

Colonial America in the Eighteenth Century

1701–1770

Chapter Learning Objectives

1. How were eighteenth-century colonial population growth and economic growth linked?
 2. How did the market economy develop in New England, and in what ways was Puritanism weakened?
 3. How did the population growth of the middle colonies, particularly Pennsylvania, differ from that of New England and the South? What role did immigration play, and why was Pennsylvania considered by some to be the “best poor [white] man’s country”?
 4. How did the large influx of slaves into the southern colonies shape the region’s economy, society, and politics?
 5. What shared experiences served to unify the culture of the disparate colonies of British North America?
 6. How did the policies of the British Empire provide a common framework of political expectations and experiences for American colonists? What relations did colonists have with their Native American neighbors, both in British North America and in Spanish California?
1. New England experienced a tremendous population explosion during the eighteenth century.
 2. The growth and diversity of the colonial population in the eighteenth century stemmed from both immigration and natural increase.
 3. The colonial economy also expanded during the eighteenth century.
 4. In 1700, nearly all the colonists lived within fifty miles of the Atlantic coast, on the edge of a vast wilderness peopled by native Indians.
 5. This settlement pattern gave the colonies an extremely low ratio of people to land; land was, therefore, cheap.
 6. Land was worthless for agriculture without labor; labor was, therefore, in high demand in the colonies.
- II. New England: From Puritan Settlers to Yankee Traders
 - A. Natural Increase and Land Distribution
 1. The New England population grew mostly by natural increase, much as it had during the seventeenth century.
 2. The burgeoning New England population pressed against a limited amount of land.
 3. By the eighteenth century, the original land allotments had to be subdivided to accommodate grandsons and great-grandsons, causing many plots of land to become too small for subsistence.
 4. During the eighteenth century, colonial governments in New England

Annotated Chapter Outline

- I. A Growing Population and Expanding Economy in British North America

abandoned the seventeenth-century policy of granting land to towns and sold land directly to individuals, including speculators.

5. Money, rather than membership in a community bound by a church covenant, determined whether a person could buy land.

B. Farms, Fish, and Trade

1. New England farmers grew food for their families, but their fields did not produce a huge marketable surplus.
2. As consumers, New England farmers were the foundation of a diversified commercial economy that linked remote farms to markets throughout the world.
3. Fish accounted for more than one-third of New England's eighteenth-century exports; livestock and timber made up another one-third.
4. Merchants dominated the commercial economy of New England and stood at the hub of trade between local folk and the international market.
5. During the eighteenth century, the incidence of genuine poverty did not change much from patterns established in the seventeenth century.
6. By 1700, Yankee traders had replaced Puritan saints as the symbolic New Englanders.

III. The Middle Colonies: Immigrants, Wheat, and Work

A. German and Scots-Irish Immigrants

1. Germans made up the largest contingent of migrants from the European continent to the middle colonies.
2. German immigrants included artisans and merchants, but the great majority were farmers and laborers.
3. By the 1720s, German immigrants wrote back to their friends and relatives, extolling the virtues of life in the New World.
4. Similar motives propelled the Scots-Irish to come to the middle colonies.
5. German and Scots-Irish immigrants were clannish, residing among relatives or neighbors from the old country.
6. Scots-Irish immigrants flooded British North America during the decades before the American Revolution.
7. Many immigrants probably did not understand the risks of migrating to America.

8. Many German immigrants were forced to become redemptioners, a variant of indentured servants.

B. Pennsylvania: "The Best Poor [White] Man's Country"

1. New settlers, whether free or in servitude, poured into the middle colonies because they perceived unparalleled opportunities, particularly in Pennsylvania.
 2. Most servants in the middle colonies worked in Philadelphia, New York City, or one of the smaller towns or villages.
 3. A few black slaves worked in shops and homes in Philadelphia and New York City.
 4. During the eighteenth century, most slaves came to the middle colonies and New England from the West Indies.
 5. Small numbers of slaves managed to obtain their freedom, but free African Americans did not escape whites' firm convictions about black inferiority and white supremacy.
 6. Immigrants swarmed to the middle colonies because of the availability of land.
 7. Few colonists drifted beyond the northern boundaries of Pennsylvania.
 8. The price of farmland varied depending on soil quality, access to water, distance from a market town, and the extent of improvements.
 9. Farmers made the middle colonies the breadbasket of North America.
 10. The standard of living in rural Pennsylvania was probably higher than in any other agricultural region of the eighteenth-century world.
 11. At the crossroads of trade in wheat exports and English imports stood Philadelphia.
 12. Many of Philadelphia's wealthiest merchants were Quakers.
 13. The ranks of merchants reached downward to aspiring tradesmen like Benjamin Franklin, whose popular *Poor Richard's Almanack* preached the likelihood of long-term rewards for tireless labor.
 14. Pennsylvania became a center of worldly affluence.
- #### IV. The Southern Colonies: Land of Slavery
- ##### A. The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Growth of Slavery
1. The number of southerners of African ancestry rocketed from just over 20,000 in 1700 to well over 400,000 in 1770.

2. Southern colonists clustered into two distinct geographic and agricultural zones: the Upper South, which specialized in growing tobacco, and the Lower South, which specialized in growing rice and indigo.
 3. The enormous growth of the South's slave population occurred through natural increase and the flourishing Atlantic slave trade, which subjected hundreds of thousands of Africans to the infamous Middle Passage.
 4. Olaudah Equiano published his account of the Middle Passage and his experiences as a slave in 1789.
 5. Most slaves who were brought into the southern colonies came directly from Africa, and almost all the ships that brought them belonged to British merchants.
 6. Mortality during the Middle Passage varied considerably from ship to ship.
 7. Individual planters purchased at any one time a relatively small number of newly arrived Africans.
 8. Planters' preferences for slaves from specific regions of Africa aided slaves' acculturation to the routines of bondage in the southern colonies.
 9. Acculturation acclimated new Africans to the physical as well as the cultural environment of the southern colonies.
 10. The slave population also grew because of a high rate of natural increase; by the 1740s, the majority of southern slaves were country-born.
- B. Slave Labor and African American Culture
1. Southern planters expected slaves to work from sunup to sundown and beyond.
 2. Some slaves resisted their bondage with direct physical confrontation with the master, mistress, or an overseer.
 3. A group of about twenty slaves launched an unsuccessful rebellion at Stono, South Carolina, in 1739.
 4. The Stono rebellion illustrated that eighteenth-century slaves had no chance of overturning slavery and very little chance of defending themselves in any bold strike for freedom.
 5. Slaves maneuvered constantly to protect themselves and to gain a measure of autonomy within the boundaries of slavery.
 6. Eighteenth-century slaves planted the roots of African American lineages; kinship structured slaves' relations with one another.
7. When possible, slaves expressed many other features of their West African heritage in their lives on New World plantations.
- C. Tobacco, Rice, and Prosperity
1. Slavery made masters rich.
 2. The products of slave labor made the southern colonies by far the richest in North America.
 3. The vast differences in wealth among white southerners engendered envy and occasional tension between rich and poor but remarkably little open hostility.
 4. The slaveholding gentry dominated the politics and economy of the southern colonies.
 5. The gentry also set the cultural standard in the southern colonies.
- V. Unifying Experiences
- A. Commerce and Consumption
1. Eighteenth-century commerce whetted the appetite to consume.
 2. The Atlantic commerce that took colonial goods to markets in England brought consumer goods back to the colonies.
 3. Despite the many differences among the colonists, the consumption of English exports built a certain material uniformity across region, religion, class, and status.
 4. The rising tide of colonial consumption compelled colonists to think of themselves as individuals who had the power to make decisions that influenced the quality of their lives.
- B. Religion, Enlightenment, and Revival
1. Eighteenth-century colonists could choose from almost as many religions as consumer goods.
 2. The varieties of Protestant faith and practice ranged across an extremely broad spectrum.
 3. Many educated colonists became deists, looking for God's plan in nature more than in the Bible.
 4. Deists shared the ideas of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers, who tended to agree that science and reason could disclose God's laws in the natural order.
 5. Most eighteenth-century colonists went to church seldom or not at all, although they probably considered themselves Christians.
 6. The spread of religious indifference, of deism, of denominational rivalry, and of

comfortable backsliding compelled some ministers to convert nonbelievers and to revive the piety of the faithful with a new style of preaching that appealed more to the heart than to the head. Historians have called this wave of revivals the “Great Awakening.”

7. The most famous revivalist in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world was George Whitefield.
 8. Whitefield’s successful revivals spawned many lesser imitations.
 9. Like consumption, revivals contributed to a set of common experiences that bridged colonial divides of faith, region, class, and status.
- VI. Bonds of the British Empire
- A. Empire of Exchange and Colonial Protection
1. All along the edge of settlement, colonists encountered Indians.
 2. Native Americans’ impulse to defend their territory from colonial incursions warred with their desire for trade, which tugged them toward the settlers.
 3. Colonial traders and their respective empires competed to control the fur trade.
 4. The shifting alliances and complex dynamics of the fur trade struck a fragile balance along the frontier.
 5. In 1754, the colonists’ endemic competition with the French flared into the Seven Years’ War, which would inflame the frontier for years.
- B. Indian Relations in Spanish California
1. Indians’ potential as allies prompted officials in New Spain to mount a campaign to block Russian access to present-day California by building forts (called *presidios*) and missions.
 2. For Indians, the Spaniards’ California missions had horrendous consequences, as they had elsewhere in the Spanish borderlands.
- C. Colonial Politics in the British Empire
1. British attempts to exercise political power in Britain’s colonial governments met with success so long as British officials were on or very near the sea.
 2. The British government envisioned colonial governors, most of whom were appointed by the king, as mini-monarchs able to exert influence in the colonies much as did the king in England.
 3. Eighty percent of colonial governors had been born in England, not in the colonies.

4. British policies did not clearly define the powers and responsibilities of colonial assemblies.
5. The heated political struggles between royal governors and colonial assemblies that occurred throughout the eighteenth century taught colonists a common set of political lessons.

Lecture Strategies

LECTURE 1

Ethnic and Religious Heterogeneity in Colonial America

Colonial America demonstrated remarkable diversity in the eighteenth century. Consider focusing on ethnicity and religion to prove this point, going from region to region. New England was the most homogeneous, with a predominance of English descendants who practiced a mainly Puritan-derived religion. Even in New England, however, diversity was present. Explain the Great Awakening in New England, and then ask how widespread was deep religious devotion at the time. (Be sure to cover the “threats” that the Enlightenment, denominational rivalry, and backsliding posed to religiosity in New England.) Next, move on to the middle colonies and explain the coming of the Germans and the Scots-Irish. With them came more diverse religions, such as the Lutheran and Presbyterian denominations. Identify the urban nature of George Whitefield’s visits to America, and ask how religion was transmitted to the frontier. Bring the Great Awakening to the South with the missions in Georgia and the influx of Scots-Irish down the Shenandoah valley. Finally, discuss the ethnicity of immigrants to the South. You may want to direct students’ attention to Map 5.1, “Europeans and Africans in the Eighteenth Century” (p. 138), to demonstrate the racial and ethnic diversity of the colonies. Leave most of the discussion on slavery for the next class, but point out that southerners differentiated between ethnicities among slaves. Using the discussion of ethnicity as a starting point, begin exploring the construction of the concept of race.

LECTURE 2

Solidly Establishing Slavery

In this lecture, you can introduce students to the institution of slavery. Direct students’ attention to

Map 5.3, “The Atlantic Slave Trade” (p. 148), and Table 4.1, “Slave Imports, 1451–1870” (p. 149), to emphasize the solidification of the institution in the Western Hemisphere. Using the textbook, reconstruct the violence that permeated slavery. Africans were kidnapped, abused, and sold to slave traders. The Middle Passage killed at least 15 to 20 percent of all Africans transported to the Americas. Here, you can refer students to the account of Olaudah Equiano’s capture and his experience of the Middle Passage (pp. 149–150). Slavery in the Sugar Islands met with sure death, and even coming to mainland America did not drastically improve a slave’s chances for survival. Ten to 15 percent died in their first year as slaves in America, while they were “seasoned.” They could not communicate with the master, who often considered them little more than livestock. Other slaves helped them make the transition from free persons embedded in systems of social relations to slaves who had no legal rights at all. At the bottom of this institution was brutal compulsion. Slaves might have been able to negotiate and resist the will of the master to a certain degree (describe such instances if possible), but ultimately the master prevailed through sheer brutality and a legal system that legitimized all that he chose to do. Ask students to consider the textbook’s account of the Stono rebellion and its consequences as a means of understanding how slavery permeated society. Finally, reintroduce your discussion of race and extend it to define the word *racism*. Students may need an explanation that racism means more than mere prejudice. Help students understand that racism stems from the belief in the biological inferiority of other races — in this case, nonwhites. They also need to understand that eighteenth-century racism entailed action and that it was goal oriented: Racism amounted to the systematic oppression of a racial minority designed to maximize exploitation of that minority. There will be a lot to talk about.

LECTURE 3

The Colonial Economy in the Eighteenth Century

The British colonies in America were embedded in a system of economic relations that benefited crown and colony alike. Draw students’ attention to Map 5.2, “Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century” (p. 140), and to Figure 5.1, “Colonial Exports, 1768–1772” (p. 158). Ask students to consider the questions posed by Map 5.2, focusing on the ways in which trade policies influenced both

Britain and the colonies. Reintroduce the original Navigation Acts of the 1650s and 1660s as they related to the American colonies. Explore the impact of the Board of Trade on American commerce (it was minimal, with the exception of the reexporting of tobacco). Show the agricultural basis of colonial prosperity (and how it rested on slave labor) and how that prosperity translated into increasing consumerism. Explore the extent of that prosperity by discussing the distribution of wealth in America compared with that of England. Who became rich in America? Did one’s region make a difference in one’s options? How important were merchants? Were farmers absolutely independent of the market? Use the Benjamin Franklin vignette at the start of the chapter to discuss how widespread prosperity and consumerism encouraged people to think of themselves as individuals capable of making their own choices for good or evil. Finally, discuss the perks of the empire that made this prosperity possible. The crown regulated trade and collected some taxes in the process, but the colonists benefited from being included in the empire’s commerce on the same basis as citizens of England. The American colonists could trade with other British colonies and enjoyed the protection of the British navy. These advantages could not have been provided by the colonies themselves.

Anticipating Student Reactions: Common Misconceptions and Difficult Topics

1. *Slavery Was a Monolithic Institution*

Many students consider slavery a monolithic institution and are unable or unwilling to see the differences in ancient, medieval, African, and New World slavery. You should quickly clear up this misconception. Be sure to illustrate the role that race played in African slavery in the New World. You will also want to cover the role of natural increase and a resident master-class in the American South. To explore the variances in the institution of slavery, point students to the differences outlined in the textbook in the tobacco and rice cultures in the American South. You may have a student who asks which system was better. Resist value judgments and stress *difference* instead. The brutality of the system should be self-evident in both cultures.

2. *Colonists Were Self-Reliant Frontiersmen*

Students frequently misunderstand the social and economic order of colonial America in the eighteenth century. They believe that a general self-sufficiency translates into absolute self-reliance. They fail to understand that, whether colonists were located in coastal cities or on the frontier, they continued to be embedded in a network of relations: political, economic, social, and familial. As the textbook makes clear, the colonists did engage in market activities, in pursuit of consumption of manufactured goods. But even when colonists failed to participate in market economic relations, there was still an exchange of goods taking place. Consumption did not necessarily mean that a cash transaction took place. One might exchange one's own labor or the loan of livestock for a manufactured good. The nonmarket, local exchange of goods, even on the frontier, rested on the ability of merchants to obtain goods, and sometimes credit, from Britain and Europe. Have students look at Figure 5.1 on colonial exports and the photo of the English glass mirror (p. 155) to demonstrate the web of market relations. Discuss how people perceived themselves as interdependent within the colonial economy.

3. *American Colonists Did Not Profit from Their Participation in the British Empire*

Because the colonies ultimately rebelled against the British Empire, some students will assume that the Americans never benefited from being a part of the empire. Make the point that the American colonies' prosperity, as evidenced by the increasing consumption described in this chapter, was a direct result of their participation in the British Empire. In many ways, the colonists got the best of all worlds. The British navy protected them and their ships of commerce, while the American merchants did their best to avoid taxation whenever possible. The colonists benefited from a stable governmental system in which they (at least the elites) helped make the rules. And they benefited from governmental policies that promoted immigration. Very little was asked in return at this time. The crown profited from its American colonies, but the colonies profited as well.

In-Class Activities

Using Film and Television in the Classroom

When discussing the Great Awakening, you may want to consider showing your class the segment

from Episode 2 ("Revolution") of the PBS series *Africans in America* that covers the revival's impact on the institution of slavery.

Class Discussion Starters

Have your students consider the possible course of colonial development had New England and the middle colonies adopted cash-crop agriculture. How would the patterns of settlement have been different? Would plantations have been possible in the northern colonies, considering the climate? Would slavery have become more entrenched in the North if a plantation-based economy had prevailed? If your students respond positively, ask them to consider whether slavery was merely an economic institution. In other words, have students consider whether slavery reflected ideological differences between northern and southern whites or whether it was merely a response to economic needs.

Historical Debates

Have your students debate the degree to which colonists considered themselves British (or French, Dutch, German, etc.) and the degree to which they considered themselves Americans. You might wish to have students review the conclusion of the chapter, "The Dual Identity of British North American Colonists." At this point, you could bring in *The Promise of Technology* feature "The Printing Press: 'The Spring of Knowledge'" (pp. 156–157) to discuss the growth of public opinion and its influence on the creation of an American culture. When can (or should) historians reasonably begin to speak of something as identifiable as "American culture"? Did it exist by 1760? Why or why not?

Reading Primary Sources

Have students read through the *Documenting the American Promise* feature "Missionaries Report on California Missions" (pp. 166–167), and ask them what kinds of reasonable conclusions historians can draw from these two documents. Initiate a discussion, if you have not done so already, on the art of crafting an argument. If students devise arguments that are not supported by the documents, ask them to think of the kinds of sources to which they could appeal and where they might find those sources. Take a few minutes to discuss the kind of primary or archival research in which historians are engaged.

Additional Resources for Chapter 5

For Instructors

Transparencies

The following maps and images from chapter 5 are available as full-color acetates:

- Map 5.1 Europeans and Africans in the Eighteenth Century
- Map 5.2 Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century
- Map 5.3 The Atlantic Slave Trade
- Map 5.4 Zones of Empire
- *Colonial Slave Drum*
- *Monterey Presidio*

Instructor's Resource CD-ROM

The following maps, figure, and images from chapter 5, as well as a chapter outline, are available on disc in both *PowerPoint* and *jpeg* formats:

- Map 5.1 Europeans and Africans in the Eighteenth Century
- Map 5.2 Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century
- Map 5.3 The Atlantic Slave Trade
- Map 5.4 Zones of Empire
- Figure 5.1 Colonial Exports, 1768–1772
- *German Hymnal*
- *Westover Plantation House*

Additional relevant images are available on disc in *jpeg* format only:

- *German Farm in Western Maryland*
- *Franklin's Influence*

Using the Bedford Series with *The American Promise*

Available online at bedfordstmartins.com/usingseries, this guide offers practical suggestions for incorporating volumes from the Bedford Series in History and Culture and the Historians at Work Series into the U.S. history survey. Relevant titles for chapter 5 include:

- *What Caused the Pueblo Revolt of 1680?*, by David J. Weber
- *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Written by Himself*, edited with an introduction by Robert J. Allison
- *The Diary and Life of Samuel Sewall*, edited with an introduction by Melvin Yazawa
- *The Autobiography of Ben Franklin*, edited with an introduction by Louis P. Masur

For Students

Reading the American Past

The following documents are available in chapter 5 of the companion reader by Michael P. Johnson, Johns Hopkins University:

1. Confessions of a Thief and Rapist, *A Boston Broadside*, 1768
2. Poor Richard's Advice: Benjamin Franklin, *Father Abraham's Speech from "Poor Richard's Almanac,"* 1757
3. A Scottish Immigrant Writes News from America: Alexander Thomson, *Letter from America*, 1774
4. Advertisements for Runaway Slaves: *South Carolina Gazette and Virginia Gazette*, 1737–1745
5. A Moravian Missionary Interviews Slaves in the West Indies: Christian George Andreas Oldendorp, *History of the Evangelical Brethren's Mission on the Caribbean Islands*, 1777

Online Study Guide at bedfordstmartins.com/roark

The Online Study Guide helps students synthesize the material from the textbook as well as practice the skills historians use to make sense of the past. The following Map, Visual, and Document activities are available for chapter 5:

Map Activity

- Map 5.2 Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century
- Map 5.3 The Atlantic Slave Trade

Visual Activity

- *Bethlehem, Pennsylvania*

Reading Historical Documents Activity

- Missionaries Report on California Missions

Critical Thinking Modules at bedfordstmartins.com/historymodules

These online modules invite students to interpret maps, audio, visual, and textual sources centered on events covered in the U.S. history survey. Relevant modules for chapter 5 include:

- Colonial Landscapes
- The Stono Rebellion

Essay Questions, Chapters 1–5

1. The authors of the textbook note that the first Americans did not leave written accounts of their experiences in the Western Hemisphere. Scholars have therefore had to rely on artifacts and material culture to reconstruct the histories of these people. Even when scholars have access to written accounts, such as those that document European exploration and colonization of the Western Hemisphere, they often still utilize material culture to help them make sense of the past. In what ways have historians and other scholars used artifacts and material culture to explain ancient America, the Age of Exploration, and early colonization efforts?
 2. What can these artifacts tell us that written documents cannot? What are the drawbacks of these types of evidence? Be sure to refer to specific examples from the textbook.
 2. Scholars used to refer to the period between 1492 and 1600 as the “Age of Discovery.” Within the last generation or so, the label “Age of Exploration” has come into fashion. The authors of the textbook, however, have chosen “Europeans and the New World” to describe the same time period. What are the implications of each term? What factors might have engendered the change? Why might “Europeans and the New World” encourage a more comprehensive study of the era?
 3. Compare the motivations for exploration of the Spanish to those of the British. How did these motivations influence settlement patterns and the maturation of colonial societies in North, Central, and South America?
 4. Historians have traditionally looked to colonial New England to explain all of colonial North America. How might the story of the colonial Chesapeake, Lower South, and middle colonies challenge this assumption of the typicality of the New England experience?
 5. Looking at the period from 1607 to 1760, to what extent was American history driven forward by the needs and traditions of the Old World versus the realities and possibilities of the New World?