



U. S. History: From the Colonial Period to 1877

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4.1 COLONIAL POPULATION, ECONOMICS, AND SOCIETY

18th CENTURY POPULATION GROWTH	The most important fact about 18 th century colonial America was its remarkable POPULATION GROWTH. The number of colonists rose over the century from 250,000 in 1700 to two million by 1770.
NEW ENGLAND Freeholders	The Puritans had migrated from a country where a handful of nobles owned 75 percent of the land and farmed it by using servants, tenants, or wage laborers. In New England, they created a society of INDEPENDENT FARM FAMILIES who owned their land as FREEHOLDERS
Land Scarcity	(without feudal dues or leases). However, by the 18 th century, population increases made LAND SCARCE and New Englanders were forced to respond to the crisis by REDUCING FAMILY SIZE, asking the government to open NEW LAND ALONG THE FRONTIER, planting CROPS WITH BETTER YIELDS, and SHARING LABOR AND GOODS.
Atlantic Commerce	At the same time, many New Englanders (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) continued to make their fortunes at sea. Their main commodity was codfish, exported to markets in southern Europe or the West Indies. The entire New England economy benefited from this ATLANTIC COMMERCE, which created new jobs ranging from LABORERS and SAILORS to SHIP CAPTAINS and MERCHANTS.
Rich and Poor	By the middle of the century, a WEALTHY ARISTOCRACY had emerged in New England. The richest and most successful merchants lived in Boston. At the same time, a small percentage of people in the region lived in genuine POVERTY.
Women Subordinate to Men	In New England society, men played the dominant role in politics and in domestic matters. WOMEN WERE SUBORDINATE to their husbands and had few rights under law. Daughters typically had a lesser position than sons. A woman's place was in the home, serving as a dutiful daughter to her father or as a helpmate to her husband. The Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth of Boston advised women in The Well-Ordered Family (1712): "Since he is thy Husband, God has made him the head and set him above thee."
Women Contributed to Family Income	Although gradual reductions in farm size after 1750 prompted many families to have fewer children, WOMEN WERE KEPT IN CHECK by CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS, COLONIAL LAWS, and RELIGIOUS RESTRICTIONS. Nevertheless, fewer children gave women the time and energy to pursue other tasks. Farm women made extra yarn, cloth, or cheese to exchange with neighbors or sell to shopkeepers, CONTRIBUTING TO THE FAMILY INCOME.
THE MIDDLE COLONIES Diverse	The MIDDLE COLONIES (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware) were more DIVERSE ETHNICALLY, POLITICALLY, AND RELIGIOUSLY than the New England colonies because non-English immigrants (Germans and Scots-Irish) settled there.
<u>Immigration:</u> Germans and Scots-Irish	GERMANS made up the largest group of immigrants from the European continent. Many were peasants seeking to ESCAPE A HARSH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT. The majority were neither rich nor poor. The SCOTS-IRISH actually came from northern Ireland, Scotland, and England. Most were poor farm laborers or tenant farmers who were EXPLOITED BY GREEDY LANDLORDS or compelled to flee to the colonies by DROUGHTS, CROP FAILURES, HIGH FOOD PRICES, AND RISING RENTS. The process of immigration was difficult and expensive. Many Germans and Scots-Irish, particularly young males, paid for their passage by becoming REDEMPTIONERS, a kind of indentured servant.
Redemptioners	Immigrants came to the middle colonies for the perceived economic opportunities. Because of a scarcity of labor, hired workers could get high wages. Most bound SERVANTS worked in

<p>Slavery on Small Scale</p>	<p>cities and towns. Masters prized them because they were much CHEAPER THAN HIRED DAY LABORERS, and more limitations were placed on them. African SLAVERY existed in the middle colonies, but on a SMALL SCALE, since only the more affluent white colonists could afford slaves and there was little use for their labor on family-operated farms. Slaves were treated much more harshly than white servants. Even when slaves obtained their freedom, white racism often made African Americans the victims of white European’s suspicions and anxieties.</p>
<p>Land + Peaceful Relations</p> <p>Flour: Number One Import</p>	<p>Immigrants were interested in the middle colonies because of the AVAILABILITY OF LAND and relatively PEACEFUL FRONTIER RELATIONS with Indians. Most people with limited funds moved just beyond already improved farms, where land was cheaper. FLOUR MILLING was the number one industry, and FLOUR THE NUMBER ONE EXPORT of the middle colonies, which allowed many middle colonists to enjoy a fairly secure and stable existence.</p>
<p>Prosperity ↓ English Imports</p>	<p>The comparatively widespread PROSPERITY of the middle colonies allowed its inhabitants to buy more ENGLISH IMPORTS between 1720 and 1770 than either New England or the South. At the center of trade was PHILADELPHIA, the largest colonial city in North America and second only to London in the British empire. A WEALTHY MERCHANT ELITE, most of whom were Quaker, ruled the city. Quaker beliefs in industry, thrift, honesty, and sobriety encouraged the accumulation of wealth.</p>
<p>THE SOUTHERN COLONIES</p>	<p>For most of the 18th century, the SOUTHERN COLONIES (Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, and Georgia) contained more colonists than either the middle colonies or New England. Many European immigrants moved from the middle colonies to the BACKCOUNTRY or came AS INDENTURED SERVANTS. AFRICAN SLAVES made important contributions to population growth and southern culture.</p>
<p>Upper South: Tobacco Lower South: Rice & Indigo</p>	<p>During the 18th century, slavery became the defining characteristic of the southern colonies. Southern colonists lived in two distinct geographic and agricultural areas. The Chesapeake colonies of the UPPER SOUTH (Virginia and Maryland) specialized in TOBACCO CULTIVATION, while the LOWER SOUTH specialized in the production of RICE AND INDIGO.</p>
<p>Slavery</p>	<p>SLAVES were primarily West Africans who had been kidnapped or captured in war and sold into bondage to other Africans, who in turn sold them to the European slavers who brought them over on slave ships. Perhaps even worse than being sold into lifelong bondage was the ordeal of crossing the Atlantic called (the MIDDLE PASSAGE). On the average about 15 percent of a ship’s human cargo died from DEHYDRATION, MALNUTRITION, DISEASES, or other maladies incurred from the FILTH, POLLUTION, AND OVERCROWDING below deck. The slaves were then sold to COLONIAL SLAVE MERCHANTS or to southern planters who put them to work on TOBACCO OR RICE PLANTATIONS.</p>
<p>Southern Wealth Based on African Slave Labor</p>	<p>African slave labor increased the prosperity of planters, British merchants, and the monarchy. Rice and indigo, the main staples of Carolina planters, made up three-fourths of lower south exports, with the majority of the crops going to England and the rest to the West Indies. Together with Chesapeake tobacco, these products made the SOUTHERN COLONIES THE RICHEST in North America. The per capita wealth of free southern whites was three times greater than that of the middle colonists and four times more than that of New Englanders.</p>
<p>Shared Sense of White Supremacy</p>	<p>The WEALTHIEST WERE THE RICE PLANTERS of the lower South and the TOBACCO GENTRY OF THE CHESAPEAKE who owned large estates that were maintained and supported by slaves. The gap in wealth among white Southerners caused envy and sometimes tensions, but a SHARED SENSE OF WHITE SUPREMACY lessened the potential for rebellion or resentment. In both the Chesapeake and the lower South, landholding determined voting rights, and the requirement was set high enough to deny about 40 percent of white men in Virginia the right to vote.</p>

UNIFYING EXPERIENCES	While all three colonial groups became increasingly different during the 18 th century, colonists throughout British North America shared certain unifying economic, religious, and political experiences. Economically, all three regions were AGRARIAN and sold their staples in similar external and internal markets. Religiously, the colonists became MORE SECULAR during the 18 th century, and politically, they became aware that despite having thirteen different local governments, they all owed allegiance to the same king and parliament and all shared distinctive IDENTITY AS BRITISH colonists.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	How do you account for the economic and social differences of the New England, middle, and southern colonies during the 18th century? What factors contributed to a feeling of unity among American colonists in the 18th century?