5
THE CHANGING WORLD OF COLONIAL AMERICA
1700–1770

This chapter explores the development of New England, the middle colonies, and the southern colonies between 1700 and 1770. It examines the factors that resulted in regional differences, as well as the common experiences, assumptions, and attitudes that contributed to a growing sense of unity among the colonists. These unifying trends helped prepare the foundation for what would become the United States of America in 1776.

DID YOU KNOW?
In 1776, Philadelphia was the largest city in the British empire except London.


> How and why did British North America change in the eighteenth century?
> What changed in New England life and culture?
> How were the middle colonies distinctive?
> How did slavery become the defining feature of the southern colonies?
> What were the unifying experiences for British American colonists?
> Conclusion: What was the dual identity of British North American colonists?
The most important fact about eighteenth-century British America is its phenomenal population growth. In 1700, colonists numbered about 250,000; by 1770, they tallied well over 2 million. An index of the emerging significance of colonial North America is that in 1700, there were nineteen people in England for every American colonist; by 1770, there were only three. The eightfold growth of the colonial population signaled the maturation of a distinctive colonial society. That society was by no means homogeneous. Colonists of different ethnic groups, races, and religions lived in varied environments under thirteen different colonial governments, all of them part of the British empire.

In general, the growth and diversity of the eighteenth-century colonial population derived from two sources: migration and natural increase (growth through reproduction). Natural increase contributed about three-fourths of the population growth, immigration about one-fourth. Immigration shifted the ethnic and racial balance among the colonists, making them by 1770 less English and less white than ever before. In 1700, more than 9 out of 10 colonists were of English ancestry, and only 1 out of 25 was of African ancestry. By 1770, only about half of the colonists were of English descent, while more than 20 percent descended from Africans. Thus, by 1770, the people of the colonies had a distinctive colonial—rather than English—profile (Map 5.1).

The booming population of the colonies hints at a second major feature of eighteenth-century colonial society: an expanding economy. In 1700, after almost a century of settlement, nearly all the colonists lived within fifty miles of the Atlantic coast. The almost limitless wilderness stretching westward made land relatively cheap. Land in the colonies commonly sold for a fraction of its price in the Old World. The abundance of land in the colonies made labor precious, and the colonists always needed more. The insatiable demand for labor was the fundamental economic environment that sustained the mushrooming population. Economic historians estimate that free colonists (those who were not indentured servants or slaves) had a higher standard of living than the majority of people elsewhere in the Atlantic world. The unique achievement of the eighteenth-century colonial economy was this modest economic welfare of the vast bulk of the free population.

How and why did British North America change in the eighteenth century?
What changed in New England life and culture?

The New England population grew significantly during the eighteenth century but lagged behind the growth in the other colonies. Most immigrants chose other destinations because of New England’s relatively densely settled land and because Puritan orthodoxy made these colonies comparatively inhospitable to religious dissenters and those indifferent to religion. As the population grew, many settlers in search of farmland dispersed from towns, and Puritan communities lost much of their cohesion. Nonetheless, networks of economic exchange linked New Englanders to their neighbors, to Boston merchants, and to the broad currents of Atlantic commerce.

Natural Increase and Land Distribution

The New England population grew mostly by natural increase, much as it had during the seventeenth century. Nearly every adult woman married. Most married women had children—often many children, thanks to the relatively low mortality rate in New England. The prospects of childbirth gave wives a shorter life expectancy than husbands, but wives often lived to have six, seven, or eight babies.

Powerful Native Americans, especially the Iroquois and Mahican tribes, jealously guarded their territory. The French (and Catholic) colony of New France also meant the British (and mostly Protestant) New England colonies when provoked by colonial or European disputes.

During the seventeenth century, New England towns parceled out land to individual families. In most cases, the original settlers practiced partible inheritance—that is, they subdivided land more or less equally among sons. By the eighteenth century, repeated subdivisions had left many plots of land too small to support a family. Sons who could not hope to inherit sufficient land to farm had to move away from the town where they were born.

During the eighteenth century, colonial governments in New England abandoned the seventeenth-century policy of granting land to towns. Needing revenue, the governments of both Connecticut and Massachusetts sold land directly to individuals, including speculators. Now money, rather than membership in a community bound by a church covenant, determined whether a person could obtain land. The new land policy ended the seventeenth-century pattern of settlement. As colonists moved, they tended to settle on individual farms rather than in the towns and villages that characterized the seventeenth century. New Englanders still depended on their relatives and neighbors, but far more than in the seventeenth century, they regulated their behavior in newly settled areas by their own individual choices.

Farms, Fish, and Atlantic Trade

New England farmers grew food for their families, but their fields did not produce huge marketable surpluses. Instead of one big crop, a farmer grew many small ones. If farmers had extra, they sold them to or traded with neighbors. By 1770, New Englanders had only one-fourth as much wealth per capita as free colonists in the southern colonies. As consumers, New England farmers participated in a diversified commercial economy that linked remote farms to markets throughout the Atlantic world. Merchants large and small stocked imported goods—British textiles, ceramics, and metal goods; Chinese tea; West Indian sugar; and Chesapeake tobacco. Farmers’ needs supported local shoemakers, tailors, wheelwrights, and carpenters. Larger towns, especially Boston, housed skilled craftsmen such as cabinetmakers, silversmiths, and printers. Shipbuilders tended to do better than other artisans because they served the most dynamic sector of the New England economy.

Many New Englanders made their fortunes at sea, as they had since the seventeenth century. Fish accounted for more than a third of New England’s eighteenth-century exports; livestock and timber made up another third. The West Indies absorbed two-thirds of all of New England’s exports. Slaves on Caribbean sugar plantations ate dried, salted codfish caught by New England fishermen, filled barrels crafted from New England timber with molasses and refined sugar, and loaded those barrels aboard ships bound ultimately for Europe.

What happened in New England life and culture?

How and why did British North America change in the eighteenth century?

How were the middle colonies distinctive?

How did slavery become the defining feature of the southern colonies?

What were the conflicting experiences for British American colonists?

Conclusion: What was the dual identity of British North American colonists?
Almost all of the rest of New England’s exports went to Britain and continental Europe (Map 5.2). This Atlantic commerce benefited the entire New England economy, providing jobs for laborers and tradesmen as well as for ship captains, clerks, merchants, and sailors.

Merchants dominated Atlantic commerce. The largest and most successful New England merchants lived in Boston at the hub of trade between local folk and the international market. Merchants not only bought and sold goods, but they also owned and insured the ships that carried merchandise throughout the Atlantic world. Shrewd, diligent, and lucky merchants could make fortunes. The luxurious homes of such men were an indication of the polarization of wealth that developed in Boston and other seaports during the eighteenth century. By 1770, the richest 5 percent of Bostonians owned about half the city’s wealth, the poorest two-thirds of the population owned less than one-tenth.

While the rich got richer and everybody else had a smaller share of the total wealth, the incidence of genuine poverty did not change much. About 5 percent of New Englanders qualified for poor relief throughout the eighteenth century. Over-all, colonists were better off than most people in England. A Connecticut traveler wrote from England in 1764, “We in New England know nothing of poverty and want, we have no idea of the thing, how much better do our poor people live than 7/8 of the people on this much famed island.”

The contrast with English poverty had meaning because the overwhelming majority of New Englanders traced their ancestry to England. New England was more homogeneously English than any other colonial region. People of African ancestry (almost all of them slaves) numbered more than fifteen thousand by 1770, but they barely diversified the region’s 97 percent white majority. In the Narragansett region of Rhode Island, large landowners imported numerous slaves to raise livestock. But most New Englanders had little use for slaves on their family farms. Instead, slaves were concentrated in towns, especially Boston, where most of them worked as domestic servants and laborers.

By 1770, the population, wealth, and commercial activity of New England differed from what they had been in 1700. Ministers still enjoyed high status, but Yankee traders had replaced Puritan saints as the symbolic New Englanders. Atlantic commerce competed with religious convictions in ordering New Englanders’ daily lives.

**QUICK REVIEW**

How and why did New England society change in the eighteenth century?
Distinctive? The Changing World of Colonial

CHAPTER 5

Pennsylvania

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

This view of the small community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1757 dramatizes the profound transformation of the natural landscape wrought in the eighteenth century by highly motivated human labor. By carefully penning their livestock (lower center right) and fencing their fields (lower left), farmers safeguarded their livelihoods from the risks and disorders of untrammeled nature. Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

FOR MORE HELP ANALYZING THIS IMAGE, see the visual activity for this chapter in the Online Study Guide at bedfordsmartwriks.com/markunderstanding.

How were the middle colonies distinctive?

IN 1700, almost twice as many people lived in New England as in the middle colonies of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware. But by 1770, the population of the middle colonies had multiplied tenfold, mainly from an influx of German, Irish, Scottish, and other immigrants. Immigrants made the middle colonies a uniquely diverse society. By 1800, barely one-third of Pennsylvanians and less than half the total population of the middle colonies traced their ancestry to England.

German and Scots-Irish Immigrants

Germans made up the largest contingent of migrants from the European continent to the middle colonies. By 1770, about 85,000 Germans had arrived in the colonies. Most German immigrants came from what is now southwestern Germany, where, one observer noted, peasants were “not as well off as cattle elsewhere.” German immigrants included numerous artisans and a few farmers, but the great majority were farmers and laborers. Economically, they represented “middling folk,” neither the poorest (who could not afford the trip) nor the better-off (who did not want to leave). By the 1720s, Germans who had established themselves in the colonies wrote back to their friends and relatives, as one reported, “of the civil and religious liberties [and] privileges, and of all the goodness I have heard and seen.” Such letters prompted still more Germans to pull up stakes and embark for America.

Similar motives propelled the Scots-Irish, who considered outnumbered German immigrants. The “Scots-Irish” actually hailed from northern Ireland, Scotland, and northern England. Like the Germans, the Scots-Irish were Protestants, but with a difference. Most German immigrants worshipped in Lutheran or German Reformed churches; many others belonged to dissenting sects such as the Mennonites, Moravians, and Amish, whose adherents sought relief from the persecution they had suffered in Europe for their refusal to bear arms and to swear oaths, practices they shared with the Quakers. In contrast, the Scots-Irish tended to be militant Presbyterians who seldom hesitated to bear arms or swear oaths. Like German settlers, however, Scots-Irish immigrants were dauntless, residing when they could among relatives or neighbors from the old country.

In the eighteenth century, wave after wave of Scots-Irish immigrants arrived, culminating in a flood of immigration in the years just before the American Revolution. Deteriorating economic conditions in northern Ireland, Scotland, and England pushed many toward America. Most of the immigrants were farm laborers or tenant farmers fleeing droughts, crop failures, high food prices, or rising rents. They came, they told inquisitive British officials, because of “poverty,” “tyranny of landlords,” and their desire to “do better in America.”

Ship captains, aware of the hunger for labor in the colonies, eagerly signed up poor emigrants as redemptioners, a variant of indentured servants. A captain would agree to provide transportation to Philadelphia, where redemptioners would obtain the money to pay for their passage by borrowing it from a friend or relative who was already in the colonies or by selling themselves as servants. Many German families came to Pennsylvania as redemptioners in the eighteenth century.
relative who was already in the colonies or, as most did, by selling themselves as servants. Many redemptioners traveled in family groups, unlike impoverished Scots-Irish emigrants, who usually traveled alone and paid for their passage by contracting as indentured servants before they sailed to the colonies.

Redemptioners and indentured servants were packed aboard ships “as closely as herring,” one migrant observed. Seasickness compounded by exhaustion, poverty, poor food, bad water, inadequate sanitation, and tight quarters encouraged the spread of disease. When one ship finally approached land, a traveler wrote, “everyone crawls from below to the deck . . . and people cry for joy, pray, and sing praises and thanks to God.” Unfortunately, their troubles were far from over. Redemptioners and indentured servants had to stay on board until somebody came to purchase their labor. Unlike indentured servants, redemptioners negotiated independently with their purchasers about their period of servitude. Typically, a healthy adult redemptioner agreed to four years of labor. Indentured servants commonly served five, six, or seven years.


New settlers, whether free or in servitude, poured into the middle colonies because they perceived unparalleled opportunities, particularly in Pennsylvania, “the best poor Man’s Country in the World,” as an indentured servant wrote in 1743. Although the servant reported that “the Condition of bought Servants is very hard” and masters often failed to live up to their promise to provide decent food and clothing, opportunity abounded because there was more work to be done than workers to do it.

Most servants toiled in Philadelphia, New York City, or one of the smaller towns or villages. From the masters’ viewpoint, servants were a bargain. A master could purchase five or six years of a servant’s labor for approximately the wages a common laborer would earn in four months. Wage-workers could walk away from their jobs when they pleased, and they did so often enough to be troublesome for employers. Servants, however, could not walk away; they were legally bound to work for their masters until their terms expired.

Since a slave cost at least three times as much as a servant, only affluent colonists could afford the long-term investment in slave labor. Most farmers in the middle colonies used family labor, not slaves. Wheat, the most widely grown crop, did not require more labor than farmers could typically muster from relatives, neighbors, and a hired hand or two. Consequently, although people of African ancestry (almost all slaves) increased to more than thirty thousand in the middle colonies by 1770, they accounted for only about 7 percent of the total population and much less outside the cities.

Most slaves came to the middle colonies and New England after a stopover in the West Indies. Very few came directly from Africa. Enough slaves arrived to prompt colonial assemblies to pass laws that punished slaves much more severely than servants for the same transgressions. But in cases of abuse, servants—unlike slaves—could charge masters with violating the terms of their indenture contracts. Small numbers of slaves managed to obtain their freedom.
just beyond already improved farms. By midcentury, settlement had reached the eastern slopes of the Appalachian Mountains, and newcomers spilled south down the fertile valley of the Shenandoah River into western Virginia and the Carolinas.

Farmers made the middle colonies the breadbasket of North America. They planted a wide variety of crops to feed their families, but they grew wheat in abundance. Flour milling was the number one industry and flour the number one export, constituting nearly three-fourths of all exports from the middle colonies. For farmers, the grain market in the Atlantic world proved risky but profitable, as grain prices rose steadily after 1720.

The standard of living in rural Pennsylvania was probably higher than in any other agricultural region of the eighteenth-century world. The comparatively widespread prosperity of all the middle colonies allowed the region’s per capita consumption of imported goods from Britain to more than double between 1720 and 1770, far outstripping the per capita consumption of British goods in New England and the southern colonies.

At the crossroads of trade in wheat exports and British imports stood Philadelphia. By 1776, Philadelphia had a larger population than any other city in the entire British empire except London. Merchants occupied the top stratum of Philadelphia society. In a city where only 2 percent of the residents owned enough property to qualify to vote, merchants built grand homes and dominated local government. Many of Philadelphia’s wealthiest merchants were Quakers, whose traits of industry, thrift, honesty, and sobriety encouraged the accumulation of wealth.

In 1733, Benjamin Franklin began to publish Poor Richard’s Almanack, which advocated hard work, discipline, and thrift. He was also a devotee, believing that God’s work was reflected in science and nature.
the southern colonies in 1700 but inched upward to 19 percent by 1770. South Carolina was the sole British colony along the southern Atlantic coast until 1732, when Georgia was founded. (North Carolina, founded in 1712, was largely an extension of the Chesapeake region.) Blacks in South Carolina, in contrast to every other British mainland colony, outnumbered whites almost two to one; in some low-country districts, the ratio of blacks to whites exceeded ten to one.

The enormous growth in the South’s slave population occurred through natural increase and the flourishing Atlantic slave trade (Map 5.3 and Table 5.1). Slave ships brought almost 300,000 Africans to British North America between 1619 and 1780. Of these Africans, 95 percent arrived in the South, and 96 percent arrived during the eighteenth century. Most of them had been born into free families in villages located within a few hundred miles of the West African coast.

Although they shared African origins, they came from many different African cultures, including Akan, Angolan, Asante, Bambara, Gambian, Igbo, and Mandinga, among others. They spoke different languages, worshipped different deities, observed different rules of kinship, grew different crops, and recognized different rulers. The most important experience they had in common was enslavement. Captured in war, kidnapped, or sold into slavery by other Africans, they were brought to the coast, sold to African traders who assembled slaves for resale, and sold again to European or colonial slave traders or ship captains, who packed two hundred to three hundred or more aboard ships that carried him on the Middle Passage across the Atlantic and then sold them yet again to colonial slave merchants or southern planters.

Olaudah Equiano published an account of his enslavement that hints at the stories that might have been told by the millions of other Africans swept up in the slave trade. Equiano wrote that he was born in 1745 in the interior of what is now Nigeria. “I had never heard of white men or Europeans, nor of the sea,” he recalled. One day when he was eleven years old, he was kidnapped by Africans, who sold him to other Africans, who in turn eventually sold him to a slave ship on the coast. Equiano feared that he was “going to be killed” and “eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair.” Once the ship set sail, many of the slaves, crowded together in squalid, filthy conditions, died from sickness. “The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable,” Equiano recalled. Most of the slaves on the ship were sold in Barbados, but Equiano and a few others were shipped off to Virginia, where he “saw few or none of our native Africans and not one soul who could talk to me.” Equiano felt isolated and “exceedingly miserable” because he “had no person to speak to that I could understand.” Finally, the captain of a tobacco ship bound for England purchased Equiano, and he traveled as a slave between North America, England, and the West Indies for ten years until he succeeded in buying his freedom in 1766.

About 85 percent of the slaves brought into the southern colonies came directly from Africa, and almost all the ships that brought them (roughly 90 percent) belonged to British merchants. Most of the slaves on board were young adults, with men usually outnumbering women two to one. Children under the age of fourteen, like Equiano, typically accounted for no more than 10 to 15 percent of a cargo.

The Deadly Middle Passage

Eighty-five percent of slaves brought into the southern colonies came directly from Africa.

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How did slavery become the defining feature of the southern colonies?

What were the unifying experiences for British American colonists?

Conclusion: What was the dual identity of British North American colonists?

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| Estimated Slave Imports to the Western Hemisphere |
|---|---|
| 1451–1600 | 275,000 |
| 1601–1700 | 1,341,000 |
| 1701–1810 | 6,100,000 |
| 1811–1870 | 19,000,000 |

TABLE 5.1 Slave Imports, 1451–1870 |

MAP 5.3 The Atlantic Slave Trade

Although the Atlantic slave trade lasted from about 1450 to 1870, it peaked during the eighteenth century, when more than six million African slaves were imported to the New World. Only a small fraction of these slaves were taken to British North America. Most went to sugar plantations in Brazil and the Caribbean.
Normally, an individual planter purchased at any one time a relatively small number of newly arrived Africans, or new Negroes, as they were called. New Negroes were often profoundly depressed, demoralized, and disoriented. Planters expected their other slaves—either those born into slavery in the colonies (often called country-born or creole slaves) or Africans who had arrived earlier—to help new Negroes become accustomed to their strange new surroundings. Planters’ preferences for slaves from specific regions of Africa aided slaves’ acculturation (or seasoning, as it was called) to the routines of bondage in the southern colonies. Chesapeake planters preferred slaves from the central African Congo and Angola regions, the origin of about 40 percent of the African slaves they imported (see Map 5.3, page 124). Although slaves within each of these regions spoke many different languages, enough linguis- tic and cultural similarities existed that they could usually communicate with other Africans from the same region.

Seasoning acclimated new Africans to the physical as well as the cultural environment of the southern colonies. Slaves who had just endured the Middle Passage were poorly nourished, weak, and sick. In this vulnerable state, they encountered the alien diseases of North America without having acquired immunities. As many as 10 to 15 percent of newly arrived Africans, sometimes more, died during their first year in the southern colonies. Nonetheless, the large number of newly enslaved Africans made the influence of African culture in the South stronger in the eighteenth century than ever before—or since.

While newly enslaved Africans poured into the southern colonies, slave moth- ers bore children, which caused the slave population in the South to grow rapidly. Slave owners encouraged these births. The growing number of slave babies set the southern colonies apart from other New World slave societies, where mortality rates were so high that deaths exceeded births. The high rate of natural increase in the southern colonies meant that by the 1740s, the majority of southern slaves were country-born.

**Slave Labor and African American Culture**

Southern planters expected slaves to work from sunup to sundown and beyond. George Washington wrote that his slaves should “be at their work as soon as it is light, work til it is dark, and be diligent while they are at it.” The conflict between the masters’ desire for maximum labor and the slaves’ reluctance to do more than necessary made the threat of physical punishment a constant for eigh- teenth-century slaves. Masters preferred black slaves to white indentured ser- vants, not just because slaves served for life but also because colonial laws did not limit the force masters could use against slaves. As a traveler observed in 1740, slaves resisted their masters’ demands because of their “greatness of soul”—their stubborn unwillingness to conform to their masters’ definition of them as merely slaves.

Some slaves escalated their acts of resistance to direct physical confrontation with the master, the mistress, or an overseer. But a hoe raised in anger, a punch in the face, or a desperate swipe with a knife led to swift and predictable retaliation by whites. Throughout the southern colonies, the balance of physical power rested securely in the hands of whites.

Rebellion occurred, however, at Stono, South Carolina, in 1739. Before dawn on a September Sunday, a group of about twenty slaves attacked a country store, killed the two storekeepers, and confiscated the store’s guns, ammunition, and powder. Enticing other slaves to join, the group plundered and burned more than half a dozen plantations and killed more than twenty white men, women, and children. A mounted force of whites quickly suppressed the rebellion. They placed the rebels’ heads atop milestones along the road, grim reminders of the consequences of rebellion. The *Stono rebellion* illustrated that eighteenth- century slaves had no chance of overturning slavery and very little chance of defending themselves in any bold strike for freedom. After the rebellion, South Carolina legislators enacted repressive laws designed to guarantee that whites would always have the upper hand. No other similar uprisings occurred during the colonial period.

Slaves never stopped constantly to protect themselves and to gain a measure of autonomy within the boundaries of slavery. In Chesapeake tobacco fields, most slaves were subject to close supervision by whites. In the lower South, the task system gave slaves some control over the pace of their work and some discretion in the use of the rest of their time. A “task” was typically defined as a certain area of ground to be cultured or a specific job to be completed. A slave who completed the assigned task might use the remainder of the day, if any, to work in a garden, fish, hunt, spin, weave, sew, or cook. When masters sought to boost productivity by increasing tasks, slaves did what they could to defend their customary work assignments.

Eighth-century slaves also planted the roots of African American lineages that branch out to the present. Slaves expressed their humanity through the value they placed on family ties, and, as in West African societies, kinship structured slaves’ relations with one another. Slave parents often gave a child the name of a grandparent, an aunt, or an uncle. In West Africa, kinship identified a person’s place among living relatives and linked the person to ancestors in the past and to descendants in the future. Newly imported African slaves usually arrived alone, like Equiano, without kin. Often slaves who arrived from Africa on the same ship adopted one another as “brothers” and “sisters.” Likewise, as new Negroes were seasoned and incorporated into existing slave communities, established families often adopted them as fictive kin.

When possible, slaves expressed many other features of their West African origins in their lives on New World plantations. They gave their children traditional African names and some African customs, such as dress and personal adornments; they gave birth to children by their own authority; they preserved traditional religious practices, African languages, and customs. Such practices, which allowed slaves to preserve some aspects of their African heritage, flourished in the southern colonies. Some slaves adapted these practices to the Caribbean, while others continued to practice them in the American South. The practice of slavery was not only harmful but sometimes also the source of innovation and resistance among African Americans in the eighteenth century.
Tobacco, Rice, and Prosperity

Slaves’ labor bestowed prosperity on their masters, British merchants, and the monarchy. The southern colonies supplied 90 percent of all North American exports to Britain. Rice exports from the lower South exploded from less than half a million pounds in 1700 to eighty million pounds in 1770, nearly all of it grown by slaves. Exports of indigo also boomed. Tobacco was by far the most important export from British North America. By 1770, it represented almost one-third of all colonial exports and three-fourths of all Chesapeake exports. Under the provisions of the Navigation Acts (see chapter 4), nearly all of it went to Britain, where the monarchy collected a lucrative tax on each pound. British merchants then pocketed a nice markup for their troubles.

These products of slave labor made the southern colonies by far the richest in North America. The per capita wealth of free whites in the South was four times greater than that in New England and three times that in the middle colonies. At the top of the wealth pyramid stood the rice grandees of the lower South and the tobacco gentry of the Chesapeake. The vast differences in wealth among white southerners engendered envy and occasional tension between rich and poor, but remarkably little open hostility. Although racial slavery made a few whites much richer than others, it also gave those who did not get rich a powerful reason to feel similar (in race) to those who were so different (in wealth).

The slaveholding gentry dominated the politics and economy of the southern colonies. Property requirements prevented about 40 percent of white men in Virginia from voting for representatives to the House of Burgesses. In South Carolina, the property requirement was lower, and therefore most adult white men qualified to vote. In both colonies, voters elected members of the gentry to serve in the colonial legislature. The gentry passed political offices from generation to generation, building a self-perpetuating oligarchy—rule by the elite few—with the votes of their many humble neighbors.

The gentry also set the cultural standard in the southern colonies. They entertained lavishly, gambled regularly, and attended Anglican (Church of England) services more for social than for religious reasons. Above all, they entertained lavishly, gambled regularly, and attended Anglican (Church of England) services more for social than for religious reasons. Above all, they entertained lavishly, gambled regularly, and attended Anglican (Church of England) services more for social than for religious reasons. Above all, they entertained lavishly, gambled regularly, and attended Anglican (Church of England) services more for social than for religious reasons. Above all, they entertained lavishly, gambled regularly, and attended Anglican (Church of England) services more for social than for religious reasons. Above all, they entertained lavishly, gambled regularly, and attended Anglican (Church of England) services more for social than for religious reasons. 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Commerce and Consumption

Colonial products spurred the development of mass markets throughout the Atlantic world. Colonial goods helped make it possible for ordinary people, not just the wealthy elite, to buy the things that they desired in addition to what they absolutely needed. Even news, formerly restricted mostly to a few people through face-to-face conversations or private letters, became an object of public consumption through the innovation of newspapers. With the appropriate stimulus, market demand seemed unlimited.

The Atlantic commerce that took colonial goods to markets in Britain brought consumer products back to the colonies. By midcentury, export-oriented industries in Britain were growing ten times faster than firms attached to the home market. Most British exports went to the vast European market, where potential customers outnumbered those in the colonies by more than one hundred to one. But as European competition stiffened, colonial markets became increasingly important. British exports to North America multiplied eightfold between 1700 and 1770, outpacing the rate of population growth after midcentury. When the colonists’ eagerness to consume exceeded their ability to pay, British exporters willingly extended credit, and colonial debts soared (Figure 5.1).

Despite the many differences among the colonists, the consumption of British exports built a certain material uniformity across region, religion, class, and status. Consumption of British exports made the colonists look and feel more British even though they lived at the edge of a wilderness an ocean away from Britain.

The rising tide of colonial consumption had other less visible but no less important consequences. Consumption presented women and men with a novel array of choices. As colonial consumers defined and expressed their desires with greater frequency during the eighteenth century, they became accustomed to thinking of themselves as individuals who had the power to make decisions that influenced the quality of their lives—attitudes of significance in the hierarchical world of eighteenth-century British North America.

Religion, Enlightenment, and Revival

Eighteenth-century colonists could choose from almost as many religions as consumer goods. Virtually all colonial religious denominations represented some form of Christianity, almost all of them Protestant. Slaves made up the largest group of non-Christians. A few slaves converted to Christianity in Africa or after they arrived in North America, but most continued to embrace elements of indigenous African religions. Roman Catholics concentrated in Maryland as they had since the seventeenth century, but even there they were outnumbered by Protestants. The varieties of Protestant faith and practice ranged across a broad spectrum. The middle colonies and the southern backcountry included militant Baptists and Presbyterians. Huguenots who had fled persecution in Catholic France peopled congregations in several cities. In New England, old-style Puritanism splintered into strands of Congregationalism that differed over fine points of theological doctrine. The Congregational Church was the official established church in New England, and all residents paid taxes for its support. Throughout the plantation South and in urban centers such as Charleston, New York, and Philadelphia, a C H R O N O L O G Y

1715 – Yamasee War pits Yamasee and Creek Indian allies of the French against British colonists in South Carolina.

1730s – Jonathan Edwards promotes the religious movement known as the Great Awakening.

1740s – George Whitefield preaches religious revival in North America.

1754 – Seven Years’ War begins.

1769 – American Philosophical Society is founded. First Spanish mission in California, San Diego de Alcalá, is established.

1770 – Spanish mission and presidio are established at Monterey, California.
Deism
- Belief that God created a universe governed by natural laws and that those laws could be discovered through the use of reason. Many deists also rejected the possibility of supernatural events and of God’s direct intervention in the lives of human beings. Deism was an outgrowth of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Enlightenment
- Eighteenth-century cultural and intellectual movement that emphasized the power of reason and focused on improving human life in the here and now. Philadelphia was the center of this movement, especially after the formation of the American Philosophical Society in 1769.

Great Awakening
- Early- to mid-eighteenth-century religious revival that attempted to convert nonbelievers and to revive the piety of the faithful through emotionalism and rational appeals. The revivals renewed the spiritual energies of thousands of colonists but did not substantially boost the total number of church members.

Prominent colonists belonged to the Anglican Church, which received tax support in the South. But dissenting faiths grew everywhere, and in most colonies their adherents won the right to worship publicly, although the established churches retained official support.

Many educated colonists became deists, looking for God’s plan in nature more than in the Bible. Deism shared the ideas of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment thinkers, who tended to agree that science and reason could disclose God’s laws in the natural order. In the colonies as well as in Europe, Enlightenment ideas encouraged people to study the world around them, to think for themselves, and to ask whether the disorderly appearance of things masked the principles of a deeper, more profound natural order. From New England towns to southern drawing rooms, individuals met to discuss such matters. Philadelphia was the center of these conversations, especially after the formation of the American Philosophical Society in 1769, an outgrowth of an earlier group organized by Benjamin Franklin, who was a deist. Leading colonial thinkers such as Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, among many other members, corresponded with each other seeking to understand nature and to find ways to improve society.

Most eighteenth-century colonists went to church seldom or not at all, although they probably considered themselves Christians. A minister in Charleston observed that on the Sabbath, “the Taverns have more Visitors than the Churches.” In the leading colonial cities, church members were a small minority of eligible adults, no more than 10 to 15 percent. Anglican parishes in the South rarely claimed more than one-fifth of eligible adults as members. In some regions of rural New England and the middle colonies, church membership embraced two-thirds of eligible adults, while in other areas, only one-quarter of the residents belonged to a church. The spread of religious indifference, deism, of denominational rivalry, and of comfortable backsliding profoundly concerned many Christians.

To combat what one preacher called the “dead formality” of church services, some ministers set out to convert nonbelievers and to revive the piety of the faithful with a new style of preaching that appealed more to the heart than to the head. Historians have termed this wave of revivals the Great Awakening. In Massachusetts during the mid-1730s, the fiery Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards reaped a harvest of souls by reemphasizing traditional Puritan doctrines of human sin and God’s direct intervention in the lives of human beings. His sermon “Sinners in the Hands of the Angry God” conveyed the flavor of his message. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, William Tennent led revivals that dramatized spiritual rebirth with accounts of God’s miraculous powers, such as raising Tennent’s son from the dead.

The most famous revivalist of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world was George Whitefield. An Anglican, Whitefield preached to large audiences in England. Whitefield visited the North American colonies seven times, staying for more than three years during the mid-1740s and attracting crowds of thousands to his sermons, including Benjamin Franklin and Oisadah Equiano. Whitefield’s preaching transported many in his audience to emotion-choked states of religious ecstasy. About one revival he wrote, “The bitter cries and groans were enough to pierce the hardest heart. Some of the people weeps as pale as death; others were wringing their hands; others lying on the ground; others sinking into the arms of their friends; and most lifting their eyes to heaven, and crying to God for mercy.”

Whitefield’s successful revivals spawned many lesser imitators. Itinerant preachers, many of them poorly educated, toured the colonial backcountry after midcentury, echoing Whitefield’s medium and message as best they could.

The revivals awakened and refreshed the spiritual energies of thousands of colonists struggling with the uncertainties and anxieties of eighteenth-century America. In the end, the conversions at revivals did not substantially boost the total number of church members, but they did communicate the important message that every soul mattered, that men and women could choose to be saved, that individuals had the power to make a decision for everlasting life or death. Colonial revivals expressed in religious terms many of the same democratic and egalitarian values expressed in economic terms by colonists’ patterns of consumption. Like consumption, revivals contributed to a set of common experiences that bridged colonial divides of faith, region, class, and status.

Borderlands and Colonial Politics in the British Empire

The plurality of peoples, faiths, and communities that characterized the North American colonies arose from the somewhat haphazard policies of the eighteenth-century British empire. Since the Puritan Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, British monarchs had valued the colonies’ contributions to trade and encouraged their growth and development. Unlike Spain and France—whose policies of excluding Protestants and foreigners kept the population of their North American colonial territories tiny—Britain kept the door to its colonies open to anyone, and tens of thousands of non-British immigrants settled in the North American colonies and raised families. The open door did not extend to trade, however, as the seventeenth-century Navigation Acts restricted colonial trade to British ships and traders. These policies evolved because they served the interests of the monarchy and of influential groups in Britain and the colonies. The policies also gave the colonists a common framework of political expectations and experiences.

At a minimum, British power defended the colonists from Indian, French, and Spanish enemies on their borders—as well as from foreign powers abroad. Each colony organized a militia, and privateers sailed from every port to prey on foreign ships and traders. These policies evolved because they served the interests of the monarchy and of influential groups in Britain and the colonies. The policies also gave the colonists a common framework of political expectations and experiences.

At conclusion, what was the dual identity of Britain’s colonies? How did slavery become a central issue in the North American colonies?
help from the British to keep the Indians at bay and to maintain the essential flow of trade. In 1754, the British colonists’ endemic competition with the French flared into the Seven Years’ War, also known as the French and Indian War (see chapter 6). Before the 1760s, neither the British colonists nor the British themselves developed a coherent policy toward the Indians. But both agreed that Indians made deadly enemies, profitable trading partners, and powerful allies. As a result, the British and their colonists kept an eye on the Spanish empire to the west and relations with the Indians there. Russian hunters in search of sea otters ventured along the Pacific coast from Alaska to California and threatened to become a permanent presence on New Spain’s northern frontier. To block Russian access to present-day California, officials in New Spain mounted a campaign to build forts (called presidios) and missions there.

In 1769, an expedition headed by a military man, Gaspar de Portolá, and a Catholic priest, Junípero Serra, traveled north from Mexico to present-day San Diego, where they founded the first California mission, San Diego de Alcalá. They soon journeyed all the way to Monterey, which became the capital of Spanish California. There Portolá established a presidio in 1770 “to defend us from attacks by the Russians,” he wrote. By 1772, Serra had founded other missions along the path from San Diego to Monterey. One Spanish soldier praised the work of the missionaries, writing that “with flattery and presents [the missionaries] attract the savage Indians and persuade them to adhere to life in society and to receive instruction for a knowledge of the Catholic faith, the cultivation of the land, and the arts necessary for making the instruments most needed for farming.” Yet for the Indians, the Spaniards’ California missions had horrendous consequences, as they had elsewhere in the Spanish borderlands. European diseases decimated Indian populations, Spanish soldiers raped Indian women, and missionaries beat Indians and subjected them to near slavery. Indian uprisings against the Spaniards occurred repeatedly, but the presidios and missions endured as projections of the Spanish empire along the Pacific coast.

British attempts to exercise political power in their colonial governments met with success so long as British officials were on or very near the sea. Colonists acknowledged British authority to collect customs duties, inspect cargoes, and enforce trade regulations. But when royal officials tried to wield their authority in the internal affairs of the colonies on land, they invariably

<table>
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<th>Map 5.4 Zones of Empire in Eastern North America</th>
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**GLOBAL COMPARISON**

Large Warships in European Navies, 1660–1760

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1660</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1710</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
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Note: Comparisons also not exact for Spain.

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**CHAPTER 5**

How and why did British North America change in the eighteenth century?

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<tr>
<th>134</th>
<th>THE CHANGING WORLD OF COLONIAL AMERICA</th>
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2nd Proof
encountered colonial resistance. A governor headed the government of each colony: he was appointed by the king in each of the nine royal colonies (Rhode Island and Connecticut selected their own governors) or by the proprietors in Maryland and Pennsylvania. The British envisaged colonial governors as mini-monarchs able to exert influence in the colonies much as the king did in Britain. But colonial governors were not kings, and the colonies were not Britain. Eighty percent of colonial governors had been born in England, not in the colonies. Some governors stayed in England and delegated the details of colonial affairs to subordinates. Even the best-intentioned colonial governors had difficulty developing relations of trust and respect with influential colonists because their terms of office averaged just five years and could be terminated at any time. Colonial governors controlled few patronage positions in the colonies that could have helped them build political alliances. In obedience to Britain, colonial governors fought incessantly with the colonists’ assemblies. They battled over governors’ vetoes of colonial legalization, removal of colonial judges, creation of new courts, dismissal of the representative assemblies, and other local issues. Some governors developed a working relationship with the colonists’ assemblies. But during the eighteenth century, the assemblies gained the upper hand.

Since British policies did not clearly define the colonists’ legal powers, colonial assemblies seized the opportunity to make their own rules. Gradually, the assemblies established a strong tradition of representative government analogous, in their eyes, to the British Parliament. Voters often returned the same representatives to the assemblies year after year, building continuity in power and leadership that far exceeded that of the governor.

By 1720, colonial assemblies had won the power to initiate legislation, including tax laws and authorizations to spend public funds. Although all laws passed by the assemblies (except in Maryland, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) had to be approved by the governor and then by the Board of Trade in Britain, the difficulties in communication about complex subjects over long distances effectively ratified the assemblies’ decisions. Often years passed before colonial laws were repealed by British authorities, and in the meantime, the assemblies’ laws prevailed.

The heated political struggles between royal governors and colonial assemblies that occurred throughout the eighteenth century taught colonists a common set of political lessons. They learned to employ traditionally British ideas of representative government to defend their own colonial interests. They learned that power in the British colonies rarely belonged exclusively to the British government.

> **QUICK REVIEW**

**How did commerce and consumption shape the collective identity of colonists in British North America during the eighteenth century?**

**CHAPTER LOCATOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion: What was the dual identity of British North American colonists?</th>
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</table>
| **DURING THE EIGHTEENTh CENTURY,** a society that was both distinctly colonial and distinctly British emerged in British North America. Tens of thousands of immigrants and slaves gave the colonies an unmistakably colonial complexion and contributed to the colonies’ growing population and expanding economy. People of different ethnicities and faiths sought their fortunes in the colonies, where land was cheap, labor was dear, and—as Benjamin Franklin preached—work promised to be rewarding. Indentured servants and redemptioners risked temporary periods of bondage for the potential reward of better opportunities in the colonies than on the Atlantic’s eastern shore. Slaves endured lifetime servitude, which they neither chose nor desired but from which their masters greatly benefited.

Identifiably colonial products from New England, the middle colonies, and the southern colonies flowed to the West Indies and across the Atlantic. Back came unquestionably British consumer goods along with fashions in ideas, faith, and politics. The bonds of the British empire required colonists to think of themselves as British subjects and, at the same time, encouraged them to consider their status as colonists.

By 1750, British colonists in North America could not imagine that their distinctively dual identity—as British and as colonists—would soon become a source of intense conflict. But by 1776, colonists in British North America had to choose whether they were British or American.

**How were the middle colonies distinctive?**

**What changed in New England life and culture?**

**What were the unifying experiences for British American colonists?**

**What was the dual identity of British North American colonists?**

**WHAT you NOW KNOW**

All of Britain’s North American colonies experienced rapid change and growth over the course of the eighteenth century leading up to the American Revolution. While there were many variations among the colonies, colonial wars and British policies helped foster a growing sense of an American identity for many colonists.
Imagine that you must explain chapter 5 to someone who hasn't read it. What would be the most important points to include and why?

**In your own words**

Looking Backward, Looking Ahead
- How did the relationship between the colonies and Britain in the eighteenth century differ from that of the seventeenth century?
- What were the most pressing sources of potential conflict between the colonies and Britain in 1770? What were the most important sources of cooperation and mutual dependence?

The Southern Colonies and Spanish California
- What role did slavery play in the social and economic development of the South?
- How did slaves attempt to maintain their own culture and gain some control within the limits of slavery?
- Why did New Spain establish presidios and missions, and what were their consequences for Native Americans?

The Middle Colonies
- How did immigration shape the religious and ethnic diversity of the middle colonies? What factors led immigrants to settle in the middle colonies?
- How did Atlantic commerce, particularly colonial consumption, affect the middle colonies?

New England
- How did the economy of New England differ from that of other regions?
- Why did New England not attract as many immigrants as other areas did? How did that affect the social structure of the region?

Putting it all together

The exercise below represents a more advanced understanding of the chapter material. In this exercise, identify the changes in colonial society between 1700 and 1770. Use the chart below to describe the economy, society, culture, and politics of the major regions of British North America in 1700 and 1770. What accounts for regional divergence over the course of the eighteenth century? To do this exercise online or to download this chart, visit bedfordstmartins.com/roarkunderstanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Economy (imports and exports, jobs, wealth)</th>
<th>Population (ethnicity, race, class)</th>
<th>Culture—ways of life, values (including religious beliefs)</th>
<th>Colonial politics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New England in 1700</td>
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<tr>
<td>New England in 1770</td>
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<td>Middle colonies in 1700</td>
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<td>Southern colonies in 1700</td>
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<td>Southern colonies in 1770</td>
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Now that you have reviewed key elements of the chapter, take a step back and try to explain the big picture. Remember to use specific examples from the chapter in your answers. To do this exercise online, visit bedfordstmartins.com/roarkunderstanding.