

Colonial Society in the Eighteenth Century

POPULATION GROWTH

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Population</i> |
|--|-------------|-------------------|
| English Colonies on the Atlantic Coast (Excluding Native Americans) | 1701 | 250,000 |
| | 1775 | 2,500,000 |
| African Americans in America | 1701 | 28,000 |
| | 1775 | 500,000 |

Reasons for dramatic population growth:-

1. Between 1701 and 1775 almost one million immigrated to America
2. High birthrate among colonial families (abundance of land and dependable food supply).

Change in Immigrant Patterns:

English: fewer settlers came due to better conditions at home.

Germans: settled in farmlands west of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Dutch (Deutsch) country. They maintained their German language, customs and religion (Lutheran). They obeyed the laws but showed little interest in politics. By 1775 German ancestry was 6% of the colonial population.

Scotch-Irish: these English-speaking immigrants came from Northern Ireland. Their original ancestors went to Ireland from Scotland, hence called Scotch-Irish. They had very little respect for the British government, who pressured them to emigrate. They settled on the western frontier sections of Pennsylvania, Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia. By 1775 they were 7% of the population.

Other Europeans: Other immigrant groups included French Protestants (Huguenots), Dutch and Swedish and by 1775 made up 5% of the population.

Africans: most were slaves, some were granted their freedom after years of forced labor. The majority, over 90% lived in the southern colonies, being the majority of the populations of South Carolina and Georgia. In every colony, from New Hampshire to Georgia there were laws discriminating against their rights and opportunities. By 1775 they were 20% of the colonial population.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE COLONIAL SOCIETY

Each of the 13 colonies developed along different lines and adapted its own unique institutions.

However the colonies also shared a number of characteristics:-

- **Dominance of English Culture**
- **Self-Government** (except for Rhode Island & Connecticut where the governor was elected by the people)
- **Religious Toleration** (Massachusetts least tolerant, excluded non-Christians and Catholics, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania were the most liberal)
- **No Hereditary Aristocracy** (no longer nobles as rulers and masses of poor people, the new trend was wealthy landowners at the top, craftspeople and small farmers were the majority of the people)
- **Social Mobility** (except for African Americans everyone in the colonies could improve their status and standard of living by hard work)

Family Life was the center of colonial society. Over 90% of the people lived on farms. While life was hard, especially on the coast and the western frontiers, the standard of living was much higher than Europe.

Men: Landowning was primarily reserved for men. They also dominated politics. English law gave the husband unlimited power, including the right to beat his wife.

Women: Household work included cooking, cleaning, clothes-making and medical care. They also educated the children. A woman usually worked next to her husband on the farm, plantation or in the store. Divorce was legal but rare. Women had limited legal and political rights. By working alongside their husbands women were usually protected from abuse and took an active role in the family decision-making.

General Patterns of Colonial Political Power

| | ROYAL | PROPRIETARY | CHARTER |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Ownership & Power | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Crown owned land * Monarch & Parliament ruled through Royal Governors * All colonial laws needed British Privy Council approval | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Land granted by monarch to an individual or group * Proprietors ruled through appointed governors * All colonial laws need privy council approval | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Land granted by monarch to a company * People's power specified in a charter |
| Executive Branch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Governors appointed by monarch * Governor must approve every legislative act | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Proprietors appointed governors * Governor must approve every legislative act | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Governor elected by the colonists * Governor could veto colonial laws |
| Legislative Branch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Bicameral * Upper House appointed by monarch * Lower House elected by colonists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Bicameral * Upper House appointed by legislature * Lower House elected by colonists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Bicameral * Both Houses elected by the colonists |
| Judicial Branch | <p>Court Systems in all the colonies followed the British model. Generally this branch was of lesser importance than the Executive and Legislative</p> | | |