

CHAPTER 1

European and Colonial Foundations to 1760

The poverty of the country is such that all the power and sway is got into the hands of the rich, who by extortious advantages, having the common people in their debt, have always curbed and oppressed them in all manner of ways.

—Nathaniel Bacon (quoted in Wertenbaker, 1958, v. 3, p. 135)

European Heritage

The Europeans who explored, conquered, and made settlements in the land mass of North America brought with them well-established practices of authority, particularly when it came to any form of productive labor or work. Agricultural wealth in Europe went to those who controlled the land. Control of property granted those who held authority over it power over those who worked it. Feudalism was the paternalistic institutional system that, with the laws of the Church, set the day-to-day pattern of life and supervised all social relations. The working population of peasants and artisans in most of Europe gave their emotional loyalty to the authority of the Church and the lord of the manor. People placed their faith and confidence in those whose power seemed to protect them from danger or offered some hope for the future.

Until about 1500 there were no nations or races as we know them, no national banks, passports, citizens, stock exchanges, or even Protestants. More than 95 percent of the people were “subjects” who lived under the power and authority of “masters” whose inherited social rank gave them their status. These subjects were called serfs. They had no access to courts, no voice or vote in any public matter, no right to make a contract or any legal claim whatsoever, and no right to testify in court or to claim legal ownership of any productive land or enterprise. There were no organizations or associations formed by them or for the purpose of acting exclusively on their behalf. They all worked, but had control only over their own gardens, personal livestock

and possessions, and whatever they could steal. Religion influenced work habits, set frequent holy days, festivals, and celebrations, and mitigated punishments.

“City air is free air” was a well-known Central European comment about the absence of feudal bonds constraining craftspeople and merchants in the expanding towns and cities. Serfs were legally bound to baronial masters with a status similar to that of children. They could enter into no legal agreements, own no real property, or move about freely. In town the medieval guilds, also known as trade corporations, and guild masters were more autonomous. Guilds were intent on preventing competition among producers. They set firm rules and limits on everything from prices to the pace of work, and supervised the lives of apprentices and journeymen workers. Control of the secrets and the skills of the crafts that were passed on through the apprenticeship system gave added social power and importance to the masters, many of whom came to manage large workshops and build great fortunes. Emulating the landed gentry, they found ways to pass on their wealth to the next generation. The famous seventeenth-century painting by Rembrandt, *The Syndics of the Clothmaker’s Guild* (*Staalmeesters*), better known as *The Dutch Masters*, dramatically captures the importance and social presence of its subject.

Every craft had its guild and usually a guildhall. Weaving, building, stonecutting, furniture making, jewelry making, shipbuilding, armor and weapons making, and food processing or victualling were among the many crafts that formed guilds. These organizations set quality standards, established prices, trained apprentices, and provided security for their members. Guilds were often involved in political struggles to hold onto monopolistic privileges or fix prices for what they produced. Work stoppages were not uncommon as a tactic to achieve their goals. In most of the prosperous cities of Europe, however, the masters were on comfortable terms with the most elite merchants, bankers, and professionals with whom they worked closely. The masters were never significant critics of the society in which they enjoyed such status. They passed many of those same conservative sentiments and practices on to the skilled trade unions and the leaders that gradually replaced them as feudalism waned and capitalism gradually emerged. That relationship has been maintained consistently through the modern period. Other workers, the semiskilled and unskilled, and their organizations did not share the elitist identification of their skilled counterparts. Their loyalty and their identity with the dominant culture would more often be drawn toward the nation-state when it and their importance as part of the labor force emerged.

European guilds had their counterparts in medieval trade associations or monopolies such as the Hanseatic League of northwestern Europe. These trading guilds put profits into the hands of merchants and other middlemen such as bankers, insurers, brokers, and shippers and took them away from producers. Norwegian fishermen and Scottish and Irish sheepherders eked out a marginal existence while the codfish and woolens they produced brought fortunes to those who marketed them. As national governments gradually formed, they assumed the practice of granting patents to merchants or monopolistic trading rights to them in exchange for a share in the profits or tax revenues.

Another area of employment that began to open up as an alternative to feudal agriculture was the armed services. Military or naval service at the end of the Middle Ages (ca. 1500) was long-term and sternly disciplined, and the ranks of officers were restricted to those of noble birth, the aristocracy. When the longbow and gunpowder—both contributing to the end of the Middle Ages—made the heavily armored aristocratic knight almost useless, the ranks of soldiers were soon filled by long-term commoners. Then, as now, it was an uncertain career. Officers were handsomely rewarded for military victories. For common soldiers basic necessities were provided and a secure existence was promised unless death or injury on the battlefield soured the deal.

Since social status, or what later would be called class, was hereditary, the women of the nobility had authority over their social inferiors, but no legal or institutional power. A tiny patriarchal elite was confirmed in its authority by religious orders and law. Unquestioning obedience to a master or higher authority provided security and the comfort of a predictable relationship, like that of a man and his dog, for workers, serfs, soldiers, and women alike. For the European peasantry this dependent legal status meant ruthless exploitation, brutality, rape, and complete disregard for their human rights. Their only recourses were the peasant rebellions, thievery, and cheating on work that were all punishable offenses, but commonplace actions. Other forms of passive resistance were in the folklore that cheered renegades like Robin Hood, or the swindling of masters, but all of these were also outside the bounds of respectability.

The Expansion of Trade

Aristocratic and clerical control was gradually undermined by the dramatic expansion of trade in the centuries that followed the Crusades (1200–1500). Commerce disrupted the feudal centrality of economic life by conferring more importance on a new group or class previously of little significance in the early Middle Ages, the merchant, or burger, or bourgeoisie. The feudal aristocracy was dependent on wealth from control of the land, and began to fall behind the bourgeoisie in wealth and political influence. This new urban class included in its membership cartographers, guild masters, shipwrights, and early bankers or moneylenders. Their energy and ambition combined with their economic needs led them to give support to national leaders over local feudal barons, even to absolute monarchs whose navies and lawmaking powers coincided with their interests. When Thomas Hobbes wrote his influential work, *Leviathan*, in 1651 about the harsh necessity of governmental power, even absolutist power, he was echoing the widespread sentiment of a new age that had emerged in modern contrast to the decentralized and stagnant feudal order.

The wealth of the new commercial class came neither from birthright titles, inherited land, nor clerical privileges, though many rich merchants and bankers would ultimately seek these for themselves and their heirs. Through intermarriage with the aristocracy, bribery, and service to royalty, the new business elite gained status and legal security for their enterprises. The military and naval services they needed to protect and expand their business ventures were paid for in the form of taxes to a new agency

created to advance the common needs of all who benefited from the expansion of trade. This new agency was called the state. It alone could provide the commercial and non-feudal property right laws, expanded banking and financial services, military and naval forces, commercial treaties, and laws that could govern and control the new workforce that were all beyond the boundaries or capabilities of traditional feudal and clerical power. The state could coin money, grant patents, charter corporations, set up secular courts of law, and establish claims to conquered territory for economic purposes beyond the grasp or scope of feudalism's religious, agricultural, and local military authority.

In some places the state was created even before there was a fully formed or unified national culture, as in some wealthy Italian city-states like Venice, or in prosperous trading towns like Pisa, Amalfi, and Genoa of the Renaissance era, or in the Dutch Republic of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In other places, like Portugal, Spain, England, and France, the institutions of the state gradually evolved along with the cultural nation. Banking and insurance practices became centralized, along with new laws and agreements about property rights, maximum wages, trading rights, and taxes. Feudal forces could not compete with the wealth and power of those who had control of the more centralized system. Germany, devastated by the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), remained divided into many feudal kingdoms and lagged behind for two centuries as a cultural entity without a state until the era of its unification. The making of the modern German nation-state is usually credited to its Iron Chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck, in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The new wealth from trade and overseas empires was something that completely eclipsed the capabilities of feudal barons. None of them could raise a high seas navy, or establish a national bank, tax, judicial, or monetary system. Merchants and monarchs alike shared an incentive to trade. Naval power meant world power financed by expanded trade and new tax revenues. New routes to old markets were sought by rival states to increase their economic independence from one another, and explorers were sent all over the world to find them, especially after the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turkish Empire in 1453. As a result, Europeans lost easy access to Asian goods and had to find new routes to them on their own or pay extortionate prices. Shipyard work expanded dramatically, especially in Portugal and Spain. Christopher Columbus was but one of many dozens of global seekers of wealth sent out on behalf of these new nation-states in search of direct routes to the fabled goods of Asia.

Prosperity in an age of increased trade was no longer primarily based on the feudal standard of land tenure. Gold and silver bullion became the new basis for the measurement of wealth. Land itself would soon come to have a monetary value. Brutal conquests and ruthless mining ventures in the "New World" (to the Europeans) were a crude way of gaining that wealth without having to trade anything for it. Nonfeudal forms of forced labor were improvised or imported to exploit the mineral wealth of America once the genocidal destruction and simple robbery or seizures from Tainos, Aztecs, and Incas, among others, gave way to regular mining operations. These native people were the first American workers. It was their confiscated land and coerced semifeudal and slave labor that created the wealth that contributed to the power of the modern European-based nation-states.

Since almost all labor was carried out in bondage or dependency in the 1500s, it is not surprising to discover the use of crude forms of enslavement of the native population. The murderous exploitation in mining operations and vulnerability to European diseases of native Americans led to the death and destruction of tens of millions of people in Central and South America by Spanish conquistadores and the viceroys that followed to govern in their wake. Devastation and genocide was so complete that in many cases only accounts of eyewitnesses and archaeological ruins remain. The poignant protests of some clergy, especially Peter Martyr and Bartolome de las Casas, continue to remind us of the price paid for the expansion of European global power. The rapid growth of every nation that became a great world power was similarly paid for with the coerced labor and seizure of the economic resources of another people. Every great nation's history is one of military conquest, expropriation of land and labor, and the development of racism. There never was an expansive modern nation that was free of militarism, conquest, and racism. Christian doctrine played almost no role at all in mitigating the harsh prerogatives of the aggressive nation-state. Most often clerical powers cheered on the conquerors and found ways to justify the harshness. Native Americans were cruelly worked to death, displaced and brutalized without mercy throughout the hemisphere by every European national power they encountered.

By many historically accepted accounts the Aztec population was reduced from about twenty-five million to one million during the forty years (1520–60) that followed Spanish conquest under Hernán Cortés. A similar devastation was carried out against the Incas of Peru. The conquistadores became spectacularly rich. No one can say for certain how many tons of gold and silver bullion were taken from the Aztec and Inca people, but one notable scholar, Ferdinand Braudel, argued in his masterful two-volume work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, that it was enough to dramatically change the entire history of Europe and the modern world.

English privateers who enjoyed the protection of Queen Elizabeth brought some of this wealth home as booty stolen from the Spanish. From the time of Columbus until the defeat of its great naval armada in 1588, Spain enjoyed nearly a century-long golden age of prosperity and power. Spanish wealth flowed through the hands of bankers and merchants in the Netherlands and England who served the empire with the goods and services Spain could not provide for itself. The unpaid labor and wealth of the Aztecs and Incas made Spain one of the first great modern nations and one of the first great global empires in history. At the same time Portuguese and Dutch merchants were finding new ways of turning nonfeudal enterprises and unpaid foreign labor into gold.

Early Colonial Practices and Institutions

Old World slavery, as known and practiced in the Mediterranean world, had already been adapted for the production of refined sugar from cane in some of the Portuguese

colonies in Africa. It was no secret that gold could be made from sugar, by selling the refined crystal for a profit. Portuguese and Dutch merchants took the lead during the sixteenth century in importing African slaves to their West Indian and Brazilian plantations to plant and cut sugarcane. Merchants quickly discovered that they could add to their commercial profits by selling slaves in other American markets as well. Sugar production flourished in the Caribbean and Brazil and, with the innovative legal authority of the modern state, turned the ancient custom of bondage into a modern labor institution that lasted until the late nineteenth century in the Americas. In the United States racial slavery finally was abolished with the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865. In Brazil and Cuba it lasted until the 1880s. Its social and cultural legacy is with us still.

Another compact way to process molasses for shipping, instead of refining it into sugar, was to distill it into rum. Rum could be turned into gold by merchants and enterprising distillers by using the labor of some slaves and, mostly, their indentured servants in colonial New England. Spices came from Dutch imperial plantation labor in the Far East and were turned into gold as well. Tobacco made by slave labor and indentured servants in Virginia soon followed. The enormous wealth made from American sugar, rum, and tobacco was greater than all of Spain's bullion and by the 18th century made the trade in slave labor the most profitable enterprise of the era. Once the English entered it in earnest after 1714, the trade in slaves soon became twice as profitable as the sugar carried in the same space on the return trip. Profits became so great by 1750 that more than a hundred English ships were regularly engaged in it, and many of them were now designed specifically for it (Davis, 1962, pp. 275, 293–95). Bristol, Bath, and Liverpool were prosperous new English cities built on the wealth made from this trade. Several historians have postulated that the wealth produced by slavery and the slave trade provided the economic foundation for the industrial revolution, and that plantation slave labor was the precursor to the propertyless industrial working class, or proletariat.

None of these things, gold, rum, tobacco, or slavery, was part of the feudal landscape. Neither was the tea or opium that came from the booming English East India trade of the era that followed (1660–1750). A new social structure with new hierarchies of power, new concepts of ownership and control, and new codes and laws of behavior was developed and imposed around these new forms of national and private wealth. The Dutch were the first to develop a national bank, a source of investment capital subsidized by the state itself, and a stock exchange. The English invented the "Poor Laws" of the sixteenth century, and later copied some of the Dutch ideas about business. The new English legal codes were designed to control the masses of impoverished peasants displaced from feudal estates after the conversion of the land system from subsistence agriculture to the more profitable sheep raising and woolens industry. In Ireland it was said that "the sheep ate the people" during the 1600s. Good agricultural land in Ireland was turned over to grazing while the people starved, fled, or were driven from the country. Following their military conquests, the English established plantations in Ireland as nonfeudal, agricultural enterprise zones and drove

the population to the near barren and rocky cliffs of the western part of the country. Native Americans would soon experience the same displacement from their lands.

Race and Servitude in Colonial America

Just as the new European nations formed legal boundaries that separated and defined themselves as nations distinct from one another, they also established laws and treaties that separated and defined their control over foreign populations that came under their power. As merchants, bankers, and their royal authorities coined and printed their own money, they similarly marked and defined their own populations and those they dominated abroad by boundaries and laws. The concept of race gave legal definition to people under the political authority of European masters even in their own lands, or as transported slave laborers to European colonies abroad. Racial laws defined and limited legal marriage, land ownership, the right to own weapons or travel, labor practices, place of residence, and standing before the law in all matters.

The Irish became a race in their own country. They became subject to laws formed under the authority of their English conquerors as did native Americans in Virginia, along with Africans transported to work on the colonial plantations. The Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish were making the same kind of laws in their sixteenth-century colonial empires in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The modern idea of race was made by European states in an era of national colonial conquest. Old-fashioned empires (e.g., Rome, Egypt, China, etc.) were multicultural mixtures of people of varied ethnicity, cultures, and religions under a hegemonic imperial ruler. The modern domination of subject populations by military and legal institutions created categories of people under national, not religious or imperial, laws. These national laws were the foundation of racism in the modern world.

Citizenship, or membership in the state, defined those who were included in and protected by the laws of the nation. Usually it was based on the ownership of taxable wealth or land. All others, including women and children, were subjected to the laws of the nation or to the authority of masters or institutions that derived their legitimacy from the nation, such as the Church. Millions of Africans, Asians, native Americans, and Irish people were racially defined by their European national conquerors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They shared a common political inferiority and common masters. Together and separately they gave up their land and labor to their conqueror and took on a new human definition imposed by force. Terms of vilification were nearly identical, in spite of vast cultural and historic differences. Masters everywhere sought to instill values of sobriety, honesty, industriousness, and obedience to authority among their laborer-subjects, wives, and children. The new Protestant work ethic was much more congenial to these values than the traditional Roman Catholicism of the old aristocracy, and it flourished in the English colonies in America. There were fewer days off for holy days, and the use of alcohol was frowned upon. Masters imposed this ethic on their subjects. The masters said they were going to civilize

their subjects, though eventually as racial mythologies became institutionalized, the masters and nation-states put that noble ambition aside. Masters assumed that the inverse or opposite of their virtues were the inherent characteristics of those under their power. Those held under racial codes often assumed these derogatory characterizations as a form of passive resistance. Many slaves and servants resisted exploitation by acting the way their masters assumed they would. Others found covert ways to resist, flee, or disguise their true sentiments.

Instead of being tied to a feudal or imperial entity, slaves and native Americans were bound to the legal systems formulated by the economic imperatives of the nation-state. Hence, treaties with native Americans were usually discarded when they became inconvenient, just as religious authorities likewise found themselves helpless to intervene against the violence or displacement imposed by the state on native Americans. The Protestant minister, Roger Williams, was forced from colonial Massachusetts in 1640 in part because of his defense of the property rights of native Americans. Some human beings, African slaves, for example, would soon have the legal status of private property. Native Americans would have their legal and property rights completely stripped away.

The Early English Colonial Settlement in Virginia

In their first few years the English colonies of North America lost money. The Virginia Company, which at first (1607) did not permit any private ownership of land and was the sole employer, became nearly bankrupt and the colony was taken over by the government in 1621. No gold or silver was found. No easy river passages to new markets were discovered and no great strategic harbors were secured. For the first few years adventurers, religious extremists, and ambitious speculators were the only significant groups with any wealth to dare the dangerous crossing and unknown circumstances that might await them in America. Convicts and prostitutes were sent to Virginia as bonded servants. English "Poor Laws" and judicially set maximum wage codes did nothing to assist an increasingly impoverished peasantry. Faced with famine and dependency on charitable services many sought any available alternative. Workhouses and debtor prisons housed thousands of people displaced by the Enclosure Movement. English law favored profitable sheep raising and the elimination of common grazing lands. The colonies became a natural and widely recommended dumping ground for these dependent laborers. Contemporary "workfare" or prison labor schemes are hardly original inventions. Kidnappers, known as "spirits," roamed the streets and alleys of English port cities looking to lure with inducements or coercion the unwary or vulnerable poor into making the passage to America as servants.

The only commercially worthwhile product in early Virginia was tobacco, though serious doubts were raised about its obnoxious and dangerous qualities from the start. Nonetheless, its profitability and immense popularity in England during the 1620s guaranteed tobacco a long, commercially successful life, even if the same could not be said for those who produced it or made use of it. Virginians gradually adopted the

land and labor system used in the sugar plantation colonies of the Caribbean for their tobacco farms. It soon became the standard throughout the Chesapeake Bay region.

Nonfeudal colonial land took the form adopted by the English after their conquest of most of Ireland. It was called the plantation. The Dutch used the same kind of plantation system in their spice-producing regions of Indonesia. This kind of land was a grant by the crown or company (which held a patent or legal authority to do this from the crown) for the purpose of developing a profitable enterprise through its use. Plantation owners soon developed controls over other businesses related to their sugar and tobacco trade. Planters and their descendants became the merchants, lawyers, land agents, and political leaders of their communities. They soon came to dominate the emerging society in the colonies.

Just as slavery became one response to the great need for labor in the English colonies, its opposite, freedom, was simultaneously developed for the same reason. To encourage settlement and more diverse economic expansion the Virginia Company began to offer land under the "headright system" to anyone who was under no bond or obligation. Fifty acres or more were promised to any freedman. If that freedman was married, he could claim an additional fifty acres, plus fifty more per child. Only a small quit-rent, or yearly fee, had to be paid to the Virginia Company, then later the Crown Colony, to maintain ownership. The incentive worked to attract twice as many laborers to Virginia in the six years that followed 1619 as had arrived in the previous twelve and the new system was quickly adopted with variations throughout the Chesapeake Bay area. The system eventually spread to the Carolinas and Georgia as well.

One explanation frequently given for the absence of class consciousness among European American workers in comparison to their European counterparts is the abundance of land and opportunity for upward social and economic mobility that was missing in the Old World. The new Americans always saw opportunities for property, and later business ownership or the professions, as available to them. This opportunity set them apart from the more rigidly fixed class order of the Europeans, or the legally set and exclusionary racial codes that were imposed on slaves and native Americans. As "whites" by law they could hope and plan for a future quite different from their past, one that was in sharp contrast to the harsh limits imposed on "blacks" and "red" native Americans. That they also adopted the cultural attitudes and mythologies that went along with their legal status seems a natural consequence of that circumstance. Thousands of dispossessed English peasants came to the colonies as indentured servants, debtors, convicts, and redemptioners. Those who survived the crossing and term of service were quickly in search of the independence and opportunity that land ownership offered.

The New England Colonies

The Plymouth Plantation and the Massachusetts Bay Colony were originally settled in the religiously rancorous 1620–40 period as theocratic sanctuaries. Calvinist ideas

of secular purity were merged in New England with economic enterprise. After a period of careful planning, thousands came to the area with the hope of finding a religious haven for the practice of their dissenting views. Indentured servants, convicts, debtors, and slaves soon added to the population. In spite of religious motivations, these people treated native Americans and slaves in New England not very differently than their counterparts in Virginia. As Mark Twain later observed, the New Englanders “first fell on their knees, and then on the aborigines.” Day-to-day economic realities, not religious pieties, made colonial social relationships. The initial civilizing mission soon gave way to harsh racist attitudes as land ownership and slavery placed native Americans and slaves in a legally inferior status.

Of course the advertising and inducements for all of this did not mention the enormous death rate suffered in the early decades of the colonies. Nor did the promoters point out that the land that would become theirs if they survived their term of servitude was on the dangerous frontier of the colony, in close proximity to those native Americans who had either been swindled or displaced by brutal force. An early form of American liberalism was present in the promise of greater political (or religious) liberty and economic opportunity through land ownership. In exchange for scantily compensated or uncompensated labor, servants and other bondsmen were given hope for a better future. Unfortunately for many of them, their dreams were offset by the harsh reality of continued social inferiority and economic and political dependency on established authority. This dependency on established political and economic elites was an early form of American conservatism that most immigrants were forced to endure.

Forms of Resistance

Native Americans, slaves, bondsmen of various types and description, and other workers that were subject to the will and abuse of conquerors and masters expressed their discontent in several ways both individually and collectively. Theft of property, flight into the wilderness or to other colonies, rebellions, slowdowns, strikes, mutinies, and suicide were overt manifestations of opposition to the physical abuse and unfair distribution of the wealth that most of these laborers endured. George Washington complained that for every bottle of good wine that he drank from his abundant cellar, his slaves stole five. Expressions of hostility toward socially imposed circumstances included depression, despair, violence, and self-loathing, all well known sentiments in any society of sharp inequities. More generalized cultural forms of resistance included music, humor, and a folklore of righteous confidence still identifiable among many groups of the working class. Many people adapted to their cultural circumstances by internalizing the codes and practices espoused by their masters, especially when there was any hope or opportunity to gain even a small benefit from doing so. Servants and workers sought to please employers and masters by emulating the values and practices they thought were desired. Often these were feigned, done

with a wink and a nod. Religion and English codes and laws pertaining to servants offered some protection from abuses. Servants, for example, had access to the courts, but other formal institutions and organizations awaited later development as no political power was in the hands of the propertyless in the seventeenth century.

That their property or labor was the source of the great wealth of their masters was not always apparent to those who gave up the land and did the work. Mythologies of entitlement that were enforced by social power and political legitimation took the place of obvious material realities. A sense of irreparable loss or intolerable physical harm was what initially drove workers to resistance, flight whenever that option was possible, rebellion, or suicidal despair. On the island of Hispaniola, almost immediately after the voyages of Columbus, the first significant slave revolt took place in 1519. Imported African slaves banded together with native Americans. This rebellion lasted more than a decade until Spanish authorities finally reconquered the island in the 1530s (Sale, 1990, p. 156). Harsh Spanish repression was accompanied by laws and codes designed to segregate and divide the loyalties of these dangerous allies in the future. In early colonial Virginia, New England, and Dutch New Amsterdam rebellions of native Americans were met with similar repression and massacres.

The Use of Force

Almost all of the work that formed the new wealth for Europeans was imposed by force. No people freely gave up their land, their labor, their gold or silver, or anything they treasured. Columbus expected tribute in gold or the consequence was death. The Taino people of Hispaniola who were completely destroyed by Columbus and his successors may have been the first genocide in the modern age, the age of national conquest. The price of modernity was paid for in gold and death. Every colonial enterprise of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the English in Ireland and North America, the Portuguese in Africa and India, the Spanish in Central and South America, the Dutch in Indonesia and Brazil, was carried out with military repression, terrifying brutality, and racial exploitation and slaughter.

Some cultural confusion led to bad trades and misunderstandings. The actual price paid by the agents of the Dutch West India Company for Manhattan Island may not have been \$24.00, but it was certainly a swindle no matter what trinkets were exchanged for it. It was a swindle since the people who lived on it did not share the same concept of private property as those with whom they traded. Once native Americans began to realize what was lost forever, they began to resist and suffered punitive and near or actual genocidal consequences. They were called "Indian givers" because, lacking the European sense of private property in land, they continued to trespass on what the newcomers claimed and defended with deadly force as their own. Those who were not destroyed in this process either found a way to assimilate into the dominant culture, died of European diseases, or moved into the unconquered territories beyond the reach of the intruders.

Slavery had no racial justification or definition in the Virginia and Maryland colonies at first. Africans, native Americans, and English servants shared a common bondage in the early years. Old World slavery carried on, following two existing traditions. One was the system of coercive codes and practices of European servitude that included whipping, branding, and other severe forms of corporal punishment. Master and servant behaviors had typically included servility and arrogance, grace and vulgarity, each dependent on the other. The other tradition was the mixture of ancient Roman and African codes regarding the ownership and treatment of slaves. Near the end of the Roman Empire, the emperor, Justinian, established a legal code for slavery. The code's most notable and enduring feature was its conferring on masters the power of life and death over their slaves. Slaves were the chattel or private property of their masters. What is equally important about Roman law from a modern point of view was its complete indifference to ethnic or racial characteristics of slaves. These codes had been modified by the actual Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch experiences in Africa, the Far East, and America. In the modern era racial slavery placed restrictions on just about every important aspect of life. Race and racial slavery was an innovation of the conquering nation-state. Once such a racial identification and division was made, as the English did first in Ireland, the Dutch in Indonesia, and the Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and Brazil, the treatment of servants and slaves was altered accordingly, with the worst punishments reserved for slaves, native Americans, Asians, the Irish, or Africans. Nonracially designated servants enjoyed specific legal rights denied to slaves. Torture and horrific punishments beyond the norm of accepted law have always been associated with race. A racially stratified culture of coercion, accommodation, and resistance formed patterns of relationships that shaped collective behaviors and the social psychology of all who were part of it.

Forming a New Culture

From the very beginning the colonial experience reshaped the cultural heritage of the newly arrived Europeans, their servants, and their slaves. Far removed from the feudal influences of Europe, the people who labored in the English colonies of North America were forced to adapt to their new habitat. In addition to what they brought along with them or learned from earlier colonial enterprises, the colonists also absorbed much from the people they destroyed and displaced. Native American agricultural practices were freely adopted, if their more casual work discipline was not. Crops were made of native corn, peas, squash, beans, pumpkins, and melons. New Englanders learned how to clear land, tap maple trees for syrup, fish, trap game, make bark-covered canoes, and use fish as fertilizer. Later, Americans successfully used the native American hit-and-run tactics of battle in their own war for independence against the English. On the frontiers where European newcomers shared an uneasy existence with native Americans, the working interaction between the two was even greater. Both wore the same kind of animal skins as clothing, the new settlers learned

to track and trail game from their neighbors, and they may even have borrowed some of their decision-making habits and powwows as early representative and democratic ways of governing themselves.

The need to improvise and adapt to harsh and remote rural circumstances led to clever methods of home manufactures, as American workers did remarkable things with simple tools and materials. Frontier people also enjoyed the liberties that distance from established authorities provided. When they exceeded the brutality and confiscation practices of the elites against native Americans, they were simply pushing the limits of established practice. Taxes were easily evaded on the frontier, but coastal merchants and businessmen did the same thing when it came to royal authorities and costly mercantile regulations. While the racial/national codes, laws, and mythologies were making the institutional and legal identities of the settlers, their cultural reality was shaped by interaction with the people they disdained, emulated, and destroyed. Fishing, farming, and hunting practices of native Americans were copied and adapted to European practices by the colonists. So were customs of preparing food, making clothing, warfare, and some social practices. In spite of the cultural borrowing and close, even intimate contact between the two groups, the legal domination of one over the other set up the emotional relationship. Racial contempt became the colonial standard whenever native Americans were legally displaced from the land. In another time white American racists would dance to and enjoy the music, artistic, and athletic contributions of descendants of slaves their forebears once dominated.

The resources in front of the newcomers were vast. It is difficult to imagine the magnificence of the American landscape as it appeared to the European settlers. The forest itself must have seemed a gold mine. Wood was used in shipbuilding, construction, and as the principal source of fuel for heating and making iron, glass, and copper. Early Dutch ships were deliberately designed for hauling lumber back to the Netherlands from their Hudson Valley colony of New Amsterdam. Fish and game seemed endlessly plentiful. The Hudson, James, Potomac, Delaware, and Charles rivers were safe harbor estuaries for tired ships.

Back home in Europe every river or creek had been accounted for, every hill and valley was under aristocratic or royal authority. All wildlife was subject to royal or aristocratic controls in the forests of England. None of these restrictions or prohibitions were found on the frontiers of colonial North America, or easily enforced in the settlements. After the whale was declared a Royal Fish and subject to tax in 1696, Long Island fishermen reported no more catches of whales for the remainder of the colonial era. No feudal aristocracy compelled obedience to inherited privileges in most of the colonies. Very little authority was imposed on settlers in frontier areas just a few miles from coastal settlements. The American class system that emerged in the colonies contained no rigidly fixed hereditary aristocracy, no titled nobility. There were, however, clear and frequently hostile clashes between back country farmers, (debtors) and the elite coastal authorities (creditors). If American labor and union organizations, when they formed later, became less class-conscious than their European counterparts, another reason is the historical absence of inherited and permanent class status. For the

conquerors and settlers the only missing part was an adequate stable labor force and a way of organizing it systematically to turn the region's raw potential into the kind of wealth that might bring them the power that would allow them to compete with their rivals. This vision of abundance and economic potential came to be shared by elites and commoners alike. The only people excluded from this vision of a land of opportunity were slaves and native Americans.

Trade and the Nation-State

Trade, the wealth made from obtaining goods in one place and carrying them someplace else to be sold for a profit, became the new way nations sought their fortunes by the middle of the seventeenth century. The greatest English monarch, Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603), launched several trading ventures, including exploratory openings to Ivan the Terrible's Russia and to Thomas Moore's Utopia in North America. Her successors, James I (r. 1603–25) and Charles I (r. 1625–49), helped launch the Virginia and New England colonies, but the European Thirty Years' War, the civil war in England, and the brutal Cromwellian conquest of Ireland postponed the development of a real systematic program for the American colonial project until the reign of Charles II (r. 1660–85). That political and economic system we now call mercantilism was constructed in his reign. It was a century-long era that served as the great nursery for the development of capitalism and the free markets that would follow. Slavery and indentured or bound labor were the standard in this highly controlled system. The gradual decline of the indenture system and the emergence of free labor, along with both the expansion and decline of slavery, took place after a century of mercantile enterprise.

Maturing Colonies in an Age of Trade, 1660–1760

The settlement of the English colonies was from the first an economic enterprise, a national business venture. That important worldly objective is sometimes obscured by the varied motives of so many of those who made the daring journey. Many thousands fled religious persecutions in Europe. It was a time of religious conflict, war, and intolerance. The concept of religious freedom gradually developed as the result of economic necessity, the pressing need for labor, not from moral enlightenment. The Thirty Years' War in Europe (1618–48) and civil strife in England slowed down the Atlantic migration until about 1660 and the coronation of a new king, Charles II. Then the English colonial enterprise got underway energetically with plantation crops of tobacco and rum driving the rest of the colonial economy in North America for the next century. England enlarged its empire through the East India Company's conquest of India during the same period. Liberty and slavery, servitude and freedom, poverty and prosperity were characteristics of this dynamic age. It was a highly

controlled economic greenhouse of commercial laws and regulations, enforcement practices, and national imperial policies aimed in the same direction: the increase in measurable national wealth in bullion made from profitable trade. It was the age that nurtured into existence the modern world system of industrial capitalism.

Racial Slavery Institutionalized

Almost all colonial labor in America came under one form of bondage or legal dependency, or started that way. Servants and slaves in the colonial world were the first propertyless nonfeudal working class. The great historian, Richard Hofstadter, estimated in his book, *America in 1750*, that half the population by that year had started out unfree. To the good fortune of many thousands who came later, the mortality rates had improved as better housing and more reliable food supplies allowed more indentured servants, convicts, and redemptioners the opportunity to survive their term of service, gain their independence, obtain some land, and enjoy the legal status of free persons who were entitled to the protection of the law. Slavery, on the other hand, according to Edmund S. Morgan's careful study, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, became a strictly racial institution by law during the 1660–1710 period. Now the labor force in North America became permanently divided by the authority of law, one sector—white, by law—the beneficiary of specific liberties and economic opportunities, the other—black and slave, by law—denied the same.

The laws that established slavery and freedom (really liberty, or rights under the law) in North America evolved side by side. Access to courts and the right to enter into legal agreements, including the right to transfer property, were among the emerging civil liberties granted to whites and not to black slaves. Native Americans became racially identified in the same way during this era as similar laws and hue differences were contrived to set them apart. Until the new racial laws were set up after 1660 native Americans were not thought of or described as “redmen.” Their so-called redness was actually the result of their use of red dye to color their skin, more an arbitrary assigning of distinction than a fixed reality. Of course, few “blacks” were actually black, and no “whites” were really white. Early English and Dutch settlers originally wrote descriptions of native Americans as tawny, as though they were Europeans who had endured more exposure to the sun and elements. Once color became incorporated in the definition of slaves and masters, color was also used in the racination of native Americans. Now everybody had a color, white, black, or red, by law.

In contrast, but by the force of similar laws, the Irish were made a colorless race in their own country. The Penal Laws were put into effect in Ireland after the Protestant Ascendancy restored the English monarchy after the Glorious Revolution of 1690. These new laws stripped the Irish Catholic population of legal and political rights in Ireland. The same kind of racially hostile sentiments and vicious characterizations of these behaviors prompted the historian, James Muldoon, to write an essay entitled “The Indian as Irishman.” The Irish only became “white” under the laws of the

United States when they became citizens after immigrating in large numbers during the nineteenth century.

As mortality rates in the English southern colonies in America fell, the impermanence of a labor force based on indentured servants and slaves gradually gave way to one dominated by slavery. Indentured servants became a greater expense and were a less reliable labor force than slaves in a plantation economy. Servants, in the closing period of their obligation, were never as productive as in the first phase of service, and they were not always easy to replace, train, or trust. In a strictly plantation environment, as in the European sugar- and rum-producing colonies in the Caribbean, slavery almost completely displaced other forms of labor. In spite of its obvious contradictory moral and religious aspects, slavery was reliable, stable, and profitable. It was in these Caribbean colonies that the racial legal codes, a legal division of labor among slaves and nonslaves was formed, then, gradually after 1660, transferred to the English continental colonies. These codes established the ownership of children born to slave women as the property of masters, regardless of the status of the father. Such codes reversed the traditional English right of paternity.

Mercantilism and Labor

It was during this same period (1660–90) that the laws and enforcement practices governing trade were also established that earned the era its name, mercantilism. Laws and restrictions were carried out by special vice-admiralty courts and customs officials. The laws sought to benefit English merchants by directing imports from rival national trading systems through English shippers, and to increase the trade in English manufactured goods in the colonies. Trading companies were granted monopolies, patents, and specified rights to markets under legal protection. Colonial raw materials were to travel first in English vessels, and goods intended for the colonies had to travel the same way, with legally specified exceptions or exemptions.

The trade in slaves was itself one of the most profitable enterprises of the British Empire, especially after 1714, when the Spanish were forced by treaty to turn over monopolistic control (the *Assiento*). Thomas Jefferson actually blamed the profitability of this trade for promoting the expansion of the deplorable institution of slavery in the American colonies in his initial draft of the Declaration of Independence. Only the political concern for winning the approval of southern planters and New England slave traders for the document convinced him to edit out the phrase that blamed the greed of the king for the slave trade:

He [King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This warfare, the opprobrium in INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market

where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce.

Each colony likewise established laws and brought forth court decisions governing internal practices. The colonies imitated English laws that set maximum wages for labor, set prices, and restricted competition to protect fledgling enterprises. But these laws were not always followed. The chronic labor shortage in the colonies contributed to much higher wages for workers in comparison to English or European rates. As early as 1636, one frustrated employer complained that continuing high wages would turn masters into servants and servants into masters. In 1666 a New Englander wrote that "Help is scarce and hard to get, difficult to please, uncertaine, etc." In Pennsylvania one observer noted that workers "can here get three times the wages for their Labour they can in England." A report in 1694 stated that "labour costs but one sixth of the price (in Sweden and Denmark) as it does in New England" (quoted in Morris, 1965, pp. 46–47). The need for skilled workmen in the colonies and local communities prompted many of them to offer incentives. Tax exemptions for a specified number of years, exemption from labor on roads and military training, special land grants and leases, and even subsidies and bounties were offered to attract artisans.

While slave labor is most commonly associated with plantation crops and agricultural labor, slaves were also employed along with indentured servants and free laborers in every craft and form of manufacturing of the colonial era as well. Enterprising landowners in all of the English colonies soon discovered the value gained from developing and diversifying the skills of all of their laborers. Labor was varied and diverse in every colony. So was the pattern of free, slave, and native American labor.

By 1708 the total population of colonial South Carolina, for example, was counted as 9,580, of whom about 1,400 were native American men, women, and children. Of the 4,080 nonslave white population, only about 120 were under indentures at the time. The remaining whites included 1,320 free men, 900 free women, and 1,740 children. Black slaves, most of whom were employed in agricultural pursuits, comprised a population of 4,100, of whom 1,800 were men, 1,100 women, and 1,200 children (W. B. Smith, 1961, p. 128). By the end of the colonial era, the files of the *South Carolina Gazette* tell us that slaves there were trained in and practicing at least twenty-eight different crafts. Of seven different kinds of slave woodworkers there were sawyers, squares (the paper doesn't tell us what these were), coopers, house carpenters or shipwrights, cabinet makers, and wheelwrights. Leatherworkers included tanners, curriers, and shoemakers. Similar specialization of slave labor was noted among cloth workers, in the building trades, and there was at least one slave silversmith. Slaves also worked as navigators, boatmen, and pilots. Many masters found it more profitable to hire out their skilled slaves than to employ them themselves. There seem to be few, if any occupations, from which the skills of slave laborers were completely excluded. Racism and slavery went together, but job discrimination was not yet part of the picture.

The Idea of Liberty

The ethnic, cultural, and religious distribution of the population also varied. Predominantly Protestant, though Maryland was founded as a religious sanctuary for Catholics, colonists were divided into a multiplicity of sectarian groups and ethnic or cultural factions. Several colonies were identified with specific religions, though only a few maintained a majority religion for very long. The Catholic influence remained strong in Maryland long after Catholics became a minority of the population, a development that took place in less than one generation after the founding of the colony. Ownership of land and control of economic resources led to political power and social prestige, not simple numbers. Consequently, though numerical minorities, Catholics dominated Maryland and Quakers dominated Pennsylvania.

The plurality of religious groups and the varied ethnicity of immigrants meant that no single faith or cultural heritage gained a majority in any of the colonies. The common fear of a religion established by a majority played more of a part in religious toleration than fondness for the more abstract concept of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Pennsylvania was established as a proprietary colony after 1681 by William Penn, a member and proponent of the small, but the influential sectarian group, the Society of Friends (more commonly known as Quakers). Penn favored the idea of religious liberty and was rewarded for his progressive views with the economic growth of his colony in spite of his otherwise poor business skills. Immigrants flocked to his and other American colonies for both the religious liberty and economic opportunity that was unavailable in most of Europe. That dual promise continued to fuel the hopes of immigrants to the United States throughout its subsequent history, with religious rights enlarged to include their secular counterpart, political liberty. That uninterrupted and unrestricted flow of (white) newcomers, until the exclusion of Chinese in 1882 and controls and ethnic origins quotas imposed on immigrants after World War I, is often noted as another explanation for the absence of the same kind of class and political consciousness among American workers as found among their counterparts elsewhere.

Newcomers usually accepted the practices of the nation that welcomed them with less criticism than the one they had fled. They worked under laws that held them as temporarily inferior politically to established citizens in exchange for the promise of a better future. Grateful for their newfound economic opportunities and the promise of civil liberties, immigrants gave their loyalties to the governmental and social authorities which granted them, in marked contrast to the denial of the same in the places from which they came. As newcomers they had to adapt their own personal and cultural habits, languages, and customs to the new society. As long as immigrants were hopeful about their newly adopted future they accepted the loss of old ways and took on those of the already existing Americans. Recent arrivals were also more vulnerable than citizens and worked for less, and their plentiful availability served as a brake on the demands of established labor groups. More than in any nation, except perhaps Canada, the labor force of the United States has been shaped and changed

by the regular flow of a diverse pattern of new immigrants from every corner of the world to its ranks.

Culture

In spite of the increasing secularism and practicality of everyday life, religion played a powerful part in shaping the cultural world and emotional responses of the people to the possibilities within it. Religion was a dynamic cultural glue that bound family, community, and society together. In the colonial era the direct power over everyday life and labor held by religious authorities, most notably in the New England colonies, gradually gave way to the legal power of the state and its civil authorities.

The fastest-growing profession in the colonies was the law. Practical skills, science, and invention were distinguishing features of the era, known philosophically as an age of reason (in contrast to faith), and scientifically as one of Enlightenment (in contrast to ignorance). Nonetheless, religious influences held the loyalties of most of the population and unfailingly sustained the prevailing property and power relationships. Insofar as religious institutional influences played an important part in shaping the limits of the public imagination and the popular consciousness of power relationships from the colonial period to the present, they have played a conservative role throughout in spite of the benevolent and often radical work of humanitarian individuals in matters of justice and compassion. Labor could not form itself as an independent social entity separated from the religious institutions of the colonial age.

Each class and population segment found a religious denomination with the emotional, intellectual, and inspirational features that best served its interests. Frontier and libertarian sentiments helped extend the Great Awakening, a populist and universalist religious revival of the 1730s–40s that challenged most traditional Protestant sectarian groups, and led to new splits and divisions among them. In spite of the multitude of sects and groupings found among this vast array of immigrant, frontier, and ethnically diverse people, the most dominant religious influences came from the owners of property and leaders of this undemocratic society. It was the religious beliefs of such leaders that shaped the prevailing attitudes on work, law and government, race and patriarchy. Servants, slaves, laborers, and women expected the reward for their obedient service to be found in the pleasure it brought to their masters and their god, or in their afterlife. Few received much in this one.

Labor and Society

In every colony domestic institutions, including colonial assemblies, courts, churches, schools, and militias, soon claimed the loyalties of most of the population. Craft associations were few. England eventually restricted the migration of skilled artisans, and the colonial manufacture of a variety of goods, including specified woolens (1699),

hats (1732), and iron (1750). Men and women in farm families took responsibility for the various household crafts, including soap and candle making, weaving, and carpentry. Fishermen and farmers built their own homes, and fashioned many of their own tools and implements. Women made clothing, preserved and prepared food, nurtured and raised large families. The relative absence of established artisans outside of the large settlements made for a simpler, even crude level of household refinement long into the American national experience. Whiskey and beer drinking among Americans, for example, was more common than wine consumption until the last decades of the twentieth century. Available free or inexpensive land was another disincentive for the growth of a large or organized artisan population.

Most artisans worked alone, traveling from place to place in the early colonial years. Many had varied skills, and could repair or make many things. Little hard currency was found in frontier regions and barter was common. Fish, tobacco, and grain were among many items traded for other goods or services. As settlements grew, and craftsmen could sustain themselves in one place, artisans or mechanics opened workshops in the larger towns and cities, took in apprentices, offered their services, and sold their wares. Craft shops, mills, and foundries were mostly small until the end of the colonial period, with masters working alongside apprentices and a few journeymen employees. Masters expected large fees for taking in apprentices, who worked for their food and shelter from about age fourteen to twenty-one while they learned the “secrets” of the trade or craft.

The products of colonial craftsmen eventually came to meet the highest standards of their European counterparts, especially in metalworking, furniture building, printing, shipbuilding, and construction. Profits were good and wages high for these skilled craftsmen compared to the European standard of the time, and abundant land and game provided inexpensive and plentiful food supplies. Products like iron, made in colonial foundries, gained an advantage in competition with iron made in Europe because of the inexpensive fuel that was provided by the vast forests of America. Finally, in 1750, the British passed an Iron Act to protect their domestic makers from cheaper colonial imports.

There were no unions, though various clubs, societies, and fraternal orders sprang up in the more prosperous decades of the later 1700s. Most of these associations professed an interest in promoting benevolent activities or the advancement of knowledge in their pursuits. For the most part they were social organizations or “friendly societies,” and met in the homes of their members or in local taverns. Strikes or turnouts were more like family disputes or arguments over specific issues. Sometimes they could be quite intense, even violent. But they were more likely to be treated as local personal quarrels without larger significance or connection to other disputes. Examples of work stoppages are found throughout the colonial period, beginning with a strike of Maine fishermen in 1636. An English court decision in 1731 held that strikers could be prosecuted for criminal conspiracy, though such cases were extremely rare in the American colonies. Labor conflict took on other forms as well as the strike.