the Iroquois were a powerful force, battling rival American Indians as well as Europeans.

Atlantic Seaboard Settlements In the area from New Jersey south to Florida lived the people of the Coastal Plains. Many were descendants of the Woodland mound builders and built timber and bark lodgings along rivers. The rivers and the Atlantic Ocean provided a rich source of food.

Europe Moves Toward Exploration

Until the late 1400s, Americans and the people of Europe, Africa, and Asia had no knowledge of the people on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. While Vikings from Scandinavia had visited Greenland and North America around the year 1000, these voyages had no lasting impact. Columbus's voyages of exploration finally brought people into contact across the Atlantic. Several factors made an oceanic crossing and exploration possible in the late 15th century.

Improvements in Technology

In Europe, a rebirth of classical learning prompted an outburst of artistic and scientific activity in the 15th and 16th centuries known as the Renaissance. Several of the technological advances during the Renaissance resulted from Europeans making improvements in the inventions of others. For example, they began to use gunpowder (invented by the Chinese) and the sailing compass (adopted from Arab merchants who learned about it from the Chinese). Europeans also made major improvements in shipbuilding and mapmaking. In addition, the invention of the printing press in the 1450s aided the spread of knowledge across Europe.

Religious Conflict

The later years of the Renaissance were a time of intense religious zeal and conflict. The Roman Catholic Church that had once dominated Western Europe was threatened from without by Ottoman Turks who were followers of Islam and from within by a revolt against the pope's authority.

Catholic Victory in Spain In the 8th century, Islamic invaders from North Africa, known as Moors, rapidly conquered most of what is now Spain. Over the next several centuries, Spanish Christians reconquered much of the land and set up several independent kingdoms. Two of the largest of these kingdoms united when Isabella, queen of Castile, and Ferdinand, king of Aragon, married in 1469. In 1492, under the leadership of Isabella and Ferdinand, the Spanish conquered the last Moorish stronghold in Spain, the city of Granada. In that year, the monarchs also funded Christopher Columbus on his historic

first voyage. The uniting of Spain under Isabella and Ferdinand, the conquest of Granada, and the launching of Columbus signaled new leadership, hope, and power for Europeans who followed the Roman Catholic faith.

Protestant Revolt in Northern Europe In the early 1500s, certain Christians in Germany, England, France, Holland, and other northern European countries revolted against the authority of the pope in Rome. Their revolt was known as the Protestant Reformation. Conflict between Catholics and Protestants led to a series of religious wars. The conflict also caused the Catholics of Spain and Portugal and the Protestants of England and Holland to want to spread their own versions of Christianity to people in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Thus, a religious motive for exploration and colonization was added to political and economic motives.

Expanding Trade

Economic motives for exploration grew out of a fierce competition among European kingdoms for increased trade with Africa, India, and China. In the past, merchants had traveled from the Italian city-state of Venice and the Byzantine city of Constantinople on a long, slow, expensive overland route that reached all the way to the capital of the Chinese empire. This land route to Asia had become blocked in 1453 when the Ottoman Turks seized control of Constantinople.

New Routes So the challenge to finding a new way to the rich Asian trade appeared to be by sailing either south along the West African coast east to China, or sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. The Portuguese, who realized the route south and east was the shortest path, thought this option seemed more promising. Voyages of exploration sponsored by Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator eventually succeeded in opening up a long sea route around South Africa's Cape of Good Hope. In 1498, the Portuguese sea captain Vasco da Gama was the first European to reach India via this route. By this time, Columbus had attempted what he mistakenly believed would be a shorter route to Asia.

Slave Trading Since ancient times people in Europe, Africa, and Asia had enslaved people captured in wars. In the 15th century, the Portuguese began trading for slaves from West Africa. They used the slaves to work newly established sugar plantations on the Madeira and Azores islands off the African coast. Producing sugar with slave labor was so profitable that when Europeans later established colonies in the Americas, they used the slave system there.

African Resistance Enslaved Africans resisted slavery in whatever ways they could. Though transported thousands of miles from their homelands and brutally repressed, they often ran away, sabotaged work, or revolted. And for generations they maintained aspects of their African culture, particularly in music, religion, and folkways.

Developing Nation-States

Europe was also changing politically in the 15th century. Small kingdoms, such as Castile and Aragon, were uniting into larger ones. Enormous multiethnic empires, such as the sprawling Holy Roman Empire in central Europe, were

breaking up. Replacing the small kingdoms and the multiethnic empires were nation-states, countries in which the majority of people shared both a common culture and common loyalty toward a central government. The monarchs of the emerging nation-states, such as Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain; Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal; and similar monarchs of France, England, and the Netherlands; depended on trade to bring in needed revenues and on the church to justify their right to rule. They used their power to search for riches abroad and to spread the influence of their version of Christianity to new overseas dominions.

Early Explorations

Changing economic, political, and social conditions in Europe shaped the ambitions of the Italian-born Christopher Columbus.

Christopher Columbus

Columbus spent eight years seeking financial support for his plan to sail west from Europe to the "Indies." Finally, in 1492, he succeeded in winning the backing of Isabella and Ferdinand. The two Spanish monarchs were then at the height of their power, having just defeated the Moors in Granada. They agreed to outfit three ships and to make Columbus governor, admiral, and viceroy of all the lands that he would claim for Spain.

After sailing from the Canary Islands on September 6, Columbus landed on an island in the Bahamas on October 12. His success in reaching lands on the other side of the ocean brought him a burst of glory in Spain. But three subsequent voyages across the Atlantic were disappointing—he found little gold, few spices, and no simple path to China and India.

Columbus's Legacy Columbus died in 1506, still believing that he had found a western route to Asia. However, many Spaniards viewed Columbus as a failure because they suspected that he had found not a valuable trade route, but a "New World." Today, some people scoff at Columbus for having erroneously giving the people he encountered the name "Indians." Even the land that he had explored was named for someone else, Amerigo Vespucci, another Italian sailor. Columbus's critics also point out the many problems and injustices suffered by the natives of the Americas after Europeans arrived and took over their land.

Nevertheless, most historians agree on Columbus's importance. Modern scholars have recognized his great skills as a navigator and his daring commitment in going forth where nobody else had ever dared to venture. Furthermore, Columbus's voyages brought about, for the first time in history, permanent interaction between people from all over the globe. He changed the world forever.

Exchanges Europeans and the original inhabitants of the Americas had developed vastly different cultures over the millennia. The contact between them resulted in the Columbian Exchange, a transfer of plants, animals, and germs from one side of the Atlantic to the other for the first time. Europeans learned about many new plants and foods, including beans, corn, sweet and

white potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco. They also contracted a new disease, syphilis. Europeans introduced to the Americas sugar cane, bluegrasses, pigs, and horses, as well as the wheel, iron implements, and guns. Deadlier than all the guns was the European importation of germs and diseases, such as smallpox and measles, to which the natives had no immunity. Millions died (there was a mortality rate of more than 90 percent), including entire tribal communities. These exchanges, biological and cultural, would permanently change the entire world.

Dividing the Americas

Spain and Portugal were the first European kingdoms to claim territories in the Americas. Their claims overlapped, leading to disputes. The Catholic monarchs of the two countries turned to the pope in Rome to resolve their differences. In 1493, the pope drew a vertical, north-south line on a world map, called the *line of demarcation*. The pope granted Spain all lands to the west of the line and Portugal all lands to the east.

In 1494, Spain and Portugal moved the pope's line a few degrees to the west and signed an agreement called the Treaty of Tordesillas. The line passed through what is now the country of Brazil. This treaty, together with Portuguese explorations, established Portugal's claim to Brazil. Spain claimed the rest of the Americas. However, other European countries soon challenged these claims.

Spanish Exploration and Conquest

Spanish dominance in the Americas was based on more than a papal ruling and a treaty. Spain owed its expanding power to its explorers and conquerors (called *conquistadores*). Feats such as the journey across the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean by Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the circumnavigation of the world by one of Ferdinand Magellan's ships (Magellan died before completing the trip), the conquests of the Aztecs in Mexico by Hernan Cortés, and the conquest of the Incas in Peru by Francisco Pizarro secured Spain's initial supremacy in the Americas.

The conquistadores sent ships loaded with gold and silver back to Spain from Mexico and Peru. They increased the gold supply by more than 500 percent, making Spain the richest and most powerful nation in Europe. Spain's success encouraged other nations to turn to the Americas in search of gold and power. After seizing the wealth of the Indian empires, the Spanish instituted an *encomienda* system, with the king of Spain giving grants of land and natives to individual Spaniards. These Indians had to farm or work in the mines. The fruits of their labors went to their Spanish masters, who in turn had to "care" for them. As Europeans' diseases and brutality reduced the native population, the Spanish brought enslaved people from West Africa under the *asiento* system. This required the Spanish to pay a tax to their king on each slave they imported to the Americas.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS IN NORTH AMERICA
1600s



English Claims

England's earliest claims to territory in the Americas rested on the voyages of John Cabot, an Italian sea captain who sailed under contract to England's King Henry VII. Cabot explored the coast of Newfoundland in 1497.

England, however, did not follow up Cabot's discoveries with other expeditions of exploration and settlement. Other issues preoccupied England's monarchy in the 1500s, including Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1570s and 1580s, under Queen Elizabeth I, England challenged Spanish shipping in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Sir Francis Drake, for example, attacked Spanish ships, seized the gold and silver that they carried, and even attacked Spanish settlements on the coast of Peru. Another English adventurer, Sir Walter Raleigh, attempted to establish a settlement at Roanoke Island off the North Carolina coast in 1587, but the venture failed.

French Claims

The French monarchy first showed interest in exploration in 1524 when it sponsored a voyage by an Italian navigator, Giovanni da Verrazano. Hoping to find a northwest passage leading through the Americas to Asia, Verrazano explored part of North America's eastern coast, including the New York harbor. French claims to American territory were also based on the voyages of Jacques Cartier (1534–1542), who explored the St. Lawrence River extensively.

Like the English, the French were slow to develop colonies across the Atlantic. During the 1500s, the French monarchy was preoccupied with European wars as well as with internal religious conflict between Roman Catholics and French Protestants known as Huguenots. Only in the next century did France develop a strong interest in following up its claims to North American land.

The first permanent French settlement in America was established by Samuel de Champlain in 1608 at Quebec, a fortified village on the St. Lawrence River. Champlain's strong leadership won him the nickname "Father of New France." Other explorers extended French claims across a vast territory. In 1673, Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette explored the upper Mississippi River, and in 1682, Robert de La Salle explored the Mississippi basin, which he named Louisiana (after the French king, Louis XIV).

Dutch Claims

During the 1600s, the Netherlands also began to sponsor voyages of exploration. The Dutch government hired Henry Hudson, an experienced English sailor, to seek westward passage to Asia through northern America. In 1609, while searching for a northwest passage, Hudson sailed up a broad river that was later named for him, the Hudson River. This expedition established Dutch claims to the surrounding area that would become New Amsterdam (and later New York). The Dutch government granted a private company, the Dutch West India Company, the right to control the region for economic gain.

Spanish Settlements in North America

Spanish settlements developed slowly in North America, as a result of limited mineral resources and strong opposition from American Indians.

Florida After a number of failed attempts and against the strong resistance of American Indians in the region, the Spanish established a permanent settlement at St. Augustine in 1565. Today, St. Augustine is the oldest city in North America founded by Europeans.

New Mexico Santa Fe was established as the capital of New Mexico in 1610. Harsh efforts to Christianize the American Indians caused the Pueblo people to revolt in 1680. The Spanish were driven from the area until 1692.

Texas In between Florida and New Mexico, the Spanish established settlements in Texas. These communities grew in the early 1700s as Spain attempted to resist French efforts to explore the lower Mississippi River.

California In response to Russian exploration from Alaska, the Spanish established permanent settlements at San Diego in 1769 and San Francisco in 1776. By 1784, a series of missions or settlements had been established along the California coast by members of the Franciscan order. Father Junípero Serra founded nine of these missions.

European Treatment of Native Americans

Most Europeans looked down upon Native Americans. The Europeans who colonized North and South America generally viewed Native Americans as inferior people who could be exploited for economic gain, converted to Christianity, and used as military allies. However, Europeans used various approaches for controlling Native Americans and operating their colonies.

Spanish Policy

The Spanish who settled in Mexico and Peru encountered the highly organized Aztec and Inca empires. Even after diseases killed most natives, millions remained in these empires that the Spanish could incorporate as laborers in their own empire. Many natives who did not die from disease died from forced labor. Because few families came from Spain to settle the empire, the explorers and soldiers intermarried with natives as well as with Africans. The latter were captured in Africa and forced to travel across the ocean to provide slave labor for the Spanish colonists. A rigid class system developed in the Spanish colonies, one dominated by pure-blooded Spaniards.

Bartolomé de Las Casas One European who dissented from the views of most Europeans toward Native Americans was a Spanish priest named Bartolomé de Las Casas. Though he had owned land and slaves in the West Indies and had fought in wars against the Indians, he eventually became an advocate for better treatment for Indians. He persuaded the king to institute the New Laws of 1542. These laws ended Indian slavery, halted forced Indian labor, and began to end the encomienda system which kept the Indians in serfdom. Conservative Spaniards, eager to keep the encomienda system, responded and successfully pushed the king to repeal parts of the New Laws.

Valladolid Debate The debate over the role for Indians in the Spanish colonies came to a head in a formal debate in 1550–1551 in Valladolid, Spain. On one side, Las Casas argued that the Indians were completely human and morally equal to Europeans, so enslaving them was not justified. On the other side, another priest, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, argued that Indians were less than human. Hence, they benefited from serving the Spaniards in the encomienda system. Neither side clearly won the debate. Though Las Casas was unable to gain equal treatment for Native Americans, he established the basic arguments on behalf of justice for Indians.

English Policy

Unlike the Spanish, the English settled in areas without large native empires that could be controlled as a workforce. In addition, many English colonists came in families rather than as single young men, so marriage with natives was less common. Initially, at least in Massachusetts, the English and the American Indians coexisted, traded, and shared ideas. American Indians taught the settlers how to grow new crops such as corn and showed them how to hunt in the forests. They traded various furs for an array of English manufactured goods, including iron tools and weapons. But peaceful relations soon gave way to conflict and open warfare. The English had no respect for American Indian cultures, which they viewed as primitive or “savage.” For their part, American Indians saw their way of life threatened as the English began to take more land to support their ever-increasing population. The English occupied the land and forced the small, scattered tribes they encountered to move away from the coast to inland territories. They expelled the natives rather than subjugating them.

French Policy

The French, looking for furs and converts to Catholicism, viewed American Indians as potential economic and military allies. Compared to the Spaniards and the English, the French maintained good relations with the tribes they encountered. Seeking to control the fur trade, the French built trading posts throughout the St. Lawrence Valley, the Great Lakes region, and along the Mississippi River. At these posts, they exchanged French goods for beaver pelts and other furs collected by American Indians. Because the French had few colonists, farms, or towns, they posed less threat to the native population than did other Europeans. In addition, French soldiers assisted the Huron people in fighting their traditional enemy, the Iroquois.

Native American Reaction

North American tribes saw themselves as groups distinct from each other, not as part of a larger body of Native Americans. As a result, European settlers rarely had to be concerned with a unified response from the Native Americans. Initially the European goods such as copper pots and guns had motivated the natives to interact with the strangers. After the decimation of their peoples from the violence and disease of the Europeans, the Native Americans had to adopt new ways to survive. Upon observing the Europeans fighting each other, some tribes allied themselves with one European power or another in hopes of gaining support in order to survive. A number of tribes simply migrated to new land to get away from the slowly encroaching settlers. Regardless of how they dealt with the European invasion, Native Americans would never be able to return to the life they had known prior to 1492.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WAS COLUMBUS A GREAT HERO?

Over the centuries, Columbus has received both praise for his role as a “discoverer” and blame for his actions as a “conqueror.” In the United States, he has traditionally been viewed as a hero. As early as 1828, Washington Irving wrote a popular biography extolling the explorer’s virtues. The apex of Columbus’s heroic reputation was reached in 1934 when President Franklin Roosevelt declared October 12 a national holiday.

Since the 1990s, however, revisionist histories and biographies have been highly critical of Columbus. His detractors argue that Columbus was simply at the right place at the right time. Europe at the end of the 15th century was ready to expand. If Columbus had not crossed the Atlantic in 1492, some other explorer—perhaps Vespucci or Cabot—would have done so a few years later. According to this interpretation, Columbus was little more than a good navigator and a self-promoter who exploited an opportunity.

Some revisionists take a harsh view of Columbus and regard him not as the first discoverer of America but rather as its first conqueror. They portray him as a religious fanatic in the European Christian tradition who sought to convert the American natives to Christianity and liquidated those who resisted.

The revisionist argument has not gone unanswered. For example, historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. has argued that the chief motivation for Columbus’s deeds was neither greed for gold nor ambition for conquest. What drove him, in Schlesinger’s view, was the challenge of the unknown. Columbus’s apologists admit that millions of Native Americans died as a result of European exploration in the Americas, but they point out that an unknown number had suffered horrible deaths in Aztec sacrifices. Moreover, the mistreatment of Native Americans was perhaps partially offset by such positive results as the gradual development of democratic institutions in the colonies and later the United States.

Historians will continue to debate the nature of Columbus’s achievement. As with other historical questions, distinguishing between fact and fiction and separating a writer’s personal biases from objective reality is difficult. One conclusion is inescapable: As a result of Columbus’s voyages, world history took a sharp turn in a new direction. His explorations established a permanent point of contact between Europeans and the first Americans, and soon between both groups and Africans. People are still living with the consequences of this interaction.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
Exchange and Interaction (WXT, ENV) corn horses disease	Identity and Politics (ID, POL) Mayas Incas Aztecs conquistadores Hernan Cortés Francisco Pizarro New Laws of 1542 Roanoke Island	American Indians (PEO, POL) Algonquian Siouan Iroquois Confederation longhouses
Labor Systems (WXT) encomienda system asiento system slavery	Atlantic Trade (WOR) compass printing press Ferdinand and Isabella Protestant Reformation Henry the Navigator Christopher Columbus Treaty of Tordesillas slave trade nation-state	Search for Resources (ENV) John Cabot Jacques Cartier Samuel de Champlain Henry Hudson
Migration (PEO) land bridge Adena-Hopewell Hokokam, Anasazi, and Pueblos Woodland mound builders Lakota Sioux		Values and Attitudes (CUL) Bartolomé de Las Casas Valladolid Debate Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda

THE THIRTEEN COLONIES AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE, 1607–1754

If they desire that Piety and godliness should prosper; accompanied with sobriety, justice and love, let them choose a Country such as this is; even like France, or England, which may yield sufficiency with hard labour and industry. . . .

Reverend John White, *The Planter's Plea*, 1630

Starting with Jamestown (Virginia) in 1607 and ending with Georgia in 1733, a total of 13 distinct English colonies developed along the Atlantic Coast of North America. Every colony received its identity and its authority to operate by means of a charter (a document granting special privileges) from the English monarch. Each charter described in general terms the relationship that was supposed to exist between the colony and the crown. Over time, three types of charters—and three types of colonies—developed:

- Corporate colonies, such as Jamestown, were operated by joint-stock companies, at least during these colonies' early years.
- Royal colonies, such as Virginia after 1624, were to be under the direct authority and rule of the king's government.
- Proprietary colonies, such as Maryland and Pennsylvania, were under the authority of individuals granted charters of ownership by the king.

Unlike the French and Spanish colonists, the English brought a tradition of representative government. They were accustomed to holding elections for representatives who would speak for property owners and decide important measures, such as taxes, proposed by the king's government. While political and religious conflicts dominated England, feelings for independence grew in the colonies. Eventually, tensions emerged between the king and his colonial subjects. This chapter summarizes the development of the English colonies.

Early English Settlements

In the early 1600s, England was finally in a position to colonize the lands explored more than a century earlier by John Cabot. By defeating a large Spanish fleet—the Spanish Armada—in 1588, England had gained a reputation as a major naval power. Also in this period, England's population was growing rapidly while its economy was depressed. The number of poor and landless people increased, people who were attracted to opportunities in the Americas. The English devised a practical method for financing the costly and risky enterprise of founding colonies. A joint-stock company pooled the savings of many investors, thereby spreading the risk. Thus, colonies on the North Atlantic Coast were able to attract large numbers of English settlers.

Jamestown

England's King James I chartered the Virginia Company, a joint-stock company that founded the first permanent English colony in America at Jamestown in 1607.

Early Problems The first settlers of Jamestown suffered greatly, mostly from their own mistakes. The settlement's location in a swampy area along the James River resulted in fatal outbreaks of dysentery and malaria. Moreover, many of the settlers were gentlemen unaccustomed to physical work. Others were gold-seeking adventurers who refused to hunt or farm. One key source of goods was from trade with American Indians—but when conflicts erupted between settlers and the natives, trade would stop and settlers went hungry. Starvation was a persistent issue in Jamestown.

Through the forceful leadership of Captain John Smith, Jamestown survived its first five years, but barely. Then, through the efforts of John Rolfe and his Indian wife, Pocahontas, the colony developed a new variety of tobacco that would become popular in Europe and become a profitable crop.

Transition to a Royal Colony Despite tobacco, by 1624 the Virginia colony remained near collapse. More than 6,000 people had settled there, but only 2,000 remained alive. Further, the Virginia Company made unwise decisions that placed it heavily in debt. King James I had seen enough. He revoked the charter of the bankrupt company and took direct control of the colony. Now known as Virginia, the colony became England's first royal colony.

Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay

Religious motivation, not the search for wealth, was the principal force behind the settlement of two other English colonies, Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. Both were settled by English Protestants who dissented from the official government-supported Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. The leader of the Church of England was the monarch of England. The Church of England had broken away from the control of the pope in Rome, so it was no longer part of the Roman Catholic Church. However, it had kept most of

the Catholic rituals and governing structure. The dissenters, influenced by the teachings of Swiss theologian John Calvin, charged that the Church of England should break more completely with Rome. In addition, the dissenters adopted Calvin's doctrine of predestination, the belief that God guides those he has selected for salvation even before their birth. England's King James I, who reigned from 1603 to 1625, viewed the religious dissenters as a threat to his religious and political authority and ordered them arrested and jailed.

The Plymouth Colony

Radical dissenters to the Church of England were known as the Separatists because they wanted to organize a completely separate church that was independent of royal control. Several hundred Separatists left England for Holland in search of religious freedom. Because of their travels, they became known as Pilgrims. Economic hardship and cultural differences with the Dutch led many of the Pilgrims to seek another haven for their religion. They chose the new colony in America, then operated by the Virginia Company of London. In 1620, a small group of Pilgrims set sail for Virginia aboard the *Mayflower*. Fewer than half of the 100 passengers on this ship were Separatists; the rest were people who had economic motives for making the voyage.

After a hard and stormy voyage of 65 days, the *Mayflower* dropped anchor off the Massachusetts coast, a few hundred miles to the north of the intended destination in Virginia. Rather than going on to Jamestown as planned, the Pilgrims decided to establish a new colony at Plymouth.

Early Hardships After a first winter that saw half their number perish, the settlers at Plymouth were helped to adapt to the land by friendly American Indians. They celebrated a good harvest at a thanksgiving feast (the first Thanksgiving) in 1621. Under strong leaders, including Captain Miles Standish and Governor William Bradford, the Plymouth colony grew slowly but remained small. Fish, furs, and lumber became the mainstays of the economy.

Massachusetts Bay Colony

A group of more moderate dissenters believed that the Church of England could be reformed. Because they wanted to purify the church, they became known as Puritans. The persecution of Puritans increased when a new king, Charles I, took the throne in 1625. Seeking religious freedom, a group of Puritans gained a royal charter for the Massachusetts Bay Company (1629).

In 1630, about a thousand Puritans led by John Winthrop sailed for the Massachusetts shore and founded Boston and several other towns. A civil war in England in the 1630s drove some 15,000 more settlers to the Massachusetts Bay Colony—a movement known as the Great Migration.

Early Political Institutions

From their very beginning, the American colonies began taking steps toward self-rule.

Representative Assembly in Virginia The Virginia Company encouraged settlement in Jamestown by guaranteeing colonists the same rights as residents of England, including representation in the lawmaking process. In 1619, just 12 years after the founding of Jamestown, Virginia's colonists organized the first representative assembly in America, the House of Burgesses.

Representative Government in New England Aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620, the Pilgrims drew up and signed a document that pledged them to make decisions by the will of the majority. This document, known as the Mayflower Compact, was an early form of colonial self-government and a rudimentary written constitution.

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, all freemen—male members of the Puritan Church—had the right to participate in yearly elections of the colony's governor, his assistants, and a representative assembly.

Limits to Colonial Democracy Despite these steps, most colonists were excluded from the political process. Only male property owners could vote for representatives. Those who were either female or landless had few rights; slaves and indentured servants had practically none at all. Also, many colonial governors ruled with autocratic or unlimited powers, answering only to the king or others in England who provided the colonies' financial support. Thus, the gradual development of democratic ideas in the colonies coexisted with antidemocratic practices such as slavery and the widespread mistreatment of American Indians.

The Chesapeake Colonies

In 1632, King Charles I subdivided the Virginia colony. He chartered a new colony on either side of Chesapeake Bay and granted control of it to George Calvert (Lord Baltimore), as a reward for this Catholic nobleman's service to the crown. The new colony of Maryland thus became the first proprietary colony.

Religious Issues in Maryland

The king expected proprietors to carry out his wishes faithfully, thus giving him control over a colony. The first Lord Baltimore died before he could achieve great wealth in his colony while also providing a haven for his fellow Catholics. The Maryland proprietorship passed to his son, Cecil Calvert—the second Lord Baltimore—who set about implementing his father's plan in 1634.

Act of Toleration To avoid persecution in England, several wealthy English Catholics emigrated to Maryland and established large colonial plantations. They were quickly outnumbered, however, by Protestant farmers. Protestants therefore held a majority in Maryland's assembly. In 1649, Calvert persuaded the assembly to adopt the Act of Toleration, the first colonial statute granting religious freedom to all Christians. However, the statute also called for the death of anyone who denied the divinity of Jesus.

Protestant Revolt In the late 1600s, Protestant resentment against a Catholic proprietor erupted into a brief civil war. The Protestants triumphed, and the Act of Toleration was repealed. Catholics lost their right to vote in elections for the Maryland assembly. In the 18th century, Maryland's economy and society was much like that of neighboring Virginia, except that in Maryland there was greater tolerance of religious diversity among different Protestant sects.

Labor Shortages

In both Maryland and Virginia, landowners saw great opportunities. They could get land, either by taking it from or trading for it with American Indians, and Europeans had a growing demand for tobacco. However, they could not find enough laborers. For example, in Virginia, the high death rate from disease, food shortages, and battles with American Indians meant that the population grew slowly. Landowners tried several ways to find the workers they wanted.

Indentured Servants At first, the Virginia Company hoped to meet the need for labor using indentured servants. Under contract with a master or landowner who paid for their passage, young people from the British Isles agreed to work for a specified period—usually between four to seven years—in return for room and board. In effect, indentured servants were under the absolute rule of their masters until the end of their work period. At the expiration of that period, they gained their freedom and either worked for wages or obtained land of their own to farm. For landowners, the system provided laborers, but only temporarily.

Headright System Virginia attempted to attract immigrants through offers of land. The colony offered 50 acres of land to (1) each immigrant who paid for his own passage and (2) any plantation owner who paid for an immigrant's passage.

Slavery In 1619, a Dutch ship brought an unusual group of indentured servants to Virginia: they were black Africans. Because English law at that time did not recognize hereditary slavery, the first Africans in Virginia were not in bondage for life, and any children born to them were free. Moreover, the early colonists were struggling to survive and too poor to purchase the Africans who were being imported as slaves for sugar plantations in the West Indies. By 1650, there were only about 400 African laborers in Virginia. However, by the end of the 1660s, the Virginia House of Burgesses had enacted laws that discriminated between blacks and whites. Africans and their offspring were to be kept in permanent bondage. They were slaves.

Economic Problems Beginning in the 1660s, low tobacco prices, due largely to overproduction, brought hard times to the Chesapeake colonies Maryland and Virginia. When Virginia's House of Burgesses attempted to raise tobacco prices, the merchants of London retaliated by raising their own prices on goods exported to Virginia.

Conflict in Virginia

Sir William Berkeley, the royal governor of Virginia (1641–1652; 1660–1677), used dictatorial powers to govern on behalf of the large planters. He antagonized small farmers on Virginia's western frontier because he failed to protect them from Indian attacks.

Bacon's Rebellion Nathaniel Bacon, an impoverished gentleman farmer, seized upon the grievances of the western farmers to lead a rebellion against Berkeley's government. Bacon and others resented the economic and political control exercised by a few large planters in the Chesapeake area. He raised an army of volunteers and, in 1676, conducted a series of raids and massacres against American Indian villages on the Virginia frontier. Berkeley's government in Jamestown accused Bacon of rebelling against royal authority. Bacon's army succeeded in defeating the governor's forces and even burned the Jamestown settlement. Soon afterward, Bacon died of dysentery and the rebel army collapsed. Governor Berkeley brutally suppressed the remnants of the insurrection, executing 23 rebels.

Lasting Problems Although it was short-lived, Bacon's Rebellion, or the Chesapeake Revolution, highlighted two long-lasting disputes in colonial Virginia: (1) sharp class differences between wealthy planters and landless or poor farmers, and (2) colonial resistance to royal control. These problems would continue into the next century, even after the general conditions of life in the Chesapeake colonies became more stable and prosperous.

Development of New England

Strong religious convictions helped sustain settlers in their struggle to establish the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies. However, Puritan leaders showed intolerance of anyone who questioned their religious teachings. The Puritans often banished dissidents from the Bay colony. These banished dissidents formed settlements that would develop into Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Rhode Island Roger Williams went to Boston in 1631 as a respected Puritan minister. He believed, however, that the individual's conscience was beyond the control of any civil or church authority. His teachings on this point placed him in conflict with other Puritan leaders, who ordered his banishment from the Bay colony. Leaving Boston, Williams fled southward to Narragansett Bay, where he and a few followers founded the settlement of Providence in 1636. The new colony was unique in two respects. First, it recognized the rights of American Indians and paid them for the use of their land. Second, Williams' government allowed Catholics, Quakers, and Jews to worship freely. Williams also founded one of the first Baptist churches in America.

Another dissident who questioned the doctrines of the Puritan authorities was Anne Hutchinson. She believed in *antinomianism*—the idea that faith alone, not deeds, is necessary for salvation. Banished from the Bay colony, Hutchinson and a group of followers founded the colony of Portsmouth in

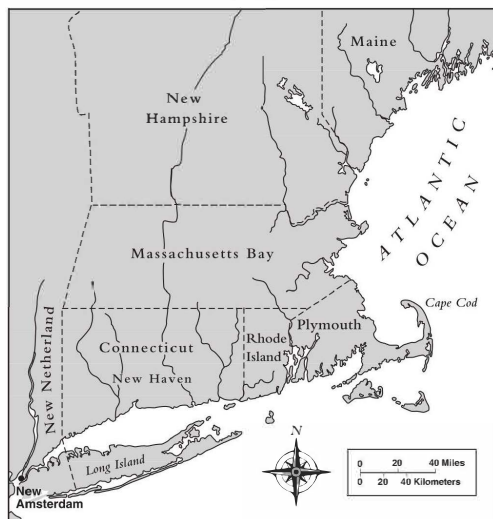
1638, not far from Williams' colony of Providence. A few years later, Hutchinson migrated to Long Island and was killed in an American Indian uprising.

In 1644, Roger Williams was granted a charter from the Parliament that joined Providence and Portsmouth into a single colony, Rhode Island. Because this colony tolerated diverse beliefs, it served as a refuge for many.

Connecticut To the west of Rhode Island, the fertile Connecticut River Valley attracted other settlers who were unhappy with the Massachusetts authorities. The Reverend Thomas Hooker led a large group of Boston Puritans into the valley and founded the colony of Hartford in 1636. The Hartford settlers then drew up the first written constitution in American history, the *Fundamental Orders of Connecticut* (1639). It established a representative government consisting of a legislature elected by popular vote and a governor chosen by that legislature. South of Hartford, a second settlement in the Connecticut Valley was started by John Davenport in 1637 and given the name New Haven.

In 1665, New Haven joined with the more democratic Hartford settlers to form the colony of Connecticut. The royal charter for Connecticut granted it a limited degree of self-government, including election of the governor.

NEW ENGLAND AND ATLANTIC COLONIES
1600s



New Hampshire The last colony to be founded in New England was New Hampshire. Originally part of Massachusetts Bay, it consisted of a few settlements north of Boston. Hoping to increase royal control over the colonies, King Charles II separated New Hampshire from the Bay colony in 1679 and made it a royal colony, subject to the authority of an appointed governor.

Halfway Covenant In the 1660s, a generation had passed since the founding of the first Puritan colonies in New England. To be a full member of a Puritan congregation, an individual needed to have felt a profound religious experience known as a conversion. However, fewer members of the new native-born generation were having such experiences. In an effort to maintain the church's influence and membership, a *halfway covenant* was offered by some clergy. Under this, people could become partial church members even if they had not had felt a conversion.

Other ministers rejected the halfway covenant and denounced it from the pulpit. Nevertheless, as the years passed, strict Puritan practices weakened in most New England communities in order to maintain church membership.

New England Confederation In the 1640s, the New England colonies faced the constant threat of attack from American Indians, the Dutch, and the French. Because England was in the midst of a civil war, the colonists could expect little assistance. Therefore in 1643, four New England colonies (Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Haven) formed a military alliance known as the New England Confederation. The confederation was directed by a board composed of two representatives from each colony. It had limited powers to act on boundary disputes, the return of runaway servants, and dealings with American Indians.

The confederation lasted until 1684, when colonial rivalries and renewed control by the English monarch brought this first experiment in colonial cooperation to an end. It was important because it established a precedent for colonies taking unified action toward a common purpose.

King Philip's War Only a few years before the confederation's demise, it helped the New England colonists cope successfully with a dire threat. A chief of the Wampanoags named Metacom—known to the colonists as King Philip—united many tribes in southern New England against the English settlers, who were constantly encroaching on the American Indians' lands. In a vicious war (1675–1676), thousands on both sides were killed, and dozens of towns and villages were burned. Eventually, the colonial forces prevailed, killing King Philip and ending most American Indian resistance in New England.

Restoration Colonies

New American colonies were founded in the late 17th century during a period in English history known as the Restoration. (The name refers to the restoration to power of an English monarch, Charles II, in 1660 following a brief period of Puritan rule under Oliver Cromwell.)

The Carolinas

As a reward for helping him gain the throne, Charles II granted a huge tract of land between Virginia and Spanish Florida to eight nobles, who in 1663 became the lord proprietors of the Carolinas. In 1729, two royal colonies, South Carolina and North Carolina, were formed from the original grant.

THE THIRTEEN ENGLISH COLONIES
AROUND 1750



South Carolina In 1670, in the southern Carolinas, a few colonists from England and some planters from the island of Barbados founded a town named for their king. Initially, the southern economy was based on trading furs and providing food for the West Indies. By the middle of the 18th century, South Carolina's large rice-growing plantations worked by enslaved Africans resembled the economy and culture of the West Indies.

North Carolina The northern part of the Carolinas developed differently. There, farmers from Virginia and New England established small, self-sufficient tobacco farms. The region had few good harbors and poor transportation; therefore, compared to South Carolina, there were fewer large plantations and less reliance on slavery. North Carolina in the 18th century earned a reputation for democratic views and autonomy from British control.

New York

Charles II wished to consolidate the crown's holdings along the Atlantic Coast and close the gap between the New England and the Chesapeake colonies. This required compelling the Dutch to give up their colony of New Amsterdam centered on Manhattan Island and the Hudson River Valley.

In 1664, the king granted his brother, the Duke of York (the future James II), the lands lying between Connecticut and Delaware Bay. As the lord high admiral of the navy, James dispatched a force that easily took control of the Dutch colony from its governor, Peter Stuyvesant. James ordered his agents in the renamed colony of New York to treat the Dutch settlers well and to allow them freedom to worship as they pleased and speak their own language.

James also ordered new taxes, duties, and rents without seeking the consent of a representative assembly. In fact, he insisted that no assembly should be allowed to form in his colony. But taxation without representation met strong opposition from New York's English-speaking settlers, most of whom were Puritans from New England. Finally, in 1683, James yielded by allowing New York's governor to grant broad civil and political rights, including a representative assembly.

New Jersey

Believing that the territory of New York was too large to administer, James split it in 1664. He gave the section of the colony located between the Hudson River and Delaware Bay to Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret. In 1674, one proprietor received West New Jersey and the other East New Jersey. To attract settlers, both proprietors made generous land offers and allowed religious freedom and an assembly. Eventually, they sold their proprietary interests to various groups of Quakers. Land titles in the Jerseys changed hands repeatedly, and inaccurate property lines added to the general confusion. To settle matters, the crown decided in 1702 to combine the two Jerseys into a single royal colony: New Jersey.

Pennsylvania and Delaware

To the west of New Jersey lay a broad expanse of forested land that was originally settled by a peace-loving Christian sect, the Quakers.

Quakers Members of the Religious Society of Friends—commonly known as Quakers—believed in the equality of all men and women, nonviolence, and resistance to military service. They further believed that religious authority was found within each person’s soul and not in the Bible and not in any outside source. Such views posed a radical challenge to established authority. Therefore, the Quakers of England were persecuted and jailed for their beliefs.

William Penn William Penn was a young convert to the Quaker faith. His father had served the king as a victorious admiral. Although the elder Penn opposed his son’s religious beliefs, he respected William’s sincerity and bequeathed him considerable wealth. In addition, the royal family owed the father a large debt, which they paid to William in 1681 in the form of a grant of American land for a colony that he called Pennsylvania, or Penn’s woods.

“The Holy Experiment” Penn put his Quaker beliefs to the test in his colony. He wanted his new colony to provide a religious refuge for Quakers and other persecuted people, to enact liberal ideas in government, and generate income and profits for himself. He provided the colony with a Frame of Government (1682–1683), which guaranteed a representative assembly elected by landowners, and a written constitution, the Charter of Liberties (1701), which guaranteed freedom of worship for all and unrestricted immigration.

Unlike other colonial proprietors, who governed from afar in England, Penn crossed the ocean to supervise the founding of a new town on the Delaware River named Philadelphia. He brought with him a plan for a grid pattern of streets, which was later imitated by other American cities. Also unusual was Penn’s attempt to treat the American Indians fairly and not to cheat them when purchasing their land.

To attract settlers to his new land, Penn hired agents and published notices throughout Europe, which promised political and religious freedom and generous land terms. Penn’s lands along the Delaware River had previously been settled by several thousand Dutch and Swedish colonists, who eased the arrival of the newcomers attracted by Penn’s promotion.

Delaware In 1702, Penn granted the lower three counties of Pennsylvania their own assembly. In effect, Delaware became a separate colony, even though its governor was the same as Pennsylvania’s until the American Revolution.

Georgia: The Last Colony

In 1732, a thirteenth colony, Georgia, was chartered. It was the last of the British colonies and the only one to receive direct financial support from the government in London. There were two reasons for British interest in starting a new southern colony. First, Britain wanted to create a defensive buffer to protect the prosperous South Carolina plantations from the threat of Spanish

Florida. Second, thousands of people in England were being imprisoned for debt. Wealthy philanthropists thought it would relieve the overcrowded jails if debtors were shipped to an American colony to start life over.

Special Regulations Given a royal charter for a proprietary colony, a group of philanthropists led by James Oglethorpe founded Georgia’s first settlement, Savannah, in 1733. Oglethorpe acted as the colony’s first governor and put into effect an elaborate plan for making the colony thrive. There were strict regulations, including bans on drinking rum and slavery. Nevertheless, partly because of the constant threat of Spanish attack, the colony did not prosper.

Royal Colony By 1752, Oglethorpe and his group gave up their plan. Taken over by the British government, Georgia became a royal colony. Restrictions on rum and slavery were dropped. The colony grew slowly by adopting the plantation system of South Carolina. Even so, at the time of the American Revolution, Georgia was the smallest and poorest of the 13 colonies.

Mercantilism and the Empire

Most European kingdoms in the 17th century adopted the economic policy of *mercantilism*, which looked upon trade, colonies, and the accumulation of wealth as the basis for a country’s military and political strength. According to mercantilist doctrine, a government should regulate trade and production to enable it to become self-sufficient. Colonies were to provide raw materials to the parent country for the growth and profit of that country’s industries. Colonies existed for one purpose only: to enrich the parent country.

Mercantilist policies had guided both the Spanish and the French colonies from their inception. Mercantilism began to be applied to the English colonies, however, only after the turmoil of England’s civil war had subsided.

Acts of Trade and Navigation England’s government implemented a mercantilist policy with a series of Navigation Acts between 1650 and 1673, which established three rules for colonial trade:

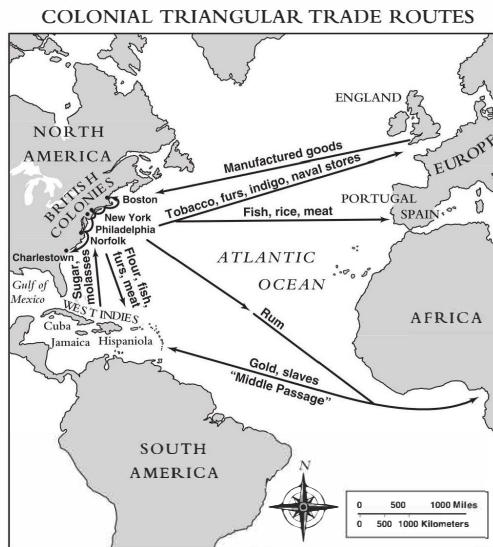
1. Trade to and from the colonies could be carried only by English or colonial-built ships, which could be operated only by English or colonial crews.
2. All goods imported into the colonies, except for some perishables, had to pass through ports in England.
3. Specified or “enumerated” goods from the colonies could be exported to England only. Tobacco was the original “enumerated” good, but over the years, the list was greatly expanded.

Impact on the Colonies The Navigation Acts had mixed effects on the colonies. The acts caused New England shipbuilding to prosper, provided Chesapeake tobacco with a monopoly in England, and provided English military forces to protect the colonies from potential attacks by the French and Spanish. However, the acts also severely limited the development of colonial

manufacturing, forced Chesapeake farmers to accept low prices for their crops, and caused colonists to pay high prices for manufactured goods from England.

In many respects, mercantilist regulations were unnecessary, since England would have been the colonies' primary trading partner in any case. Furthermore, the economic advantages from the Navigation Acts were offset by their negative political effects on British-colonial relations. Colonists resented the regulatory laws imposed by the distant government in London. Especially in New England, colonists defied the acts by smuggling in French, Dutch, and other goods.

Enforcement of the Acts The British government was often lax in enforcing the acts, and its agents in the colonies were known for their corruption. Occasionally, however, the crown would attempt to overcome colonial resistance to its trade laws. In 1684, it revoked the charter of Massachusetts Bay because that colony had been the center of smuggling activity.



The Dominion of New England A new king, James II, succeeded to the throne in 1685. He was determined to increase royal control over the colonies by combining them into larger administrative units and doing away with their representative assemblies. In 1686, he combined New York, New Jersey, and the various New England colonies into a single unit called the Dominion of New England. Sir Edmund Andros was sent from England to serve as governor of

the dominion. The new governor made himself instantly unpopular by levying taxes, limiting town meetings, and revoking land titles.

James II did not remain in power for long. His attempts at asserting his royal powers led to an uprising against him. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 succeeded in deposing James and replacing him with two new sovereigns, William and Mary. James's fall from power brought the Dominion of New England to an end and the colonies again operated under separate charters.

Permanent Restrictions Despite the Glorious Revolution, mercantilist policies remained in force. In the 18th century, there were more English officials in the colonies than in any earlier era. Restrictions on colonial trade, though poorly enforced, were widely resented and resisted.

The Institution of Slavery

More important than mercantilism in the early 18th century was the growth of slavery. By 1750, half of Virginia's population and two-thirds of South Carolina's population were enslaved.

Increased Demand for Slaves The following factors explain why slavery became increasingly important, especially in the southern colonies:

1. **Reduced migration:** Increases in wages in England reduced the supply of immigrants to the colonies.
2. **Dependable workforce:** Large plantation owners were disturbed by the political demands of small farmers and indentured servants and by the disorders of Bacon's Rebellion (see page 29). They thought that slavery would provide a stable labor force totally under their control.
3. **Cheap labor:** As tobacco prices fell, rice and indigo became the most profitable crops. To grow such crops required a large land area and many inexpensive, relatively unskilled field hands.

Slave Laws As the number of slaves increased, white colonists adopted laws to ensure that African Americans would be held in bondage for life and that slave status would be inherited. In 1641, Massachusetts became the first colony to recognize the enslavement of "lawful" captives. Virginia in 1661 enacted legislation stating that children automatically inherited their mother's enslaved status for life. By 1664, Maryland declared that baptism did not affect the enslaved person's status, and that white women could not marry African American men. It became customary for whites to regard all blacks as social inferiors. Racism and slavery soon became integral to colonial society.

Triangular Trade In the 17th century, English trade in enslaved Africans had been monopolized by a single company, the Royal African Company. But after this monopoly expired, many New England merchants entered the lucrative slave trade. Merchant ships would regularly follow a triangular, or three-part, trade route. First, a ship starting from a New England port such as Boston would carry rum across the Atlantic to West Africa. There the rum would be traded for hundreds of captive Africans. Next, the ship would set out on the horrendous

Middle Passage. Those Africans who survived the frightful voyage would be traded as slaves in the West Indies for a cargo of sugarcane. Third, completing the last side of the triangle, the ship would return to a New England port where the sugar would be sold to be used in making rum. Every time one type of cargo was traded for another, the slave-trading entrepreneur usually succeeded in making a substantial profit.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: HOW INFLUENTIAL WERE THE PURITANS?

To what extent did the Puritan founders of Massachusetts shape the development of an American culture? Although some early historians such as James Truslow Adams have minimized the Puritan role, more recent scholars generally agree that the Puritans made significant cultural and intellectual contributions. There is continuing disagreement, however, about whether the Puritan influence encouraged an individualistic spirit or just the opposite.

Some historians have concentrated their study on the writings and sermons of the Puritan clergy and other leaders. They have concluded that the leaders stressed conformity to a strict moral code and exhorted people to sacrifice their individuality for the common good. According to these historians, in other words, the Puritan influence tended to suppress the individualism that later came to characterize American culture.

Other historians believe that the opposite is true. They raise objections to the method of studying only sermons and the journals of leading Puritans such as John Winthrop. If one examines the writings and actions of ordinary colonists in Massachusetts society, say these historians, then one observes many instances of independent thought and action by individuals in Puritan society. According to their argument, American individualism began with the Puritan colonists.

KEY TERMS BY THEME

Religion (CUL) Cecil Calvert, Lord Baltimore Act of Toleration Roger Williams Providence Anne Hutchinson antinomianism Rhode Island Halfway covenant Quakers William Penn Holy Experiment Charter of Liberties (1701)	Massachusetts Bay Colony John Winthrop Great Migration Virginia Thomas Hooker John Davenport Connecticut New Hampshire	Authority (WOR) corporate colonies royal colonies proprietary colonies Chesapeake colonies joint-stock company Virginia Company
Crops (GEO) rice plantations tobacco farms	Later Settlements (MIG) The Carolinas New York New Jersey Pennsylvania Delaware Georgia James Oglethorpe	Royal Authority (WOR) mercantilism Navigation Acts Dominion of New England Sir Edmund Andros Glorious Revolution
Early Settlements (MIG) John Cabot Jamestown Captain John Smith John Rolfe Pocahontas Jamestown Puritans Separatists Pilgrims Mayflower Plymouth Colony	Conflict (MIG) Wampanoags Metacom King Philip's War	Labor (WXT) indentured servants headright system slavery triangular trade Middle Passage
	Self-Rule (POL) Mayflower Compact Virginia House of Burgesses Sir William Berkeley Bacon's Rebellion Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639) New England Confederation Frame of Government (1682)	

COLONIAL SOCIETY IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American.

J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 1782

The Frenchman who wrote the above description of Americans in 1782 observed a very different society from the struggling colonial villages that had existed in the 17th century. The British colonies had grown, and their inhabitants had evolved a culture distinct from any in Europe. This chapter describes the mature colonies and asks: If Americans in the 1760s constituted a new kind of society, what were its characteristics and what forces shaped its “new people”?

Population Growth

At the start of the new century, in 1701, the English colonies on the Atlantic Coast had a population of barely 250,000 Europeans and Africans. By 1775, the figure had jumped to 2,500,000, a tenfold increase within the span of a single lifetime. Among African Americans, the population increase was even more dramatic: from about 28,000 in 1701 to 500,000 in 1775.

The spectacular gains in population during this period resulted from two factors: immigration of almost a million people and a sharp natural increase, caused chiefly by a high birthrate among colonial families. An abundance of fertile American land and a dependable food supply attracted thousands of European settlers each year and also supported the raising of large families.

European Immigrants

Newcomers to the British colonies came not only from England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, but also from other parts of Western and Central Europe. Many immigrants, most of whom were Protestants, came from France and German-speaking kingdoms and principalities. Their motives for leaving Europe were many. Some came to escape religious persecution and wars. Others sought

economic opportunity either by farming new land or setting up shop in a colonial town as an artisan or a merchant. Most immigrants settled in the middle colonies (Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware) and on the western frontier of the southern colonies (Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia). In the 18th century, few immigrants headed for New England, where land was both limited in extent and under Puritan control.

English Settlers from England continued to come to the American colonies. However, with fewer problems at home, their numbers were relatively small compared to others, especially the Germans and Scotch-Irish.

Germans This group of non-English immigrants settled chiefly on the rich farmlands west of Philadelphia, an area that became known as Pennsylvania Dutch country. They maintained their German language, customs, and religion (Lutheran, Amish, Brethren, Mennonite, or one of several smaller groups) and, while obeying colonial laws, showed little interest in English politics. By 1775, people of German stock comprised 6 percent of the colonial population.

Scotch-Irish These English-speaking people emigrated from northern Ireland. Since their ancestors had moved to Ireland from Scotland, they were commonly known as the Scotch-Irish or Scots-Irish. They had little respect for the British government, which had pressured them into leaving Ireland. Most settled along the frontier in the western parts of Pennsylvania, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. By 1775, they comprised 7 percent of the population.

Other Europeans Other immigrant groups included French Protestants (called Huguenots), the Dutch, and the Swedes. These groups made up 5 percent of the population of all the colonies in 1775.

Africans

The largest single group of non-English immigrants did not come to America by choice. They were Africans—or the descendants of Africans—who had been taken captive, forced into European ships, and sold as enslaved laborers to southern plantation owners and other colonists. Some Africans were granted their freedom after years of forced labor. Outside the South, thousands of African Americans worked at a broad range of occupations, such as being a laborer, bricklayer, or blacksmith. Some of these workers were enslaved and others were free wage earners and property owners. Every colony, from New Hampshire to Georgia, passed laws that discriminated against African Americans and limited their rights and opportunities.

By 1775, the African American population (both enslaved and free) made up 20 percent of the colonial population. About 90 percent lived in the southern colonies in lifelong bondage. African Americans formed a majority of the population in South Carolina and Georgia.

The Structure of Colonial Society

Each of the thirteen British colonies developed distinct patterns of life. However, they all also shared a number of characteristics.

General Characteristics

Most of the population was English in origin, language, and tradition. However, both Africans and non-English immigrants brought diverse influences that would modify the culture of the majority in significant ways.

Self-government The government of each colony had a representative assembly that was elected by eligible voters (limited to white male property owners). In only two colonies, Rhode Island and Connecticut, was the governor also elected by the people. The governors of the other colonies were either appointed by the crown (for example, New York and Virginia) or by a proprietor (Pennsylvania and Maryland).

Religious Toleration All of the colonies permitted the practice of different religions, but with varying degrees of freedom. Massachusetts, the most conservative, accepted several types of Protestants, but it excluded non-Christians and Catholics. Rhode Island and Pennsylvania were the most liberal.

No Hereditary Aristocracy The social extremes of Europe, with a nobility that inherited special privileges and masses of hungry poor, were missing in the colonies. A narrower class system, based on economics, was developing. Wealthy landowners were at the top; craft workers and small farmers made up the majority of the common people.

Social Mobility With the major exception of the African Americans, all people in colonial society had an opportunity to improve their standard of living and social status by hard work.

The Family

The family was the economic and social center of colonial life. With an expanding economy and ample food supply, people married at a younger age and reared more children than in Europe. More than 90 percent of the people lived on farms. While life in the coastal communities and on the frontier was hard, most colonists had a higher standard of living than did most Europeans.

Men While wealth was increasingly being concentrated in the hands of a few, most men did work. Landowning was primarily reserved to men, who also dominated politics. English law gave the husband almost unlimited power in the home, including the right to beat his wife.

Women The average colonial wife bore eight children and performed a wide range of tasks. Household work included cooking, cleaning, making clothes, and providing medical care. Women also educated the children. A woman usually worked next to her husband in the shop, on the plantation, or on the farm. Divorce was legal but rare, and women had limited legal and political rights. Yet the shared labors and mutual dependence with their husbands gave most women protection from abuse and an active role in decision-making.

The Economy

By the 1760s, almost half of Britain's world trade was with its American colonies. The British government permitted limited kinds of colonial manufacturing, such as making flour or rum. It restricted efforts that would compete with English industries, such as textiles. The richness of the American land and British mercantile policy produced colonies almost entirely engaged in agriculture.

As the people prospered and communities grew, increasing numbers became ministers, lawyers, doctors, and teachers. The quickest route to wealth was through the land, although regional geography often provided distinct opportunities for hardworking colonists.

New England With rocky soil and long winters, farming was limited to subsistence levels that provided just enough for the farm family. Most farms were small—under 100 acres—and most work was done by family members and an occasional hired laborer. The industrious descendants of the Puritans profited from logging, shipbuilding, fishing, trading, and rum-distilling.

Middle Colonies Rich soil produced an abundance of wheat and corn for export to Europe and the West Indies. Farms of up to 200 acres were common. Often, indentured servants and hired laborers worked with the farm family. A variety of small manufacturing efforts developed, including iron-making. Trading led to the growth of such cities as Philadelphia and New York.

Southern Colonies Because of the diverse geography and climate of the southern colonies, agriculture varied greatly. Most people lived on small subsistence family farms with no slaves. A few lived on large plantations of over 2,000 acres and relied on slave labor. Plantations were self-sufficient—they grew their own food and had their own slave craftworkers. Products were mainly tobacco in the Chesapeake and North Carolina colonies, timber and naval stores (tar and pitch) in the Carolinas, and rice and indigo in South Carolina and Georgia. Most plantations were located on rivers so they could ship exports directly to Europe.

Monetary System One way the British controlled the colonial economy was to limit the use of money. The growing colonies were forced to use much of the limited hard currency—gold and silver—to pay for the imports from Britain that increasingly exceeded colonial exports. To provide currency for domestic trade, many colonies issued paper money, but this often led to inflation. The British government also vetoed colonial laws that might harm British merchants.

Transportation Transporting goods by water was much easier than attempting to carry them over land on rough and narrow roads or trails. Therefore, trading centers such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were located on the sites of good harbors and navigable rivers. Despite the difficulty and expense of maintaining roads and bridges, overland travel by horse and stage became more common in the 18th century. Taverns not only provided food and lodging for travelers, but also served as social centers where news was exchanged and politics discussed. A postal system using horses on overland routes and small ships on water routes was operating both within and between the colonies by the mid-18th century.

Religion

Although Maryland was founded by a Catholic proprietor, and larger towns such as New York and Boston attracted some Jewish settlers, the overwhelming majority of colonists belonged to various Protestant denominations. In New England, Congregationalists (the successors to the Puritans) and Presbyterians were most common. In New York, people of Dutch descent often attended services of the Reformed Church, while many merchants belonged to the Church of England, also known as Anglicans (and later, Episcopalians). In Pennsylvania, Lutherans, Mennonites, and Quakers were the most common groups. Anglicans were dominant in Virginia and some of the other southern colonies.

Challenges Each religious group, even the Protestants who dominated the colonies, faced problems. Jews, Catholics, and Quakers suffered from the most serious discrimination and even persecution. Congregationalist ministers were criticized by other Protestants as domineering and for preaching an overly complex doctrine. Because the Church of England was headed by the king, it was viewed as a symbol of English control in the colonies. In addition, there was no Church of England bishop in America to ordain ministers. The absence of such leadership hampered the church's development.

Established Churches In the 17th century, most colonial governments taxed the people to support one particular Protestant denomination. Churches financed through the government are known as established churches. For example, in Virginia, the established church was the Church of England. In Massachusetts Bay it was the Congregational Church. As various immigrant groups increased the religious diversity of the colonies, governments gradually reduced their support of churches. In Virginia, all tax support for the Anglican Church ended shortly after the Revolution. In Massachusetts by the time of the Revolution, members of other denominations were exempt from supporting the Congregational Church. However, some direct tax support of the denomination remained until the 1830s.

The Great Awakening

In the first decades of the 18th century, sermons in Protestant churches tended to be long intellectual discourses and portrayed God as a benign creator of a perfectly ordered universe. Ministers gave less emphasis than in Puritan times on human sinfulness and the perils of damnation. In the 1730s, however, a dramatic change occurred that swept through the colonies with the force of a hurricane. This was the Great Awakening, a movement characterized by fervent expressions of religious feeling among masses of people. The movement was at its strongest during the 1730s and 1740s.

Jonathan Edwards In a Congregational church at Northampton, Massachusetts, Reverend Jonathan Edwards expressed the Great Awakening ideas in a series of sermons, notably one called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741). Invoking the Old Testament scriptures, Edwards argued that God was rightfully angry with human sinfulness. Each individual who expressed deep

penitence could be saved by God's grace, but the souls who paid no heed to God's commandments would suffer eternal damnation.

George Whitefield While Edwards mostly influenced New England, George Whitefield, who came from England in 1739, spread the Great Awakening throughout the colonies, sometimes attracting audiences of 10,000 people. In barns, tents, and fields, he delivered rousing sermons that stressed that God was all-powerful and would save only those who openly professed belief in Jesus Christ. Those who did not would be damned into hell and face eternal torments. Whitefield taught that ordinary people with faith and sincerity could understand the gospels without depending on ministers to lead them.

Religious Impact The Great Awakening had a profound effect on religious practice in the colonies. As sinners tearfully confessed their guilt and then joyously exulted in being "saved," emotionalism became a common part of Protestant services. Ministers lost some of their former authority among those who now studied the Bible in their own homes.

The Great Awakening also caused divisions within churches, such as the Congregational and Presbyterian, between those supporting its teachings ("New Lights") and those condemning them ("Old Lights"). More evangelical sects such as the Baptists and Methodists attracted large numbers. As denominations competed for followers, they also called for separation of church and state.

Political Influence A movement as powerful as the Great Awakening affected all areas of life, including politics. For the first time, the colonists—regardless of their national origins or their social class—shared in a common experience as Americans. The Great Awakening also had a democratizing effect by changing the way people viewed authority. If common people could make their own religious decisions without relying on the "higher" authority of ministers, then might they also make their own political decisions without deferring to the authority of the great landowners and merchants? This revolutionary idea was not expressed in the 1740s, but 30 years later, it would challenge the authority of a king and his royal governors.

Cultural Life

In the early 1600s, the chief concern of most colonists was economic survival. People had neither the time nor the resources to pursue leisure activities or create works of art and literature. One hundred years later, however, the colonial population had grown and matured enough that the arts could flourish, at least among the well-to-do southern planters and northern merchants.

Achievements in the Arts and Sciences

In the coastal areas, as fear of American Indians faded, people displayed their prosperity by adopting architectural and decorative styles from England.

Architecture In the 1740s and 1750s, the Georgian style of London was widely imitated in colonial houses, churches, and public buildings. Brick and stucco homes built in this style were characterized by a symmetrical placement

of windows and dormers and a spacious center hall flanked by two fireplaces. Such homes were found only on or near the eastern seaboard. On the frontier, a one-room log cabin was the common shelter.

Painting Many colonial painters were itinerant artists who wandered the countryside in search of families who wanted their portraits painted. Shortly before the Revolution, two American artists, Benjamin West and John Copley, went to England where they acquired the necessary training and financial support to establish themselves as prominent artists.

Literature With limited resources available, most authors wrote on serious subjects, chiefly religion and politics. There were, for example, widely read religious tracts by two Massachusetts ministers, Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards. In the years preceding the American Revolution, writers including John Adams, James Otis, John Dickinson, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson issued political essays and treatises highlighting the conflict between American rights and English authority. The lack of support for literature did not stop everyone. The poetry of Phillis Wheatley is noteworthy both for her triumph over slavery and the quality of her verse.

By far the most popular and successful American writer of the 18th century was that remarkable jack-of-all-trades, Benjamin Franklin. His witty aphorisms and advice were collected in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, a best-selling book that was annually revised from 1732 to 1757.

Science Most scientists, such as the botanist John Bartram of Philadelphia, were self-taught. Benjamin Franklin won fame for his work with electricity and his developments of bifocal eyeglasses and the Franklin stove.

Education

Basic education was limited and varied among the colonies. Formal efforts were directed to males, since females were trained only for household work.

Elementary Education In New England, the Puritans' emphasis on learning the Bible led them to create the first tax-supported schools. A Massachusetts law in 1647 required towns with more than fifty families to establish primary schools for boys, and towns with more than a hundred families to establish grammar schools to prepare boys for college. In the middle colonies, schools were either church-sponsored or private. Often, teachers lived with the families of their students. In the southern colonies, parents gave their children whatever education they could. On plantations, tutors provided instruction for the owners' children.

Higher Education The first colonial colleges were sectarian, meaning that they promoted the doctrines of a particular religious group. The Puritans founded Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1636 in order to give candidates for the ministry a proper theological and scholarly education. The Anglicans opened William and Mary in Virginia in 1694, and the Congregationalists started Yale in Connecticut in 1701. The Great Awakening prompted the creation of five new colleges between 1746 and 1769:

- College of New Jersey (Princeton), 1746, Presbyterian
- King's College (Columbia), 1754, Anglican
- Rhode Island College (Brown), 1764, Baptist
- Queens College (Rutgers), 1766, Reformed
- Dartmouth College, 1769, Congregationalist

Only one nonsectarian college was founded during this period. The College of Philadelphia, which later became the University of Pennsylvania, had no religious sponsors. On hand for the opening ceremonies in 1765 were the college's civic-minded founders, chief among them Benjamin Franklin.

Ministry During the 17th century, the Christian ministry was the only profession to enjoy widespread respect among the common people. Ministers were often the only well-educated person in a small community.

Physicians Colonists who fell prey to epidemics of smallpox and diphtheria were often treated by "cures" that only made them worse. One common practice was to bleed the sick, often by employing leeches or bloodsuckers. A beginning doctor received little formal medical training other than acting as an apprentice to an experienced physician. The first medical college in the colonies was begun in 1765 as part of Franklin's idea for the College of Philadelphia.

Lawyers Often viewed as talkative troublemakers, lawyers were not common in the 1600s. In that period, individuals would argue their own cases before a colonial magistrate. During the 1700s, however, as trade expanded and legal problems became more complex, people felt a need for expert assistance in court. The most able lawyers formed a bar (committee or board), which set rules and standards for aspiring young lawyers. Lawyers gained further respect in the 1760s and 1770s when they argued for colonial rights. John Adams, James Otis, and Patrick Henry were three such lawyers whose legal arguments would ultimately provide the intellectual underpinnings of the American Revolution.

The Press

News and ideas circulated in the colonies principally by means of a postal system and local printing presses.

Newspapers In 1725, only five newspapers existed in the colonies, but by 1776 the number had grown to more than 40. Issued weekly, each newspaper consisted of a single sheet folded once to make four pages. It contained such items as month-old news from Europe, ads for goods and services and for the return of runaway indentured servants and slaves, and pious essays giving advice for better living. Illustrations were few or nonexistent. The first cartoon appeared in the Philadelphia *Gazette*, placed there by, of course, Ben Franklin.

The Zenger Case Newspaper printers in colonial days ran the risk of being jailed for libel if any article offended the political authorities. In 1735, John Peter Zenger, a New York editor and publisher, was brought to trial on a charge of libelously criticizing New York's royal governor. Zenger's lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, argued that his client had printed the truth about the governor.

According to English common law at the time, injuring a governor's reputation was considered a criminal act, no matter whether a printed statement was true or false. Ignoring the English law, the jury voted to acquit Zenger. While this case did not guarantee complete freedom of the press, it encouraged newspapers to take greater risks in criticizing a colony's government.

Rural Folkways

The majority of colonists rarely saw a newspaper or read any book other than the Bible. As farmers on the frontier or even within a few miles of the coast, they worked from first daylight to sundown. The farmer's year was divided into four ever-recurring seasons: spring planting, summer growing, fall harvesting, and winter preparations for the next cycle. Food was usually plentiful, but light and heat in the colonial farmhouse were limited to the kitchen fireplace and a few well-placed candles. Entertainment for the well-to-do consisted chiefly of card playing and horse-racing in the southern colonies, theater-going in the middle colonies, and attending religious lectures in Puritan New England.

The Enlightenment

In the 18th century, some educated Americans felt attracted to a European movement in literature and philosophy that is known as the Enlightenment. The leaders of this movement believed that the "darkness" of past ages could be corrected by the use of human reason in solving most of humanity's problems.

A major influence on the Enlightenment and on American thinking was the work of John Locke, a 17th-century English philosopher and political theorist. Locke, in his *Two Treatises of Government*, reasoned that while the state (the government) is supreme, it is bound to follow "natural laws" based on the rights that people have simply because they are human. He argued that sovereignty ultimately resides with the people rather than with the state. Furthermore, said Locke, citizens had a right and an obligation to revolt against whatever government failed to protect their rights.

Other Enlightenment philosophers adopted and expounded on Locke's ideas. His stress on natural rights would provide a rationale for the American Revolution and later for the basic principles of the U.S. Constitution.

Emergence of a National Character

The colonists' motivations for leaving Europe, the political heritage of the English majority, and the influence of the American natural environment combined to bring about a distinctly American viewpoint and way of life. Especially among white male property owners, the colonists exercised the rights of free speech and a free press, became accustomed to electing representatives to colonial assemblies, and tolerated a variety of religions. English travelers in the colonies remarked that Americans were restless, enterprising, practical, and forever seeking to improve their circumstances.

Politics

By 1750, the 13 colonies had similar systems of government, with a governor acting as chief executive and a separate legislature voting either to adopt or reject the governor's proposed laws.

Structure of Government

There were eight royal colonies with governors appointed by the king (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia). In the three proprietary colonies (Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware), governors were appointed by the proprietors. The governors in only two of the colonies, Connecticut and Rhode Island, were elected by popular vote.

In every colony, the legislature consisted of two houses. The lower house, or assembly, elected by the eligible voters, voted for or against new taxes. Colonists thus became accustomed to paying taxes only if their chosen representatives approved. (Their unwillingness to surrender any part of this privilege would become a cause for revolt in the 1770s.) In the royal and proprietary colonies, members of the legislature's upper house—or council—were appointed by the king or the proprietor. In the two self-governing colonies, both the upper and lower houses were elective bodies.

Local Government From the earliest period of settlement, colonists in New England established towns and villages, clustering their small homes around an open space known as a green. In the southern colonies, on the other hand, towns were much less common, and farms and plantations were widely separated. Thus, the dominant form of local government in New England was the town meeting, in which people of the town would regularly come together, often in a church, to vote directly on public issues. In the southern colonies, local government was carried on by a law-enforcing sheriff and other officials who served a large territorial unit called a *county*.

Voting

If democracy is defined as the participation of all the people in the making of government policy, then colonial democracy was at best limited and partial. Those barred from voting—white women, poor white men, slaves of both sexes, and most free blacks—constituted a sizable majority of the colonial population. Nevertheless, the barriers to voting that existed in the 17th century were beginning to be removed in the 18th. Religious restrictions, for example, were removed in Massachusetts and other colonies. On the other hand, voters in all colonies were still required to own at least a small amount of property.

Another factor to consider is the degree to which members of the colonial assemblies and governors' councils represented either a privileged elite or the larger society of plain citizens. The situation varied from one colony to the next. In Virginia, membership in the House of Burgesses was tightly restricted to certain families of wealthy landowners. In Massachusetts, the legislature was more open to small farmers, although there, too, an educated, propertied elite held

power for generations. The common people everywhere tended to defer to their “betters” and to depend upon the privileged few to make decisions for them.

Without question, colonial politics was restricted to participation by white males only. Even so, compared with other parts of the world, the English colonies showed tendencies toward democracy and self-government that made their political system unusual for the time.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WAS COLONIAL SOCIETY DEMOCRATIC?

Was colonial America “democratic” or not? The question is important for its own sake and also because it affects one’s perspective on the American Revolution and on the subsequent evolution of democratic politics in the United States. Many historians have focused on the politics of colonial Massachusetts. Some have concluded that colonial Massachusetts was indeed democratic, at least for the times. By studying voting records and statistics, they determined that the vast majority of white male citizens could vote and were not restricted by property qualifications. According to these historians, class differences between an elite and the masses of people did not prevent the latter from participating fully in colonial politics.

Other historians question whether broad voting rights by themselves demonstrate the existence of real democracy. The true test of democratic practice, they argue, would be whether different groups in a colonial town felt free to debate political questions in a town meeting. In the records of such meetings, they found little evidence of true political conflict and debate. Instead, they found that the purpose of town meetings in colonial days was to reach a consensus and to avoid conflict and real choices. These historians believe that the nature of consensus-forming limited the degree of democracy.

A third historical perspective is based on studies of economic change in colonial Boston. According to this view, a fundamental shift from an agrarian to a maritime economy occurred in the 18th century. In the process, a new elite emerged to dominate Boston’s finances, society, and politics. The power of this elite prevented colonial Massachusetts from being considered a true democracy.

The question remains: To what extent were Massachusetts and the other colonies democratic? Much of the answer depends on the definition of democracy.

KEY TERMS BY THEME

Arts & Science (CUL) English cultural domination Benjamin West John Copley Benjamin Franklin <i>Poor Richard's Almanack</i> Phillis Wheatley John Bartram professions: religion, medicine, law	Jonathan Edwards George Whitefield Cotton Mather sectarian nonsectarian The Land (GEO) subsistence farming Ethnicity (NAT) J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur colonial families Germans Scotch-Irish Huguenots Dutch Swedes Africans People (MIG) immigrants social mobility	Government (POL) hereditary aristocracy John Peter Zenger Andrew Hamilton Enlightenment colonial governors colonial legislatures town meetings county government limited democracy
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