Colonial Society in the Mid-Eighteenth Century
Societal Structure
Population Growth

- 1700 – 300,000 / 1775 – 2.5 million (20% Black)
- High fertility rate
- Largest colonies are VA, Mass, PA, NC, MD
- Only 4 major cities – Philly, Boston, NY, Charleston
- 90% live in rural areas in 18th Century / 80% by Revolution
- Immigration
  - South held 90% of slaves
  - NE is least mixed population of all regions
  - Middle is most mixed & most influential
  - Outside of NE, half the population not English in 1775
- Breakdown of population
  - English/Welsh – 66%  African – 20%  Scots/Irish – 5.6%
  - German – 4.5%  Dutch – 2%  Irish – 1.6%
  - French – 4%
Structure of Society

- Stratification emerged by mid-1700’s
- Small upper class – Church in NE
- Aristocratic plantation owners dominate wealth and influence in South
- Farmers are the majority – owned land
- Tradesmen, manual workers, hired hands – no land
- Indentured servants – no influence
- Slaves
- American’s had on average the highest standard of living in the world
- Few class distinctions on frontier
Characteristics

- Dominant English culture
- Religious toleration
- Self government – not all democratic
- Representative assemblies
- No hereditary aristocracy
- Social mobility available
Economies
Economies

A. **Triangle Trade**
- Used illegally to circumvent Nav. Acts
- NE exports timber, fish, cotton, to French Caribbean for molasses
- NE distills molasses to make rum – mostly goes to RI
- Rum sent to West Indies, then to Gold coast for slaves
- Slaves come to Newport, RI

B. **Land speculation make for wealth**

C. **Manufacturing**
- Secondary to farming
- Lumber is most important – ship building
- Women spinning in home produce large amounts of cloth
- Small industries – tailoring, shoemaking, baking, metal work, furniture
Economies

D. **Increased Trade**
- Population growth creates more demand
- As economy grows, Americans seek other markets
  - exports to France and West Indies get money to buy British goods
  - ignore Molasses Act of 1733
  - Salutary Neglect

E. **Transportation**
- Poor roads
- Most of population located near rivers
- Taverns on roads serve as important political discussion points
- Postal system developed in mid 1700’s

F. **Differences between Colonies**
- New England – rocky soil, long winters, 100 acre plots, farming limited to subsistence levels, small farms, family does most of work, logging, ship building, fish, rum, distilleries
- Middle Colonies – wheat, corn, rich soil, 200 acres plots, much farming, indentured servants, small manufacturing
- Southern Colonies – subsistence agriculture to large plantations, 2000 acre plots, tobacco, rice, indigo, slavery, self-sufficient plantations
Politics
Politics

A. Structure
- Royal, proprietary, or charter colonies
- Bi-Cameral legislatures were common
  - upper house appointed
  - lower house elected by property owners

B. Nature of Politics
- Colonial government did not enjoy the power Parliament held
- Colonial government was far more reformed than England
- More direct representation in colonies
- Less corruption in colonial government

C. Local Government
- NE – Town Hall meetings decided issues
- South – County governments controlled
- Middle Colonies – combination of both

D. Voting
- Upper class didn’t trust commoners – didn’t support a democracy
- Property and religious restrictions imposed on voting
- 50% of all white male population could vote
Politics

E. Governors
   - Had veto power – could dissolve lower house – ruled over judiciary
   - Weak – salary controlled by assembly (Power of the Purse)
   - Distance from England allowed for undermining of Governor’s power

F. Development of Democratic Ideals
   - Tolerance, education, opportunity, freedom of speech, press, assembly, representative government found in all colonies

G. Needs of the Colonies
   - Virtual representation loses favor in place of actual representation
   - Colonies have had lots of practice at self government
   - Assemblies held control over governors
   - Colonies want written document that spelled out their rights
Politics

H. Uniting the Colonies
- Pequot War
  - Puritan victory shows value of collective security
  - Puritans want Indians (Pequots) to move
  - Pequots captured, sold as slaves or fled to neighbor tribes
  - Puritans justify extermination of Pequots using Bible

- New England Confederation Formed
  - purpose – defense against Natives, Dutch, & French / slave issues / trade
  - significance – first colonial unification
  - English Civil War leaves colonies to themselves for a while
  - Confederation is exclusively Puritan – no RI or Maine

- Confederation put to the test
  - Metacom (King Phillip) is Wampanoag Chief
  - 52 of 90 Puritan towns are attacked
  - Indians mirror Puritan attacks on non-combatants – kill women and kids
  - most Indians are sold into slavery after the battle
  - Metacom drawn & quartered – head displayed for 20 years
Culture
A. Architecture
- Georgian style of architecture – brick & stucco
- Symmetrical placement of windows and dormers & 2 fireplaces
- Frontier – Log Cabins

B. Painting
- Benjamin West and John Copley are leaders in Art
- Do mostly family portraits

C. Literature
- Most writings were about religion & politics (Mather and Edwards)
- Pre Revolution – Jefferson, Adams, Paine
- Ben Franklin – *Poor Richard’s Almanac* / starts a library
- Phyllis Wheatley – wrote poetry – taught to read & write by master’s mistress

D. Science
- John Bartram – self taught scientist
- Ben Franklin – electricity, bi-focals, Franklin stove
Culture

E. Enlightenment
- Liberty ideas – freedom of religion, press, speech, equality
- Equality of opportunity not economic equality
- Human dignity
- Scientific progress and rational thought would create a better society
- Representative government
- Thinkers
  - John Locke – Second Treatise on Civil Government 1690 – natural rights, life, liberty, property, encouraged rebellion if necessary
  - Montesquieu – Spirit of Laws 1748 – checks and balances, separation of powers
  - Adam Smith – Wealth of Nations 1776 – free economy

F. Deism
- God created the universe and then sat back and let things happen
- Most rejected traditional Christianity
- Influenced Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, and Paine

G. The New England Way
- Standards for identifying the “Elect”
- Must correctly profess faith
- Must have conversion experience and defend it
- Women are denied the ability to try / must be literate
- Parents are responsible for children being taught the faith – checked by congregation
- Clergy – need to be highly educated
- Helped to enforce religious conformity
Education
Education

A. New England
   - Dedicated to and stresses bible reading in community members
   - Primary and secondary schools
   - High literacy rate

B. Middle Colonies
   - Primary and secondary school education available
   - Spread out population makes it hard to run school system
   - Many wealthy colonists send children to England for school

C. South
   - Opportunity limited for education except for privileged
   - Wealthy can hire tutors
   - Population is dispersed – ineffective for schooling common folk
D. Higher Education

- Set up to train clergy – not academics
- Improved with the founding of Univ. of Pennsylvania
  - Ben Franklin helps establish
  - free of denominational ties
  - modern curriculum, modern languages, use experiments and reason

- Nine important colleges during colonial period
  Harvard (Anglican)  William & Mary (Anglican)
  Princeton (Presbyterian)  Penn (Non-denominational)
  Dartmouth – (Congregational)  Rutgers (Dutch Reformed)
  Yale (Congregational)  Columbia (Anglican)
  Brown (Baptist)
Class Structure
Class Structure

- Upper Class – plantation owner, merchants, high gov’t officials, clergy
- Middle Class – small farmers, skilled craftsmen, shopkeepers, doctors, teachers
- Lower Class – tenant farmers, hired hands, servants, unskilled workers, indentured servants, free blacks
- Slaves
- (Physicians and Lawyers will gain prominence in time)
The Press
The Press

A. Newspapers
   - 40 papers by 1776
   - News from England, ad’s, cartoons, runaway slave notices, essays

B. John Zenger
   - New York editor
   - Charged with libel for criticizing New York Governor Andrew Hamilton defends him, said he told truth
   - English law states he cannot hurt public image of governor, even if it is true
   - Jury acquits him
   - Encourages others to take greater risks in criticizing political figures
Rural Folkways
Rural Folkways

- Farmers...
  - rarely had time to read newspapers
  - worked from sun up to sun down
  - spring planting, summer growing, fall harvest, winter planting
  - light and heat limited to kitchen fire and candles
  - entertainment for well-to-do – cards, horse races in south, religious lectures in north
Family
Family

- Puritans believed in Nuclear family
- Mather – well ordered family produced good order in society
- Obedience to husband – a good wife was subject to her husbands authority
- Typical family had 5 children with 3 making it to adulthood
- New England – life span to 65
- Middle & South – larger families to work homestead
- Farms – all family had jobs / not always by gender / worked along side of each other
- City – gender based work / some females worked with men
- Women still have very limited rights
- Men mostly worked and had almost unlimited power over wife, including beating her
- Women cooked and cleaned / educated children / worked along side of husband
Towns
Towns

- New England town charters given to several families – freedom to lay out town
- Determined own qualifications for voting and government
- Each family gets one acre house lot within half mile of meeting house
- More strips of land outside of town for farming
- Not given more land than needed – created a more urban society
- Town meetings solved disputes through majority rule
Similarities and Differences of the 13 Colonies
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A. Similarities
   - Mostly English background
   - Possessed British freedoms
   - Self-government – although not necessarily democratic
   - Religious toleration
   - Educational opportunities – mostly in NE / less in South
   - Economic opportunity and social development available

B. Differences
   - New England
     - Puritan dominant, less tolerant of religions, restrictions on civil participation in government, more industry, less available farm land
   - Middle Colonies
     - Ethnically diverse, tolerant or religions, democratic, human freedoms, farming, lumber, ship building, shipping, trade, fur trapping
   - Southern Colonies
     - Plantations, aristocratic, slavery, cash crops, scattered population, expansionary, some toleration of religion