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Chapter 05 - Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution

I. Conquest by the Cradle

1. By 1775, Great Britain ruled 32 colonies in North America.
 - Only 13 of them revolted (the ones in what's today the U.S.).
 - Canada and Jamaica were wealthier than the "original 13."
 - All of them were growing by leaps and bounds.
2. By 1775, the population numbered 2.5 million people.
3. The average age was 16 years old (due mainly to having several children).
4. Most of the population (95%) was densely cooped up east of the Alleghenies, though by 1775, some had slowly trickled into Tennessee and Kentucky.
5. About 90% of the people lived in rural areas and were therefore farmers.

II. A Mingling of the Races

1. Colonial America, though mostly English, had other races as well.
2. **Germans** accounted for about 6% of the population, or about 150,000 people by 1775.
 - Most were Protestant (primarily Lutheran) and were called the "Pennsylvania Dutch" (a corruption of Deutsch which means German).
3. The **Scots-Irish** were about 7% of the population, with 175,000 people.
 - Over many decades, they had been transplanted to Northern Ireland, but they had not found a home there (the already existing Irish Catholics resented the intruders).
 - Many of the Scots-Irish reached America and became squatters, quarreling with both Indians and white landowners.
 - They seemed to try to move as far from Britain as possible, trickling down to Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas.
 - In 1764, the Scots-Irish led the armed march of the Paxton Boys. The Paxtons led a march on Philadelphia to protest the Quaker' peaceful treatment of the Indians. They later started the North Carolina Regulator movement in the hills and mountains of the colony, aimed against domination by eastern powers in the colony.
 - They were known to be very hot-headed and independent minded.
 - Many eventually became American revolutionists.

4. About 5% of the multicolored population consisted of other European groups, like French Huguenots, Welsh, Dutch, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss, and Scots-Highlanders.
5. Americans were of all races and mixed bloods, so it was no wonder that other races from other countries had a hard time classifying them.

III. The Structure of the Colonial Society

1. In contrast to contemporary Europe, America was a land of opportunity.
 - Anyone who was willing to work hard could possibly go from rags to riches, and poverty was scorned.
 - Class differences did emerge, as a small group of aristocrats (made up of the rich farmers, merchants, officials, clergymen) had much of the power.
2. Also, armed conflicts in the 1690s and 1700s enriched a number of merchants in the New England and middle colonies.
3. War also created many widows and orphans who eventually had to turn to charity.
4. In the South, a firm social pyramid emerged containing...
 - The immensely rich plantation owners ("planters") had many slaves (though these were few).
 - "Yeoman" farmers, or small farmers. They owned their land and, maybe, a few slaves.
 - Landless whites who owned no land and either worked for a landowner or rented land to farm.
 - Indentured servants of America were the paupers and the criminals sent to the New World. Some of them were actually unfortunate victims of Britain's unfair laws and did become respectable citizens. This group was dwindling though by the 1700s, thanks to Bacon's Rebellion and the move away from indentured servant labor and toward slavery.
 - Black slaves were at the bottom of the social ladder with no rights or hopes up moving up or even gaining freedom. Slavery became a divisive issue because some colonies didn't want slaves while others needed them, and therefore vetoed any bill banning the importation of slaves.

IV. Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

1. The most honored profession in the colonial times was the clergy (priests), which in 1775, had less power than before during the height of the "Bible Commonwealth," but still wielded a great amount of authority.
2. Physicians were not highly esteemed and many of them were bad as medical practices were archaic.
 - Bleeding was often a favorite, and deadly, solution to illnesses.
 - Plagues were a nightmare.
 - Smallpox (afflicting 1 of 5 persons, including George Washington) was rampant, though a crude form of inoculation for it was introduced in 1721.
 - Some of the clergy and doctors didn't like the inoculation though, preferring not to tamper with the will of God.
3. At first, lawyers weren't liked, being regarded as noisy scumbags.
 - Criminals often represented themselves in court.
 - By 1750, lawyers were recognized as useful, and many defended

high-profile cases, were great orators and played important roles in the history of America.

V. Workaday America

1. Agriculture was the leading industry (by a huge margin), since farmers could seem to grow anything.
 - In Maryland and Virginia, tobacco was the staple crop, and by 1759, New York was exporting 80,000 barrels of flour a year.
2. Fishing could be rewarding, though not as much as farming, and it was pursued in all the American colonies especially in New England.
3. Trading was also a popular and prevalent industry, as commerce occurred all around the colonies.
 - The “**triangular trade**” was common: a ship, for example, would leave (1) New England with rum and go to the (2) Gold Coast of Africa and trade it for African slaves. Then, it would go to the (3) West Indies and exchange the slaves for molasses (for rum), which it'd sell to New England once it returned there.
4. Manufacturing was not as important, though many small enterprises existed.
5. Strong-backed laborers and skilled craftspeople were scarce and highly prized.
6. Perhaps the single most important manufacturing activity was lumbering.
 - Britain sometimes marked the tallest trees for its navy's masts, and colonists resented that, even though there were countless other good trees in the area and the marked tree was going toward a common defense (it was the principle of Britain-first that was detested).
7. In 1733, Parliament passed the **Molasses Act**, which, if successful, would have struck a crippling blow to American international trade by hindering its trade with the French West Indies.
 - The result was disagreement, and colonists got around the act through smuggling.

VI. Horsepower and Sailpower

1. Roads in 1700s America were very poor, and they only connected the large cities.
 - It took a young Benjamin Franklin 9 days to get from Boston to Philadelphia.
2. Roads were so bad that they were dangerous.
 - People who would venture these roads would often sign wills and pray with family members before embarking.
 - As a result, towns seemed to cluster around slow, navigable water sources, like gentle rivers, or by the ocean.
3. Taverns and bars sprang up to serve weary travelers and were great places of gossip and news.
4. An inter-colonial mail system was set up in the mid-1700s, but mailmen often passed time by reading private letters, since there was nothing else to do.

VII. Dominant Denominations

1. Two “**established churches**” (tax-supported) by 1775 were the Anglican and the Congregational.
2. A great majority of people didn't worship in churches.
3. The **Church of England** (the **Anglican Church**) was official in Georgia, both Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, and a part of New York.

- Anglican sermons were shorter, its descriptions of hell were less frightening, and amusements were less scorned.
 - For Anglicans, not having a resident bishop proved to be a problem for unordained young ministers.
 - So, William and Mary was founded in 1693 to train young clergy members.
4. The **Congregational** church had grown from the Puritan church, and it was established in all the New England colonies except for Rhode Island.
 - There was worry by the late 1600s that people weren't devout enough.

VIII. The Great Awakening

1. Due to less religious fervor than before, and worry that so many people would not be saved, the stage was set for a revival, which occurred, and became the **First Great Awakening**.
2. **Jonathan Edwards** was a preacher with fiery preaching methods, emotionally moving many listeners to tears while talking of the eternal damnation that nonbelievers would face after death.
 - He began preaching in 1734, and his methods sparked debate among his peers.
 - Most famous sermon was "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," describing a man dangling a spider over a blazing fire, able to drop the spider in at any time – just as God could do to man.
 - His famous metaphor: "The road to hell is paved with the skulls of unbaptized children."
3. **George Whitefield** was even better than Edwards when he started four years later.
 - An orator of rare gifts, he even made Jonathan Edwards weep and persuaded always skeptical Ben Franklin to empty his pockets into the collection plate.
 - Imitators copied his emotional shaking sermons and his heaping of blame on sinners.
4. These new preachers were met with skepticism by the "old lights," or the orthodox clergymen.
5. However, the Great Awakening led to the founding of "new light" centers like Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth.
6. The Great Awakening was the first religious experience shared by all Americans as a group.

IX. Schools and Colleges

1. Education was most important in New England, where it was used to train young future clergymen.
 - In other parts of America, farm labor used up most of the time that would have been spent in school. However, there were fairly adequate primary and secondary schools in areas other than New England. The only problem was that only well-to-do children could afford to attend.
2. In a gloomy and grim atmosphere, colonial schools put most of the emphasis on religion and on the classical languages, as well as doctrine and orthodoxy.
 - Discipline was quite severe, such as a child being cut by a limb from a birch tree.
3. Also, at least in New England, college education was regarded more important than the ABC's.
4. Eventually, some change was made with emphasis of curriculum change from dead languages to live ones, and Ben Franklin helped by launching the school that would become the University of Pennsylvania.

X. A Provincial Culture

1. Though there was little time for recreation (due to farm work, fear of Indians, etc...), the little free time that was there was used on religion, not art.
2. Painters were frowned upon as pursuing a worthless pastime.
 - **John Trumbull** of Connecticut was discouraged, as a youth, by his father.
 - **Charles Willson Peale**, best known for his portraits of George Washington, also ran a museum, stuffed birds, and practiced dentistry in addition to his art.
 - **Benjamin West** and **John Singleton Copley** had to go to England to complete their ambitious careers.
3. Architecture was largely imported from the Old World and modified to meet American needs.
 - The log cabin was borrowed from Sweden.
 - The classical, red-bricked Georgian style of architecture was introduced about 1720.
4. Colonial literature was also generally undistinguished.
 - However, a slave girl, Phillis Wheatley, who had never been formally educated, did go to Britain and publish a book of verse and subsequently wrote other polished poems that revealed the influence of Alexander Pope.
 - **Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*** was very influential, containing many common sayings and phrases, and was more widely read in America and Europe than anything but for the Bible.
 - Ben Franklin's experiments with science, and his sheer power of observation, also helped advance science.

XI. Pioneer Presses

1. Few libraries were found in early America, and few Americans were rich enough to buy books.
2. On the eve of the revolution, many hand-operated presses cranked out leaflets, pamphlets, and journals signed with pseudonyms.
3. In one famous case, **John Peter Zenger**, a New York newspaper printer, was taken to court and charged with seditious libel (writing in a malicious manner against someone).
 - The judge urged the jury to consider that the mere fact of publishing was a crime, no matter whether the content was derogatory or not.
 - Zenger won after his lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, excellently defended his case.
 - The importance—freedom of the press scored a huge early victory in this case.

XII. The Great Game of Politics

1. By 1775, eight of the colonies had royal governors who were appointed by the king.
2. Three had governors chosen by proprietors.
3. Practically every colony utilized a two-house legislative body.
 - The upper house was appointed by royal officials or proprietors.
 - The lower house was elected by the people.
4. Self-taxation with representation came to be a cherished privilege that Americans came to value above most other rights.
5. Most governors did a good job, but some were just plain corrupt.
 - I.e., Lord Cornbury, first cousin of Queen Anne, was made governor of New York and New Jersey in 1702, but proved to be a drunkard, a

spendthrift, a grafter, and embezzler, a religious bigot, a cross-dresser, and a vain fool.

6. The right to vote was not available to just anyone, just white male landowners only.
 - However, the ease of acquiring land to hard workers made voting a privilege easily attainable to many people in this group.

XIII. Colonial Folkways

1. Americans had many hardships, as many basic amenities that we have today were not available.
 - Churches weren't heated at all.
 - Running water or plumbing in houses was nonexistent.
 - Garbage disposal was primitive at best.
2. Yet, amusement was permitted, and people often worked/partied during house-raising, barn-raising, apple-parings, quilting bees, husking bees, and other merrymaking.
3. In the South, card playing, horse racing, cockfighting, and fox hunting were fun.
4. Lotteries were universally approved, even by the clergy because they helped raise money for churches and colleges.
5. Stage plays were popular in the South, but not really in the North.
6. Holidays were celebrated everywhere in the colonies (New England didn't like Christmas, though).
7. America in 1775 was like a quilt, each part different and individual in its own way, but all coming together to form one single, unified piece.

XIV. Makers of America: The Scots-Irish

1. Life for the Scots was miserable in England, as many were extremely poor, and Britain still taxed them, squeezing the last cent out of them.
2. Migrating to Ulster, in Ireland, the Scots still felt unwelcome, and eventually came to America.
3. They constantly tried to further themselves away from Britain.
 - Most went to Pennsylvania, where tolerance was high.
4. The Scots-Irish were many of America's pioneers, clearing the trails for others to follow.
5. Otherwise independent, religion was the only thing that bonded these people (Presbyterian).
6. Their hatred of England made them great allies and supporters of the United States during the Revolutionary War.

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