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Chapter 4  
American Life in the 17th Century  
1607-1692

### **The Unhealthy Chesapeake**

Half the people born in early Virginia and Maryland did not survive past age 20 due to widespread disease. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, **Virginia** was the **most populous** colony with 59,000 people. Maryland was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest, after Massachusetts, with 30,000.

### The Tobacco Economy

By the **1630s**, **1.5 million pounds of tobacco** were being shipped out of the Chesapeake Bay every year and almost 40 million by the end of the century.

Because of the massive amounts of tobacco crops planted by families, "**indentured servants**" were brought in from England to work on the farms. In exchange for working, they received transatlantic passage and eventual "**freedom dues**", including a few barrels of corn, a suit of clothes, and possibly a small piece of land.

**Virginia and Maryland** employed the "**headright**" system to encourage the importation of servant workers. Under its terms, whoever paid the passage of a laborer received the right to acquire 50 acres of land.

Chesapeake planters brought some **100,000 indentured servants** to the region by **1700**. These "white slaves" represented more than **3/4 of all European immigrants** to Virginia and Maryland in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Frustrated Freeman and Bacon's Rebellion

In **1676**, about **1,000 Virginians**, led by a 29-year-old planter, **Nathaniel Bacon**, revolted against the Virginia government. They resented Virginia's Governor William Berkeley for his friendly policies towards the Indians. When Berkeley refused to retaliate for a series of savage Indian attacks on frontier settlements (due to his monopolization of the fur trading with them), the crowd attacked Indians and chased Berkeley from Jamestown, Virginia. They torched the capitol.

During the civil war in Virginia, Bacon suddenly died from disease. Berkeley took advantage of this and crushed the uprising, hanging more than 20 rebels. Charles II complained of the penalties dealt by Berkeley.

Due to the rebellions and tensions started by Bacon, planters looked for other, less troublesome laborers to work their tobacco plantations. They soon looked to Africa.

### Colonial Slavery

**Africans** had been brought to **Jamestown** as early as **1619**, but as late as **1670**, there were only about 2,000 in Virginia - about 7% of the total population of the South.

In the **1680s**, the **wages in England rose**, therefore decreasing the number of indentured servants coming to America. By the **mid-1680s**, **black slaves outnumbered white servants** among the plantation colonies' new arrivals.

In **1698**, the **Royal African Company**, first chartered in **1672**, **lost its monopoly** on carrying slaves to the colonies. Due to this, many Americans, including many Rhode Islanders, rushed to cash in on the slave trade. (Eventually, Rhode Island became the first state to abolish slavery.)

Blacks accounted for half the population of Virginia by 1750. In South Carolina, they outnumbered whites 2:1.

Most of the slaves came from the west coast of Africa, especially stretching from present-day Senegal to Angola.

Starting in **1662**, Virginia enacted "**slave codes**" (laws) made blacks and their children the property of the white masters for life.

### Africans in America

By about 1720, the proportion of females in the Chesapeake area soon began to rise, and the number of families increased.

On the Sea Islands off South Carolina's coast, blacks evolved a language, **Gullah**. It blended English with several African languages, including Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa.

In **New York City in 1712**, a **slave revolt** killed 12 whites and caused the execution of 21 blacks.

In **1739 in South Carolina** along the Stono River, a revolt exploded. The rebels tried to march to Spanish Florida but were stopped by a local militia.

### Southern Society

Just before the Revolutionary War, **70%** of the **leaders** of the **Virginia legislature** came from families established in Virginia before 1690.

### **Social Scale:**

- Planters-owned gangs of slaves and vast domains of land; ruled the region's economy and monopolized political power.
- Small Farmers-largest social group; tilled their own modest plots and may have owned one or two slaves.
- Landless Whites-many were former indentured servants.
- Black Slaves

### **The New England Family**

In contrast with the Chesapeake, the New Englanders tended to migrate in families as opposed to single individuals.

Family came first with New Englanders.

There were low premarital pregnancy rates, in contrast with the Chesapeake.

Because southern men frequently died young, leaving widows with small children to support, **the southern colonies generally allowed married women to retain a separate title their property and gave widows the right to inherit their husband's estates.** But in New England, Puritan lawmakers worried that recognizing women's separate property rights would undercut the unity of married persons by acknowledging conflicting interests between husband and wife. **When a man died in the North, the Church inherited the property, not the wife.**

New England women usually gave up their property rights when they married (to maintain the unity of marriage). In contrast to old England, the laws of New England made provisions for the property of widows and even extended important protections to women with marriage.

Above all, the laws of Puritan New England sought to defend the integrity of marriages.

### **Life in the New England Towns**

Massachusetts was at the front of the colonies attempting to abolish black slavery.

New towns were legally chartered by the colonial authorities, and the distribution of land was entrusted to proprietors. Every family received several parcels of land.

Towns of more than 50 families had to have an elementary school.

Just 8 years after **Massachusetts** was formed, the colony established **Harvard College, in 1636.** Virginia established its first college, **William and Mary, in 1693.**

Puritans ran their own churches, and democracy in Congregational Church government led logically to democracy in political government.

### **The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials**

About the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a new form of sermon began to be heard from Puritan pulpits - the "**jeremiad.**"

Troubled ministers in **1662** announced a new formula for church membership, the **Half-Way Covenant.** This new arrangement modified the covenant, or the agreement between the church and its adherents, to admit to baptism-but not "full communion"-the unconverted children of existing members. This move increased the churches' memberships. This boost in aided the money-stricken church.

A group of adolescent girls in **Salem, Massachusetts**, claimed to have been bewitched by certain older women. A witch hunt ensued, leading to the legal lynching of **20 women in 1692.**

In **1693**, the witchcraft hysteria ended when the governor of Massachusetts prohibited any further trials and pardoned those already convicted. **In 1713, the Massachusetts legislature annulled the "conviction"** of the "witches" and made reparation to their heirs.

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

The **soil of New England was stony** and hard to plant with.

There was **less diversity in New England than in the South** because European immigrants did not want to come to a place where there was bad soil. The summers in New England were very hot and the winters very cold.

The Native Americans recognized their right to USE the land, but the concept of OWNING was unknown. The people of New England became experts at shipbuilding and commerce due to the timber found in the

dense forests. They also fished for **cod** off the coasts.

The combination of Calvinism, soil, and climate in New England made for energy, purposefulness, sternness, stubbornness, self-reliance, and resourcefulness.

### The Early Settlers' Days and Ways

Women, slave or free, on southern plantations or northern farms, wove, cooked, cleaned, and care for children. Men cleared land; fenced, planted, and cropped the land; cut firewood; and butchered livestock as needed.

Resentment against upper-class pretensions helped to spark outbursts like **Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 in Virginia** and the **uprising of Maryland's Protestants toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century**. In New York, animosity between lordly landholders and aspiring merchants fueled **Leisler's Rebellion**, an ill-starred and bloody insurgence that rocked **New York City from 1689-1691**.

In **1651, Massachusetts prohibited poorer folk from "wearing gold or silver lace,"** and in 18<sup>th</sup> century Virginia, a tailor was fined and jailed for arranging to race his horse-"a sport only for gentlemen."

### Estimated Slave Imports to the New World, 1601-1810

Region	17th Century	18th Century	Total	Percent
Spanish American	292,500	598,600	871,000	11.7
Brazil	560,000	1,891,400	2,451,400	33
British Caribbean	263,700	1,401,000	1,664,700	22.5
Dutch Caribbean	40,000	460,000	500,000	6.7
French Caribbean	155,800	1,348,400	1,504,200	20.3
Danish Caribbean	4,000	24,000	28,000	0.4
British North America and future United States	10,000	390,000	400,000	5.4
TOTAL	X	X	<b>7,419,300</b>	<b>100</b>

### Chronology

1619: First Africans arrive in Virginia

1636: Harvard College founded

1662: Half-Way Covenant for Congregational Church membership established

1670: Virginia assembly disfranchises landless freeman

1676: Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia

1680s: Mass expansion of slavery in colonies

1689-1691: Leisler's Rebellion in New York

1692: Salem witch trials in Massachusetts

1693: College of William and Mary founded

1698: Royal African Company slave trade monopoly ended

1712: New York City slave revolt

1739: South Carolina slave revolt

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