

The American Pageant

Chapter 5:
Colonial Society on
The Eve of Revolution,
1700 – 1775

Conquest by the Cradle



- ▶ By 1775, Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Maryland became the most populous colonies in the new world.
- ▶ About 90% of the people lived in rural areas.

A Mingling of the Races

Colonial America was ethnically diverse

- ▶ **Germans** (6%) who fled to the new world sought freedom from religious persecution, economic oppression and wars. They settled into the backcountry of Pennsylvania.
- ▶ **Scot-Irish** (7%) settled (illegally) out onto the Appalachian frontier. They were already experienced colonizers and agitators by the time they had settled. They led the armed march of the **Paxton Boys** on Philadelphia in 1764 to protest the Quaker's lenient policy with the Indians. A couple years later, they struck the **Regulator Movement** in North Carolina, a small insurrection against eastern domination of the colony's affairs.
- ▶ 5% of the multicultural group were French Huguenots, Welsh, Dutch, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss and Scots Highlanders.

The Structure of Colonial Society

- ▶ The common 'Rags-to-Riches' method allows even a former indentured servant to become a wealthy aristocrat.
- ▶ By the 1750s, the richest 10% of New England settlers (Boston) and Philadelphians were entitled to 2/3 of taxable wealth in their respective cities.
- ▶ In 1750 Boston, an alarming number of homeless poor rose, and had to wear a large red 'P' on their clothing.
- ▶ The continuing influx of indentured servants from England created a rather large lower class.
- ▶ African slaves were at the very bottom of the social ladder.



Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

- ▶ The most honored of the professions was the **Christian ministry**, even if the religious ferocity had burned down by 1775.
- ▶ The majority of **Physicians** were poorly trained and not highly esteemed. The first medical school was established in 1765. The infamous bleeding treatment was still a favorite and frequently fatal remedy. Plagues, smallpox and Diphtheria were still very common.
- ▶ **Lawyers** were frowned upon and were commonly regarded as noisy or trouble-making rogues.

The American Economy

- ▶ About 90% of the people were involved in **Agriculture**. Tobacco was the staple crop in Maryland and Virginia and the large quantities of grain were quite easy to grow in the fertile middle colonies.



The American Economy

(continued)

- ▶ Fishing was pursued in all of the colonies and became a major industry in New England. Shiploads of dried cod were shipped to Europe. This also stimulated shipbuilding and created a nursery for the seamen who manned the navy and the merchant marine.



The American Economy

(continued)

- ▶ Amongst the New England group, New York and Pennsylvania, trading was immensely popular.
- ▶ Manufacturing was only of second importance to the colonies. Lumbering was perhaps the most important manufacturing activity. By 1770, about 1/3 of the British navel vessels were made in America.
- ▶ The populous American colonies needed more and more British goods. However, there was a limit to the absorption of material goods and Britain had at last reached its limit. This imbalance of trade forced the Americans to look elsewhere to earn money in order to pay for British goods.
- ▶ 1773 – Parliament passed the Molasses Act, aiming to sever the American-French trading ties. Unfortunately for them, the Americans got around by smuggling.

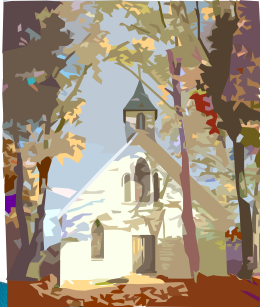


Horse-Power and Sail-Power

- ▶ In the American-British colonies, the roads were in terrible condition.
- ▶ A postal system was established amongst the colonies by the mid 1700s. However, the mailmen were treacherously slow and passed their time by reading the letters that were entrusted to them.



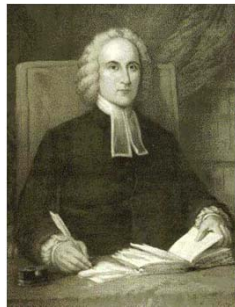
Dominant Denominations



- Two tax-supported churches were in existence in 1775.
- ▶ The Church of England was the official faith in Georgia, both Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland and a part of New York. It served as a major prop of Kingly authority.
 - ▶ The Congregational Church grew out of the Puritan Church and was established in all of the New England colonies, minus Rhode Island.
 - ▶ Religious toleration has made tremendous strides in America. It was not uncommon to live in a religiously tolerate area.

The Great Awakening

- ▶ A few churches (resentfully) stated that spiritual conversion was unnecessary for church membership.
- ▶ The Great Awakening started with **Jonah Edwards**, who proclaimed with such burning righteousness that one did not need to do good works to obtain salvation and affirmed the need for complete dependence on God's grace.



The Great Awakening

(continued)

- ▶ **George Whitefield** had a different style of evangelical preaching that revolutionized the spiritual life of the colonies. His eloquence in speech was said to have moved Edwards to tears and even convince the skeptical and thrifty Benjamin Franklin to empty his pockets into the collection plate.



The Great Awakening

(continued)

- ▶ The "Old Lights" (Orthodox clergymen) were skeptical of the new styles of preaching. On the other hand, the "New lights" defended it. Schisms were set off and a great number of churches were created afterwards.
- ▶ The Great Awakening revitalized the American religion.

Schools & Colleges

- ▶ Puritan New England were more into education than any other sections of the colonies. The need for Bible reading by the individual worshipper created a natural want for education.
- ▶ College education was regarded very highly amongst the Puritans. 9 local colleges were established in the area.

Art & Architecture

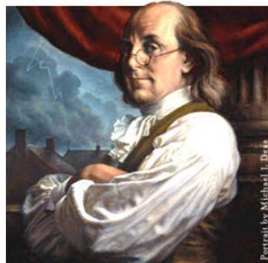
- ▶ Art and architecture was, at first, regarded as an invention of the Devil.
- ▶ Architecture was imported from the Old World and modified. The red-bricked Georgian style was introduced in about 1720.
- ▶ The painter, **John Trumbull** of Connecticut was scolded by his father. **Charles W. Peale** painted many portraits of George Washington. He also ran a museum, stuffed birds and practiced dentistry. **Benjamin West** and **John S. Copley** had to travel to England to become successfully famous painters.

Literature

- ▶ Colonial Literature was generally piled up in the dust.
- ▶ A noteworthy exception: **Phillis Wheatley**, a slave girl brought to Boston at age eight, published a book of verse and wrote other poems.
- ▶ **Benjamin Franklin** was known for *Poor Richard's Almanack* and a few newspapers.

Science

- ▶ Science was behind the Old World in the colonies. Ben Franklin was perhaps the only man who deserved to be acknowledged as a scientist.



Pioneer Presses

- ▶ Hand-operated printing presses were active in printing pamphlets, leaflets and journals.
- ▶ **John Peter Zenger** was charged with printing things that attacked the corrupt royal governor of New York. The jury voted him not guilty. This began the road for freedom of the press.

The Great Game of Politics

- ▶ 1775 – 8 colonies had royal governors who had been appointed by the King of England himself.
- ▶ Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware were under proprietors who chose governors themselves.
- ▶ Connecticut and Rhode Island chose their own governors under their own charters.
- ▶ A two house legislative body existed in almost every colony established. The **upper house/council** was appointed by the King in the "Royal Colonies" and the Proprietors in the "Propriety Colonies". The **lower house** was elected by the people.
- ▶ **Lord Cornbury** was governor of New York and New Jersey in 1702 as an incompetent old fool who was also a drunkard and spendthrift.
