In 1758, 37-year-old Hannah Cook Heaton stood trial for her refusal to attend her local congregationalist church. A resident of North New Haven, Connecticut, Hannah was required by Connecticut law to attend Sunday worship services—a law derived from the belief that religious uniformity was a social good. Hannah did not object to churchgoing; in fact, she was a fervent Christian. She had been a member of Isaac Stiles’s church—indeed, he had performed her marriage to Theophilus Heaton, Jr., in 1743. But later in that decade, after she had been caught up in the enthusiasm of the Great Awakening, a series of religious revivals that rocked New England in the 1740s, Hannah ceased to attend Sunday worship. Thereafter, finding that her minister’s preaching and church admission policies left her cold and dissatisfied, Heaton quit the church, arguing that Stiles had never himself undergone conversion and was therefore a “blind guide” leading his flock astray.

Hannah’s decision to leave the village church was prompted by the preaching of men she believed were imbued with the spirit. Hearing touring evangelists George Whitefield, James Davenport, and Gilbert Tennant sparked a profound conversion experience. As she later recorded in her diary, she “thought I see Jesus with the eyes of
my soul.” This religious transformation led her to join a small congregation headed by Benjamin Beach, a lay preacher. Uneducated and unlicensed, he was precisely the kind of man whom Harvard- and Yale-trained ministers regarded as a threat to well-ordered New England communities. Yet many like Hannah Heaton found him spiritually gifted, and so they separated themselves from the established church to meet regularly at Beach’s home for worship and prayer.

Because she abandoned the established church for this community of believers, who called themselves Separatists, Hannah was pressured by both members of Stiles’s church and local officials and then finally brought to trial. She remained defiant, telling the justice at her trial that “there was a day a-coming when justice would be done . . . there is a dreadful day a-coming upon them that have no Christ.” Declaring that Hannah “talked sass,” the justice convicted her of breaking the law and fined her twelve shillings.

To Hannah’s dismay and despite her efforts, her husband never shared her commitment to the dissenters. He remained a member of Stiles’s church, urged Hannah to rejoin it, and, against Hannah’s wishes, paid her fine in the trial of 1758. Resenting his wife’s involvement with the Separatists, he hid her spectacles so she could not read her Bible or write in her diary, threw her diary in the mud, and refused to provide her with a horse to ride to the Separatists’ meetings. Hannah worried about his immortal soul, disheartened that even on his deathbed she could not persuade him to repent and seek after the Lord.

Hannah Cook Heaton was in many ways a typical colonial woman, married to a farmer and the mother of numerous children. Her life would be virtually unknown to us except that she kept a diary of her spiritual experiences, in which she revealed a life that was dramatically reshaped by the Great Awakening. Her identity as a Separatist was fundamental to her life, affecting her marriage and her intimate relationships. Her separatism also brought her briefly into public prominence, as one of the few members of her movement to be prosecuted in court in Connecticut in the 1750s. Her life suggests the significance of revivalism in the lives of many eighteenth-century colonists. Her religious convictions motivated her to defy various authorities in her life, including her husband, her minister, and the local magistrate.

The religious revivals that transformed Hannah Heaton’s life were just one of the forces affecting colonial life during the eighteenth century. Between 1680 and 1750, a virtual population explosion occurred in the English colonies, swelling the number of settlers from 150,000 settlers in 1680 to more than 1 million at midcentury. Such growth staggered English policymakers, who uneasily watched the population gap between England and its American colonies closing rapidly. A high marriage rate, large families, lower mortality than in Europe, and heavy immigration accounted for much of the population boom.

This chapter’s first, second, and fourth sections explain how population growth and economic development gradually transformed eighteenth-century British America. Three variations of colonial society emerged: the farming society of the North, the plantation society of the South, and the urban society of the seaboard commercial towns. Although they shared some important characteristics—growing class differences and a deepening involvement with slavery except on the frontier—each region had distinctive features. Even within regions, diversity increased as incoming streams of immigrants, mostly from Germany, Ireland, and France, and especially from Africa, added new pieces to the shifting American mosaic.

Until the late seventeenth century, the Spanish, French, and English settlements in North America were largely isolated from one another. But when a
long period of war erupted in Europe among these colonizing nations, North America and the Caribbean became important theaters of international conflict—a development that would reach a climax in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This chapter also explores the commercial orientation that spread from north to south, especially in the towns and their immediate hinterlands, as local economies matured and forged sturdier links within the Atlantic basin trade network. We will also see how colonists such as Hannah Heaton experienced a deep-running religious awakening that established evangelical religion as a hallmark of American society. Connected to this democratization of religion was the changing exercise of political power. From increasingly powerful legislative assemblies and local instruments of governance emerged seasoned leaders, a tradition of local autonomy, and a widespread belief in a political ideology stressing the liberties that freeborn Englishmen should enjoy. In these ways, raw frontier settlements developed into mature provincial societies.
THE NORTH: A LAND OF FAMILY FARMS

Although New England strove to maintain its homogeneity by making non–English immigrants unwelcome, the mid-Atlantic colonies swarmed with waves of immigrants from the Rhineland and Ireland, showing how connected were the destinies of people on opposite sides of the Atlantic. About 90,000 Germans flocked in during the eighteenth century, many fleeing "God’s three arrows": famine, war, and pestilence. They settled where promoters promised cheap and fertile land, low taxes, and freedom from military duty. Coming mostly in families, they turned much of the mid-Atlantic hinterland into a German-speaking region. Place names still mark their zone of settlement: Mannheim, New Berlin, and Herkimer, New York; Bethlehem, Ephrata, Nazareth, and Hanover, Pennsylvania; Hagerstown and Frederick, Maryland; Mecklenberg and New Hanover, North Carolina. Even more Protestant Scots–Irish arrived. Mostly poor farmers, they streamed into the same backcountry areas where Germans were settling, especially New York and Pennsylvania, and many went farther, into the mountain valleys of the Carolinas and Georgia.

Northern Agricultural Society

In the mid-eighteenth-century northern colonies, especially New England, tight-knit farming families that were organized in communities of several thousand people dotted the landscape. New Englanders staked their future on a mixed economy. They cleared forests for timber used in barrels, ships, houses, and barns. They plumbed the offshore waters for fish that fed both local populations and the ballooning slave population of the West Indies. And they cultivated and grazed as much of the thin-soiled rocky hills and bottomlands as they could recover from the forest.

The Farmer's Guide Other than a Bible, an almanac was often the only book in a farmer’s house. What did farmers find in almanacs that made them so valuable? (The Library Company of Philadelphia)
The farmers of the middle colonies—Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York—drove their wooden plows through much richer soils than New Englanders. They enjoyed the additional advantage of settling an area cleared by Native Americans who had relied more on agriculture than New England tribes. Thus favored, mid-Atlantic farm families produced modest surpluses of corn, wheat, beef, and pork. By the mid-eighteenth century, New York and Philadelphia ships were carrying these foodstuffs not only to the West Indies, always a primary market, but also to England, Spain, Portugal, and even New England. In this way, they strengthened ties within the Atlantic basin.

In the North, the broad ownership of land distinguished farming society from every other agricultural region of the Western world. Although differences in circumstances and ability led gradually toward greater social stratification, in most communities, few were truly rich or abjectly poor. Except for indentured servants, most men lived to purchase or inherit a farm of at least 50 acres. With their family’s labor, they earned a decent existence and provided a small inheritance for each of their children. Settlers valued land highly, for freehold tenure ordinarily guaranteed both economic independence and political rights.

By the eighteenth century, with widespread property ownership, a rising population pressed against a limited land supply especially in New England. Family farms could not be divided and subdivided indefinitely, for it took at least 50 acres (of which only a quarter could usually be cropped) to support a family. In Concord, Massachusetts, for example, the founders had worked farms averaging about 250 acres. A century later, in the 1730s, the average farm had shrunk by two-thirds, as farm owners struggled to provide an inheritance for the three or four sons that the average marriage produced.

Decreasing soil fertility compounded the problem of dwindling farm size. When land had been plentiful, farmers planted crops in the same field for three years and then let it lie fallow seven years or more until it regained its strength. But on the smaller farms of the eighteenth century, farmers reduced fallowing to only a year or two, reducing crop yields and forcing farmers to plow marginal land or shift to livestock production. Thus, Jared Eliot, New England’s first agricultural essayist, referred to “our old land which we have worn out.”

The diminishing size and productivity of family farms drove many New Englanders to the frontier or out of the area. “Many of our old towns are too full
of inhabitants for husbandry, many of them living on small shares of land," bemoaned one Yankee. In Concord, one of every four adult males migrated from town every decade from the 1740s on. In many towns out-migration was even greater, with some drifting to New York and Pennsylvania, and others going to western Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Nova Scotia. Still others sought opportunities as artisans in the coastal towns or took to the sea.

Northern farming was less intense than in the South. The growing season was shorter, and cereal crops required incessant labor only during spring planting and autumn harvesting. This seasonal rhythm led many northern cultivators to fill out their calendars with work as clockmakers, shoemakers, carpenters, and weavers.

Unfree Labor

In the northern colonies, though the shorter growing seasons curbed the demand for labor in the North, slaves and indentured servants made up much of the incoming human tide after 1713. The westward traffic in servants became a regular part of the commerce linking Europe and North America.

Despite official attempts to reduce the "tight packing" of indentured immigrants, shipboard conditions for both slaves and servants worsened in the eighteenth century. Crammed between decks in stifling air, they suffered from smallpox and fevers, rotten food, impure water, cold, and lice. "Children between the ages of one and seven seldom survive the sea voyage," lamented one German immigrant, "and parents must often watch their offspring suffer miserably, die, and be thrown into the ocean." As one Virginia observer remarked of an incoming troop of servants in 1758, "I never see such parcels of poor wretches, some almost naked and what had clothes was as black as chimney sweepers and almost starved." The shipboard mortality rate of about 15 percent in the colonial era made this the unhealthiest of all times to seek American shores.

Most indentured servants, especially males, found the labor system harsh. Merchants sold them, one shocked Britisher reported in 1773, "as they do their horses, and advertise them as they do their beef and oatmeal." Every servant's goal was to secure a foothold on the ladder of opportunity. However, many died before finishing their time; others won freedom only to toil for years as poor day laborers and tenant farmers. The chief beneficiaries of the system of bound white labor were the masters.

The number of enslaved Africans in the northern colonies grew in the eighteenth century but not nearly as fast as the indentured servant population. Slaves made up less than 10 percent of the population in all northern colonies and in most only 3 to 4 percent. Since in the North the typical slave labored alone or with only a few others while living in the same house as the master, slaves adapted to European ways much faster than in the South. Slavery was also less repressive in the North.

Along with occasional Native American slaves, enslaved Africans typically worked as artisans, farmhands, or personal servants. Slavery grew fastest in the northern ports. Artisans invested profitably in slaves; ship captains purchased them for maritime labor; and an emerging urban elite of merchants, lawyers, and landlords displayed its wealth with slave coachmen and personal servants. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, more than 40 percent of New York City's households owned slaves. Even in Quaker Philadelphia, slaveholding increased sharply in the eighteenth century. Struggling white artisans resented slave workers for undercutting their wages, and the white citizenry feared black arsonists and
rebels. Yet high labor demand outweighed these reservations, and the advantage of purchasing lifelong servants for just two years’ worth of a free white laborer’s wages was obvious.

Changing Values

Boston’s weather on April 29, 1695, began warm and sunny, noted the devout merchant Samuel Sewall in his diary. But by afternoon, lightning and hailstones “as big as pistol and musket bullets” pummeled the town. Sewall dined that evening with Cotton Mather, New England’s prominent Puritan clergyman. Mather wondered why “more ministers’ houses than others proportionately had been smitten with lightning.” The words were hardly out of his mouth before hailstones began to shatter the windows. Sewall and Mather fell to their knees in prayer “after this awful Providence.” These two third-generation Massachusetts Puritans understood that God was angry with them as leaders of a people whose piety was giving way to worldliness. Massachusetts was becoming “sermon-proof,” explained one dejected minister.

In other parts of the North, the expansive environment and the Protestant emphasis on self-discipline and hard work were also breeding qualities that would become hallmarks of American culture: ambitiousness, individualism, and materialism. One colonist remarked, “Every man expects one day or another to be upon a footing with his wealthiest neighbor.” Commitment to religion, family, and community did not disappear, but fewer people saw daily existence just as a preparation for the afterlife. Land was not simply a source of livelihood but as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit.

A slender almanac, written by the twelfth child of a poor Boston candlemaker, captured the new outlook with wit and charm. Born in 1706, Benjamin Franklin climbed the ladder of success spectacularly. Running away from a harsh apprenticeship to an older brother when he was 16, he abandoned a declining Boston for a rising Philadelphia. By 23, he had learned the printer’s trade and was publishing the Pennsylvania Gazette. Three years later, he began Poor Richard’s Almanack, which, next to the Bible, was the most widely read book in the colonies. Franklin filled it with quips, adages, and homespun philosophy: “The sleeping fox gathers no poultry.” “Lost time is never found again.” “It costs more to maintain one vice than to raise two children.” “Sloth makes all things difficult but industry all easy.” Franklin caught the spirit of the rising secularism of the eighteenth century and preached the utilitarian doctrine that good is whatever is useful. For Franklin, the community was best served through individual self-improvement and accomplishment.

Women and the Family in the Northern Colonies

In 1662, Elnathan Chauncy, a Massachusetts schoolboy, copied into his writing book that the soul “consists of two portions, inferior and superior; the superior is masculine and eternal; the feminine inferior and mortal.” Generations on both sides of the Atlantic had taught such ideas as part of a larger conception of God’s design that assigned degrees of status and stations in life to all individuals. In that world, women were subordinate, taught from infancy to be modest, patient, and compliant. Regarded by men as weak of mind and large of
heart, they existed for and through men, subject first to their fathers and then to their husbands. Colonial women usually accepted these narrowly circumscribed roles and few complained openly that their work was generally limited to housewifery and midwifery. They silently accepted exclusion from the early public schools, laws that transferred to their husbands any property or income they brought into a marriage, and customs prohibiting them from speaking in their churches or participating in governing them (except in Quaker meeting-houses).

In a society in which producing legal heirs was the means of transmitting property, parental guidance prevailed over love in choosing a husband. Once wed, women expected to remain so until death, for they could rarely obtain a divorce. But young colonial women slowly gained the right of consenting to a marriage partner—a right that came by default to the thousands of female indentured servants who completed their labor contracts and had no parents within 3,000 miles to dictate to them.

On the colonial frontier, women’s lives changed in modest ways. One in 10 European women did not marry. But in the colonies, where men outnumbered women for the first century, a spinster was almost unheard of, and widows remarried with astounding speed. “A young widow with 4 or 5 children, who among the middling or inferior ranks of people in Europe would have little chance for a second husband,” observed one Englishman, “is in America frequently courted as a sort of fortune.” Woman and wife thus became nearly synonymous.

Another change concerned property rights. As in England, single women and widows in the colonies could make contracts, hold and convey property, represent themselves in court, and conduct business, though a woman forfeited these rights, as well as all property, when she married. In the colonies, however, legislatures and courts gave wives more control over property brought into marriage or left at their husbands’ death. They also enjoyed broader rights to act for and with their husbands in business transactions.

Although colonial society did not encourage or reward female individuality, women worked alongside their husbands in competent and complementary ways. Women had limited career choices and rights but broad responsibilities. The work spaces and daily routines of husband and wife overlapped and intersected far more than today. Farm women as well as men worked at planting, harvesting, and milking cows. Women also made candles and soap, butter and cheese, and smoked meat; they made cloth and sometimes marketed farm products. A merchant’s wife kept shop, handled accounts when her husband voyaged abroad, and helped supervise the servants and apprentices. “Deputy husbands” and “yoke mates” were revealing terms used by New Englanders to describe eighteenth-century wives.

Despite conventional talk of inferiority, women within their families and neighborhoods nevertheless shaped the world around them. Older women modeled the behavior of young women, aided the needy, and subtly affected menfolk, who held formal authority. Women outnumbered men in church life and, like Hannah Heaton, worked within their families to promote religion in outlying areas, to seat and unseat ministers, and to influence morals. Periodically, they appeared as visionaries and mystics.

Until the late eighteenth century, the “obstetrick art” was almost entirely in their hands. Midwives counseled pregnant women, delivered babies, supervised postpartum recovery, and participated in infant baptism and burial ceremonies. Mrs. Phillips, an immigrant to Boston in 1719, was a familiar figure as she hurried through the streets to attend the lying-in of about 70 women each year. In her 42-year career,
she delivered more than 3,000 infants. Because colonial women were pregnant or nursing infants for about half the years between ages 20 and 40 and because childbirth was dangerous, the circle of female friends and relatives attending childbirth created strong networks of mutual assistance.

In her role as wife and mother, the eighteenth-century northern woman differed somewhat from her English counterpart. Whereas English women married in their midtwenties, American women typically took husbands a few years earlier, increasing their childbearing years. Hence, the average colonial family included five children (two others typically died in infancy), whereas the English family contained fewer than three. Gradually, the marriage age crept up and the number of children per family inched down.

Northern child-rearing patterns varied widely. In the seventeenth century, stern fathers dominated Puritan family life, and few were reluctant to punish unruly children. “Better whip’d than damn’d,” advised Cotton Mather, reinforcing the belief that breaking the young child’s will created a pious and submissive personality. Quaker mothers, however, tended to use love rather than guilt to mold their children. Puritan parents usually arranged their children’s marriages but allowed them the right to veto. Young Quaker men and women made their own matches, subject to parental veto. These differences aside, all children played roles, from an early age, in contributing to the family economy.

The father-dominated family of New England gradually declined in the eighteenth century, replaced by the mother-centered family, in which affectionate parents encouraged self-expression and independence in their children. This “modern” approach, on the rise in Europe as well, brought the colonists closer to the methods of parenthood found among the coastal Native Americans, who initially had been disparaged for their lax approach to rearing their young.

**Ecological Transformation**

Wherever Europeans settled in the Americas, they brought with them animals, plant life, diseases, and ways of viewing natural resources—all with enormous consequences. In England’s North American colonies, the rapid increase of settlers after 1715 affected the environment rapidly. First, the demand for wood—for building and heating houses, for producing the charcoal necessary for ironmaking, for shipbuilding and barrelmaking—swiftly depleted coastal forests. Rapid and often wasteful harvesting of the forests had many ill effects. Without the forest canopy, summers became hotter and winters colder. Early-melting snow caused watersheds to empty faster, and, in turn, triggered soil erosion and drought.

A second ecological transformation occurred when animals brought by Europeans began to replace animals already in North America. European colonists were a livestock people, skilled in mixed farming and herding of domesticated cattle, horses, pigs, sheep, and goats. Multiplying rapidly in a favorable environment, pigs and cattle “swarm like vermin upon the earth,” reported one Virginia account as early as 1700. In an environment generally free of animal predators, the grazing animals devoured the tall grasses and most palatable plant species. With little or no ground cover, new unwelcome plant species took hold: stinging nettles, dandelions, and nightshade. Native grasses and shrubs disappeared so quickly that the European livestock began to die for lack of grazing land.

Meanwhile, native fur-bearing animals—beaver, deer, bear, wolf, raccoon, and marten—rapidly became extinct in the areas of settlement. Prizing their pelts or hating them as predators of domesticated animals, colonists and Native Americans hunted these species relentlessly. One broken link in the ecological chain affected others. For example, the dams and ponds of the beaver, which had been breeding grounds for many species of wild ducks, soon were drained and converted to meadows for cattle. Animals prized for dinner-table fare also quickly reached extinction along the East Coast. Wild turkeys were a rarity in Massachusetts by the 1670s and deer disappeared by the early 1700s in settled areas. “Hunting with us exists chiefly in the tales of other times,” wrote Yale’s president in the late eighteenth century.

All these environmental changes were linked not only to the numbers of Europeans arriving in North America but also to their ways of thinking about nature. Transplanted Europeans saw only the possibility of raising valuable crops as if the ecosystem were composed of unconnected elements, each ripe for exploitation. Land, lumber, fish, and fur-bearing animals could be converted into sources of cash that would buy imported commodities that improved one’s material condition. Coming from homelands where land was scarce, the settlers viewed their ability to reap nature’s abundance in North America as proof of their success. Yet the “rage for commerce” and for an improved life produced wasteful practices on farms and in forests and fisheries. “The grain fields, the meadows, the forests, the cattle, etc.,” wrote a Swedish visitor in the 1750s, “are treated with equal carelessness.” Once the native peoples had been driven from the land, and seeing no limits to the land that was available, the colonists embarked on ecologically destructive practices that over a period
of many generations profoundly altered the natural world of North America.
THE PLANTATION SOUTH

Between 1690 and 1760, the southern white tidewater settlements changed from a frontier society with high immigration, a surplus of males, and an unstable social organization to a settled society composed mostly of native-born families. But while a mature southern culture took form from the ocean to the piedmont, after 1715 Scots-Irish and German immigrants flooded into the backcountry of Virginia, the Carolinas, and the new colony of Georgia, which was founded in 1732 as a debtors’ haven and a buffer between Spanish Florida and the Carolinas. The fast-growing slave population accounted for swifter population growth than in the North. Virginia, with a population of nearly 340,000 by 1760, remained by far the largest colony in North America.

The Tobacco Coast

Tobacco production in Virginia and Maryland expanded rapidly in the seventeenth century, with exports reaching 25 million pounds annually during the 1680s. Then, two decades of war in Europe made Atlantic-basin commercial traffic more dangerous, drove up transportation costs, and dampened the demand for tobacco. Stagnation in the tobacco market lasted from the mid-1680s until about 1715.

During this period the Upper South underwent a profound social transformation. First, African slaves replaced European indentured servants so rapidly that by 1730 the unfree labor force was overwhelmingly black. Second, planters responded to the depressed tobacco market by diversifying their crops. They shifted some tobacco fields to grain, hemp, and flax; increased their herds of cattle and swine; and became more self-sufficient by developing local industries to produce iron, leather, and textiles. By the 1720s, when a profitable tobacco trade with France created a new period of prosperity, the economy was much more diverse and resilient. Third, the population structure changed rapidly. African slaves grew from about 7 percent to more than 40 percent of the region’s population between 1690 and 1750, and the drastic imbalance between white men and women disappeared. Families rather than single men now predominated. The earlier frontier society of white immigrants, mostly living short, unrewarding lives as indentured servants, grew into an eighteenth-century plantation society of native-born freeholder families.

Notwithstanding the influx of Africans, slave owning was far from universal. As late as 1750, a majority
of families owned no slaves at all. Not more than one-tenth of slaveholders held more than 20 slaves. Nonetheless, the common goal was the large plantation where slaves made the earth yield up profits to support an aristocratic life for their masters.

The Chesapeake planters who acquired the best land and accumulated enough capital to invest heavily in slaves created a gentry lifestyle that set them apart from ordinary farmers. By the eighteenth century, the development of the northern colonies had produced prosperous farmers worth several thousand pounds. But such wealth paled alongside the estates of men who counted their slaves by the hundreds, their acres by the thousands, and their fortunes by the tens of thousands of pounds.

Ritual display of wealth marked southern gentry life. Racing thoroughbred horses and gambling on them recklessly, sometimes for purses of £100 (at a time when a laboring man earned £40 per year), became common sport for young gentlemen, who had often been educated in England. Planters began to construct stately brick Georgian mansions, filled with imported furniture, attended by liveried black slaves, and graced by formal gardens and orchards. The emerging Chesapeake planter elite controlled the county courts, officered the local militia, ruled the parish vestries of the Anglican church, made law in their legislative assemblies, and passed to their sons the mantle of political and social leadership.

For all their airs, these southern squires were essentially agrarian businessmen. They spent their days haggling over credit, land, slaves, and tenant leases; scheduling planting and harvesting; conferring with overseers; and disciplining slaves. Tobacco cultivation (unlike that of wheat and corn) claimed the planter’s year-round attention. A planter’s reputation rested on the quality of his crop. To personalize their tobacco, planters stamped their hogsheads of leaf with their initials or emblem. “Question a planter on the subject,” explained one observer, “and he will tell you that he cultivates such or such a kind [of tobacco], as for example, Colonel Carter’s sort, John Cole’s sort or [that of] some other leading crop master.”

Planters’ wives also shouldered many responsibilities. They supervised cloth production and the processing and preparation of food while ruling over households crowded with children, slaves, and visitors. An aristocratic veneer gave the luster of gentility to plantations from Maryland to North Carolina, but in fact these were large working farms, often so isolated from one another that the planter and his wife lived a “solitary and unsociable existence,” as one phrased it.

The Rice Coast

The plantation economy of the Lower South in the eighteenth century rested on rice and indigo. Rice exports surpassed 1.5 million pounds per year by 1710 and reached 80 million pounds by the eve of the Revolution. Indigo, a smelly blue dye obtained from plants for use in textiles, became a staple crop in the 1740s after Eliza Lucas Pinckney, a wealthy South Carolina planter’s wife, experimented successfully with its cultivation. Within a generation,
indigo production had spread into Georgia, ranking among the leading colonial exports.

The expansion of rice production, exported to the West Indies and Europe, transformed the swampy coastal lowlands around Charleston, where planters imported thousands of slaves after 1720. By 1740, slaves composed nearly 90 percent of the region’s inhabitants. White population declined as wealthy planters entrusted their estates to resident overseers. They wintered in cosmopolitan Charleston and summered in Newport, Rhode Island, their refuge from seasonal malaria along the rice coast. At midcentury, a shocked New England visitor described it as a society “divided into opulent and lordly planters, poor and spiritless peasants, and vile slaves.”

Throughout the plantation South, the courthouse became a central male gathering place. All classes came to settle debts, dispute over land, and sue and be sued. When court was over, a multitude lingered on, drinking, gossiping, and staging horse races, cockfights, wrestling matches, footraces, and fiddling contests—all considered tests of male prowess.

The church, almost always Anglican in the South before 1750, also became a center of community gathering. A visiting northerner described the animated socializing before worship: men “giving and receiving letters of business, reading advertisements, consulting about the price of tobacco and grain, and settling either the lineage, age, or qualities of favourite horses.” Then people filed into church, with lesser planters entering first and standing attentively until the wealthy gentry, “in a body,” took their pews at the front. After church, socializing continued, with young people strolling together and older ones extending invitations to Sunday dinner. New England’s pious Sabbath was little in evidence.

### The Backcountry

While the southern gentry matured along the tobacco and rice coasts, settlers poured into the upland backcountry. As late as 1730, only hunters and Native American fur traders had known this vast expanse of hilly red clay and fertile limestone soils from Pennsylvania to Georgia. Over the next four decades, it attracted some 250,000 inhabitants, nearly half the southern white population.

Thousands of land-hungry German and Scots–Irish settlers spilled into the interior valleys along the eastern side of the Appalachians. They squatted on land, lived tensely with neighboring Indians in a region where boundaries were shadowy, and built a subsistence society of small farms. This “mixed medley from all countries and the off scouring of America,” as one colonist described
them, remained isolated from the coastal region for several generations, which helped these pioneers cling fiercely to folkways they had brought across the Atlantic.

Crude backcountry life appalled visitors from the more refined seaboard. In 1733, William Byrd described a large Virginia frontier plantation as a "poor, dirty hovel, with hardly anything in it but children that wallowed about like so many pigs." Charles Woodmason, a stiff-necked Anglican minister who tramped between settlements in the Carolina upcountry, was shocked. "Through the licentiousness of the people many hundreds live in concubinage—swopping their wives as cattle and living in a state of nature more irregularly and unchastely than the Indians."

These comments reflected the poverty of frontier life and the lack of schools, churches, and towns. Most families plunged into the backcountry with only a few crude household possessions, tools, a few chickens and swine, and the clothes on their backs. They lived in rough-hewn log cabins and planted their corn, beans, and wheat between tree stumps. Women toiled alongside men. For a generation, everyone endured a poor diet, endless work, and meager rewards.

By the 1760s, the southern backcountry had begun to emerge from the frontier stage. Small marketing towns such as Camden, South Carolina; Salisbury, North Carolina; Winchester, Virginia; and Fredericktown, Maryland, became centers of craft activity, church life, and local government. Farms began producing surpluses for shipment east. Density of settlement increased, creating a social life known for harvest festivals, log-rolling contests, horse races, wedding celebrations, dances, and prodigious drinking bouts. Class distinctions remained narrow compared with the older seaboard settlements, as many backcountry settlements acquired the look of permanence.

**Family Life in the South**

As the South emerged from the early era of withering mortality and stunted families, male and female roles gradually became more physically and functionally separated. In most areas, the white gender ratio reached parity by the 1720s, depriving women of their leverage in the marriage market. The growth of slavery also changed white women's work role, with the wealthy planter's wife becoming a domestic manager in "the great house." In a description of his daughters' daily routine, William Byrd II pointed to the emerging female identity: "They are every day up to their elbows in housewifery, which will qualify them effectually for useful wives and if they live long enough for notable women."

The balanced gender ratio and the growth of slavery also brought changes for southern males. The planters' sons had always been trained in horsemanship, the use of a gun, and the rhythms of agricultural life. Learning how to manage and discipline slaves was as important as lessons with tutors. Bred to command, southern planters' sons developed a

**AMERICAN VOICES**

*Charles Woodmason, A Congregation in the Southern Backcountry*

*Planter, merchant, and then clergyman, Charles Woodmason preached extensively in the southern backcountry, always struggling to understand the crudity of frontier life.*

It would be a great novelty to a Londoner to see one of these congregations. The men with only a thin shirt and a pair of breeches or trousers on—barelegged and barefooted. The women bareheaded, barelegged, and barefooted, with only a thin shift and under petticoat.... The young women have a most uncommon practice, which I cannot break them of. They draw their shift as tight as possible to the body and pin it close to show the roundness of their breasts and slender waists (for they are generally finely shaped) and draw their petticoat to their hips to show the fineness of their limbs so that they might as well be in puri naturalibus. Indeed, nakedness is not censurable or indecent here, and they expose themselves often quite naked without ceremony, rubbing themselves and their hair with bear's oil and tying it up behind in a bunch like the Indians (being hardly one degree removed from them). In a few years, I hope to bring about a reformation, as I have already done in several parts of the country.

- Why do you think young frontier women adopted Native American customs?
- Did the men and women go barefooted by choice or necessity?
self-confidence and authority that propelled many of them into leadership roles during the American Revolution.

On the small farms of the tidewater region and throughout the back settlements, women's roles closely resembled those of northern women. Women labored in the fields alongside their menfolk. “She is a very civil woman,” noted an observer of a southern frontierswoman, “and shows nothing of ruggedness or immodesty in her carriage; yet she will carry a gun in the woods and kill deer and turkeys, shoot down wild cattle, catch and tie hogs, knock down beeves with an ax, and perform the most manful exercises as well as most men in those parts.”

Marriage and family life were more informal in the backcountry. With vast areas unattended by ministers and with courthouses out of reach, most couples married or “took up” with each other until an itinerant clergyman on horseback appeared to bless the marriages and baptize the children.

**Enslaved Africans in the Southern Colonies**

From the late seventeenth century, the slave population grew rapidly—from about 15,000 in 1690 to 80,000 in 1730 and 325,000 in 1760. By then, when they composed one-fifth of the colonial population, Africans were growing in number far more from natural increase than from importation. The generation after 1730 witnessed the largest influx of African slaves in the colonial period, averaging about 5,000 a year. In the entire period from 1700 to 1775, more than 350,000 African slaves entered the American colonies.

Most of these miserable captives were auctioned off to southern planters, but some landed in the northern cities, especially New York and Philadelphia. Merchants sold them there to artisans, farmers, and upper-class householders seeking domestic servants.

The basic struggle for Africans toiling on plantations 5,000 miles from their homes was to create strategies for living as satisfactorily as possible despite horrifying treatment. The master hoped to convert the slave into a mindless drudge who obeyed every command and worked efficiently for his profit. But attempts to cow slaves rarely succeeded completely. Masters could set the external boundaries of existence for their slaves, controlling physical location, work roles, diet, and shelter. But the authority of the master class impinged far less on how slaves established friendships, fell in love, formed kin groups, reared children, worshiped their gods, buried their dead, and organized their leisure time.

In these aspects of daily life, slaves in the Americas drew on their African heritage to shape their existence to some degree, thus laying the foundations for an African American culture. At first, this culture had many variations because slaves came from many areas in Africa and lived under different conditions in the colonies. But common elements emerged, led by developments in the South, where about 90 percent of American slaves labored in colonial times.

*Indian Traders at New Orleans* Visiting French Louisiana in 1735, Alexander de Batz painted members of the Illinois tribe who traded at New Orleans. Note the hatted African, who apparently has been adopted by the Illinois. What do you think the barrels and boxes in the foreground contain? (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Photography by Hillel Burger)
Arriving in North America, Africans entered a relatively healthy environment compared with other slave-labor areas in the Western Hemisphere. In the southern colonies, where the ghastly mortality of the early decades had subsided by the time Africans were arriving in large numbers, the slave’s chance for survival was much better than in the West Indies or Brazil. This, as well as a more even gender ratio, led to a natural increase in the North American slave population unparalleled elsewhere.

Although slave codes severely restricted the lives of slaves, the possibility for family life increased as the southern colonies matured. Larger plantations employed dozens and even hundreds of slaves, with many of the men laboring in skilled crafts, and the growth of roads and market towns permitted them greater opportunities to forge relationships beyond their own plantation. By the 1740s, a growing proportion of Chesapeake slaves were American-born, had established families, and lived in plantation outbuildings where from sundown to sunup they could fashion personal lives.

In South Carolina, African slaves drew on agricultural skills practiced in Africa and made rice the keystone of the coastal economy by the early eighteenth century. Their numbers increased rapidly, from about 4,000 in 1708 to 90,000 by 1760. Working mostly on large plantations in swampy lowlands, they endured the most life-sapping conditions on the continent. But they outnumbered whites three to one by 1760 and hence could maintain more of their African culture than slaves in the Chesapeake region. Many spoke Gullah, a “pidgin” mixing several African languages. They often gave African names to their children and kept alive African religious customs.

**Resistance and Rebellion**

Slaves not only adapted to bondage but also resisted and rebelled in ways that constantly reminded their masters that slavery’s price was eternal vigilance. Slaveowners interpreted rebelliousness as evidence of the “barbarous, wild savage natures” of Africans, as a South Carolina law of 1712 phrased it. Some planters, like Virginia’s Landon Carter, believed that “slaves are devils and to make them free is to set devils free.” But from the African point of view, resistance was essential to maintaining meaning and dignity in a life of degrading toil. Resisters’ goals varied: to rejoin family members, to flee, to persuade masters to improve their condition, or to avenge sadistic overseers.

“Saltwater” Africans, fresh from their homelands, often fought slavery fiercely. “They often die before they can be conquered,” said one white planter. Commonly, initial resistance took the form of fleeing—to renegade frontier settlements, to interior Native American tribes (which sometimes offered refuge), or to Spanish Florida. Rebellions, such as those in New York City in 1712 and at Stono, South Carolina, in 1739, mostly involved newly arrived slaves. There was no...
North American parallel, however, for the massive slave uprisings of the West Indies and Brazil, where Africans vastly outnumbered their masters and therefore had a special incentive for rebelling.

The relatively small rebellions that did occur (or were feared) led to atrocious repression. Near Charleston in 1739, officials tortured and hanged 50 black rebels. Their decapitated heads, impaled on posts, warned other potential insurrectionists. In New York City a year later, rumors of a planned insurrection caused the hanging of 18 slaves and 4 white allies and the burning of 13 other slaves.

As slaves learned English, adjusted to work routines, and began forming families, they practiced more subtle forms of resistance. Dragging out jobs, pretending illness or ignorance, and breaking tools were ways of avoiding physical exhaustion and indirect forms of opposing slavery itself. More direct resistance included truancy, arson directed against the master’s barns and houses, crop destruction, pillaging to supplement their food supply, and direct assaults on masters, overseers, and drivers. Overall, slave masters did extract labor and obedience from their slaves, but they did so only with difficulty. To push slaves too hard could be costly. One South Carolina planter drove his slaves late into the night cleaning and barreling a rice crop in 1732. When he awoke in the morning, he found his barn, with the entire harvest in it, reduced to ashes.

**Black Religion and Family**

The balance of power was always massively stacked against the slaves. Only the most desperate challenged the system directly. But as slaves struggled to find meaning and worth in their existence, religion and family became especially important.

Africans brought to the New World a complex religious heritage that no desolation or physical abuse could crush. People enduring the daily travail that accompanied slavery typically turned for relief to their deepest emotional sources. Coming from cultures where the division between sacred and secular activities was less clear than in Europe, slaves made religion central to their existence. Most slaves died strangers to Christianity until the mid-eighteenth century. Then they began to blend African religious practices with the religion of the master class, using this hybrid religion both to light the spark of resistance and to find comfort from oppression.

The religious revival that began in the 1720s in the northern colonies and spread southward thereafter made important contributions to African American religion. Evangelicalism stressed personal rebirth, used music and body motion, and produced an intense emotional experience. The dancing, shouting, rhythmic clapping, and singing that came to characterize slaves’ religious expression represented a creative mingling of West African and Christian religions.

Besides religion, the slaves’ greatest refuge from their dreadful fate lay in their families. In West Africa, all social relations were centered in kinship, which included dead ancestors. Torn from their native societies, slaves placed great importance on rebuilding extended kin groups.

Most English colonies prohibited slave marriages. But in practice, slaves and masters struck a bargain. Slaves desperately wanted families, and masters found that slaves with families would work harder and be less inclined to escape or rebel.

Slaves fashioned a family life only with difficulty, however. The general practice of importing three male slaves for every two females stunted family formation. Female slaves, much in demand, married in their late teens, but males usually had to wait until their mid- to late twenties. But as natural increase swelled the slave population in the eighteenth century, the gender ratio became more even.

Slave marriages were rarely secure because they could be abruptly severed by the sale of either husband or wife. This happened repeatedly, especially when a deceased planter’s estate was divided among his heirs or his slaves were sold to his creditors to satisfy debts. Children usually stayed with their mothers until about age 8; then they were frequently torn from their families through sale, often to small planters needing only a hand or two. Few slaves escaped separation from family members at some time during their lives.

White male exploitation of black women represented another assault on family life. How many black women were coerced or lured with favors into sexual relations with white masters and overseers cannot be known, but the sizable mulatto (mixed-race) population at the end of the eighteenth century indicates that the number was large. Interracial liaisons, frequently forced, were widespread, especially in the Lower South. In 1732, the *South-Carolina Gazette* called racial mixing an “epidemical disease.” It was a malady that had traumatic effects on slave attempts to build stable relationships.

In some interracial relationships, the coercion was subtle. In some cases, black women sought the liaison to gain advantages for themselves or their children. These unions nonetheless threatened both the slave community and the white plantation ideal. They bridged the supposedly unbridgeable
gap between slave and free society and produced children who did not fit into the plantation ideal of separate racial categories.

Despite such obstacles, slaves fashioned intimate ties as husband and wife, parent and child. If monogamous relationships did not last as long as in white society, much of the explanation lies in slave life: the shorter life span of African Americans, the shattering of marriage through sale of one or both partners, and the call of freedom that impelled some slaves to run away.

Whereas slave men struggled to preserve their family role, many black women assumed a position in the family that differed from that of white women. Plantation mistresses usually worked hard in helping manage estates, but nonetheless the ideal grew that they should remain in the house guarding white virtue and setting standards for white culture. In contrast, the black woman remained indispensable to both the work of the plantation and the functioning of the slave quarters. She toiled in the fields and slave cabins alike. Paradoxically, black women's constant labor made them more equal to men than was the case of women in white society.

Above all, slavery was a set of power relationships designed to extract the maximum labor from its victims. Hence, it regularly involved cruelties that filled family life with tribulation. Still, slaves in North America toiled in less physically exhausting circumstances than slaves on sugar and coffee plantations and were better clothed, fed, and treated than Africans in the West Indies, Brazil, and other parts of the hemisphere. Therefore, they were unusually successful in establishing families. Slave family life in the American colonies brimmed with uncertainty and sorrow but was nonetheless the greatest monument to slaves' will to endure captivity and eventually gain their freedom.
CONTENDING FOR A CONTINENT

By 1750, when English colonists numbered about 1.2 million, only a small fraction of them, along with their African slaves, lived farther than 100 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. Growing rapidly, the English colonies were beginning to elbow up against the French and Spanish settlements in the rich river valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi and beyond. France posed the greatest threat to English colonists in the interior of North America, while the Spanish presented another challenge on their southern flank. On the other side of the continent, the Spanish were moving northward up the California coast until they reached the limits of Russian settlement in northern California.

France’s Inland Empire

In 1661, France’s Louis XIV, determined to make his country the most powerful in Europe, looked with keen interest to North America and the Caribbean. New France’s timber would build the royal navy, its fish would feed the growing mass of slaves in the French West Indies, and its fur trade, if greatly expanded, would fill the royal coffers. From French Caribbean islands came precious sugar.

New France grew in population, economic strength, and ambition in the late seventeenth century. In 1673, Louis Joliet and Father Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit priest, explored an immense territory watered by the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. A decade later, military engineers and priests began building forts and missions in the Great Lakes region and the Mississippi valley. In 1682, René Robert de La Salle canoed down the Mississippi all the way to the Gulf of Mexico and planted a settlement in Texas at Matagorda Bay. The French solidified their claim to the North American heartland and the lower Mississippi valley when Pierre le Moyne d’Iberville established a small settlement at Biloxi in 1699 and then three years later a settlement at Mobile.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the French developed a system of forts, trading posts, and agricultural villages throughout the heart of the continent, threatening to pin the English to the seaboard. French success in this vast region hinged partly on shrewd dealing with the Native American tribes, which retained sovereignty over the land but gradually succumbed to French diseases, French arms, and French-promoted intertribal wars.

Because France’s interior empire was organized primarily as a military, trading, and missionizing operation, male French settlers arrived with few French women. Thus, for a long time, French men were in a state of need when they encountered Native Americans—not only for trading partners, allies, and religious converts but also for wives. These needs produced a mingling of French and Native American peoples—what the French called *metissage*—in the North American interior. Such interracial marriages, called “the custom of the country,” were welcomed by the natives as well as the French. Marital alliances cemented trade and military relations. French traders entered Native American kinship circles, making trade flow smoothly, while natives gained protection against
their enemies and access to provisions and weapons at French trading posts.

The French presence in the continent’s vast heartland, thinly dotted with small farming communities, created a shield against the expansive British. As the French population grew to about 70,000 by 1750, they demonstrated how European settlers and Native American peoples could coexist. Almost all French settlements in North America’s interior were mixed-race, or métis, communities—a sharp contrast to the English colonies.

In 1718, French pioneers of the interior and those along the Gulf of Mexico were inundated when France settled New Orleans at great cost by transporting almost 7,000 whites and 5,000 African slaves to the mouth of the Mississippi River. Disease rapidly whittled down these numbers, and an uprising of the powerful Natchez in 1729 discouraged further French immigration. Most of the survivors settled around the little town of New Orleans and on long, narrow plantations stretching back from the Mississippi River. While New Orleans’ economy and society resembled early Charleston, South Carolina, it was run and financed by royal government and knew nothing of representative political institutions such as elections, legislative assembly, newspapers, or taxes.
French slaves were critically important to the development of Louisiana. Arriving with skills as rice growers, indigo processors, metal workers, river navigators, herbalists, and cattle keepers, Africans became the backbone of the economy. Like male slaves in the Spanish colonies, they mingled extensively with Native American women, producing mixed-race children known locally as *grifs*. African women also made interracial liaisons with French immigrants, often soldiers in search of partners. By 1765 black Louisianans, outnumbering whites, served as militiamen and sometimes received freedom for military service. Paternalistic French law also gave slaves some protection in courts. All in all, the chance of gaining freedom in fluid French Louisiana exceeded that of any other colony in North America’s Southeast, and the absorption of free blacks into white society, particularly if they were of mixed-race descent, was shockingly common from the English point of view. When the Spanish took over the colony in 1769, they guaranteed slaves the right to buy freedom with money earned in their free time. Soon a free black class emerged. When Americans acquired the colony in 1803, they suppressed freedom purchase and discouraged manumission.

A Generation of War

The growth of French strength and ambitions brought British America and New France into deadly conflict beginning in the late seventeenth century. Protestant New Englanders regarded Catholic New France as a satanic challenge to their divinely sanctioned mission. When the European wars began in 1689, precipitated by Louis XIV’s territorial aggression in western and central Europe, conflict between England and France quickly extended into every overseas theater where the two powers had colonies. In North America, the battle zone included New York, New England, and eastern Canada.

In two wars, from 1689 to 1697 and 1701 to 1713, the English and French, while fighting in Europe, also sought to oust each other from the Americas. The zone of greatest importance was the Caribbean, where slaves produced huge sugar fortunes. But both home governments valued the North American settlements greatly as a source of the timber and fish that sustained the sugar-producing West Indian colonies.

The English struck three times at the centers of French power—at Port Royal, which commanded the access to the St. Lawrence River, and at Quebec, the capital of New France. In 1690, during King
Like every other Anglo-French conflict in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Queen Anne’s War was fought in the Caribbean as well as in North America. The sugar- and coffee-rich islands of the West Indies, teeming with enslaved Africans, made them prizes in the competition for empire.
William’s War (1689–1697), their small flotilla captured Port Royal, the hub of Acadia (which was returned to France at the end of the war). The English assault on Quebec, however, failed disastrously. In Queen Anne’s War (1701–1713), New England attacked Port Royal three times before finally capturing it in 1710. A year later, when England sent a flotilla of 60 ships and 5,000 men to conquer Canada, the land and sea operations foundered before reaching their destinations.

With European-style warfare miserably unsuccessful in America, both England and France attempted to subcontract military tasks to their Native American allies. This policy occasionally succeeded, especially with the French, who gladly sent their own troops into the fray alongside Native American partners. In both wars, the French and their Native American allies wiped out the frontier outpost of Schenectady, New York, in 1690; razed Wells, Maine, and Deerfield, Massachusetts, in 1703; and battered other towns along the New England frontier during both wars.

Retaliating, the English-supplied Iroquois left New France “bewildered and benumbed” after a massacre near Montreal in 1689. Assessing their own interests and too powerful to be bullied by either France or England, the Iroquois sat out the second war in the early eighteenth century. Convinced that neutrality served their purposes better than acting as mercenaries for the English, they held to the principle that “we are a free people uniting ourselves to whatever sachem [chief] we wish.”

Though England had rebuffed France after a generation of war, New England suffered grievous economic and human losses. Massachusetts bore the heaviest burden. Probably one-fifth of all able-bodied males in the colony participated in the Canadian campaigns, and of these, about one-quarter never lived to tell of the terrors of New England’s first major experience with international warfare. The war debt was £50,000 sterling in Massachusetts alone, a greater per capita burden than the national debt today. At the end of the second conflict, in 1713, war widows were so numerous that the Bay Colony faced its first serious poverty problem. In addition, wartime taxes and price inflation had eaten deeply into the pocketbooks of most working families.

The colonies south of New England remained on the sidelines during most of the two wars. But war at sea between European rivals affected even those who sat out the land war. New York lost one of its best grain markets when Spain, allied with France, outlawed American foodstuffs in its Caribbean colonies. The French navy plucked off nearly one-quarter of the port’s fleet and disrupted Philadelphia grain merchants’ access to the Caribbean.

The burdens and rewards fell unevenly on the participants, as usually happens in wartime. Some lowborn men could rise spectacularly. William Phips, the twenty-sixth child in his family, had been a poor sheep farmer and ship’s carpenter in Maine who seemed destined to go nowhere. He then won a fortune by recovering a sunken Spanish treasure ship in the West Indies in 1687 and was given command of the expedition against Port Royal in 1690. Victory there catapulted him to the governorship of Massachusetts in 1691; thereafter his status was secure.

Other men, already rich, got richer. Andrew Belcher of Boston, who had grown wealthy on provisioning contracts during King Philip’s War, supplied warships and outfitted the New England expeditions to Canada. He became a local titan, riding in London-built coaches, erecting a handsome mansion, and purchasing slaves.

Most men, especially those who did the fighting, gained little, and many lost everything. The least securely placed New Englanders—indentured servants, apprentices, recently arrived immigrants, unskilled laborers, fishermen, and ordinary farmers—supplied most of the voluntary or involuntary recruits, and they died in numbers that seem staggering today. Antipopery, dreams of glory, and promises of plunder in French Canada lured most of them into uniform. Having achieved no place on the paths leading upward, they grasped at straws and usually failed again.

In 1713, the Peace of Utrecht, which ended Queen Anne’s War, capped the century-long rise of England and the decline of Spain in the rivalry for the sources of wealth outside Europe. England, the big winner, received Newfoundland and Acadia (renamed Nova Scotia), and France recognized English sovereignty over the fur-rich Hudson Bay territory. France retained Cape Breton Island, controlling the entrance to the St. Lawrence River. In the Caribbean, France yielded St. Kitts and Nevis to England. Spain lost its provinces in Italy and the last of its holdings in the Netherlands to the Austrian Hapsburgs. Spain also surrendered Gibraltar and Minorca to England and awarded the English the lucrative privilege of supplying the Spanish empire in the Americas with African slaves.

**Spain’s Frail North American Grip**

Spain’s grip on its colonies in North America had always been tenuous. On the East Coast, the growth of South Carolina’s slave-based plantation society in the late seventeenth century stemmed partly from the
English use of Native American allies to attack Spanish Indian missions and outposts and sell the captives into slavery. From this time forward, English and French traders, with more attractive trade goods to offer, held sway over Florida Indians.

After the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, Spain maintained a fragile hold on the southern tier of the continent. However, Spain learned how easily its thinly peopled missions and frontier outposts could be crippled or destroyed by chafing Native Americans and invading English. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Spanish settlements stagnated, suffering from Spain's colonial policy that regarded them as marginal, money-losing affairs, useful only as defensive outposts.

Hispanics, mestizos, and detribalized Native Americans began to increase modestly in Texas, New Mexico, and California in the first half of the eighteenth century, but by 1745 in Florida they had only one-tenth the population of the English in South Carolina. New Mexico's Hispanic population of about 10,000 at midcentury could defend the vast region only because no European challenger appeared.

As in New France, racial intermixture and social fluidity were more extensive in New Spain than in the English colonies because Spanish male colonizers greatly outnumbered Spanish women. Precisely how much intermixing occurred is uncertain because the Spanish never defined racial groups as distinctly as the English. The word **Spaniard** on a census might mean a white immigrant from Mexico or a part—Native American person who "lived like a Spaniard." Social mobility was considerable because the Crown was willing to raise even a common person to the status of **hidalgo** (minor nobleman) as an inducement to settle in New Spain's remote northern frontier. Most of the immigrants became small ranchers, producing livestock, corn, and wheat for export to southward Spanish provinces.

Native Americans had mixed success in resisting Spanish domination. In New Mexico, an early nineteenth-century Spanish investigator saw the key to Pueblo cultural autonomy as the underground kivas, which were "like impenetrable temples, where they gather to discuss mysteriously their misfortunes or good fortunes, their happiness or grief. The doors of these **estufas** are always closed to us." However, California tribes had difficulty in maintaining cultural cohesion. In the 1770s, the Spanish rapidly completed their western land and sea routes from San Diego to Yerba Buena (San Francisco) to block Russian settlement south of their base in northern California. California's Spanish pioneers were Franciscan missionaries, accompanied by royal soldiers. The priests would choose a good location and then attract a few Native Americans to be baptized and resettled around the missions, which they helped build. Visiting relatives would then be induced to stay. These Native Americans lived under an increasingly harsh regimen until they were reduced to a condition of virtual slavery. The California mission, with...
its extensive and profitable herds and grain crops, theoretically belonged to the Native American converts, but they did not enjoy the profits. Ironically, the spiritual motives of the priests brought the same degradation of tribal Americans as elsewhere.

Cultural and Ecological Changes Among Interior Tribes

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the inland tribes proved their capacity to adapt to the contending European colonizers in their region while maintaining political independence. Yet extensive contact with the French, Spanish, and English slowly brought ominous changes to Native American societies. European trade goods, especially iron implements, textiles, firearms and ammunition, and alcohol, altered Native American ways of life. Subsistence hunting turned into commercial hunting, restricted only by the quantity of trade goods desired. Native American males, gradually wiping out deer and beaver east of the Mississippi River, spent more time away from the villages trapping and hunting. Women were also drawn into the new economy, skinning animals and fashioning pelts into robes. Among some tribes, these commercial activities became so time-consuming that they had to procure food from other tribes.

The fur trade greatly altered traditional Native American life. Spiritual beliefs that the destinies of humans and animals were closely linked eroded when trappers and hunters declared all-out war on the beaver and other fur-bearing animals in order to exchange pelts for attractive trade goods. Competition for furs sharpened intertribal tensions, often to the point of war. The introduction of European weaponry, which Native Americans quickly mastered, intensified these conflicts.
Tribal political organization in the interior changed too. Earlier, most tribes had been loose confederations of villages and clans with the Creek, Cherokee, and Iroquois peoples giving primary loyalty to the village, not to the tribe or confederacy. But trade, diplomatic contact, and war with Europeans required coordinated policies, so villagers gradually adopted more centralized leadership. For example, the basic unit of Cherokee political authority was the nearly autonomous village. But tension with Creek neighbors and intermittent hostilities with the English pressed home the need for coordinated decision making. By 1750, the Cherokee had formed an umbrella political organization that gathered together the fragmented authority of the villages and formed a more centralized tribal “priest state.” When this proved inadequate, warriors began to assume the dominant role in tribal councils, replacing the civil chiefs.

While incorporating trade goods into their material culture and adapting their economies and political structures to new situations, the interior tribes held fast to many traditions. They saw little reason to replace what they valued in their own culture. What they saw of the colonists’ law and justice, religion, education, family organization, and child rearing usually convinced Native Americans that their own ways were superior.

The Native Americans’ refusal to accept the superiority of white culture frustrated English missionaries, eager to win Native Americans from “savage” ways. A Carolinian admitted that “they are really better to us than we are to them. We look upon them with scorn and disdain, and think them little better than beasts in human shape, though if well examined, we shall find that, for all our religion and education, we possess more moral deformities and evils than these savages do.”

Overall, interior tribes suffered from contact with the British colonizers. Decade by decade, the fur trade spread epidemic diseases, intensified warfare, depleted game animals, and drew Native Americans into a market economy in which their trading partners gradually became trading masters.

**AMERICAN VOICES**

**Susanna Johnson, Adoption into a Native American Tribe**

Susanna Johnson, who had been captured by Abenaki in 1754, describes her adoption into the tribe and her assignment to a Native American “master.”

I, with my infant, was taken to the grand parade, where we found a large collection of the village inhabitants. An aged chief stepped forward into an area, and after every noise was silenced and every one fixed in profound attention he began his harangue: his manner was solemn; his motions and expression gave me a perfect idea of an orator. Not a breath was heard, and every spectator seemed to reverence what he said. After the speech my little son was brought to the opposite side of the parade, and a number of blankets laid by his side. It now appeared that his master and mine intended an exchange of prisoners. My master, being a hunter, wished for my son to attend him on his excursions. Each delivered his property with great formality: my son and blankets being an equivalent for myself, child, and wampum. I was taken to the house of my new master, and found myself allied to the first family. My master, whose name was Gill, was son-in-law to the grand sachem, was accounted rich, had a store of goods, and lived in a style far above the majority of his tribe. He often told me that he had an English heart, but his wife was true Indian blood. Soon after my arrival at his house the interpreter came to inform me that I was adopted into his family. I was then introduced into his family, and was told to call them brothers and sisters. I made a short reply, expressive of gratitude for being introduced to a house of high rank, and requested their patience while I should learn the customs of the nation.

Do you believe captured Native Americans were adopted into white families in the manner described here? If not, why?

THE URBAN WORLD OF COMMERCE AND IDEAS

Only about 5 percent of the eighteenth-century colonists lived in towns as large as 2,500, and no city boasted a population above 16,000 in 1750 or 30,000.
CHAPTER 4 The Maturing of Colonial Society

Cities were trade centers. Through them flowed colonial export staples (tobacco, rice, furs, wheat, timber products, and fish) and the imported goods that colonists needed: manufactured and luxury goods from England (glass, paper, iron implements, and cloth); wine, spices, coffee, tea, and sugar from other parts of the world; and the human cargo to fill the labor gap. The pivotal seaport figure was the merchant, often engaging in both retail and wholesale trade, usually the moneylender (for no banks yet existed), and frequently the shipbuilder, insurance agent, land developer, and coordinator of artisan production.

By the eighteenth century, the American economy was integrated into an Atlantic trading system that connected settlers to Great Britain, western Europe, Africa, the West Indies, and Newfoundland. Great Britain, like other major trading nations of western Europe, pursued mercantilist trade policies. Mercantilism's core idea was that a country must gain wealth by increasing exports, taxing imports, regulating production and trade, and exploiting colonies. These policies governed British treatment of their North American and Caribbean colonies.

The colonists could never produce enough exportable raw materials to pay for the imported goods they craved, so they had to earn credits in England by supplying the West Indies and other areas with foodstuffs and timber products. They also accumulated credit by providing shipping and distribution services. Sailing from Boston, Salem, Newport, and Providence, New Englanders became the most ambitious participants in the carrying trade.

The Artisan's World

Although merchants stood first in wealth and prestige in the colonial towns, artisans were far more numerous. About two-thirds of urban adult males (slaves excluded) labored at handicrafts. By the mid-eighteenth century, the colonial cities contained scores of specialized “leather apron men” besides the proverbial butcher, baker, and candlestick maker. Handicraft specialization increased as the cities matured, but every artisan worked with hand tools, usually in small shops.

Work patterns for artisans were irregular, dictated by weather, length of daylight, erratic delivery of raw materials, and shifting consumer demand. When ice blocked northern harbors, mariners and dockworkers endured slack time. If prolonged rain delayed the slaughter of cows in the country or

In 1775. Yet urban societies were at the leading edge of the transition to “modern” life. There, a barter economy first gave way to a commercial economy, a social order based on assigned status turned into one based on achievement, rank-conscious and deferential politics changed to participatory and contentious politics, and small-scale artisanship was gradually replaced by factory production. Into the cities flowed European ideas, which radiated outward to the hinterland.

Sinews of Trade

In the half century after 1690, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston blossomed into thriving commercial centers. Their growth accompanied the development of the agricultural interior, to which the seaports were closely linked. As the colonial population rose and spread out, minor seaports such as Salem, Newport, Providence, Annapolis, Norfolk, and Savannah gathered 5,000 or more inhabitants.
made impassable the rutted roads into the city, the tanner and the shoemaker laid their tools aside. The hatter depended on the supply of beaver skins, which could stop abruptly if disease struck a Native American tribe or war disrupted the fur trade. Every urban artisan knew “broken days,” slack spells, and dull seasons. Ordinary laborers dreaded winter, for it was a season when cities had “little occasion for the labor of the poor,” and firewood could cost several months’ wages.

Urban artisans took fierce pride in their crafts. While deferring to those above them, they saw themselves as the backbone of the community, contributing essential products and services. “Our professions rendered us useful and necessary members of our community,” the Philadelphia shoemakers asserted, “Proud of that rank, we aspired to no higher.” This self-esteem and desire for community recognition sometimes jostled with the upper-class view of artisans as “mere mechanicks,” part of the “vulgar herd.”

Striving for respectability, artisans placed a premium on achieving economic independence. Every artisan began as an apprentice, spending five or more teenage years in a master’s shop, then, after fulfilling his contract, becoming a “journeyman,” selling his labor to a master and frequently living in his house where he ate at his table and sometimes married his daughter. He hoped to complete within a few years the three-step climb from servitude to self-employment. After setting up his own shop, he could control his work hours and acquire the respect that came from economic independence. But in trades requiring greater organization and capital, such as distilling and shipbuilding, the rise from journeyman to master often proved impossible.

In good times, urban artisans did well. They expected to earn a “decent competency” and eventually to purchase a small house. But success was far from automatic, even for those following Poor Richard’s advice about hard work and frugal living. An advantageous marriage, luck in avoiding illness, and an ample inheritance were often critical. In Philadelphia, about half the artisans in the first half of the eighteenth century died leaving enough personal property to have ensured a comfortable standard of living. Another quarter left more, often including slaves and indentured servants. New England’s artisans did not fare so well because their economy was weaker.

### Urban Social Structure

Population growth, economic development, and war altered the urban social structure between 1690 and 1765. Stately townhouses displayed fortunes built through trade, shipbuilding, war contracting, and—probably most profitable of all—urban land development. “It is almost a proverb,” a Philadelphian observed in the 1760s, “that every great fortune made here within these 50 years has been by land.” A merchant’s estate of £2,000 sterling was impressive in the early eighteenth century. Two generations later, North America’s first millionaires were accumulating estates of £10,000 to £20,000 sterling.

The rise of Thomas Hancock, on whose fortune his less commercially astute nephew, John Hancock, would later construct a shining political career, shows how war could catapult an enterprising trader to affluence. An opportune marriage to the daughter of a prosperous merchant provided bookseller Hancock with a toehold in commerce and enough capital to invest in several vessels. By 1735, he had made enough money, much of it from smuggling tea, to build a mansion on Beacon Hill. When war broke out with Spain in 1739, Hancock obtained lucrative supply contracts for military expeditions to the Caribbean and Nova Scotia. He also invested...
heavily in privateers, who engaged in private warfare against enemy shipping and auctioned the enemy vessels they overpowered. When peace returned in 1748, Hancock was riding through Boston in a London-built four-horse chariot emblazoned with a heraldic shield.

Alongside urban wealth grew urban poverty. From the beginning, every city had its disabled, orphaned, and widowed who required aid. But after 1720, poverty marred the lives of many more city dwellers, including war widows with no means of support, rural migrants, and recent immigrants. Boston was hit especially hard. Its economy stagnated in the 1740s, and taxpayers groaned under the burden of paying for heavy war expenditures. Cities devised new ways of helping the needy, such as building large almshouses where the poor could be housed and fed more economically. But many of the indigent preferred “to starve in their homes” rather than endure the discipline and indignities of the poorhouse. Boston’s poor women also resisted laboring in the linen factory that was built in 1750 to enable them to contribute to their own support through spinning and weaving. Despite the warnings of Boston’s ministers that “if any would not work, neither should they eat,” they refused to leave their children at home to labor in America’s first textile factory.

Urban eighteenth-century tax lists reveal the increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor. The top 5 percent of taxpayers increased their share of the cities’ taxable assets from about 30 to 50 percent between 1690 and 1770. The bottom half of the taxable inhabitants saw their share of the wealth shrink from about 10 to 4 percent. Except in Boston, the urban middle classes continued to gain ground. Still, the growth of princely fortunes amid increasing poverty made some urban dwellers reflect that Old World ills were reappearing in the New.

### The Entrepreneurial Ethos

As the cities grew, new values took hold. In the traditional view of society, economic life was supposed to operate according to what was fair, not what was profitable. Regulated prices and wages, quality controls, supervised public markets, and other such measures seemed natural because a community was defined as a single body of interrelated parts, where individual rights and responsibilities formed a seamless web.

In their commercialized cities, most urban dwellers grew to regard the subordinating of private interests to the commonweal as unrealistic. Prosperity required the encouragement of acquisitive appetites rather than self-denial, for ambition would spur economic activity as more people sought more goods. The new view held that if people were allowed to pursue their material desires competitively, they would collectively form a natural, impersonal market of producers and consumers that would advantage everyone.

Hence, as the colonial port towns became imbedded in the Atlantic world of commerce, merchants began to make decisions according to the emerging commercial ethic that rejected traditional restraints on entrepreneurial activity. If wheat fetched eight shillings a bushel in the West Indies but only five in Boston, a grain merchant felt justified in sending all he could purchase from local farmers to the more distant buyer. Indifferent to individuals and local communities, the new transatlantic market responded only to the invisible laws of supply and demand.

Tension between the new economic freedom and the older concern for the public good erupted only with food shortages or galloping inflation. Because

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### Wealth Distribution in Colonial America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Richest 10%</th>
<th>Poorest 30%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boston</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1684–1699</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1700–1715</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1716–1725</td>
<td>61.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1726–1735</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1736–1745</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1746–1755</td>
<td>55.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1756–1765</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766–1775</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1684–1699</td>
<td>36.4</td>
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<td>1700–1715</td>
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<td>1716–1725</td>
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<td>1746–1755</td>
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<td>1756–1765</td>
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<tr>
<td>1766–1775</td>
<td>69.9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chester County, Pennsylvania</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1693</td>
<td>23.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Historians use probate records to examine social changes in American society. They include wills, the legal disposition of estates, and household inventories taken by court-appointed appraisers that detail the personal possessions left at death. Inventories have been especially valuable in tracing the transformation of colonial communities.

Like tax lists, inventories can be used to show changes in a community’s distribution of wealth. But they are far more detailed than tax lists, providing a snapshot of how people lived at the end of their life. Inventories list and value almost everything a person owned—household possessions, equipment, books, clothes and jewelry, cash on hand, livestock and horses, crops and stored provisions. Hence, through inventories, we can measure the quality of life at different social levels. We can also witness how people made choices about investing their savings—in capital goods of their trade such as land, ships, and equipment; in personal goods such as household furnishings and luxury items; or in real property such as land and houses.

Studied systematically (and corrected for biases, which infect this source as well as others), inventories show that by the early 1700s, ordinary householders were improving their standard of living. Finished furniture such as cupboards, beds, tables, and chairs turn up more frequently in inventories. Pewter dinnerware replaces wooden bowls and spoons, bed linen makes an appearance, and books and pictures are sometimes noted.

Among an emerging elite before the Revolution, much more fashionable articles of consumption appear. The partial inventory of Robert Oliver, a wealthy merchant and officeholder living in a Boston suburb, is reproduced here. You can get some idea of the dignified impression Oliver wished to make by looking at his furniture and dishes and by noticing that he owned a mahogany tea table, damask linen, and a bed with curtains. The inventory further suggests the spaciousness of Oliver’s house and shows how he furnished each room.

It is helpful when studying inventories to categorize the goods in the following way: those that are needed to survive (basic cooking utensils, for example); those that make life easier or more comfortable (enough plates and beds for each member of the family, for example); and those that make life luxurious (slaves, silver plates, paintings, mahogany furniture, damask curtains, spices, wine, and so forth). Oliver had many luxury goods as well as items that contributed to his use of leisure time and his personal enjoyment. Which items in his inventory do you think were needed only to survive comfortably? Which were luxuries? What other conclusions can you draw about the lifestyle of rich colonial merchants like Oliver?

Beyond revealing a growing social differentiation in colonial society, the inventories help the historian understand the reaction during the Great Awakening to what many ordinary colonists regarded as sinful pride and arrogance displayed by the elite. By the 1760s, this distrust of affluence among simple folk had led to outright hostility toward men who surrounded themselves with the trappings of aristocratic life. Even the ambitious young John Adams, a striving lawyer, was shocked at what he saw at the house of a wealthy merchant in Boston. “Went over the House to view the furniture, which alone cost a thousand Pound sterling,” he exclaimed. “A seat it is for a noble Man, a Prince. The Turkey Carpets, the painted Hangings, the Marble Tables, the rich Beds with crimson Damask Curtains . . . are the most magnificent of any Thing I have ever seen.”

Such a description takes on its full meaning only when contrasted with what inventories tell us about life at the bottom of society. The hundreds of inventories for Bostonians dying in the decade before the American Revolution show that fully half of them died with less than £40 personal wealth and one-quarter with £20 or less. The inventories and wills of Jonathan and Daniel Chandler of Andover, Massachusetts, show the material circumstances of less favored Americans who suffered from the economic distress afflicting New England since the 1730s. Note that Daniel Chandler was a shoemaker.

**Reflecting on the Past** How do the possessions of these brothers compare with Oliver’s partial inventory? An examination of these contrasting inventories helps explain the class tension that figured in the revolutionary experience.
Household Inventory of Robert Oliver, Wealthy Merchant
Dorchester Jan ry 11 th 1763.
Inventory of what Estates Real & Personall, belonging to Coll. o Robert Oliver [Esquire] late of Dorchester Deceased, that has been Exhibited to us the Subscribers, for Apprizement. Viz.t

In the Setting Parlour Viz.t
- a looking Glass £4.—.—
- a Small Ditto
- 12 Metzitens pictures Glaz’d @6/ 3.12.—
- 8 Cartoons D.o Ditto 4.—.—
- 11 small Pictures
- 4 Maps
- 1 Prospect Glass
- 2 Executions Glaz’d
- 1 pair small hand Irons
- 1 Shovel & Tongs
- 1 Tobacco Tongs
- 1 pair Bellows
- 1 Tea Chest
- 2 Small Waters
- 1 Mahogany Tea Table
- 8 China Cups & Saucers
- 1 Earthen Cream Pott
- 1 Ditto. Sugar Dish
- 1 Black Walnut Table
- 1 Black Ditto Smaller
- 1 Round painted Table
- 7 Leather Bottom Chairs @ 6/
- 1 Arm’d Chair Common
- 1 Black Walnut Desk
- 1 pair Candlesticks snuffers & Stand
- 6 Wine Glasses 1 Water Glass
- a parcell of Books
- a Case with Small Bottles

In the Entry & Stair Case Viz.t
- 17 pictures

In the Kitchen Chamber Viz.t
- a Bedstead & Curtains Compleat £4.—.—
- a Bed Bolster & 2 pillows
- a Under Bed & 1 Chair
- 2 Rugs & 1 Blanket @ 6/

£43.13.0

Household Inventory of Jonathan Chandler (d. 1745)
Cash £18p
Gun 1p
Psalmbook 8p
£19p
Debts £3p
Total £14p

Household Inventory of Daniel Chandler (d. 1752), Shoemaker
Bible
Shoe knife
Hammer Total £12
Last (shoe shaper)
Various notes

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the American colonies experienced none of the famines that ravaged Europe in this period, such crises were rare, usually occurring during war, when demand for provisions rose sharply. Such a moment struck in Boston during Queen Anne’s War. Merchant Andrew Belcher contracted to ship wheat to the Caribbean, where higher prices would yield greater profit than in Boston. Ordinary neighbors, threatened with a bread shortage and angered that a townsman would put profit ahead of community needs, attacked one of Belcher’s grain-laden ships and tried to seize the grain. The grand jury, composed of substantial members of the community, hinted its approval of the violent action against Belcher by refusing to indict the rioters.

The two conceptions of community and economic life continued to rub against each other for decades. Urban merchants, shopkeepers, land speculators, and ambitious artisans cleaved more and more to the new economic formulas, while many clergymen continued to preach the traditional message: “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.” By the mid-eighteenth century, the pursuit of profits was winning out over the old community-oriented social compact.

The American Enlightenment

Ideas not only about economic life but also the nature of the universe and the improvement of the human condition filtered across the Atlantic. In the eighteenth century, an American version of the European intellectual movement called the Enlightenment came into focus.

In what is called the Age of Reason, European thinkers rejected the pessimistic Calvinist concept of innate human depravity, replacing it with the optimistic notion that a benevolent God had blessed humankind with the supreme gift of reason. Thinkers like John Locke, in his influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), argued that God had not predetermined the content of the human mind but had instead given it the capacity to acquire knowledge. All Enlightenment thinkers prized this acquisition of knowledge, for it allowed humankind to improve its condition. As the great mathematician Isaac Newton demonstrated, systematic investigation could unlock the secrets of the physical universe. Moreover, scientific knowledge could be applied to improve society.

The scientific and intellectual advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries encouraged a
The English clergyman Andrew Burnaby toured the mid-Atlantic English colonies in 1759–1760, just a few years before relations between England and its North American colonies became severely strained. Here are some of his judgments on the Pennsylvanians he visited.

The Pennsylvanians, as to character, are a frugal and industrious people: not remarkably courteous and hospitable to strangers unless particularly recommended to them; but rather, like the denizens of most commercial cities, the reverse. They are great republicans, and have fallen into the same errors in their ideas of independency as most of the other colonies have. They are by far the most enterprising people upon the continent. As they consist of several nations, and talk several languages, they are aliens in some respect to Great Britain; nor can it be expected that they should have the same filial attachment to her which her own immediate offspring have. However, they are quiet and concern themselves but little, except about getting money.

The women are exceedingly handsome and polite; they are naturally sprightly and fond of pleasure; and, upon the whole, are much more agreeable and accomplished than the men. Since their intercourse with the English offices, they are greatly improved; and, without flattery, many of them would not make bad figures even in the first assemblies in Europe. Their amusements are chiefly dancing in the winter; and, in the summer, forming parties of pleasure upon the Schuylkill [River] and in the country.

**What does Burnaby mean by calling the Pennsylvanians "great republicans"?**

**Do you think he finds a connection between money-grubbing and his comments on the superiority of American women?**


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**Animals of North America**  In two trips to the Americas between 1712 and 1726, the Englishman Mark Catesby captured the flora and fauna of the British colonies, both on the North American mainland and in the West Indies. His work, published in 1747 as Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands, became the first illustrated natural history of the British colonies. Portrayed here is the American bison, unknown in Europe, and chiggers, heron, and eft (the latter held in the heron’s beak). (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
belief in “natural law” and fostered debate about the “natural” human rights. In Europe, French philosophers Voltaire and Denis Diderot explored the issue of equality. From 1750 to 1772, Diderot published his Encyclopedia, which treated such topics as equality, liberty, reason, and rights. These ideas spread in Europe and the Americas, eventually finding expression in movements for reform, democracy, and liberation—all of deep interest to those beginning to oppose slavery and the slave trade as abominations. Even as the traffic in slaves peaked, religious and humanitarian opposition to slavery arose. The idea grew in the 1750s that slavery contradicted the Christian concept of brotherhood and the Enlightenment notion of the natural equality of all humans. Abolitionist sentiment was also fed by the growing belief that a slave master’s authority “depraved the mind,” as the Quaker John Woolman argued. An introspective tailor from New Jersey, in the 1750s Woolman dedicated his life to a crusade against slavery. He traveled thousands of miles on foot to convince every Quaker slaveholder of his or her wrongdoing. Only a few hundred masters freed their slaves in the mid-eighteenth century, but men such as Woolman had planted the seeds of abolitionism.

Eighteenth-century Americans began to make significant contributions to the advancement of science. Naturalists such as John Bartram of Philadelphia gathered and described American plants from all over eastern North America as part of the transatlantic attempt to classify all plant life into one universal system. Professor John Winthrop III of Harvard made an unusually accurate measurement of the earth’s distance from the sun. Foremost of all was Benjamin Franklin, whose spectacular (and dangerous) experiments with electricity, the properties of which were just becoming known, earned him an international reputation.

Franklin’s true genius as a figure of the Enlightenment came in his practical application of scientific knowledge. Among his inventions were the lightning rod, which nearly ended the age-old danger of fires when lightning struck wooden buildings; bifocal spectacles; and a stove that heated rooms more cost-effectively than the open fireplace. Franklin made his adopted city of Philadelphia a center of the American Enlightenment by helping found America’s first circulating library in 1731, an artisans’ debating club for “mutual improvement,” and an intercolonial scientific association that in 1769 became the American Philosophical Society.

Most colonists were not educated enough to participate actively in the American Enlightenment, and only a handful read French Enlightenment authors such as Voltaire. But the efforts of men such as Franklin exposed thousands, especially in the cities, to new currents of thought. This kindled hopes that Americans, blessed by an abundant environment, might achieve the Enlightenment ideal of a perfect society.
THE GREAT AWAKENING

Many of the social, economic, and political changes occurring in eighteenth-century colonial society converged in the Great Awakening, the first of many religious revivals that would sweep America during the next two centuries. Though the timing and character of the Awakening varied from region to region, this quest for spiritual renewal challenged old sources of authority and produced patterns of thought and behavior that helped fuel a revolutionary movement in the next generation.
Fading Faith

Early eighteenth-century British America remained an overwhelmingly Protestant culture. Puritanism—that is, the Congregational church—dominated all of New England except Rhode Island. Anglicanism held sway in much of New York and throughout the South except the backcountry. In the mid-Atlantic and in the back settlements, German Mennonites, Dunkers, Moravians, and Lutherans; Scots-Irish Presbyterians; and English Baptists and Quakers all mingled. Even so, two-thirds of the colonists went to Presbyterians; and English Baptists and Quakers all mingled. Even so, two-thirds of the colonists went to no church at all, partly because in many areas, ministers and churches were simply unavailable. In the most populous colony, Virginia, only 60 parsons in 1761 served a population of 350,000—one for every 5,800 people.

Most colonial churches were voluntary ("congregated") groups, formed for reasons of conscience rather than government compulsion. Though Catholics, Jews, and nonbelievers could not vote or hold office, the persecution of Quakers and Catholics had largely passed, and by 1720 some dissenting groups had gained the right to use long-obligatory church taxes to support their own congregations.

The clergy often administered their congregations with difficulty. Anglicans and several German sects maintained close ties to mother churches across the Atlantic, whereas other denominations attempted to centralize authority. However, most efforts to tighten organization and discipline failed. For example, Anglican ministers had to be ordained in England and regularly report to the bishop of London. But in his Chesapeake parish, an Anglican priest faced wealthy planters who controlled the vestry (the local church's governing body), set his salary, and would drive him out if he challenged them too forcefully. In Connecticut, the Saybrook Platform of 1708 created a network, or "consociation," of Congregational churches, but individual churches still preserved much of their autonomy.

Though governing their churches frustrated many clergymen, religious apathy was a more pressing problem. As early as the 1660s, New England's Congregational clergy had adopted the Half-Way Covenant in order to combat religious indifference. It allowed children of church members, if they adhered to the "forms of godliness," to join the church even if they could not demonstrate that they had undergone a conversion experience. They could not, however, vote in church affairs or take communion.

Such compromises and innovations could not halt the creeping religious apathy that many ministers observed. An educated clergy, its energies often drained by doctrinal disputes, appealed too much to the mind and not enough to the heart. As one Connecticut leader remembered it, “the spirit of God appeared to be awfully withdrawn.”

The Awakeners’ Message

The Great Awakening was not a unified movement; rather it was a series of revivals that swept different regions between 1720 and 1760 with varying degrees of intensity. The first stirrings came in the 1720s in New Jersey, where a Dutch Reformed minister, Theodore Frelinghuysen, excited his congregation through emotional preaching about the need to be "saved" rather than offering the usual theological abstractions. A neighboring Presbyterian, Gilbert Tennent, soon took up the Dutchman's techniques, with similar success.

From New Jersey, the Awakening spread to Pennsylvania in the 1730s, especially among Presbyterians, and then broke out in the Connecticut River valley. There its greatest leader was Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts. Later a philosophical giant in the colonies, as a young man Edwards gained renown by frightening his parishioners with the fate of "sinners in the hands of an angry God." "How manifold have been the abominations of your life!" Edwards preached. "Are there not some here that have debased themselves below the dignity of human nature, by wallowing in sensual filthiness, as swine in the mire . . . ?" Edwards paraded one sin after another before his trembling congregants and drew such graphic pictures of the hell awaiting the unrepentant that his Northampton neighbors were soon preparing frantically for the conversion by which they would be “born again.” His Faithful Narrative of the Surprizing Work of God (1736), which described his town's awakening, was the first published revival narrative. This literary form would be used many times in the future to fan the flames of evangelical religion.

In 1739, these regional brushfires of evangelicalism were drawn together by a 24-year-old Anglican priest from England, George Whitefield. Inspired by John Wesley, the founder of English Methodism, Whitefield used his magnificent speaking voice in dynamic open-air preaching before huge gatherings. Whitefield barnstormed seven times along the American seaboard, beginning in 1739. In Boston, he preached to 19,000 in three days and at a farewell sermon left 25,000 writhing in fear of damnation. In his wake came American preachers whom he had inspired, mostly young men.
The appeal of the Awakeners lay both in the medium and the message. They preached that the established, college-trained clergy was too intellectual and tradition-bound. Congregations were dead, Whitefield declared, “because dead men preach to them.” “The sapless discourses of such dead drones,” cried another Awakener, were worthless. The fires of Protestant belief could be reignited only if individuals assumed responsibility for their own conversion.

An important form of individual participation was “lay exhorting,” which meant that anyone—young or old, female or male, black or white—could defy assigned roles and spontaneously recount a conversion experience and preach “the Lord’s truth.” This horrified the trained clergy and shattered their monopoly. The oral culture of common people gained new importance, their impromptu outpourings contrasting sharply with the controlled literary culture of the gentry.

How religion, social change, and politics became interwoven in the Great Awakening can be seen by examining two regions swept by revivalism. Both Boston, the heartland of Puritanism, and interior Virginia, a land of struggling small planters and slave-rich aristocrats, experienced the Great Awakening, but in different ways and at different times.

**Revivalism in the Urban North**

In Boston, Whitefield-inspired revivalism blazed up amid political controversy about paper money and land banks, which pitted large merchants against local traders, artisans, and the laboring poor, who preferred the fiscally liberal land bank over the merchants’ fiscally conservative silver bank.

**Jonathan Edwards**

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was the first major philosopher in the American colonies. A leader of the Great Awakening in Massachusetts, he was ousted by his congregation for reprimanding the children of church members for reading *The Midwife Rightly Instructed*, an obstetric guide that was as close as curious children could come to learning about sex. (Joseph Badger, Reverend Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), c. 1750–1755. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn., bequest of Eugene Phelps Edwards)

**Samson Occom**

Samson Occom, a Mohegan born in Connecticut, was attracted to Christianity, like so many others who were “outsiders,” by the emotional and populistic appeal of the Great Awakening preachers. On a trip to England, Occom raised £12,000 for an evangelical school for Native Americans, later to become Dartmouth College. What did the artist men to convey by the oversize book Occom points at? (Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department)

**George Whitefield**

George Whitefield, who first toured the American colonies in 1739 and 1740, sent thousands of souls “flying to Christ” with his emotional sermons. More Americans heard Whitefield on his many seaboard itinerances than any other figure in the eighteenth century. (John Wollaston, George Whitefield, 1742. National Portrait Gallery, London)
Whitefield’s arrival in Boston coincided with the currency furor. At first, Boston’s elite applauded his ability to call the masses to worship. It seemed that the master evangelist might restore social harmony by redirecting people from earthly matters such as the currency dispute toward concerns for their souls. But when he left Boston in 1740, others followed him who were more critical of the “unconverted” clergy and the self-indulgent accumulation of wealth. One was 25-year-old James Davenport, who appeared anything but respectable to the elite.

Finding every meetinghouse closed to him, even those whose clergy had embraced the Awakening, Davenport preached daily on the Boston Common, aroused religious ecstasy among thousands of people like Hannah Heaton, and stirred up feeling against the city’s leading figures. Respectable people decided that revivalism had gotten out of hand when ordinary people began verbally attacking opponents of the land bank in the streets as “carnal wretches, hypocrites, fighters against God, children of the devil, [and] cursed Pharisees.” A revival that had begun as a return to religion among backsliding souls. But when he left Boston in 1740, others followed him who were more critical of the “unconverted” clergy and the self-indulgent accumulation of wealth. One was 25-year-old James Davenport, who appeared anything but respectable to the elite.

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Southern Revivalism
Although aftershocks continued for years, by 1744 the Great Awakening was ebbing in New England and the middle colonies. But in Virginia, where the initial religious earthquake was barely felt, tremors of enthusiasm rippled through society from the mid-1740s onward. As in Boston, the Awakeners challenged and disturbed the gentry-led social order.

Whitefield stirred some religious fervor during his early trips through Virginia. Traveling “New Light” preachers, led by the brilliant orator Samuel Davies, were soon gathering large crowds both in the back-country and in the traditionally Anglican parishes of the older settled areas. By 1747, worried Anglican clergymen persuaded the governor to issue a proclamation restraining “strolling preachers.” As in other colonies, Virginia’s leaders despised traveling evangelists, who, like lay exhorters, conjured up a world without properly constituted authority. When the Hanover County court gave the fiery James Davenport a license to preach in 1750, the governor ordered the suppression of all circuit riders.

New Light Presbyterianism, challenging the gentry-dominated Anglican church’s spiritual monopoly, spread in the 1750s. Then, in the 1760s, came the Baptists. Renouncing finery and ostentatious display and addressing each other as “brother” and “sister,” the Baptists reached out to thousands of unchurched people. Like northern revivalists, they focused on the conversion experience. Many of their preachers were uneducated farmers and artisans who called themselves “Christ’s poor” and insisted that heaven was populated more by the humble poor than by the purse-proud rich. Among the poorest of all, Virginia’s 140,000 slaves in 1760, the evangelical message began to take hold.

The insurgent Baptist movement in rural Virginia became both a quest for a personal, emotionally satisfying religion among ordinary folk and a rejection of gentility values. Established Anglican pulpits denounced the Awakeners as furiously as had respectable New England divines. In both regions, social changes had weakened the cultural authority of the upper class and, in the context of religious revival, produced a vision of a society drawn along more equal lines.

Legacy of the Awakening
By the time George Whitefield returned to North America for his third tour in 1745, the revival had burned out in the North. Its effects, however, were long-lasting. Notably, it promoted religious pluralism and nourished the idea that all denominations were equally legitimate. Whitefield had anticipated this tendency when he sermonized: “Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven? Any Episcopalians? And the answer came back, No! Any Presbyterians? No! Any Independents or Methodists? No, no, no! Whom have you there? And the final answer came down from heaven, We don’t know the names here. All who are here are Christians.”

By legitimizing the dissenting Protestant groups that had sprung up in seventeenth-century England, the Great Awakening gave them all a basis for living together in relative harmony. From this framework of denominationalism came a second change—the separation of church and state. Once a variety of churches gained legitimacy, it was hard to justify one denomination claiming special privileges. In the seventeenth century, Roger Williams had tried to sever church and state because he believed that ties with civil bodies would corrupt the Church. But during the Awakening, groups such as the Baptists and Presbyterians in Virginia constituted their own religious bodies and broke the Anglican monopoly as the Church in the colony. This undermining of the church–state tie would be completed during the Revolutionary era.

A third effect of the revival was to legitimize community diversity. Almost from their beginnings,
POLITICAL LIFE

"Were it not for government, the world would soon run into all manner of disorders and confusions," wrote a Massachusetts clergyman early in the eighteenth century. "Men's lives and estates and liberties would soon be prey to the covetous and the cruel," and every man would be "as a wolf" to his neighbors. Few colonists or Europeans would have disagreed. Government existed to protect life, liberty, and property.

How should political power be divided—in England, between the English government and the American colonies, and within each colony? Colonists naturally drew heavily on inherited political ideas and institutions—almost entirely English ones, for it was English charters that sanctioned settlement, English governors who ruled, and English common law that governed the courts. But meeting unexpected circumstances in a new environment, colonists modified familiar political forms.

Structuring Colonial Governments

All societies consider it essential to determine the final source of political authority. In England, the notion of the God-given, supreme monarchical authority was crumbling even before the planting of the colonies. In its place arose the belief that stable government depended on blending and balancing the three pure forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Unalloyed, each would degenerate into oppression. Monarchy, the rule of one, would become despotism. Aristocracy, the rule of the few, would turn into corrupt oligarchy. Democracy, the rule of the many, would descend into anarchy or mob rule. Most colonists believed that the Revolution of 1688 in England had vindicated and strengthened a carefully balanced political system.

In the colonies, political balance was achieved somewhat differently. The governor, as the king's agent (or, in proprietary colonies, the agent of the proprietor to whom the king delegated authority), represented monarchy. Bicameral legislatures arose in most of the colonies in the seventeenth century, and in most provinces they had upper houses of wealthy men appointed by the governor; as a pale equivalent of Britain's House of Lords, it formed a nascent aristocracy. The assembly, elected by white male freeholders, replicated the House of Commons and was the democratic element. Every statute required the governor's assent (except in Rhode Island and Connecticut), and all colonial laws required final approval from the king's privy council. This royal check operated imperfectly, however. A law took months to reach England and months more before word came of its final approval or rejection. In the meantime, the law took force in the colony.

Behind the formal structure of politics stood rules governing who could participate as voters and officeholders. In England, land ownership conferred political rights (women and non-Christians were uniformly excluded). Only men with property producing an annual rental income of 40 shillings or more could vote or hold office. The colonists closely followed this principle, except in Massachusetts, where until 1691 Church membership was the basic...
CHAPTER 4 The Maturing of Colonial Society

requirement. As in England, the poor and propertyless were excluded, for they lacked the “stake in society” that supposedly produced responsible voters. In England the 40-shilling freehold requirement kept the electorate small, but in the colonies, where land was cheap, it conferred the vote on 50 to 75 percent of free adult males. However, as the proportion of landless colonists increased in the eighteenth century, the franchise contracted.

Though voting rights were broadly based, most men assumed that the wealthy and socially prominent should hold the main political positions. Balancing this elitism, however, was the notion that the entire electorate should periodically judge the performance of those entrusted with political power and reject those who were found wanting. Following the precedent of England’s Glorious Revolution, in British America the people were assumed to have the right to badger their leaders, to protest openly, and, in extreme cases of abuse of power, assume control and put things right. Crowd action, frequently effective, gradually achieved a kind of legitimacy.

The Crowd in Action

What gave special power to the common people when they assembled to protest oppressive authority and the trampling of traditional English liberties was the general absence of effective police power. In the countryside, where most colonists lived, only the county sheriff insulated civil leaders from angry farmers. In the towns, the sheriff had only the night watch to keep order. As late as 1757, New York’s night watch was described as a “parcell of idle, drinking vigilant snorers, who never quelled any nocturnal tumult in their lives.” In theory, the militia stood ready to suppress public disturbances, but crowds usually included many militiamen.

Boston’s Impressment Riot of 1747 vividly illustrates the people’s readiness to defend their inherited privileges and the weakness of law enforcement. It began when Commodore Charles Knowles brought his royal navy ships to Boston for provisioning—and to replenish the ranks of mariners thinned by desertion. When Knowles sent press gangs to fill the crew vacancies from Boston’s waterfront population, they scooped up artisans, laborers, servants, and slaves, as well as merchant seamen from ships riding at anchor in the harbor.

But before the press gangs could hustle away their victims, a crowd of angry Bostonians seized several British officers, surrounded the governor’s house, and demanded the release of their townspeople. When the sheriff and his deputies tried to intervene, the mob mauled them. The militia refused to respond. An enraged Knowles threatened to bombard the town, but negotiations amid further tumult averted a showdown. Finally, Knowles released the impressed Bostonians. After the riot, a young politician named Samuel Adams defended

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### Colonial Foundations of the American Political System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1606</td>
<td>Virginia companies of London and Plymouth granted patents to settle lands in North America.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1619</td>
<td>First elected colonial legislature meets in Virginia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1634</td>
<td>Under a charter granted in 1632, Maryland's proprietor is given all the authority “as any bishop of Durham” ever held—more than the king possessed in England.</td>
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<td>1635</td>
<td>The council in Virginia deports Governor John Harvey for exceeding his power, thus asserting the rights of local magistrates to contest authority of royally appointed governors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1643</td>
<td>The colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven draw up articles of confederation and form the first intercolonial union, the United Colonies of New England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1647</td>
<td>Under a charter granted in 1644, elected freemen from the Providence Plantations draft a constitution establishing freedom of conscience, separating church and state, and authorizing referenda by the towns on laws passed by the assembly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1677</td>
<td>The Laws, Concessions, and Agreements for West New Jersey provide for a legislature elected annually by virtually all free males, secret voting, liberty of conscience, election of justices of the peace and local officeholders, and trial by jury in public so that “justice may not be done in a corner.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1689</td>
<td>James II deposed in England in the Glorious Revolution and royal governors, accused of abusing their authority, ousted in Massachusetts, New York, and Maryland.</td>
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<td>1701</td>
<td>First colonial unicameral legislature meets in Pennsylvania under the Frame of Government of 1701.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td>John Peter Zenger, a New York printer, acquitted of seditious libel for printing attacks on the royal governor and his faction, thus widening the freedom of the press.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1754</td>
<td>First congress of all the colonies meets at Albany (with seven colonies sending delegates) and agrees on a Plan of Union (which is rejected by the colonies and the English government).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>The Stamp Act Congress, the first intercolonial convention called outside England’s authority, meets in New York.</td>
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Boston’s defiance of royal authority. The people, he argued, had a “natural right” to band together against press gangs that deprived them of their liberty. He labeled local magnates who supported the governor in this incident “tools to arbitrary power.”

### The Growing Power of the Assemblies

While the Impressment Riot of 1747 was dramatic, a more gradual and restrained change was underway—the growing ambition and power of the legislative assemblies. For most of the seventeenth century, royal and proprietary governors had exercised greater power in relation to the elected legislatures than did England’s king in relation to Parliament. Governors could dissolve the lower houses and delay their sitting, control the election of their speakers, and in most colonies initiate legislation with their appointed councils. They had authority to appoint and dismiss judges at all levels of the judiciary and to create chancery courts, which sat without juries. Governors also controlled the expenditure of public monies and had authority to grant land to individuals and groups, which they sometimes used to confer vast estates on their favorites. They lacked, however, the extensive patronage power that enabled ministers of government in England to manipulate elections and buy off opponents.

Since the seventeenth century, Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York had been royal colonies, with crown-appointed governors. In the eighteenth century, royal government came to New Jersey (1702), South Carolina (1719), and North Carolina (1729), replacing proprietary regimes.

Many royal governors were competent military officers or bureaucrats, but some were corrupt recipients of patronage posts. Some never even came over, preferring to pocket the salary and pay part of it to another man who went to serve as lieutenant governor. One committed suicide a week after arriving. Most, however, were merely mediocre.

Eighteenth-century legislatures challenged the swollen powers of the colonial governors. Bit by bit, they won new rights: to initiate legislation, to elect their own speakers, to settle contested elections, to discipline members, and to nominate provincial treasurers who disbursed public funds. Most important, they won the “power of the purse”—the authority to initiate money bills, specifying how much money should be raised by taxes and how it should be spent. Thus, the elected assemblies gradually transformed themselves into governing bodies reflecting the interests of the electorate. Governors

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**The “Paxton Boys” in Philadelphia**

When frontier farmers marched on Philadelphia in 1763 to demand more protection on the frontier, a miniature civil war was narrowly averted. Philadelphians had little use for the “Paxton Boys,” who had murdered 20 harmless Christian Indians in retaliation for frontier raids. Why are soldiers and mounted men commanding the public space? (The Library Company of Philadelphia)
compained bitterly about the “levelling spirit” and “mutinous and disorderly behavior” of the assemblies, but they could not stop their rise.

**Local Politics**

Binding elected officeholders to their constituents became an important feature of the colonial political system. In England, the House of Commons claimed to represent the entire nation rather than narrow local interests, yet was filled with representatives from “rotten boroughs” (ancient places left virtually uninhabited by population shifts) and with men whose vote was controlled by the government because they had accepted offices, contracts, or gifts. American assemblies, by contrast, contained mostly representatives sent by voters who instructed them on particular issues and held them accountable.

Royal governors and colonial grandees who sat as councilors often deplored this localist, popular orientation. Sniffed one aristocratic New Yorker, the assemblies were crowded with “plain, illiterate husbandmen [small farmers], whose views seldom extended farther than the regulation of highways, the destruction of wolves, wildcats, and foxes, and the advancement of the other little interests of the particular counties which they were chosen to represent.” In actuality, most lower-house members were merchants, lawyers, and substantial planters and farmers, who by the mid-eighteenth century constituted the political elite in most colonies. They took pride in upholding their constituents’ interests, for they saw themselves as bulwarks against oppression and arbitrary rule, which history taught them were most frequently imposed by monarchs and their appointed agents.

Local government was usually more important to the colonists than provincial government. In the North, local political authority generally rested in the towns (which included surrounding rural areas). The New England town meeting decided a wide range of matters, arguing until it could express itself as a single unit. “By general agreement” and “by the free and united consent of the whole” were phrases denoting a collective assent rather than a democratic competition among differing interests and points of view.

In the South, the county was the primary unit of government, and by the mid-eighteenth century, a landed squirearchy of third- and fourth-generation families had achieved political dominance. They ruled the county courts and the legislature, and substantial farmers served in minor offices such as road surveyor and deputy sheriff. At court sessions, usually four times a year, deeds were read aloud and then recorded, juries impaneled and justice dispensed, elections held, licenses issued, and proclamations read aloud. On election days, gentlemen treated their neighbors (on whom they depended for votes) to “bumbo,” “kill devil,” and other alcoholic treats.

**The Spread of Whig Ideology**

Whether in local or provincial affairs, a political ideology called Whig, or “republican,” had spread widely by the mid-eighteenth century. This body of thought, inherited from England, rested on the belief that concentrated power was historically the enemy of liberty and that too much power lodged in any person or group usually produced corruption and tyranny. The best defenses against concentrated power were balanced government, elected...
legislatures adept at checking executive authority, prohibition of standing armies (almost always controlled by tyrannical monarchs to oppress the people), and vigilance by the people in watching their leaders for telltale signs of corruption.

Much of this Whig ideology reached the people through some 23 newspapers circulating in the colonies by 1763. Many papers reprinted pieces from English Whig writers railing against corruption and creeping despotism. Though limited to a few pages and published only once or twice a week, the papers passed from hand to hand and were read aloud in taverns and coffeehouses, so that their contents probably reached most urban households and a substantial minority of rural farms.

The new power of the press and its importance in guarding the people's liberties against would-be tyrants (such as haughty royal governors) were dramatically illustrated in the Zenger case in New York.

Young John Peter Zenger, a printer's apprentice, had been hired in 1733 by the anti-government faction of Lewis Morris to start a newspaper, the New-York Weekly Journal, that would publicize the tyrannical and corrupt actions of Governor William Cosby.

Arrested for seditious libel, Zenger was defended brilliantly by Andrew Hamilton, a Philadelphia lawyer hired by the Morris faction to convince the jury that Zenger had been simply trying to inform the people of attacks on their liberties. Although the jury acquitted Zenger, the libel laws remained very restrictive. But the acquittal did reinforce the notion that the government was the people's servant, and it brought home the point that public criticism could keep people with political authority responsible to the people they ruled. Such ideas about liberty and corruption, raised in the context of local politics, would shortly achieve a much broader significance.

**Conclusion**

**America in 1750**

The English colonies in North America, robust and expanding, matured rapidly between 1690 and 1750. Transatlantic commerce linked them closely to Europe, Africa, and other parts of the Americas. Churches, schools, and towns—the visible marks of the receding frontier—appeared everywhere. And everywhere, people like Hannah Heaton had been energized by the Great Awakening and were
introduced to the idea of ordinary people helping to shape the future. A balanced gender ratio and stable family life had been achieved throughout the colonies. Many men were able to move up in society despite frequent obstacles. Seasoned political leaders and familiar political institutions functioned from Maine to Georgia.

Yet the sinew, bone, and muscle of American society had not yet fully knit together. The polyglot population, one-fifth of it bound in chattel slavery and its Native American component still unassimilated and uneasily situated on the frontier, was a kaleidoscopic mixture of ethnic and religious groups. While developing rapidly, its economy showed weaknesses, particularly in New England, where land resources had been strained. The social structure reflected the colonizers’ emergence from a frontier stage, but the consolidation of wealth by a landed and mercantile elite was matched by pockets of poverty appearing in the cities and some rural areas. Full of strength, yet marked by awkward incongruities, colonial America in 1750 approached an era of strife and momentous decisions. Much of that strife involved the growing power of France’s inland empire in North America and the way that wars in Europe were becoming globe-encircling conflicts.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Regional variations within colonial society created different social and economic systems in areas of North America. What were the key regional divisions, and what differences characterized the societies and economies in each?
2. Why did slavery become a widespread institution in eighteenth-century colonial North America, and how did it shape society?
3. Was the Great Awakening compatible with other changes occurring in the society, or did it contradict most other trends? How do you see religious change relating to social, political and intellectual changes?
4. Was colonial America more affected by transatlantic trends or local influences in the areas of politics, ideas and social life?
5. What were the most important aspects of colonial society that enabled it to mature? Why do you think these particular factors most significant?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Kenneth Roberts, king of historical novelists on eighteenth-century America, movingly describes the Seven Years’ War in *Northwest Passage* (1937); Spencer Tracy starred in the Hollywood version with the same title. James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1836) is another American classic, but much more to the taste of today’s students is Hollywood’s movie by the same title (1992), starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Madeleine Stowe.

Discovering U.S. History Online

History Buff’s Reference Library
www.historybuff.com/library/refseventeen.html
This site offers brief journalistic essays on newspaper coverage of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century American history.

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
www.bdhp.moravian.edu
A cooperative effort of area libraries, this site examines the history of the Moravian community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Martha Ballard’s Diary
www.dohistory.org
Focusing on the life of Martha Ballard, a late eighteenth-century New England woman, this site employs selections from her diary, excerpts from a book and film about her life, and other primary documents that enable students to conduct their own historical investigation.
Colonial Williamsburg  
www.history.org/Almanack/almanack.cfm  
Sections of this view of colonial Williamsburg include “Meet the People,” “See the Places,” and “Colonial Life.”

Excerpts from Slave Narratives  
www.vgskole.net/prosjekt/slavrute/primary.htm  
This site offers online access to slave narratives dating from the seventeenth century.

Two Centuries of Louisiana History  
lsm.crt.state.la.us/cabildo/cabildo.htm  
This state-run site focuses on the diverse ethnic heritage of Louisiana’s people. The early sections cover pre-contact and colonial Louisiana.

Military Artifacts of Spanish Florida, 1650–1821  
www.artifacts.org/default.htm  
Along with an extensive display of military artifacts, this “Internet Museum” also provides background information on the age of Spanish exploration and settlement as well as details about its rival, Bourbon France.

Colonial Currency  
etext.lib.virginia.edu/users/brock  
This site includes useful primary and secondary documents on early American currency.

North American Women’s Letters and Diaries  
www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/asp/NAWLD  
At this site, students can find rich firsthand accounts of colonial life from women’s perspectives.

White Oak Fur Post  
www.whiteoak.org  
This site documents an eighteenth-century fur trading post among Native Americans in the region that would become Minnesota.

Religion in Eighteenth-Century America  
www.lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html  
Providing an overview of eighteenth-century religion in the American colonies, this site draws on primary source material such as paintings of clergymen, title pages of published sermons, and other artifacts.

Benjamin Franklin  
www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin  
This richly illustrated site relates the story of Franklin’s life and political involvement in seven parts.

The Trial of John Peter Zenger  
www.jurist.law.pitt.edu/trials20.htm  
This site provides a thorough essay on the trial, with links to primary documents.