Chapter 5- Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution

1700-1775

A. Conquest by the Cradle

1. The common term thirteen original colonies is misleading as Britain ruled thirty-two colonies in North America, including the Caribbean Islands by 1775 but only thirteen of them staked a rebellion
2. Among the distinguishing characteristics that the eventually rebellious settlements shared was lusty population growth; in 1700 they contained fewer than 300,00 people; by 1775, there were about 2.5 million people
    1. Of the 2.5 million people, about half a million were black and white immigrants made up nearly 400,000 of the increased number, and black "forced immigrants" accounted for almost as many again
    2. But most of the spurt stemmed from the remarkable natural fertility of all Americans, white and black; to the amazement and dismay of Europeans, the colonists were doubling every twenty-five years
    3. The population boom had political consequences; in 1700 there were twenty English subjects for each American colonist but by 1775 the English advantage in numbers had fallen to three to one—setting the stage for a momentous shift in the balance of power
    4. The bulk of the population was up east of the Alleghenies, although by 1775 groups of pioneers were in the clearings of Tennessee and Kentucky (the most populous colonies in 1775 were Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Maryland
3. Only four communities could properly be called cities: Philadelphia (34,000 residents), trailed by New York, Boston, and Charleston; still, 90 percent of the people lived in rural areas in the country

B. A Mingling of the Races

1. Colonial America was a melting pot and had been from the outset; the population was picturesquely mottled with numerous foreign groups
    1. Germans constituted about 6 percent of the total population, or 150,000, by 1775; fleeing religious persecution, economic oppression, and war, they had flocked to America in early 1700s and settled chiefly in Pennsylvania (carious Protestant sects)
    2. Known popularly but erroneously as the Pennsylvania Dutch, they total about one-third of the Pennsylvania's population
    3. These German newcomers moved into the backcountry of Pennsylvania, had no deep-rooted loyalty to the British crown, and clung tenaciously to their German language and customs
2. The Scots-Irish who in 1775 numbered about 175,000 or 7 % of the population, were an important non-English group (Scots Lowlanders)
    1. Over many years, they had been transplanted to Northern Ireland, where they had not prospered; the Irish Catholics already there, hating Scottish Presbyterianism, resented the intruders
    2. The economic life of the Scots-Irish was severely hampered, especially when the English government placed burdensome restrictions on their production of linens and woolens
    3. Early in the 1700s, tens of thousands of embittered Scots-Irish finally abandoned Ireland and came to America, chiefly to tolerant and deep soiled Pennsylvania—finding the best acres already taken, they pushed out onto the frontier (many of them illegally)
    4. When the westward-flowing Scots-Irish tide lapped up against the Allegheny barrier, it was deflected southward into the backcountry of Maryland, down Virginia and into the western Carolinas
    5. Already experience colonizers and agitators in Ireland, the Scots-Irish proved to be superb frontiersmen, though their readiness to visit violence on the Indians repeatedly inflamed western districts

3. By the mid-eighteenth century, a chain of Scots-Irish settlements lay scattered along the "great wagon road," which hugged the eastern Appalachian foothills form Pennsylvania to Georgia
    1. It was said that the Scots-Irish kept the Sabbath—and all else they could lay their hands on; pugnacious, lawless, and individualistic, they brought with them the Scottish secrets of whiskey distilling
    2. They cherished no love for the British government that had uprooted them and still lorded over them (or any government)
    3. They led the armed march of the Paxton Boys on Philadelphia in 1764, protesting the oligarchy's lenient policy toward the Indians and years later, headed the Regulator movement in North Carolina, an insurrection against eastern domination of the colony's affairs
    4. Many of these hotheads including the young Andrew Jackson eventually joined the embattled American revolutionists and about a dozen future presidents were of Scots-Irish descent
4. Approximately 5 percent of the multicolored colonial population consisted of other European groups; these embraced French Huguenots, Welsh, Dutch, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss, and Scots Highlanders
5. By far the largest single non-English group was African, accounting for nearly 20 percent of the colonial population in 1775 (mostly South)
6. The population of the thirteen colonies, though mainly Anglo-Saxon, was perhaps the most mixed to be found anywhere in the world
    1. The South, holding about 90 percent of the slaves, already displayed its historic black-and-white racial composition
    2. New England, mostly staked out by the original Puritan migrants, showed the least ethnic diversity but the middle colonies, especially Pennsylvania, received the bulk of later white immigrants and boasted an astonishing variety of peoples; outside of New England about one-half the population was non-English in 1775

7. As these various immigrant groups mingled and intermarried, they laid the foundations for a new multicultural American national identity

    1. Nor were white colonists alone in creating new societies out of diverse ethnic groups; the African slave trade long had mixed peoples from many different tribal backgrounds

    2. These people gave birth to an African-American community far more variegated in its cultural origins than anything to be found

    3. Similarly, in the New England "praying towns" where Indians were gathered to be Christianized, and in Great Lakes villages, polyglot Native American communities emerged (blurring differences)

C. The Structure of Colonial Society

1. In contrast with contemporary Europe, eighteenth century America was a shining land of equality and opportunity—exception of slavery

    1. No titled nobility dominated society from on high and no pauperized underclass threatened it from below; most Americans were small farmers who owned modest holdings and did work

    2. The cities contained a small class of skilled artisans as well as a few shopkeepers and trades-people and a handful of unskilled laborers

    3. The most remarkable feature of the social ladder was the rags-to-riches ease with which an ambitious colonist might rise from a lower rung to a higher one, a rare step in old England

2. Yet in contrast with seventeenth-century America, colonial society on the eve of the Revolution was beginning to show signs of stratification and barriers to mobility that raised worries about the "Europeanization"

    1. The gods of war contributed to these developments as armed conflicts of the 1690s and early 1700s had enriched a number of merchant princes in the New England and

middle colonies; they laid the foundations of their fortunes with profits made as suppliers

2. Roosting regally atop the social ladder, these elites now had money and they sported imported clothing and dined at tables laid with English china and gleaming silverware; prominent individuals came to be seated in churches and schools according to their social rank

3. The plague of war also created a class of widows and orphans, who became dependent for their survival on charity (almshouses); yet the numbers of poor people remained tiny compared to the numbers in England, where about a third of the population lived impoverished

4. In New England countryside, the descendants of the original settlers faced more limited prospects than had their pioneering forbearers

    1. As the supply of unclaimed soil dwindled and families grew, existing landholdings were repeatedly subdivided among children

    2. The average size of farms shrank drastically and younger children were forced to hire out as wage laborers, or eventually to seek virgin tracts of land beyond the Alleghenies (lots of homeless)

5. In the South the power of great planters continued to be bolstered by their disproportionate ownership of slaves (not even distribution)

    1. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of the largest slaveowners, widening the gap between the prosperous gentry and the “poor whites,” who were more and more likely to become tenant farmers

    2. In all the colonies, the ranks of the lower classes were further swelled by the continuing stream of indentured servants; many who were prosperous—two even signed Declaration of Independence

6. Far less fortunate than the voluntary indentured servants were the paupers and convicts involuntarily shipped to America; although about fifty thousand “jayle birds” were dumped on the colonies by London

1. This crowd—including robbers, rapists, and murderers—were generally sullen and undesirable, and not bubbling over with goodwill for the king's government

2. Many convicts were the unfortunate victims of circumstances and of a viciously unfair English penal code that included about two hundred capital crimes; some deportees came to be respectable

7. Least fortunate of all were the black slaves who enjoyed no equality with whites and dared not even dream of ascending or approaching the ladder of opportunity (were the closest to Europe's lower classes)

8. Fears of black rebellion plagued the white colonists in America

    1. Some colonial legislatures, notably South Carolina's in 1760, sensed the dangers present in a heavy concentration of resentful slaves and attempted to restrict or half their importation

    2. But the British authorities seeking to preserve the supply of cheap labor for the colonies, especially the West Indies plantations always vetoed all efforts to stem the transatlantic traffic in slaves

    3. Many North American colonists condemned these vetoes as morally cruel, although New England slaves traders benefited handsomely from the British policy; the complexity of the slavery issue was further revealed when Thomas Jefferson, a slaveholder, assailed the British vetoes in an early draft of the Declaration but was forced to withdraw by a torrent of protest from southerners

D. Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

1. Most honored of the professions was the Christian ministry; in 1775, the clergy wielded less, influence than in the early days of Massachusetts; they still occupied a position of high prestige

2. Although, most physicians were poorly trained and not highly esteemed

1. Not until 1765 was the first medical school established, although European centers attracted some students; aspiring young doctors served for a while as apprentices to older practitioners

2. Bleeding was a favorite and frequently fatal remedy; when the physician was not available, a barber was often summoned

3. Epidemics were a constant nightmare; especially dreaded was smallpox, which afflicted one out of five person; a crude form of inoculation was introduced in 1721, despite the objections of many physicians and some of the clergy, who opposed tampering with God

    1. Powdered dried toad was a favorite prescription for smallpox

    2. Diphtheria was also a deadly killer, especially of young people; one epidemic in the 1730s took the lives of thousands

    3. This grim reminder of their mortality may have helped to prepare many colonists in their hearts and minds for the religious revival

4. At first the law profession was not favorably regarded; in this pioneering society, which required much honest manual labor, the parties to a dispute often presented their own cases in court

5. Lawyers were commonly regarded as noisy windbags or troublemaking rogues; early Connecticut law classed them with drunkards and brothel keepers (John Adams, a lawyer, was frowned upon by his future wife)

E. Workaday America

1. Agriculture was the leading industry, involving about 90 % of people

    1. Tobacco continued to be the staple crop in Maryland and Virginia, though wheat cultivation also spread through the Chesapeake

    2. The fertile middle (“bread”) colonies produced large quantities of grain, and by 1759 New York alone was exporting eighty thousand barrels of flour a year (higher standard of living for Americans)

2. Fishing, though ranking far below agriculture, was rewarding; pursued in all the American colonies, this harvesting of the sea was a major industry in New England (cod) and the fishing fleet also stimulated shipbuilding and served as a nursery for the seamen of the marines

3. A bustling commerce, both coastwise and overseas, enriched all the colonies, especially New England, New York, and Pennsylvania

    1. Commercial ventures and land speculation were the surest avenues to speedy wealth; Yankee seamen were famous in many climes not only as skilled mariners but as tightfisted traders

    2. They provisioned the Caribbean sugar islands with food and forest products, hauled Spanish and Portuguese gold, wine, and oranges to London to be exchanged for industrial goods and sold for profit

    3. This triangular trade was infamously profitable, though small relation to total colonial commerce (handsome profit each trip)

4. Manufacturing the colonies was of only secondary importance, although there was a surprising variety of small enterprises

    1. As a rule, workers could get ahead faster in soil-rich America by tilling the land; huge quantities of rum were distilled in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and even some of the “elect of the Lord” developed an overfondness for the “kill devil” rum

    2. Handsome beaver hats were manufactured in quantity, despite British restrictions; smoking iron forges dotted the land and in fact were more numerous in 1775 (but smaller) than those of England

    3. In addition, household manufacturing, including spinning and weaving by women, added up to an impressive output

    4. As in all pioneering countries, strong-backed laborers and skilled craftspeople were scarce and highly prized (skills were needed)

5. Lumbering was one of the most important single manufacturing activity

1. Countless cartloads of new timber were consumed by shipbuilders, at first chiefly in New England and ten elsewhere in the colonies
2. By 1770 about four hundred vessels of assorted sizes were splashing down the ways each year (1/3 of British merchant marine were American-built); colonial naval stores were highly valued
3. London offered generous bounties to stimulate production of products such as tar, pitch, rosin, and turpentine, as Britain was anxious to gain and retain a mastery of the seas (Baltic areas)
4. Even though there were countless unreserved trees and the blazed ones were being saved for the common defense, this shackle on free enterprise engendered considerable bitterness (king reserved)

6. Americans held an important flank of a thriving, many-sided Atlantic economy by the dawn of the eighteenth century (appeared in 1730s)
    1. Fast-breeding Americans demanded more and more British products but the British population reached the saturation point for absorbing imports from America; this trade imbalance raised a question—how could colonists sell the goods to make the money to buy what they wanted in Britain: by seeking foreign markets
    2. By the eve of the Revolution, the bulk of Chesapeake tobacco was filling pipes in France and in other European countries
    3. More important was the trade with the West Indies, especially the French islands; West Indian purchases of North American timber and foodstuffs provided the crucial cash for the colonists for trade
7. But in 1733, bowing to pressure from influential British West Indian planters, Parliament passed the Molasses Act, aimed at squelching North American trade with the French West Indies; this would have been a crippling blow to the American international trade and living

8. American merchants responded to the act by bribing and smuggling their way around the law; thus was foreshadowed the impending imperial crisis, when the Americans would revolt rather than submit

F. Horsepower and Sailpower

1. All sprawling and sparsely populated pioneer communities are cured with oppressive problems of transportation; America with a scarcity of both money and workers, was no exception to the rule

    1. Not until the 1700s did roads connect even the major cities, and these dirt thoroughfares were treacherously deficient; a wayfarer could have rumbled along more rapidly over the Roman roadways

    2. News of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 reached Charleston from Philadelphia twenty-nine days after Fourth of July

    3. Roads were often clouds of dust in the summer and quagmires of mud in the winter; stagecoach travelers braved such additional dangers as tree-strewn roads, rickety bridges, and carriage overturns

2. Where man-made roads were retched, heavy reliance was placed on God-grooved waterways; population tended to cluster along the banks of navigable rivers; there was also much coastwise traffic, and although it was slow and undependable, it was relatively cheap and pleasant

3. Taverns sprang up along the main routes of travel, as well as in cities

    1. Their attractions customarily included such amusements as bowling alleys, pool tables, bars, and gambling equipment (all social classes would mingled and the tavern was yet another cradle of democracy)

    2. Gossips also gathered at the taverns, which were clearinghouses of information, misinformation, and rumor—alcohol and politics

    3. A successful politician was often a man who had a large alehouse fraternity in places like Boston's Green Dragon Tavern

4. Taverns were important in crystallizing public opinion and proved to be hotbeds of agitation as the Revolutionary movement gathered

4. An intercolonial postal system was established by the mid-1700s, although private couriers remained; some mail was handled on credit—service was slow and infrequent, and secrecy was problematic

5. Mail carriers, serving long routes, would sometimes pass the time by reading the letters entrusted to their care

G. Dominant Denominations

1. Two "established" or tax-supported churches were conspicuous in 1775: the Anglican church and the Congregational church

    1. A considerable segment of the population did not worship in any church; and in those colonies that maintained an "established" religion, only a minority of the people belonged to it

    2. The Church of England, whose members were commonly called Anglicans, became the official faith in Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and a part of New York

    3. Established also in England, it served in America as a major prop of kingly authority; British officials naturally made vigorous attempts to impose it on additional colonies (ran into wall of opposition)

    4. In America the Anglican Church fell distressingly short of its promise; secure and self-satisfied, like its parent in England, it clung to a faith that was less fierce and more worldly than the religion of Puritanical New England (sermons were shorter; hell less scorching; and amusements, like hunting, were less scorned)

    5. So dismal was the reputation of the Anglican clergy in seventeenth-century Virginia that the College of William and Mary was founded in 1693 to train a better class of clerics for the church

2. The influential Congregational Church, which had grown out of the Puritan Church, was formally established in all the New England colonies, except independent-minded Rhode Island

    1. At first Massachusetts taxed residents to support Congregationalism but later relented and exempted members of other denominations

    2. Presbyterianism, though closely associated, was never made official

    3. Ministers of the gospel, from the Bible to world, grappled burning political issues; as the start revolution against the British crown could be heard, sedition flowed free from pulpits; Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and rebellion became a neo-trinity

    4. Many leading Anglican clergymen, aware of which side their tax-provided bread was buttered on, naturally supported their king

3. Anglicans in the New World were seriously handicapped by not having a resident bishop, whose presence would be convenient for the ordination of young ministers (had to travel to England to be ordained)

4. On the eve of the Revolution there was serious talk of creating an American bishopric, but the scheme was violently opposed by many non-Anglicans, who feared a tightening of the royal reins

5. Religious toleration had indeed made enormous strides in America

    1. Roman Catholics were still generally discriminated against, as in England, even in office-holding; but there were fewer Catholics in America, and hence the anti-papist laws were less serve

    2. The anti-papist laws were also less strictly enforced; and in general, people could worship, or not worship, as they pleased

H. The Great Awakening

1. In all the colonial churches, religion was less fervid in the early eighteenth century than it had been a century earlier, in the beginning

1. The Puritan churches in particular sagged under the weight of two burdens: their elaborate theological doctrines and their compromising efforts to liberalize membership requirements

2. Churchgoers increasingly complained about the "dead dogs" who droned out tedious, overerudite sermons from Puritan pulpits

3. Some ministers, on the other hand, worried that many of their parishioners had gone soft and that their souls were no longer kindled by the hellfire of orthodox Calvinism; liberal ideas began to challenge the old-time religious beliefs of churchgoers

4. Some worshipers now proclaimed that human beings were not necessarily predestined to damnation and might save themselves by good works; even more threatening were the doctrines of the Arminians, follows of Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius, who preached that individual free will determined a person's eternal fate

5. Pressured by these "heresies," a few churches grudgingly conceded that spiritual conversion was not necessary for church membership; together these twin trends toward clerical intellectualism and lay liberalism were sapping the spiritual vitality from denominations

2. The stage was thus set for a rousing religious revival

    1. Known as the Great Awakening, it exploded in the 1730s and 1740s and swept through the colonies like a fire through prairie grass

    2. The Awakening was first ignited in Northampton, Massachusetts by an intellectual pastor, Jonathan Edwards; perhaps the deepest theological mind in America, Edwards proclaimed with burning righteousness the folly of believing in salvation through good works and affirmed need for complete dependence on God's grace

    3. Warming to his subject, he painted in lurid detail the landscape of hell and the eternal torments of the damned—"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was the title of one of his most famous sermons

3. Edwards's preaching style was learned and closely reasoned, but his stark doctrines sparked a warmly sympathetic reaction among his parishioners in 1734; four years later

English parson George Whitefield loosed a different style of preaching on America and touched off a conflagration of religious ardor that revolutionized spiritual life

1. A former alehouse attendant, Whitefield was an orator of rare gifts
2. His magnificent voice boomed sonorously over thousands of enthralled listeners in an open field (many were envious of him)
3. Triumphantly touring the colonies, Whitefield trumpeted his message of human helplessness of divine omnipotence; during those roaring revival meetings, many sinners professed conversion
4. Whitefield soon inspired American imitators (style of preaching)

4. Orthodox clergymen, known as "old lights," were deeply skeptical of the emotionalism and the theatrical antics of the revivalists; "new light" ministers, defended the Awakening for its role in revitalizing religion
5. Congregationalists and Presbyterians split over this issue, and many of the believers in religious conversion went over to the Baptists and other sects more prepared to make room for emotion in religion
6. The Awakening left many lasting effects; its emphasis on direct, emotive spirituality seriously undermined the older clergy, whose authority had derived from their education and erudition
    1. The schisms it set off in many denominations greatly increased the numbers and the competitiveness of American churches
    2. It encouraged a fresh wave of missionary work among the Indians and even among black slaves, many of whom had to attend revivals
    3. It led to the founding of "new light" centers of higher learning such as Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth
    4. Perhaps most significant, the Great Awakening was the first spontaneous mass movement of the American people; it tended to break down sectional boundaries as

well as denominational lines and contributed to the growing sense that Americans had of themselves as a single people, united by a common history

I. Schools and Colleges

1. A time-honored English idea regarded education as a blessing reserved for the aristocratic few, not for the unwashed many; education should be for leadership, not citizenship, and primarily for males; only slowly and painfully did the colonists break the chains of these restrictions

2. Puritan New England, largely for religious reasons, was more zealously interested in education than any other section of the colonies

1. Dominated by the Congregational Church, it stressed the need for Bible reading by the individual worshiper; the primary goal of the clergy was to make good Christians rather than good citizens

2. Education, principally for boys, flourished almost from the outset in New England; this densely populated region boasted an impressive number of graduates from the English universities, especially Cambridge, the intellectual center of England's Puritanism

3. New Englanders, relatively early, established primary and secondary schools, which varied widely in the quality of instruction and in the length of time that their doors remained open each year

4. Back-straining farm labor drained much of youths' time and energy

3. Fairly adequate elementary schools were also hammering knowledge into the heads of reluctant "scholars" in the middle colonies and South

1. Some of these institutions were tax-supported; others were privately operated; the South, with its white and black population diffused over wide areas, was severely handicapped logically in attempting to establish an effective school system (wealth families had tutors)

2. The general atmosphere in the colonial schools and colleges continued grim and gloomy; most emphasis was placed on religion and on the classical languages, Latin and Greek

3. The focus was not on experiment and reason, but on doctrine and dogma; the age of one of orthodoxy, and independence of thinking was discouraged—discipline was quite severe (whipping occurred)

4. College education was regarded—at least at first in New England—as more important that instruction in the ABCs; churches would wither if a new crop of ministers was not trained to lead the spiritual flocks

5. Many well-to-do families, especially in the South, sent their boys abroad to English institutions in order to receive a college education

6. For purposes of convenience and economy, nine local colleges were established during the colonial era—Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth

    1. Student enrollments were small, numbering about 200 boys; at one time, a few lads as young as eleven were admitted to Harvard

    2. Instruction was poor by present-day standards and the curriculum was still heavily loaded with theology and the “dead” languages

    3. A significant contribution was made by Benjamin Franklin, who played a major role in launching what became the University of Pennsylvania, the first college free from denominational control

J. A Provincial Culture

1. When it came to art and culture, colonial Americans were still in thrall to European tastes, especially British; the simplicity of pioneering life had not yet bred many homespun patrons of the arts

    1. Like so many of his talented artistic contemporaries, Trumbull was forced to travel to London to pursue his ambitions

2. Charles Willson Peale best known for his portraits of George Washington, ran a museum, stuffed birds, and practiced dentistry

3. Gifted Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley succeeded in their ambition to become famous painters, but like Trumbull they had to go to England to complete their training

4. Only abroad could they find subjects who had the leisure to sit for their portraits and the money to pay handsomely for them

5. Copley was regarded as a Loyalist during the Revolutionary War, and West, a close friend of George II and official court painter, was buried in London's St. Paul's Cathedral following his death

2. Architecture was largely imported from the Old World and modified to meet the peculiar climatic and religious conditions of the New World

1. Even the lowly log cabin was apparently borrowed from Sweden

2. The red-bricked Georgian style, so common in the pre-Revolutionary decades, was introduced about 1720 and is best exemplified by the beauty of now-restored Williamsburg, Virginia

3. Colonial literature, like art, was generally undistinguished, and for much the same reasons; one noteworthy exception was the poet Phillis Wheatley, a slave girl in Boston at eight and never formally educated

1. Taken to England when she was twenty, she published a verse book and subsequently wrote polished poems that revealed the influence of Alexander Pope; her verse were one of the best of the period

2. The remarkable fact is that she could overcome her severely disadvantaged background and write poetry at all

4. Versatile Benjamin Franklin, often called "the first civilized American," also shone as a literary light among other things

1. Although his autobiography is a classic, he was best known to his contemporaries for Poor Richard's Almanack (edited 1732 to 1758)

2. This publication, containing many pithy sayings culled from the thinkers of the ages, emphasized such virtues as thrift, industry, morality, and common sense—Honesty is the best policy, plough deep while sluggards sleep, and fish and visitors stink in three days

3. Poor Richard's was well known in Europe and was more widely read in America than anything except the Bible (teacher of old and young, Franklin had influence in shaping the American character)

5. Science, rising above the shackles of superstition, was making some progress, though lagging behind the Old World's progress

    1. A few botanists, mathematicians, and astronomers had won some repute, but Benjamin Franklin was perhaps the only first-rank scientists produced in the American colonies

    2. Franklin's spectacular but dangerous experiments, including the famous kite-flying episode proving that lightning was a form of electricity, won him numerous honors in Europe

    3. But his mind also had a practical turn, and among his numerous inventions were bifocal spectacles and the highly efficient stove

    4. His lightning rod, not surprisingly was condemned by some stodgy clergymen who felt it was "presuming on God" by attempting to control the "artillery of the heavens" (the lightning)

K. Pioneer Presses

1. Americans were generally too poor to buy quantities of books and too busy to read them; however a few private libraries of fair size could be found, especially among the clergy and rich families in the colonies

    1. The Byrd family of Virginia enjoyed perhaps the largest collection in the colonies, consisting of about four thousand volumes

    2. Bustling Benjamin Franklin established in Philadelphia the first privately supported circulating library in America; and by 1776 there were about fifty public libraries and collections available

2. Hand-operated printing presses cranked out pamphlets, leaflets, and journals; on the eve of the Revolution, there were about forty colonial newspapers, chiefly weeklies that consisted of a single large sheet

    1. Columns ran heavily to somber essays, frequently signed with pseudonyms and the "news" often lagged many weekends behind the event especially in the case of oversea happenings

    2. Newspapers proved to be a powerful agency for airing colonial grievances an rallying oppositions to the British crown's control

3. A celebrated legal case, in 1734-1735, involved John Peter Zenger, a newspaper printer; significantly, the case arose in New York, reflecting the tumultuous give-and-take of politics in the middle colonies

    1. Zenger's newspaper had assailed the corrupt royal governor; charged with seditious libel, the accused was hauled to court where he was defended by a former indentured servant, Andrew Hamilton

    2. Zenger argued that he had printed the truth but the royal chief justice instructed the jury not to consider the truth or falsity; the fact of printing, irrespective of the truth, was enough to convict

    3. Hamilton countered that "the very liberty of both exposing and opposing arbitrary power" was at stake; swayed by his eloquence, the jurors defied the judges and returned a verdict of not guilty

4. The Zenger decision was a banner achievement for freedom of the press and for the health of democracy; it pointed the way to the kind of open public discussion required by the diverse society that colonial New York already was and that all America was to become

5. Although contrary to existing law and not immediately accepted by other judges and juries, in time it helped establish the doctrine that true statements about public officials could not be prosecuted as libel

6. Newspapers were thus eventually free to print responsible criticism of powerful officials though full freedom of press was unknown for a time

L. The Great Game of Politics

1. American colonists were making noteworthy contributions to politics

    1. The thirteen colonial governments took a variety of forms; by 1775, eight colonies had royal governors, who were appointed by the king

    2. Three—Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware—were under proprietors who themselves chose the governors; two, Connecticut and Rhode Island, elected their governors under self-governing rule

2. Practically every colony utilized a two-house legislative body

    1. The upper house, or council, was normally appointed by the crown in the royal colonies and by the proprietor in the proprietary colonies; it was chosen by the voters in the self-governing colonies

    2. The lowerhouse, as the popular branch, was elected by the people—or rather by those who owned enough property to qualify as voters

    3. In several of the colonies, the backcountry elements were seriously underrepresented, and they hated the ruling colonial group

    4. Legislatures, in which the people enjoyed direct representation, voted such taxes as they chose for the necessary expenses of colonial government—self-taxation through representation was a precious privilege that Americans had come to cherish above others

3. Governors appointed by the king were generally able men, sometimes outstanding figures; some, unfortunately, were incompetent or corrupt—broken-down politicians badly in need of jobs

1. The worst of the group was probably impoverished Lord Cornbury, first cousin of Queen Anne, who was made governor of New York and New Jersey in 1702—he was a drunkard, a spendthrift, a grafter, an embezzler, a religious bigot, and a vain fool

2. Even the best appointees had trouble with the colonial legislatures, basically because the royal governor embodied a bothersome transatlantic authority some three thousand miles away

4. The colonial assemblies found various ways to assert their authority and independence; some of them employed the trick of withholding the governor's salary unless he yielded to their wishes (he was normally in need of money so the power of the purse usually forced him to terms)

5. The London government, in leaving the colonial governor to the tender mercies of the legislature, was guilty of poor administration

1. In the interests of simple efficiency, the British authorities should have arranged to pay him from independent sources; as events turned out, control over the purse by the colonial legislatures led to prolonged bickering, which proved to be one of the irritants that generated a spirit of revolt (Parliament's Townshend taxes of 1767)

2. Administration at the local level was varied; county government remained the rule of the plantation South; townmeeting government predominated in New England; and a modification of the two developed in the middle colonies—in the town meetings, with its open discussion and opening voting, direct democracy functioned

6. Yet the ballot was by no means a birthright; religious or property qualifications for voting, even stiffer qualifications for office holding, existed in all the colonies at the time in the late 18th century

1. The privileged upper classes, fearful of democratic excesses, were unwilling to grant the ballot to every person in the colony

2. Perhaps half of the adults whites males were thus disfranchised but because of the ease of acquiring land and thus satisfying property requirements, the right to vote was not beyond the reach of most

3. Yet somewhat surprisingly, eligible voters did not exercise this precious privilege and frequently acquiesced in the leadership of their betters who ran colonial affairs (able to vote people out office)

7. By 1775 America was not yet a true democracy—socially, economically, or politically; but it was far more democratic than England and the European continent; colonial institutions were giving freer rein to the democratic ideals of tolerance, educational advantages, equality of economic opportunity, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and representative government

M. Colonial Folkways

1. Everyday life in the colonies was drab and tedious; for most people the labor was heavy and constant—from "can see" to "can't see"

2. Food was plentiful, though the diet could be coarse and monotonous; Americans probably ate more bountifully, especially of meat, than any people in the Old World—Lazy/sickly was the person that was hungry

3. Basic comforts now taken for granted were lacking; churches were not heated at all; drafty homes were poorly heated, chiefly by fireplaces

    1. There was no running water in the houses, no plumbing, and probably not a single bathtub in all colonial America

    2. Candles and whale-oil lamps provided faint and flickering illumination; garbage disposal was so primitive that hogs ranged the streets and buzzards, protected by law, flapped over waste

4. Amusement was eagerly pursued where time and custom permitted

    1. The militia assembled periodically for "musters", which consisted of several days of drilling, liberally interspersed with merry-making

    2. On the frontier, pleasure was often combined with work at house-raising, quilting bees, husking bees, and apple parings

3. Funerals and weddings everywhere afforded opportunities for social gathering, which customarily involved the swilling of much liquor

5. Winter sports were common in the North, whereas in the South card playing, horse racing, cockfighting, dancing and fox hunting

6. Over diversions beckoned; lotteries were universally approved, even by the clergy, and were used to raise money for churches and colleges

7. Stage plays became popular in the South but were frowned upon in Quaker and Puritan colonies and in some places forbidden by law; many of the New England clergy saw playacting as time-consuming and immoral—they preferred religious lectures (spiritual satisfaction)

8. Holidays were everywhere celebrated in the American colonies, but Christmas was frowned upon in New England as an offensive reminder

9. Thanksgiving Day came to be American festival for it combined thanks to God with an opportunity for jollification, gorging, and guzzling

10. By the mid-eighteenth century, Britain's several North American colonies, despite their differences, revealed some striking similarities

    1. All were basically English in language and customs, and Protestant in religion, while the widespread presence of other peoples and faiths compelled every colony to cede at least some degree of ethnic and religious toleration (as compared to contemporary Europe)

    2. They all afforded to enterprising individuals unusual opportunities for social mobility; they all possessed some measure of self-government, though by no means complete democracy

    3. Communication and transportation among the colonies were improving; British North America by 1775 looked like a patchwork quilt—each part slightly different, but stitched together by common origins, common ways of life, and common beliefs in toleration, economic development and above all, were somewhat self-ruled

4. Fatefully, all the colonies were also separated from the seat of imperial authority by a vast ocean some three thousand miles wide; these simple facts of shared history, culture, and geography set the stage for the colonists' struggle to unite as an independent people