Chapter 3: Society and Culture in Provincial America

THE COLONIAL POPULATION

Indentured Servants

- At least three fourths of the immigrants in 17th century arrived as indentured servants
- The general concept: men and women bind themselves to a master in America for a fixed period of time to work for them and in return, they would get food and shelter
  - After leaving the fixed time period, they were supposed to get clothing, tools, and occasionally land to keep themselves going
  - Reality: most people were unprepared to support themselves and they didn’t get any of these benefits
  - Some people became artisans, farmers, or trades people afterwards
  - Most of the unfortunate formed groups and went from town to town looking for work – mostly males
- Indentured servants made a way to cope with the severe labor shortage in America
- Reason for rising interest in African slave trade: indentured system wasn’t looking good b/c of the instability the former servants created in the community

Birth and Death

- By end of 17th century: non-Indian population = 250,000 (25,000 = Africans)
- Natural increase replaced immigration as most important source of population
- Life spans:
  - 1st generation: men = 71, women = 70
  - 2nd gen: men = 65
- Fertility caused New England population to quadruple
- South
  - Life span: men = 40, women = a little less than 40 (yikes!) notice the stark contrast
  - 1 in 4 children died to infancy
  - 2 in 4 died before age of 20
  - It was rare for marriages to last longer than 10 years
  - Population in South grew, but b/c of immigration
  - Results: sex-ratio = more balanced (weakening of traditional patriarchal system where men = head of family, women’s roles strengthened)

Medicine in the Colonies

- Physicians didn’t know much about infections and bacteria so numerous people got sick and died, like from unclean water and trash
- Midwives
  - Easy to get into medical field w/o professional training, so women joined (most amount)
o Midwives assisted women at childbirth and gave advice about getting herbs or other natural remedies
o Doctors felt threatened by midwives – people knew the midwives better b/c they’re family and friends but no one knew the doctors

Women and Families in the Chesapeake

- Male Authority Undermined
  - The male dictatorial role in the family (head of family, keeping everyone in line) was difficult to maintain
  - Indentured servants forced to not marry until their term expired, but women got pregnant and got punished
- Women gave birth a lot – pregnant every 2 years and averaged 8 kids a piece (but around 5 died)
- Greater Independence in the South
  - Men = many and women = few, so women had more freedom to choose their husbands
  - Women generally outlived their husbands
  - Widows were left with the farm to manage and kids which was hard, but it gave them economic power
  - Widows married again and had to manage and act as peacekeeper to all the step bros and sisters and all that – it enhanced their role in the family
- Revival of Patriarchy
  - As families grew more stabled, the men’s role grew to be the head of the family again

Women and Families in New England

- North
  - Children more likely to survive
  - Women less likely to become widows
  - Women’s fathers were strict in who they married so there was that restriction
  - Parents were able to live to see their kids grow up and maybe even see their grandkids
    - Parents were more controlling over their kids than in the South
  - Less likely to become pregnant before women marry
  - Stricter parental supervision over their kids overall vs. the South
- Puritan families
  - High value on family (principle economic and religious unit in the community
  - Assumed male authority and female weak authority in family – traditional ways
  - Women had to be submissive

The Beginnings of Slavery in British America

- As tobacco demand grew, so did the demand for African labor
• Began with Portuguese slavers shipping out captive men and women from Africa and putting them in colonies in the Caribbean
• Slaves went from the Caribbean to the southern colonies of British America
• Commerce in slaves caused the forced migration of 11 million Africans to the New World – mostly captured enemy Africans of the sellers along the west coast
  o Densely packed into dark and dirty ships – conditions varied
    ▪ Some ship holders looked after their health while most didn’t care
  o The dead were thrown overboard
• Slaves then auctioned off to new owners
• Most slaves spent time in West Indies (doing labor intensive sugar crops) before going to British America
• Mid-1690s: TURNING POINT: Royal African Company lost its monopoly on trade in mainland colonies
  o African migration to North America increased (prices fell)
• 1 in 10 people = African – Africans slowly outnumbering Europeans
• Between 1700 and 1760: Africans = 250,000
• At first, slaves were like indentured servants (fixed period of serving, then freed) but it came to be expected that their slave work was permanent
• Slave Codes
  o One factor only determined whether someone was subject to the slaves codes: COLOR

Changing Sources of European Immigration

• Life in England improved – better economic conditions and new gov’t restriction on leaving for America
  o Caused less migration to America from England
  o French, German, Swiss, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and Scandinavian migration increased
• Earliest non-English European migrants = French Calvinists (Huguenots)
  o Edict of Nantes (1598) let the group become pretty much a state within the Roman Catholic Church state
    ▪ Revoked in 1685
  o Huguenots (300,000) left for America
• German Protestants suffered the same kind of religious discrimination
  o Quaker colony = most popular destination for the Germans
  o Went to North Carolina too, especially after the founding of New Bern (1710) by company of German – speaking Swiss
• MOST NUMEROUS new arrivals: Scots-Irish
  o First tried Ireland, but that fell through
  o Then they headed for America
  o Not welcomed at colonial ports, so they went out to outskirts of European settlement – ruthless for getting land
  o Helped establish Presbyterianism in New Jersey and Pennsylvania
THE COLONIAL ECONOMIES

The Southern Economy

- Tobacco
  - In Chesapeake region, tobacco became basis for economy
  - Quickly, though, production exceeded the demand for tobacco, so it suffered low prices
  - People didn’t understand that growing even more tobacco made the situation worse
  - After 1700: it was common for plantations growing tobacco to have several dozen slaves

- South Carolina and Georgia staple crop: rice
  - Hard work: knee deep in mud under hot sun with lots of bugs – many people refused to work that
  - More demand for slaves here: Africans were more resistant to malaria and other diseases and they could do the work much better

- 1740s: another staple crop for S. Carolina: indigo
  - Eliza Lucas wanted to experiment with a crop from the West Indies (source of blue dye that’s in great demand in Europe) in America
  - Found out it could grow in South Carolina
  - Quickly became even more popular

- In all, South’s economy depended on large cash-crops in its economy

Northern Economic and Technological Life

- Northern colonies less dominated by farming – more diverse economy there
- Agriculture = better in southern New England and Middle Colonies – weather is more temperate and the soil is fertile, not rocky
- New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut River valley = main suppliers of wheat to New England and South
- Colonists engage in industry at home:
  - They became cobblers, blacksmiths, riflemakers, cabinetmakers, silversmiths, and printers
  - Used water power to run mills for grinding grain, processing cloth, or milling lumber
  - Shipbuilding

- Saugus, Massachusetts: first effort to establish a metals industry in the colonies
  - Used water power to power the heat in the furnaces and they made “sow bars” to be formed into plows, hoes, axes, pots, etc.
  - Financial failure: opened in 1646 but had to close in 1668

- German ironmaster: Peter Hasenclever
  - Made largest industrial enterprise anywhere in English North America
  - Hundreds of workers – many came from Germany

- Iron Act of 1750: restricted metal processing in the colonies
• Obstacles to industrialization in America: small labor supply, small domestic market, transportation and energy supply wasn’t good enough
• Lumbering, fishing, and mining gradually replaced the fur trade (mid 1600s)

The Extent and Limits of Technology

• People were poorly equipped with supplies
• Up to half of farmers had a plow
• No pots or kettles
• Half of houses had a gun or rifle
• Few people had candles (couldn’t afford the wax)
• Not many farmers had wagons – just 2 wheeled carts
• Most commonly used tool: the axe
• People were too isolated and poor to afford much of these tools
• They were still self-sufficient though

The Rise of Colonial Commerce

• Shortage of currency
  o No coins of silver or gold, so they tried tobacco certificates – didn’t work – outlawed by Parliament
  o Had to made to with bartering and beaver skins as currency
• Impossible to impose order on trade
  o Lack of communication to find out if enough goods were to be produced and if there was a market for them
  o Ships were at sea for years looking for consumers
  o Basically, it was a big mess of competitors looking for customers all over the Atlantic
• Triangular Trade
  o Between Africa, Caribbean Islands, and North America
  o Key trading items: rum, slaves, and sugar
  o In reality: it was a big maze of trade between Northern and Southern colonies, Africa, West Indies, and Europe
• Emerging merchant class
  o Enjoyed protection from foreign competition within English colonies (Boston, New York, and Philadelphia)
  o Had access in England for American products like furs, timber, and ships
  o Ignored the Navigation Acts and they made markets in French, Spanish, and Dutch West Indies where prices = higher than in British colonies
  o Allows them to import manufactured goods they needed from England

The Rise of Consumerism

• Increasing division of American societies by class CAUSED growing demand in material goods
• People at upper ranks would buy tons of stuff to demonstrate their “high class”
• England and Europe making lots of goods for the Americans to buy
• Grew because of an increasing tendency among colonists to take on debt to finance purchases and because of the willingness of some merchants to offer credit
• Merchants advertise their goods – they got agents (the first salesmen) to interest the wealthy people across the country
• Results of all this
  o Goods that were “luxury” (tea, furniture, glassware, etc) become common
  o Association of material goods with virtue and “refinement”
  o People sought to be more “gentlemen” and “ladylike” – read books on how to
  o Became all about yourself: hairstyles, wardrobes, portraits of themselves, etc
  o 18th century cities were designed to be elegant and gracious and fancy
  o It became more important to create public stages for social display than just among small groups of people – more like the broad picture now

PATTERNS OF SOCIETY

• In contrast to England, in America, there was much more land than people (England was opposite)

The Plantation

• Virginia and Maryland = first sites of plantations once tobacco became the economic basis
• Some were large: Maryland plantation of Charles Carroll of Carrollton: 40,000 acres and 285 slaves
• Generally, they were rough and crude – people died every day
• Workforces didn’t exceed 30 people usually
• Variations of plantation economy
  o Good years = growers could expand and make lots of profit
  o The bad: they couldn’t control the market – constantly at risk of going bankrupt
• Usually outside of cities and towns, so they became their own little communities
  o “great house” of the planter, service buildings, barns, cabins
  o Wealthier = school, chapel, large population
• On larger plantations, women could depend on the slaves for housework unlike the smaller ones
• Stratified Southern Society
  o Wealthy planters influenced lives of smaller plantations farmers (smaller couldn’t compete)
  o Depended on smaller to market crops and receive credit
  o Planters dominated southern agrarian economy

Plantation Slaves

• Slave Culture
Developed their own family structure

- Increased life expectancy and natural increase rate helped this
- Grew food in their own gardens
- Stable households
- But constant fear that any family member could be sold at any time
- Emphasis on extended kinship networks

- Unique language and religion
  - Combo of African and English – masters couldn’t understand
  - Called “Gullah”
  - Unique religion too – combo of Christianity and African folklore

- Still very constricted – under constant surveillance
- African women subjected to forced sexual advances
- Treatment varied from brutal to kindness

- Stono Rebellion
  - South Carolina in 1739
  - 100 Africans got weapons, killed white people, and tried to escape to Florida

Some slaves learned: blacksmithing, carpentry, shoemaking, spinning, weaving, sewing, etc.
Used their talents to share profits with the masters and some bought their freedom – very few

The Puritan Community

- “Covenant” was formed in each settlement to bind everyone in religion and harmony
- Houses and meetinghouses arranged around a central passage or “commons”
- Divided up land outside the town
- Lived close to neighbors to reinforce sense of community
- Yearly “town meetings” decide important questions and select group of “selectmen” w/o interference from the government
  - Only adult males
- Most important social distinction = membership in church
  - Only those who were very committed to church got membership
  - If someone hadn’t experienced “conversion”, they could participate as the “halfway covenant”
- Fathers split land between his sons
- Mothers and women took care of movable objects: furniture, household goods, etc.

Pressures on tight-knit social structure

- Commercialization of New England
  - Population – people kept moving farther and farther away – ended up creating a new church, the beginning of a new town
  - Generational conflict – land kept getting smaller and smaller as sons kept dividing it further – people felt it wasn’t enough to go around. People moved out
  - Fathers needed their entire family to work the farm
The Witchcraft Phenomenon

- Salem Witch Trials
  - Most famous outbreak of supposed witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts
  - Began when girls began showing strange behavior
  - 100s of people, mostly women, accused of being witches – 19 people put to death before 1692
- General person accused: middle-aged women, often widowed, few or no children
- Phenomenon spread in 1690s to numerous New England towns
- New Englanders believed in the power of Satan and his ability to assert power in the real world

Cities

- By 1770s: 2 largest port cities: Philadelphia (28,000) and New York (25,000)
- Other large cities: Boston (16,000), Charles Town (12,000), Newport, RI (11,000)
- Characteristics
  - Trading centers for farmers
  - Crowded and often filthy conditions of living
  - Distinction b/w masters and slaves = very clear and evident
  - Ironworks and facilities to turn molasses into rum
  - Advanced schools, sophisticated cultural activities, shops for imported goods
  - Social problems: vice, crime, traffic, epidemics, etc.
  - Needed elaborate government systems
  - Urban poor numbers grew in times of economic crisis
  - Vulnerable to fluctuations in trade
  - Important: cities became place of where ideas could circulate and be discussed – books, newspapers, intellectual influences

Inequality

- Elites (“gentlemen” and “ladies”) VS. lower levels (“goodman” and “goodwife”)
- Elites get best seats in churches and had more influence
- Men had more power than women
- Servants had few rights
- Church taught that it was God’s intention to have all this inequality

AWAKENINGS AND ENLIGHTENMENTS

The Pattern of Religions

- Church of England established as official religion for:
  - Virginia, Maryland, New York, Carolinas, and Georgia
  - Laws establishing this were ignored
o Even Puritans went to different denominations (Congregationalism and Presbyterianism)
- Dutch settlers established their own Calvinist denomination – New York and Jersey
- Roger Williams introduced Baptism
  o Rebaptism = necessary when reaching maturity
  o Remained Calvinist
- Protestants saw the pope as evil and saw New France (Canada) as agents of the pope
- Catholics remained small in number – Maryland had greatest amount at 3,000
- Jews in provincial America didn’t number more than 2,000 – largest amount in New York City
- Loosing strong religious role
  o Population movement westward caused people to become disconnected with the church
  o Rise of commercialism caused a more secular outlook
- Jeremaids: sermons of despair ministers preached, talking about how religious piety was waning

**The Great Awakening**

- First major American revival
- Began in 1730s, climax in 1740s
- Emphasized potential for people to forget the past and begin anew in their relationships with God
- John and Charles Wesley
  o Founders of Methodism
  o 1730s: visited colonies like Georgia
- Jonathan Edwards
  o Most outstanding preacher of this time
  o Orthodox Puritan
  o Preached and attacked the doctrines of easy salvation for all
  o Preached absolute sovereignty in God, predestination, and salvation by God’s grace alone
- Led to division b/w “New Light” revivalists and “Old Light” traditionalists

**The Enlightenment**

- Great scientific and intellectual discoveries in 17th century Europe
- Celebrate power of human reason and intellect
- Argued that people didn’t need to turn to God for guidance – “we’ve got reason and intellect! We’ve got the power”
- Undermined traditional authority – encouraged people to look to themselves for guidance
Education

- 1647: Massachusetts implemented law that required every town to support a public school – many failed to comply
- At least a hundred schools popped up between 1723 – 1770
- “dame schools” by widowed or unmarried women
- Craftsmen schools for apprentices in cities
- By time of Revolution, well over half of white males could read and write – better than most European countries
  o Helped create market for almanacs – first widely circulated publication other than the Bible
- Education for males beyond primary school = rare; opportunities for women = don’t exist
- Women’s literacy rates just behind males
- Home-based education
- New colleges by 1763
  o Harvard (1636, First American college) by General Court of Massachusetts – wanted to create training center for ministers; named for John Harvard
  o Yale (Elihu Yale) in New Haven, CT
  o Courses besides religion: geometry, Latin, Hebrew, physics, astronomy
  o King’s College (1754, New York) – spread of secular knowledge

The Spread of Science

- Incorporated science courses into schools
- Most vigorous promotion of science happened outside the schools
  o Ben Franklin and his invention of the lightning rod – proving lightning and electricity were the same thing
  o Experiment that was daring: inoculation against smallpox
    ▪ Proving that disease is not a punishment for sin – it’s science, not supernatural

Concepts of Law and Politics

- England tried to impose common law upon America but the differences in law already were grounded and affirm
- Punishments in colonies: whipping post, branding iron, etc. but in England: prison = punishment
- Peter Zenger case: German-American printer, publisher, editor, and journalist in New York City. He was a defendant in a landmark legal case in American jurisprudence that determined that truth was a defense against charges of slander (opposite of praise)
- Americans made their own institutions that gave them a feeling of self-goverment
- 1763: England government began to try to tighten its grip on the American colonies and a great imperial crisis developed