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# Chapter 04 - American Life in the Seventeenth Century

## I. The Unhealthy Chesapeake

1. Life in the American wilderness was harsh.
2. Diseases like malaria, dysentery, and typhoid killed many.
3. Few people lived to 40 or 50 years.
4. In the early days of colonies, women were so scarce that men fought over all of them. The Chesapeake region had fewer women and a 6:1 male to female ratio is a good guide.
5. Few people knew any grandparents.
6. A third of all brides in one Maryland county were already pregnant before the wedding (scandalous).
7. Virginia, with 59,000 people, became the most populous colony.

## II. The Tobacco Economy

1. The Chesapeake was very good for tobacco cultivation.
2. Chesapeake Bay exported 1.5 million pounds of tobacco yearly in the 1630s, and by 1700, that number had risen to 40 million pounds a year.
  - More availability led to falling prices, and farmers still grew more.
  - The **headright system** encouraged growth of the Chesapeake. Under this system, if an aristocrat sponsored an indentured servant's passage to America, the aristocrat earned the right to purchase 50 acres land, undoubtedly at a cheap price. This meant land was being gobbled by the rich, and running out for the poor.
  - Early on, most of the laborers were indentured servants.
    - Life for them was hard, but there was hope at the end of seven years for freedom.
    - Conditions were brutal, and in the later years, owners unwilling to free their servants extended their contracts by years for small mistakes.

## III. Frustrated Freeman and Bacon's Rebellion

1. By the late 1600s, there were lots of free, poor, landless, single men frustrated by the lack of money, land, work, and women.
2. In 1676, **Nathaniel Bacon** led a few thousand of these men in a rebellion against the hostile conditions.

- These people wanted land and were resentful of Virginia governor William Berkeley's friendly policies toward the Indians.
  - Bacon's men murderously attacked Indian settlements after Berkeley refused to retaliate for a series of savage Indian attacks on the frontier.
3. Then, in the middle of his rebellion, Bacon suddenly died of disease, and Berkeley went on to crush the uprising.
- Still, Bacon's legacy lived on, giving frustrated poor folks ideas to rebel, and so a bit of paranoia went on for some time afterwards.

#### IV. Colonial Slavery

1. In the 300 years following Columbus' discovery of America, only about 400,000 of a total of 10 million African slaves were brought over to the United States.
2. By 1680, though, many landowners were afraid of possibly mutinous white servants, by the mid 1680s, for the first time, black slaves outnumbered white servants among the plantation colonies' new arrivals.
3. After 1700, more and more slaves were imported, and in 1750, blacks accounted for nearly half of the Virginian population.
  - Most of the slaves were from West Africa, from places like Senegal and Angola.
4. Some of the earliest black slaves gained their freedom and some became slaveholders themselves.
5. Eventually, to clear up issues on slave ownership, the **slave codes** made it so that slaves and their children would remain slaves to their masters for life (chattels), unless they were voluntarily freed.
  - Some laws made teaching slaves to read a crime, and not even conversion to Christianity might qualify a slave for freedom.

#### V. Africans in America

1. Slave life in the Deep South was very tough, as rice growing was much harder than tobacco growing.
  - Many blacks in America evolved their own languages, blending their native tongues with English.
  - Blacks also contributed to music with instruments like the banjo and bongo drum.
2. A few of the slaves became skilled artisans (i.e. carpenters, bricklayers and tanners), but most were relegated to sweaty work like clearing swamps and grubbing out trees.
3. Revolts did occur.
  - In 1712, a slave revolt in New York City cost the lives of a dozen whites and 21 Blacks were executed.
  - In 1739, South Carolina blacks along the **Stono River** revolted and tried to march to Spanish Florida, but failed.

#### VI. Southern Society

1. A social gap appeared and began to widen.
  - In Virginia, a clutch of extended clans (i.e. the Fitzhughs, the Lees, and the Washingtons) owned tracts and tracts of real estate and just about dominated the House of Burgesses.

- They came to be known as the First Families of Virginia (FFV).
- 2. In Virginia, there was often a problem with drunkenness.
- 3. The largest social group was the farmers.
- 4. Few cities sprouted in the South, so schools and churches were slow to develop.

## VII. The New England Family

1. In New England, there was clean water and cool temperatures, so disease was not as predominant as in the South.
2. The first New England Puritans had an average life expectancy of 70 years.
3. In contrast to the Chesapeake, the New Englanders tended to migrate as a family, instead of individually.
  - Women usually married in their early twenties and gave birth every two years until menopause.
  - A typical woman could expect to have ten babies and raise about eight of them.
- Death in childbirth was not uncommon.
1. In the South, women usually had more power, since the Southern men typically died young and women could inherit the money, but in New England, the opposite was true.
  - In New England, men didn't have absolute power over their wives (as evidenced by the punishments of unruly husbands), but they did have much power over women.
2. New England law was very severe and strict.
  - For example, adulterous women had to wear the letter "A" on their bosoms if they were caught (as with *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne).

## VIII. Life in the New England Towns

1. Life in New England was organized.
  - New towns were legally chartered by colonial authorities.
  - A town usually had a meetinghouse surrounded by houses and a village green.
  - Towns of more than 50 families had to provide primary education.
  - Towns of more than 100 had to provide secondary education.
2. In 1636, Massachusetts Puritans established Harvard College to train men to become ministers.
  - (Note: in 1693, Virginia established their first college, William and Mary.)
3. Puritans ran their own churches, and democracy in Congregational church government led logically to democracy in political government.

## IX. The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials

1. As Puritans began to worry about their children and whether or not they would be as loyal and faithful, and new type of sermon came about called "**jeremiads**."
  - In jeremiads, earnest preachers scolded parishioners for their waning piety in hope to improve faith.
2. Paradoxically, troubled ministers announced a new formula for church membership in 1662, calling it the "**Half-Way Covenant**."
  - In the Half-Way Covenant, all people could come and participate in the church, even if they fell short of the "visible-saint" status and

were somehow only half converted (with the exception of a few extremely hated groups).

3. In the early 1690s, a group of **Salem** girls claimed to have been bewitched by certain older women.
  - What followed was a hysterical witch-hunt that led to the executions of 20 people (19 of which were hanged, 1 pressed to death) and two dogs.
  - Back in Europe, larger scale witch-hunts were already occurring.
  - Witchcraft hysteria eventually ended in 1693.

## **X. The New England Way of Life**

1. Due to the hard New England soil (or lack thereof), New Englanders became great traders.
2. New England was also less ethnically mixed than its neighbors.
3. The climate of New England encouraged diversified agriculture and industry.
  - Black slavery was attempted, but didn't work. It was unnecessary since New England was made of small farms rather than plantations as down South.
4. Rivers were short and rapid.
5. The Europeans in New England chastised the Indians for "wasting" the land, and felt a need to clear as much land for use as possible.
6. Fishing became a very popular industry. It is said New England was built on "God and cod."

## **XI. The Early Settlers' Days and Ways**

1. Early farmers usually rose at dawn and went to bed at dusk.
2. Few events were done during the night unless they were "worth the candle."
3. Life was humble but comfortable, at least in accordance to the surroundings.
4. The people who emigrated from Europe to America were most usually lower middle class citizens looking to have a better future in the New World.
5. Because of the general sameness of class in America, laws against extravagances were sometimes passed, but as time passed, America grew.

## **XII. Makers of America: From African to African-American**

1. Africans' arrival into the New World brought new languages, music, and cuisines to America.
  - Africans worked in the rice fields of South Carolina due to (a) their knowledge of the crop and (b) their resistance to disease (as compared to Indians).
2. The first slaves were men; some eventually gained freedom.
3. By 1740, large groups of African slaves lived together on plantations, where female slaves were expected to perform backbreaking labor and spin, weave, and sew.
4. Most slaves became Christians, though many adopted elements from their native religions.
  - Many African dances led to modern dances (i.e. the Charleston).
  - Christian songs could also be code for the announcement of the arrival of a guide to freedom.
  - Jazz is the most famous example of slave music entering mainstream culture.

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