

Chapter 3

Society and Culture in Provincial America

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Key Concepts

- **Tobacco** was a central crop to the Chesapeake/North Carolina colonies; originally farmed by white male indentured servants and later by Africans
- New England colonies (initially Puritan) developed around small towns, family farms; thriving economy blending **agriculture** and **commerce**
- Middle colonies based around **export economy** of cereal crops; known for **diversity** of migrants (which promoted **tolerance**)
- Southernmost colonies/West Indies relied on long growing seasons for **plantation economies** depending on enslaved Africans (majority of population -> cultural autonomy)
- Britain's lax attention led to democratic, **self-governing** institutions centered around town meetings which led to election to legislatures; dominated by plantation owners in south
- Atlantic trade developed with goods, Africans, natives sent between Europe, Africa, Americas; significant source of labor in Europe and Americas
- British colonies slowly **Anglicized**, leading to communities based on English models, spread of Protestant evangelicalism
- Chattel slavery led to numerous laws prohibiting **intermarriage**, making slavery **hereditary**
- Africans developed **overt** and **covert** methods of resisting slavery

What are this chapter's key concepts?

The Colonial Population

What factors affected the population of colonial society?

The colonial population was initially most heavily influenced by indentured servitude; however, an increasing birth rate led to a more stable sex ratio, primitive medical knowledge led to significant decreases especially during childbirth, African slaves came in large numbers after the 1690s, and changing sources of European immigration influenced the cultural diversity. Culturally, women were given numerous freedoms in the south due to the high death rate's undermining of male authority, while New England's stability and Puritanism saw a more stable society.

What were the social standings of the initial migrants?

- Took significant time for Europeans/Africans to outnumber natives despite significant growth
- Earliest settlers members of upper classes (younger members of lesser gentry); generally unaristocratic
 - Businessmen like Winthrop migrating for commercial reasons; others for religious
 - Laborers were dominant element, some of whom came independently (generally as religious dissenters)
 - * In Chesapeake, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of immigrants were indentured servants

Although many of the first migrants were upper class, most were unaristocratic, with businessmen, missionaries, and laborers (the majority).

What were the influences of indentured servitude?

- System of indentured servitude developed out of existing passages; based on fixed term of service with free passage to America
 - Although masters often promised clothing, tools, land to servants after freedom, rarely successful
 - Women had more promising prospects ($\frac{1}{4}$) of servants due to easy marriage to plentiful men
- Mostly voluntary, but government often sent convicts, POWs (Scots/Irish), orphans, vagrants; sometimes based around kidnapping
- Key incentives for landowners were reduced labor force in New World, headright promising land grants for more servants
- Servants often hoped to escape troubles, establish themselves
 - Some became successful farmers/tradespeople/artisans
 - Most left w/o prospects, travelling restlessly, causing social unrest
 - Many free laborers began trend of moving to other places when times were difficult
- Indentured servitude reduced in significance by 1670s
 - Significant prosperity in England led to reduced pressure; landowners found less attractive due to social unrest
 - All other servants avoided arduous labor of south, relying on North for greater prospects

Indentured servitude, which brought the majority of migrants to the New World based around a fixed term of work, left most servants with few prospects, leading to great social unrest. Ultimately, it reduced in significance due to prosperity in England and the changing perspectives of the landowners.

What were the key rates of birth and death in the colonies?

- Great hardship led to slow initial growth; conditions eventually improved to point of expansion
- Natural reproduction slowly overtook immigration as greatest source of increase
 - In New England, population quadrupled through reproduction due to unusual longevity created by cool climate, lack of diseases/population centers
 - South \approx 20 years lower than New England; England itself \approx 10 years lower
- South took much longer to improve
 - Mortality rates high for whites (and higher for Africans), leading to many children dying at birth or losing both parents before maturity; white population of Chesapeake known for widows, widowers, orphans
 - Salt-contaminated water, diseases remained damaging until slow immunity emerged
- In all, natural increases led to gradual improvement in sex ratio, slowly approaching England's (matching in 18th century)
 - Some change in migration patterns w/ more women arriving

New England was known for a rapid population increase due to exceptional longevity, contrasted with the South, known for its high mortality rate due to arduous working conditions, diseases, and contaminated water. In all, the increase in natural birth rate led the sex ratio to gradually equalize.

What was the extent of the medical knowledge in the colonies?

- Initial colonial medical knowledge very primitive, evidenced by large proportion of female deaths during childbirth
 - Easy for anyone to enter medical field: often, women became midwives to assist in childbirth, use herbs/other natural remedies
 - * Preferred due to social connection
 - * Threatened male physicians
- Prevailing theory of medicine: "humoralism," introduced by 2nd century Roman physician Galen
 - Focused on four "humors" (fluids) in body: yellow bile, black bile, blood, phlegm
 - Fluids must be in balance; illnesses caused by fluid imbalance -> treatment involved purging, expulsion, bleeding
 - * Bleeding often practiced by male physicians; lack of evidence for success reflects lack of scientific method in pre-Enlightenment society
 - * Midwives generally prescribed more homeopathic treatments

Colonial medicine was extremely primitive, seen in the numerous deaths of women during childbirth. Medicine was based on Galen's "humoralism," which required the balance of four essential bodily fluids. Despite little proof of its validity, it remained the accepted theory for centuries.

What were the key traits of women and families in the Chesapeake?

- High sex ratio -> few women remained unmarried for long (at much younger ages, too)
- High mortality rate, splintering of families -> male-centered family structure challenging to maintain
- Sexual behavior more flexible: indentured servants forbidden to marry
 - Female servants who became pregnant before term expiration expected harsh treatment (fines, whipping, removal of children)
 - * Children born out of marriage often became indentured themselves
 - Women giving birth after expiry of term often married quickly (pregnant marriages common)
- Most women devoted entire lives to childbearing (as many as 8 children, if having survived)
- Initial female scarcity led to higher freedom; able to choose partners, responsible for keeping up plantation after death of partners
 - Need for male assistance often led to remarriage (often to widowers, leading to complex family structure; peacemaker role led to another path of great power)
- Nature of typical family beginning to change as life expectancy increased for whites, leading to growth of patriarchy

Sexual behavior was significantly more flexible in the Chesapeake, especially for indentured servants who were unable to marry. Initially, the highly skewed sex ratio gave women positions of great power in society; however, as life expectancy began to increase and with it natural birth, society returned to its formerly patriarchal state.

What were the key traits of women and families in New England?

- Family structure far more stable, traditional due to balanced sex ratio
- Women still married somewhat young
 - Parents continued to control children far longer; almost always influenced decision of spouse
 - * Women required dowries for desirable husbands
- Northern children more likely to survive, fewer widows
 - White parents generally lived to see children, often grandchildren grow to maturity
 - New England
- Puritanism placed emphasis on family, male authority
 - Women, with names like Prudence, Patience, Chastity, Comfort, expected to be modest/submissive

In contrast to the Chesapeake, the more stable birth rate, leading to a more even sex ratio, gave women significantly less freedom in the New England colonies, with an expectation of modesty and submission. Furthermore, because parents lived to much older ages, they exercised greater control over their children.

What marked the beginnings of slavery in British America?

- Demand for African slaves began with tobacco cultivation, though slave trade initially primarily served Caribbean
- Slave trade involved chieftains capturing whole groups to provide to British, who forced them through terrible middle passage to America
 - Although some captains ensured health of slaves, many others crammed as many as possible onto boat
 - Frequent sexual abuse, death; minimal food/water
 - At arrival, auctioned to landowners
- Until 1670s, most slaves to British America passed through Caribbean (due to labor-intensive sugar)
 - Royal African Company maintained monopoly over slaves directly to North America during 1670s, deliberately keeping supply low
- Monopoly broken by 1690s, leading to rapid arrival of slaves in British colonies
 - Primarily to southern regions, beginning to outnumber Europeans in Chesapeake (due to reasonable conditions) but remain unsustainable in SC (rice fields)
 - Few slaves in New England, middle colonies; vast majority remained in south
- Slaves initially received equal treatment to white servants, often receiving freedom after certain period and owning their own land (often w/ slaves)
- Masters realized lack of necessity to free black workers, making terms indefinite for slaves and offspring
 - Based on natural assumption of inferiority
 - Furthered by "slave codes" of early eighteenth century, subjecting *all* of African descent to have few rights

Although the slave trade to British America remained limited due to the initial Caribbean-only passthrough of slaves and later the monopoly of the Royal African Company, it began to boom by the 1690s, with most slaves centered in the south and beginning to slowly lose their rights.

How did sources of European immigration change over time?

- ↑ economy, government restrictions due to ↓ population led to reduced English immigration
- Immigration boomed from other European regions
 - Earliest were French Calvinists/Huguenots after having lost statehood in south of France
 - German Protestants suffered from religious discrimination; all Germans from wars with Louis XIV
 - * Ousted from NY, Mohawk Valley
 - * Most received warm welcome in Pennsylvania due to religious similarity
 - Most numerous: Scots-Irish from Ulster, in Northern Ireland
 - * After Parliament prohibited exports of wools, other key economic products to England, banned Presbyterian religion, rents boomed, many left for America
 - * Often received coldly → travelled to westernmost borderlands without regard for natives
 - Scottish Highlanders → NC, Presbyterian Lowlanders → NJ/PA before American Revolution
- Immigration led to rapid population growth, reflected in doubling of non-Indian population every 25 years

As the English economy stabilized and laws changed, the English source of immigration began to diminish. Taking its place were numerous other European groups, including the French Calvinists, Germans, Scots-Irish, Scottish Highlanders, Presbyterian Lowlanders. This immigration boom led to a rapid population growth.

The Colonial Economies

What was the condition of the colonial economy?

Economically, while the south focused on cash crops like tobacco in the Chesapeake and rice in the southernmost colonies, the north focused more on a blend between agriculture and commerce, leading to a more thriving economy. As commerce began to grow due to the industrial revolution in England and an emerging merchant class, consumerism began to take over as a powerful social force.

Broadly, what were the key initial sources of commercial growth?

- Substantial trade with native population
- Occasional trade w/ Spanish, French
- Atlantic economies gradually grew, dominated by farming in all regions of European settlement

The initial sources of commerce included trade with natives, the Spanish, and the French. However, gradually, the trade with England and Africa over the Atlantic grew.

What was the crops most fundamental to the southern economies?

- Tobacco quickly became center of economy in Chesapeake
 - Production began to exceed demand, leading to boom-and-bust pattern
 - Farmers unable to understand process of supply-and-demand, leading to continual enlargement of fields, laborers
- SC/GA based around arduous, diseased cultivation of rice
 - White laborers generally refused, leading to growth of African slave trade
 - African resistance to malaria, experience with rice cultivation made slaves popular labor sources
 - Indigo complemented rice especially due to potential for growth on high ground of SC, popular import in England
- South never developed commercial economy due to focus on large-scale cash crops; commerce handled by London merchants

In the south, the boom-and-bust tobacco industry was most prevalent in the Chesapeake while the arduous cultivation of rice (generally by African slaves) complemented by indigo was most popular in the southernmost colonies. The reliance on cash crops led to the reduced growth of the commercial industry.

How did technology influence the northern economy?

- North less dominated by farming, particularly due to rocky soil of New England
- Primary agriculture conducted in NY, PA, CT, the major wheat suppliers to England, other colonies
 - Commercial economies emerged even there
- Home industries were crucial to the growth of northern industry
 - Home-produced surplus goods traded and sold; craftsmen/artisans diversified as cobblers, blacksmiths, riflemakers, cabinetmakers, silversmiths, printers
 - Entrepreneurs harnessed water power for milling grain, cloth, lumber
 - Shipbuilding operations gradually grew
- Industrial metalworks began first in Saugus, MA due to iron ore deposits
 - Bellows driven by water power, heating charcoal furnace to turn metal into marketable molds
 - Saugus works became financial failure despite technological success
- Metalworks slowly grew in significance, most notably ironworks of German Peter Hasenclever
 - Hasenclever's plant contained hundreds of laborers funded by British capital
 - Never led to early Industrial Revolution like in Britain due to Iron Act restricting iron production, manufacture of woolens/hats/other goods
 - Inadequate labor supply prevented influence as major industry
- Fur trade began to decline, replaced by lumbering, mining, fishing
 - Led to thriving commercial class

In the north, the economy was far more commerce-driven and industrial due to the lesser focus on agriculture. Home industries were crucial for local commerce, and metalworks began to grow in significance as an international industry. Furthermore, although the fur trade began to decline, the growing industries of lumbering, mining, and fishing took its place as the major industries of commercial society.

What was the state of technology in the colonies relative to Britain?

- Majority of colonial society lacking even in most basic technologies
 - Up to half of farmers lacked plows; many households owned no pots, pans, rifles, candles, wagons due to poverty, isolation
 - Central tool: axe → large amount of time spent clearing land
- Despite the backward technological state, few colonists were self-sufficient
 - Went against traditional image of self-sufficient early American households
 - Most purchased key goods from merchants rather than producing at home

The majority of colonial inhabitants lacked even the most basic technologies, like plows, rifles, pots, and wagons, primarily due to poverty and isolation. Regardless, few colonists were self-sufficient, relying on merchants for most goods.

What contributed to the rise of colonial commerce?

- Commerce in the colonies marked by significant disorganization for long period of time
 - Lack of defined currency, with very limited circulation of gold/silver coins
 - * Sometimes tobacco/land certificates, though outlawed by Parliament
 - * Most goods from abroad paid for through barter, crude currencies like beaver skin
 - Lack of order, with no schedules for port arrival or quantity of arriving goods
 - * Small companies jumping between ports furthered disorganization
- Despite disorganization, commerce grew
 - Prominent coastal business with West Indies and transatlantic trade
 - * Common term "triangular trade" in fact an oversimplification: generally extremely diverse routes with numerous combinations
 - Adventurous entrepreneurs contributed to emergence of growing merchant class with competition throughout port cities
 - * Often broke laws defined in Navigation Acts for greater wealth, travelling to markets outside of British Empire

Colonial commerce, despite rampant disorganization caused by lack of a defined currency or order, rapidly grew, with the prominent transatlantic trade industries and a growing, often adventurous merchant class.

What led to the rise of consumerism as a powerful social force?

- Possessions soon associated with social status as a result of greater, starker divisions of American societies by class
 - Product of early industrial revolution in England, allowing products of much greater value to be sold for cheap prices
 - Related to increase in willingness among colonists to take on debt to finance larger purchases
- Appetites facilitated by advertisement in journals, newspapers; travelling salesmen
- Former luxuries gradually became necessities
- Culturally, greater emphasis on virtue, refinement stimulated by greater economic activity
 - Led cities to create more elegant displays like parks, boulevards, public squares
 - Many regions took London as prime example of elegance

Consumerism was stimulated by the growing social division as well as the industrial revolution in England, which allowed for many products once viewed as luxuries to be sold at cheaper prices. Accompanying the rise of consumerism was an emphasis on elegance, changing the structure of cities and the behavioral patterns of Americans.

Patterns of Society

What were the key social patterns in colonial society?

Colonial society in the south was characterized by plantations, self-contained communities often taking on characteristics of towns where whites and slaves lived in rigid separation. Plantation-inhabiting slaves often created their own culture and resistance. As for New England, society was primarily defined by smaller Puritan towns, known for being tight-knit religious societies. However, there were far larger cities than in the south, important economically, politically, and culturally.

What was the social basis of all American colonies?

- Unlike British deep class system, America generally had reduced aristocracy due to scarcity of people, abundance of land
 - Power represented not by land ownership but by labor force
- Social mobility much more attainable in both directions (aristocrats less powerful, less secure)

Early American colonies were never based on a powerful land-based aristocracy due to the abundance of land. Consequently, labor was the primary measure of success and social mobility was much more common than in Britain.

What defined the plantation society?

- Earliest plantations in Chesapeake region
- Some were enormous (like Charles Carroll in Maryland), but most were relatively small with landowners and servants working alongside
 - Death extremely common for all
 - Economy extremely precarious due to volatility of agricultural industry
- Many plantations were self-contained communities, often as large as towns
 - Contained schools, chapels, large populations with multiple homes
- Large slave workforce provided servants for plantation owners
 - Allowed plantation wives to devote more effort to spending time with husbands
 - Frequently led to sexual liaisons between husbands/sons and black women
- Southern society highly stratified with wealthy planters shaping livelihoods of all under them, most notably small farmers

Early plantation society was generally characterized by small, town-sized regions with a medium-sized workforce (generally no more than 30). They were frequently self-contained and were highly stratified, with the plantation owner influencing all others.

What was life like for the slaves on plantations?

- African slaves began to develop society and culture of their own
 - Despite lack of encouraged formal marriages, generally developed elaborate, nuclear family structure
 - * Frequent transferring of slaves led to emphasis on relatives as surrogates to raise children
 - * Represented adaptation to life out of their control
 - Developed creole languages, like in SC: Gullah, English-African hybrid
 - Slave religion blending Christianity and African folklore
- Slave society remained tied to white society in many ways
 - Slave servants lived in luxurious conditions (by standards of slavery) but isolated from kin
 - Black women received unwanted sexual advances from owners, overseers
 - * Led to mulatto children rarely recognized by white fathers, accepted in slave community
 - At times, workers received kindness and affection; other times, brutality and sadism
 - Occasional resistance emerged, most significantly in the **Stono Rebellion**
 - * 100 Africans rose up, killed several whites, attempted to escape to Florida
 - * Immediate execution followed, showing that running away was not a true option for slaves
- Many slaves began to partake in skilled labor like trades, crafts, blacksmithing, carpentry, sewing, weaving
 - Often hired out to other planters; set up their own establishments and shared profits with owners
 - Wealth of self-sufficient slaves allowed rare purchase of freedom, leading to small free black population in southern cities

Although slave communities developed a society and culture of their own, including creole languages and unique religion, they remained extremely intertwined with their white owners, including through sexual advances and brutality. For some slaves, the opportunity to learn useful crafts and trades allowed them to buy their freedom and live freely.

What were the key characteristics of the Puritan community?

- Characteristic social unit in New England: the town
 - Each settlement drew up "covenant" to bind members in social/religious harmony
 - * Often consisted of large groups of Puritans who had traveled as a group
 - Towns based around central pasture; land divided up based on family's numbers, wealth, social status
 - Proximity of neighbors led to strong sense of community
 - Towns generally politically independent from colonial government
 - * Held yearly meeting to discuss important questions, decide on "selectmen" to govern for the following year
 - * Only adult males allowed to participate; full membership only given to those part of the elect
- English system of primogeniture (passing all land to firstborn son) replaced with equal division
 - Father's control over inheritance led to great power over sons; women, with inheritance generally in dowries/movable objects, able to travel
- Tight-knit community began to experience significant strains
 - Caused in part by increasing commercialization
 - Primary cause was population growth: as land was continually split up through inheritance, pieces became smaller and smaller, leading to westward expansion
 - * New towns were created, leading to great quarrels
 - True interdependent relationships where all family members relied on *each other* undermined patriarchal model

The basic Puritan social unit was the town, based around tight-knit religious unity. Towns generally received a significant degree of political autonomy, with a yearly meeting among adult men part of the "elect." However, this system began to experience strains as population growth led to expansion and interdependence threatened the patriarchal model.

What were the major accusations of witchcraft in the colonies?

- Rooted in growing diversity beginning to undermine cohesiveness of New England communities
- Most famous outbreak in Salem, MA: adolescent girls began to act oddly, first accusing West Indian servants but eventually a larger group (later redacted)
 - Witchcraft centralized around marginalized, powerless groups (starting with racial minorities)
 - Larger targets were widowed, middle-aged women of low social position or challenging the gender norms as independent women
 - Nineteen Salem residents excuted
- Reflected religious character of society, influence of satanic beliefs

The most significant instance of witchcraft trials were in Salem, MA, where a group of girls accused marginalized groups of altering their behavior. The most common victims of witchcraft accusations were powerful, independent women who went against social norms, threatening the strong patriarchal character of Puritan society.

What was the role of cities in colonial society?

- Two largest cities in 1770s: Philadelphia and NY; by today's standards, extremely small; then, ranked higher than many European cities
- Crucial trading centers, international trade marts; generally led by merchants with large estates
- Clear displays of wealth disparity, with wealthy merchants seen in stark contrast with workers forced to live in filthy, crowded conditions
- Centers of most advanced industry, cultural activities, government
 - Ironworks, molasses distilleries common industries
 - Large, most successful schools generally in cities
 - Faced standard urban social problems of crime, pollution, epidemics, traffic
 - Known for larger governments with constables' offices, fire departments, support given to poor
- Affected immensely by trade fluctuations; countryside saw much more muted impact
- Became birthplaces of new, brewing ideas through regular newspapers, locations for debating major issues

Cities were essential as trading centers and locations of industry, education, politics, and radical ideas. However, they most clearly reflected the wealth disparity of the time, with the poorest workers living in despicable conditions, and were greatly affected by even the smallest economic fluctuation.

What were the key instances of inequality in New England society?

In New England, wealthy families experienced social distinctions such as being called "ladies"/"gentlemen (in contrast with "goodman"/"goodwife"), receiving the best seats in churches and great influence over the parishes. Surprisingly, the wealthy were the majority of the population in many of the major colonial cities.