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# Colonial Society in the 18th Century

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The British Colonies had evolved a culture distinct from Europe.



# Population Growth

- Population : (1701) 250,000 to (1775) 2,500,000
- 2 factors
  - immigration bc fertile land + food supply in America
  - High birth rate





# European Immigrants



- From England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, & German-speaking countries/principalities
- **Motives:** away from religious persecution + wars, economic opportunity
- Most settled in middle colonies, and the western frontier of the southern colonies
- **English:** less, but still came over
- **Germans:** settled mainly in West Philadelphia (Pennsylvania Dutch country) & Maintained language, customs, and religion.
- **Scotch-Irish:** from Northern Ireland & settled along frontier in the Western parts of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Carolinas, and Georgia.
- **Other Europeans:** French Protestant, Dutch, and Swede.

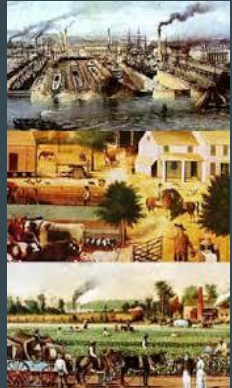
# Africans

- Largest group of non-english immigrant
- X come by choice
  - Came as slaves, although some were granted freedom after slavery
  - Laborers, bricklayers, blacksmiths, and also some free wage earners, and property owners
- Every colony had discrimination laws against them
- By 1775, they constituted 20% of the population
- Formed the current majority of South Carolina and Georgia



# *The Structure of Colonial Society*

- Although similar, each colony had their own way of life
- General Characteristics
  - Mostly English in origin, language, and tradition
  - Many non-English immigrants brought diverse influences though
  - Self-government
    - Representative assembly elected by eligible voters (exc. Rhode Island & Connecticut- elected by the people)
  - Religious toleration
    - All permitted practice of different religions, just on varying degrees of freedom
  - No hereditary aristocracy
    - Very basic social class system based on economic status
  - Social mobility
    - Except African Americas, by hard work, one could improve social status



# Family

- Economic and social center of colonial life
- Most colonists had a higher standard of living than most Europeans
- Men
  - Landowners, dominated politics, patriarchy
- Women
  - Household work, birthed babies, educated children, limited rights, were protected from abuse, sometimes influential to decisions



# Economy

- By 1760s, ½ of Britain's world trade was in the American colonies
- Mercantilism and fertile American land produced colonies that were majorly agricultural
- The land was the quickest route to wealth
- New England
  - Subsistence farming
  - Dependent on industry: logging, shipbuilding, fishing, trading, and rum-distilling
- Middle Colonies
  - Rich soil: wheat and corn export to Europe & West Indies
  - Trade led to growth of cities like Philadelphia and NY



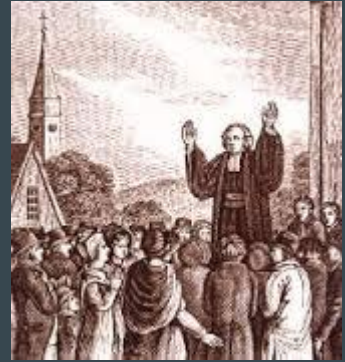
# Economy continued...

- Southern Colonies
  - Diverse geography & climate=diverse agriculture
    - Subsistence farming and large plantations
  - Tobacco (Chesapeake and North Carolina region), timber & naval stores (Carolinas), rice and indigo (South Carolina & Georgia)
  - Most plantations= directly on rivers for direct export
- Monetary System
  - British limited use of money to control the colonies
    - Forced to use hard currency (gold/silver)
    - Colonies tried domestic paper money, but caused bad inflation
- Transportation
  - Waterways were the fastest and easiest way
  - Major trading centers were on good harbors and navigable rivers
  - small Postal system on road and water w/i and btwn colonies





# Religion



- Majority of colonies were from various Protestant denominations
- New England= Presbyterians and Congregationalists
- New York= Reformed Church and Church of England (Anglicans)
- Pennsylvania= Lutherans, Mennonites, and Quakers
- Virginia= Anglicans
- Challenges
  - All faced, but Jews, Catholics, and Quakers had it bad- discrimination + persecution
- Established Churches
  - Churches that were financed through government
  - Most colonial governments taxed people to support one particular Protestant denomination
  - As religious diversity was embraced, governments reduced support of churches
  - But taxing still lasted until the 1830s

# The Great Awakening (1730s-1740s)

- Fervent expressions of religious feeling
- Jonathan Edwards
  - Congregational Church in Massachusetts
  - Need to repent for sins from justified angry God
- George Whitefield
  - From England
  - Ordinary people can understand gospel w/o minister guide
- Religious Impact
  - Emotionalism became really common
  - Caused many divisions: Congregational & Presbyterian; “New Light” & “Old Light”
  - Called for separation of church & state
- Political Influence
  - United all origins and social classes with a common experience
  - Revolutionary idea: we don't need authorities, just like we don't need ministers
  - ^ later challenged authority of king and royal governors



# Cultural Life

- Initial Focus: economic survival, but 100 years later: room for arts to flourish
- Achievements in the Arts and Sciences
  - Architecture
    - Display of Prosperity by adopting European styles
    - Eastern: Georgian style of London= houses, churches, and public buildings
    - Frontier: One room log cabin= popular
  - Painting
    - Low-key. Maybe some family portraits
    - Benjamin West and John Copley= prominent artists
  - Literature
    - Focus on religion and politics
    - Pre-Revolution= Thomas Paine and THomas Jefferson wrote many political essays and treatises about America-Britain conflict
    - Benjamin Franklin- popular & successful. Wrote Poor Richard's Almanack
  - Science
    - Benjamin Franklin- electricity, developed glasses and stove



# Education

- Basic education was limited and varied
- Males > female education
- Elementary Education
  - New England- tax-supported schools focused on learning Bible
  - Middle Colonies- church-sponsored, or private
  - Southern colonies- private tutors, or whatever education was available
- Higher Education
  - First colleges= sectarian ( promoted particular religion)
    - Harvard, William & Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth
  - One non-sectarian= UPENN



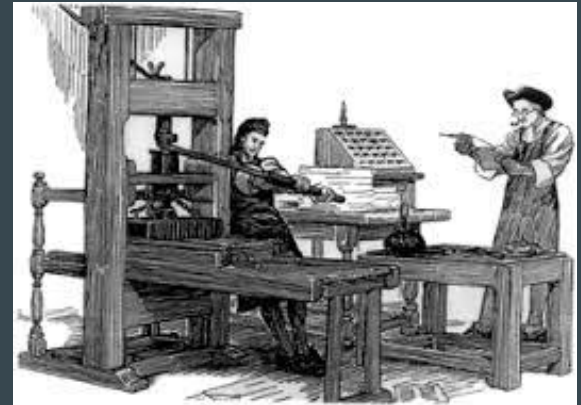
# Education Continued...

- Ministry
  - Ministers were very respected and were often the only well-educated
- Physicians
  - Many trial--and-error medications
  - First medical college- College of Philadelphia
- Lawyers
  - Talkative troublemakers
  - uncommon , but as trade expanded and legal problems became more complex, people requested professional assistance
  - Further respect as they argued for colonial rights



# The Press

- News and ideas went around by postal systems + local printing presses
- Newspaper
  - Contained old news from Europe, ads, return signs, no illustrations
  - The Zenger Case
    - IN 1735, John Zenger was brought to trial for criticizing NY's governor.
    - Ignoring the law, the jury voted to free Zenger from punishment.
    - Shaky foundation for freedom of press



# Rural Folkways

- Majority of people were busy farmers who worked 24/7
- Majority of colonists only read the Bible
- Food was plentiful, but electricity was very limited
- Entertainment for the wealthy= card playing, horse-racing, theater-going, and religious lectures



# The Enlightenment

- Americans attracted to European Enlightenment
- HUMAN REASON to solve problems
- John Locke
  - Influenced Enlightenment and American thinking
  - Two Treatises of Government- state is supreme, but needs to follow “natural laws” that are essentially laws for humans.
  - Sovereignty in people
  - People had right to revolt if fail to protect rights
  - Stress on natural rights later influenced the American Revolution and the U.S. Constitution





# Emergence of a National Character

- Distinct American way of life
  - Motivations for immigration, political heritage of English, influence of natural environment
- Unofficial Rights of free speech and free press
- Accustomed to electing representatives
- Toleration of religion



# Politics



- 13 colonies = similar systems of government
  - governor= chief executive ; separate legislature voting proposed laws
- Structure of Government
  - 8 colonies where crown appointed governors (New Hamp., Mass., NY, NJ, VA, NC, SC, and GA)
  - 3 proprietary colonies where governors were appointed by proprietors (Maryland, PA, Delaware)
  - 2 colonies elected governors by popular vote (Connecticut, + Rhode Island)
  - 2 house legislature
  - Taxes w/ representation
- Local Government
  - New England- town meeting to vote directly on public issues
  - Southern Colonies- law-enforcing sheriff and other officials who served a large territorial unit called a county

# Voting

- Partial and limited democracy
  - Majority couldn't actually vote (Africans, Women)
  - Barriers slowly removed (religious restrictions removed in Mass.)
- Representation in the councils and assemblies differed in colonies
  - Virginia = House of Burgesses membership was limited to wealthy landowners
  - Massachusetts = open to small farmers
  - Common people depended upon the privileged few to make decisions for them
- Colonial politics was restricted to white males
- But relatively, colonies went towards democracy and self-government that was unusual at the time

