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Chapter 5
Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution
1700-1775

Britain governed most of North America by 1775 (32 colonies), but only 13 colonies had rebelled against

the crown by this time. Canada, Jamaica, and others did not rebel. This was due to the social, economic, and political differences between the colonies.

Conquest by the Cradle

Over the course of the 1700s, the population in the North American colonies exploded. By the end of the century, Britain no longer had more people than its colonies.

In 1775, the most populous colonies were Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Maryland.

About 90% of people lived in rural areas.

A Mingling of the Races

Colonial America was a melting pot.

Germans were 6% of the total population in 1775. Many Germans settled in Pennsylvania, fleeing religious persecution, economic oppression, and the ravages of war.

Scots-Irish were 7% of the population in 1775. They were lawless individuals.

By the mid 18th century, a series of Scots-Irish settlements were scattered along the "**great wagon road**", which hugged the eastern Appalachian foothills from Pennsylvania to Georgia.

The Scots-Irish led the armed **march of the Paxton Boys in Philadelphia in 1764**, protesting the Quaker oligarchy's lenient policy toward the Indians. A few years later, they led the **Regulator movement** in North Carolina, a small but nasty insurrection against eastern domination of the colony's affairs.

About 5% of the multicolored colonial population consisted of other European groups- French Huguenots, Welsh, Dutch, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss, and Scots Highlanders.

The Structure of Colonial Society

By the mid 1700s, the richest 10% of Bostonians and Philadelphians owned 2/3 of the taxable wealth in their cities.

By 1750, Boston contained a large number of homeless poor, who were forced to wear a large red "P" on their clothing.

In all the colonies, the influx of indentured servants added to the population of the lower classes.

The black slaves were the lowest class in society.

Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

A position in the Christian ministry held the highest prestige.

Most physicians were poorly trained and not highly esteemed. The first medical school opened in 1765. Epidemics were a constant nightmare. A crude form of inoculation was introduced in 1721. Powdered dried toad was a favorite prescription for smallpox. Diphtheria was also a killer, especially of young people.

Lawyers were also not held in high regard.

Workday America

Agriculture was the leading industry, involving about 90% of the people. The staple crop in Maryland and Virginia was tobacco. The fertile middle (bread) colonies produced large quantities of grain.

Fishing was not nearly as prevalent as agriculture, but it was financially rewarding.

Trade was popular in the New England group - New York and Pennsylvania.

Triangular Trade: a ship would leave a New England port with rum and sail to Africa. It would pick up slaves and then sail to the West Indies. It would pick up molasses and take this to New England where it would be converted to rum.

Manufacturing in the colonies was of only secondary importance.

Lumbering was the most important manufacturing activity. By 1770, about 1/3 of the British merchant marine was American built.

As early as the 1730s, fast-breeding Americans demanded more and more British products-yet the slow growing British population early reached the saturation point for absorbing imports from America. This trade imbalance prompted the Americans to look for foreign markets to get money to pay for British products.

In 1773, bowing to pressure from British West Indian planters, Parliament passed the **Molasses Act**, aimed at crushing North American trade with the French West Indies. The colonists got around this by smuggling.

Horsepower and Sailpower

The roadways in the colonies were in terrible condition.

An intercolonial postal system was established by the mid-1700s.

Dominant Denominations

Two established, or tax-supported, churches were prominent in 1775: the **Anglican** and the **Congregational**.

The **Church of England (Anglicans)** became the official faith in Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and a part of New York. The College of William and Mary was founded in 1693 to train a better class of clerics for the Anglican Church.

The **Congregational Church** had grown out of the Puritan Church, and was formally established in all the New England colonies except independent-minded Rhode Island. Presbyterianism was never made official in any of the colonies.

Religious toleration had made tremendous strides in America. There were fewer Catholics in America; hence anti-Catholic laws were less severe and less strictly enforced. In general, people could worship or not worship as they pleased.

The Great Awakening

A few churches grudgingly said that spiritual conversion was not necessary for church membership. Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian who preached that individual free will, not divine decree, determined a person's eternal fate (**Arminianism**). This challenged the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.

The **Great Awakening** exploded in the 1730s and 1740s. The Awakening was started in Northampton, Massachusetts by Jonathan Edwards. He said that through faith in God, **not** through doing good works, could one attain eternal salvation. He had an alive-style of preaching.

George Whitefield gave America a different kind of enthusiastic type of preaching. The **old lights**, orthodox clergymen, were skeptical of the new ways of preaching. **New lights**, on the other hand, defended the Awakening for its role in revitalizing American religion.

The Awakening had an emphasis on direct, emotive spirituality and seriously undermined the older clergy. It started many new denominations and greatly increased the numbers and the competitiveness of American churches.

Schools and Colleges

Puritan New England was more interested in education than any other section. Dominated by the Congregational Church, it stressed the need for Bible reading by the individual worshipper.

College education was regarded very highly in New England. In New England, the schools were focused on training men for the ministry.

9 local colleges were established during the colonial era.

A Provincial Culture

The red-bricked Georgian style was introduced in 1720.

Art & architecture were popular in the colonies.

Scientific progress in the colonies lagged behind progress in Britain. Ben Franklin was considered the only first-rank scientist in the New World.

Pioneer Presses

A celebrated legal case in 1734-1735 involved John Peter Zenger, a newspaper printer. He was charged with printing things that assailed the corrupt royal governor of New York. The jury voted him not guilty to the surprise of the judge and many people. This paved the way for freedom of the press.

The Great Game of Politics

By 1775, 8 of the colonies had royal governors, who were appointed by the king. 3 of the colonies (Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware) were under proprietors who themselves chose the governors. 2 colonies (Connecticut and Rhode Island) elected their own governors under self-governing characters.

Nearly every colony used a two-house legislative body. The **upper house**, or council, was appointed by

the crown in the **royal colonies** and by the proprietor in the **proprietary colonies**. The **lower house**, as the popular branch, was elected by the **people**.

Lord Cornbury: made governor of New York and New Jersey in 1702. He was a drunkard, a spendthrift, and a bad person.

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