

CHAPTER 4

American Life in the Seventeenth Century, 1607–1692

PART I: REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

A. CHECKLIST OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. describe the basic economy, demographics, and social structure and life of the seventeenth-century colonies.
2. compare and contrast the different forms of society and ways of life of the southern colonies and New England.
3. explain how the practice of indentured servitude failed to solve the colonial labor problem, and why colonists then turned to African slavery.
4. describe the slave trade and the character of early African American slavery.
5. summarize the unique New England way of life centered on family, town, and church, and describe the changes that overcame this comfortable social order in the late seventeenth century.
6. describe the role of family life and the roles of women in the seventh century colonies, and indicate how these changed over time.

B. GLOSSARY

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms:

1. **headright** The right to acquire a certain amount of land granted to the person who finances the passage of a laborer. “Masters—not servants themselves—thus reaped the benefits of landownership from the headright system.” (p. 67)
2. **disfranchise** To take away the right to vote. “The Virginia Assembly in 1670 disfranchised most of the landless knockabouts. . . .” (p. 68)
3. **civil war** Any conflict between the citizens or inhabitants of the same country. “As this civil war in Virginia ground on . . .” (p. 68)
4. **tidewater** The territory adjoining water affected by tides—that is, near the seacoast or coastal rivers. “Bacon . . . had pitted the hard scrabble backcountry frontiersmen against the haughty gentry of the tidewater plantations.” (pp. 68, 70)
5. **middle passage** That portion of a slave ship’s journey in which slaves were carried from Africa to the Americas. “. . . the captives were herded aboard sweltering ships for the gruesome ‘middle passage.’ . . .” (p. 71)
6. **fertility** The ability to mate and produce abundant young. “The captive black population of the Chesapeake area soon began to grow not only through new imports but also through its own fertility. . . .” (p. 72)

7. **menial** Fit for servants; humble or low. “But chiefly they performed the sweaty toil of clearing swamps, grubbing out trees, and other menial tasks.” (p. 73)
8. **militia** An armed force of citizens called out only in emergencies. “[They] tried to march to Spanish Florida, only to be stopped by the local militia.” (p. 73)
9. **hierarchy** A social group arranged in ranks or classes. “The rough equality . . . was giving way to a hierarchy of wealth and status. . . .” (p. 73)
10. **corporation** A group or institution granted legal rights to carry on certain specified activities. “. . . the Massachusetts Puritans established Harvard College, today the oldest corporation in America. . . .” (p. 79)
11. **jeremiad** A sermon or prophecy recounting wrongdoing, warning of doom, and calling for repentance. “Jeremiads continued to thunder from the pulpits. . . .” (p. 80)
12. **lynching** The illegal execution of an accused person by mob action, without due process of law. “A hysterical ‘witch-hunt’ ensued, leading to the legal lynching in 1692 of twenty individuals. . . .” (p. 80)
13. **hinterland** An inland region set back from a port, river, or seacoast. “. . . their accusers came largely from subsistence farming families in Salem’s hinterland.” (p. 80)
14. **social structure** The basic pattern of the distribution of status and wealth in a society. “. . . many settlers . . . tried to re-create on a modified scale the social structure they had known in the Old World.” (p. 83)
15. **blue blood** Of noble or upper-class descent. “. . . would-be American blue bloods resented the pretensions of the ‘meaner sort.’ . . .” (p. 83)

PART II: CHECKING YOUR PROGRESS

A. True-False

Where the statement is true, circle T; where it is false, circle F.

1. T F Life expectancy among the seventeenth-century settlers of Maryland and Virginia was about sixty years.
2. T F Because men greatly outnumbered women in the Chesapeake region, a fierce competition arose among men for scarce females.
3. T F By the eighteenth century, the Chesapeake population was growing on the basis of natural increase.
4. T F Chesapeake Bay tobacco planters responded to falling prices by cutting back production.
5. T F The “headright” system of land grants to those who brought laborers to America primarily benefited wealthy planters rather than the poor indentured servants.
6. T F Most of the European immigrants who came to Virginia and Maryland in the seventeenth century were indentured servants.
7. T F Bacon’s Rebellion involved an alliance of white indentured servants and Indians who attacked the elite planter class.
8. T F African slaves began to replace white indentured servants as the primary labor supply in the plantation colonies in the 1680s.

9. T F Slaves brought to North America developed a culture that mixed African and American elements.
10. T F Directly beneath the wealthy slaveowning planters in the southern social structure were the white indentured servants.
11. T F New Englanders' long lives contributed to the general stability and order of their childrearing and family life.
12. T F New England expansion was carried out primarily by independent pioneers and land speculators who bought up large plots and then sold them to individual farmers.
13. T F New England women enjoyed fewer rights to inherit and own property than women in the South.
14. T F New England's commercial wealth was based on the export of agricultural crops to England and elsewhere.
15. T F Seventeenth-century American life was generally simple and lacking in displays of wealth or elaborate class distinctions.

B. Multiple Choice

Select the best answer and circle the corresponding letter.

1. For most of their early history, the colonies of Maryland and Virginia
 - a. provided a healthy environment for child rearing.
 - b. contained far more men than women.
 - c. had harsh laws punishing premarital sexual relations.
 - d. encouraged the formation of stable and long-lasting marriages.
2. The primary beneficiaries of the "headright" system were
 - a. landowners who paid the transatlantic passage for indentured servants.
 - b. widows who acquired new husbands from England.
 - c. indentured servants who were able to acquire their own land.
 - d. English ship owners who transported new laborers across the Atlantic.
3. The primary cause of Bacon's Rebellion was
 - a. Governor Berkeley's harsh treatment of the Indians.
 - b. the refusal of landlords to grant indentured servants their freedom.
 - c. the poverty and discontent of many single young men unable to acquire land.
 - d. the persecution of the colonists by King Charles II.
4. African slavery became the prevalent form of labor in the 1680s when
 - a. planters were no longer able to rely on white indentured servants as a labor force.
 - b. the first captives were brought from Africa to the New World.
 - c. blacks could be brought to the New World in safer and healthier condition.
 - d. the once-clear legal difference between a servant and a slave began to be blurred.
5. The culture that developed among the slaves in the English colonies of North America was
 - a. derived primarily from that of the white masters.
 - b. based mainly on the traditions of southern Africa.
 - c. a combination of several African and American cultures.
 - d. originally developed in the West Indies and spread northward.
6. Political and economic power in the southern colonies was dominated by
 - a. urban professional classes such as lawyers and bankers.
 - b. small landowners.
 - c. wealthy planters.

- d. the English royal governors.
- 7. Because there were few urban centers in the colonial South,
 - a. good roads between the isolated plantations were constructed early on.
 - b. a professional class of lawyers and financiers was slow to develop.
 - c. the rural church became the central focus of southern social and economic life.
 - d. there were almost no people of wealth and culture in the region.
- 8. Puritan lawmakers in New England prevented married women from having property rights because
 - a. they believed that property should be held by towns, not private citizens.
 - b. they feared that too much property would fall into the control of the numerous widows.
 - c. they feared that separate property rights for women would undercut the unity of married couples.
 - d. the Bible plainly prohibited women from owning property.
- 9. In New England, elementary education
 - a. was mandatory for any town with more than fifty families.
 - b. failed to provide even basic literacy to the large majority of citizens.
 - c. was less widespread than in the South.
 - d. was oriented to preparing students for entering college.
- 10. The Congregational Church of the Puritans contributed to
 - a. the development of basic democracy in the New England town meeting.
 - b. the extremely hierarchical character of New England life.
 - c. the social harmony and unity displayed throughout the seventeenth century in New England towns.
 - d. the growing movement toward women's rights in New England.
- 11. In contrast to the Chesapeake Bay colonists, those in New England
 - a. had fewer women and more men in their population.
 - b. had shorter life expectancies.
 - c. practiced birth control as a means of preventing overpopulation.
 - d. enjoyed longer lives and more stable families.
- 12. The focus of much of New England's politics, religion, and education was the institution of
 - a. the colonial legislature.
 - b. the town.
 - c. the militia company.
 - d. the college.
- 13. The "Half-Way Covenant" provided
 - a. baptism but not "full communion" to people who had not had a conversion experience.
 - b. partial participation in politics to people who were not church members.
 - c. admission to communion but not to voting membership in the church.
 - d. partial participation in church affairs for women.
- 14. Those people accused of being witches in Salem were generally
 - a. from the poorer and more uneducated segments of the town.
 - b. notorious for their deviation from the moral norms of the community.
 - c. outspoken opponents of the Puritan clergy.
 - d. from families associated with Salem's burgeoning market economy.
- 15. English settlers greatly altered the character of the New England environment by
 - a. raising wheat and oats rather than the corn grown by Indians.
 - b. their extensive introduction of livestock.
 - c. beating trails through the woods as they pursued seasonal hunting and fishing.
 - d. building an extensive system of roads and canals.

C. Identification

Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.

1. _____ Early Maryland and Virginia settlers had difficulty creating them and even more difficulty making them last
2. _____ Primary cause of death among tobacco-growing settlers
3. _____ Immigrants who received passage to America in exchange for a fixed term of labor
4. _____ Maryland and Virginia's system of granting land to anyone who would pay trans-Atlantic passage for laborers
5. _____ Fate of many of Nathaniel Bacon's followers, though not of Bacon himself
6. _____ American colony that was home to the Newport slave market and many slave traders
7. _____ English company that lost its monopoly on the slave trade in 1698
8. _____ African American dialect that blended English with Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa
9. _____ Uprisings that occurred in New York City in 1712 and in South Carolina in 1739
10. _____ Wealthy extended clans like the Fitzhughs, Lees, and Washingtons that dominated politics in the most populous colony
11. _____ Approximate marriage age of most New England women
12. _____ The basic local political institution of New England, in which all freemen gathered to elect officials and debate local affairs
13. _____ Formula devised by Puritan ministers in 1662 to offer partial church membership to people who had not experienced conversion
14. _____ Late seventeenth-century judicial event that inflamed popular feelings, led to the deaths of twenty people, and weakened the Puritan clergy's prestige
15. _____ Primary occupation of most seventeenth-century Americans

D. Matching People, Places, and Events

Match the person, place, or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. ___ | Chesapeake | a. Major middle-colonies rebellion that caused thirty-three deaths |
| 2. ___ | Indentured servants | b. Helped erase the earlier Puritan distinction between the converted “elect” and other members of society |
| 3. ___ | Nathaniel Bacon | c. Small New York revolt of 1689–1691 that reflected class antagonism between landlords and merchants |
| 4. ___ | Governor Berkeley | d. Primary laborers in early southern colonies until the 1680s |
| 5. ___ | Royal African Company | e. Experience for which human beings were branded and chained, and which only 80 percent survived |
| 6. ___ | Middle passage | f. Author of a novel about the early New England practice of requiring adulterers to wear the letter “A” |
| 7. ___ | Ringshout | g. West African religious rite, retained by African Americans, in which participants responded to the shouts of a preacher |
| 8. ___ | New York City slave revolt of 1712 | h. Phenomena started by adolescent girls’ accusations that ended with the deaths of twenty people |
| 9. ___ | Nathanael Hawthorne | i. Virginia-Maryland bay area, site of the earliest colonial settlements |
| 10. ___ | “New England conscience” | j. The legacy of Puritan religion that inspired idealism and reform among later generations of Americans |
| 11. ___ | Harvard | k. Colonial Virginia official who crushed rebels and wreaked cruel revenge |
| 12. ___ | William and Mary | l. The oldest college in the South, founded in 1793 |
| 13. ___ | Half-Way Covenant | m. Organization whose loss of the slave trade monopoly in 1698 led to free-enterprise expansion of the business |
| 14. ___ | Salem witch trials | n. Agitator who led poor former indentured servants and frontiersmen on a rampage against Indians and colonial government |
| 15. ___ | Leisler’s Rebellion | o. The oldest college in America, originally based on the Puritan commitment to an |

educated ministry

E. Putting Things in Order

Put the following events in correct order by numbering them from 1 to 10.

1. _____ “Legal lynching” of twenty accused witches occurs.
2. _____ Royal slave trade monopoly ends.
3. _____ First colonial college is founded.
4. _____ Landless whites in Virginia lose the right to vote.
5. _____ Major rebellion by African Americans occurs in one of the middle colonies.
6. _____ Southern slaves in revolt try but fail to march to Spanish Florida.
7. _____ Partial church membership is opened to the unconverted.
8. _____ African slaves begin to replace white indentured labor on southern plantations.
9. _____ Poor Virginia whites revolt against governor and rich planters.
10. _____ First Africans arrive in Virginia.

F. Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with the proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

Cause		Effect	
1. ____	The severe shortage of females in southern colonies	a.	Inspired passage of strict “slave codes”
2. ____	Poor white males’ anger at their inability to acquire land or start families	b.	Sparked Bacon’s Rebellion
3. ____	Planters’ fears of indentured servants’ rebellion, coupled with rising wages in England	c.	Produced large number of unattached males and weak family structure
4. ____	The dramatic increase in colonial slave population after 1680s	d.	Thwarted success in agriculture but helped create the tough New England character
5. ____	The growing proportion of female slaves in the Chesapeake region after 1720	e.	Inspired the Half-Way Covenant and jeremiad preaching
6. ____	New Englanders’ introduction of livestock and intensive agriculture	f.	Reduced forests and damaged the soil
7. ____	The healthier climate and more equal male-female ratio in New England	g.	Produced high birthrates and a very stable family structure
8. ____	The decline of religious devotion and in number of conversions in New England	h.	Fostered stronger slave families and growth of slave population through natural reproduction of children
		i.	Underlay the Salem witchcraft persecutions
		j.	Caused southern planters to switch from indentured-servant labor to African slavery

9. ____ Unsettled New England social conditions and anxieties about the decline of the Puritan religious heritage
10. ____ The rocky soil and harsh climate of New England

G. Developing Historical Skills

Learning from Historical Documents

The illustrations on pp. 69 and 79 reproduce parts of two colonial documents: excerpts from an indentured servant's contract and some pages from children's school materials.. By carefully examining even these small partial documents, you can learn more about early colonial culture and ideas.

Answering the following questions will illustrate the kind of information that historical documents can provide.

1. What are the principal goals that both the master and the indentured servant are seeking in the contract?
2. What potential problems does each side anticipate?
3. What does the reference to the mother's consent suggest about this servant's condition?