The Maturing of Colonial Society

(1) CHAPTER OUTLINE

During a period of rapid growth, Devereaux Jarratt grows up in the family of a Virginia yeoman farmer. His interest in books and learning enables him to become a tutor for rich Virginia planter families. Eventually he rises to become an Anglican clergyman.

The North: A Land of Family Farms
   Northern Agricultural Society
   Unfree Labor
   Changing Values
   Women and the Family in the Northern Colonies
   Ecological Transformation

The Plantation South
   The Tobacco Coast
   The Rice Coast
   The Backcountry
   Family Life in the South
   Enslaved Africans in the Southern Colonies
   Resistance and Rebellion
   Black Religion and Family

Contending for a Continent
   France’s Inland Empire
   A Generation of War
   Spain’s Frail North American Grip
   Cultural and Ecological Changes Among Interior Tribes

The Urban World of Commerce and Ideas
   Sinews of Trade
   The Artisan’s World
   Urban Social Structure
   The Entrepreneurial Ethos
   The American Enlightenment

The Great Awakening
SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

1. In the first half of the eighteenth century, America was made up of several distinct regional societies, each in the process of growth and change. Beyond the Appalachians, extensive contact with France's growing inland empire and Spanish American settlements in the South and Southwest transformed Native American ways of life. English settlements, however, exploding in population, threatened Indian cultural cohesion the most. This chapter stresses the increasing complexity, adaption, and maturing of colonial English society. The eighteenth century provided opportunities for some, like Devereaux Jarratt; great gains for a few, like Boston merchant Andrew Belcher; but disappointment and privation for many others.

2. The farming society of the North was characterized by widespread land ownership and a rough kind of economic equality. In the South, plantation society was marked by the emergence of a gentry class and a labor force almost entirely made up of black slaves, while the backcountry, still in the frontier stages and settled by thousands of Scots-Irish and German immigrants, lacked the sharp class distinctions of the tidewater region. Colonial cities, with their highly differentiated class structure and new commercial values, were on the “cutting edge” of change. In each area, women played an important but limited role in daily life.

3. Slavery became a primary source of labor and profits in the plantation south but was also closely bound up with economic life in the North. Slavery profoundly affected the lives of both White and Black Americans and was an ironic comment on the notion of America as a place of refuge and hope.

4. The Great Awakening was more than a religious revival, for it produced patterns of thought and behavior that helped to fuel the Revolution. The course of the Great Awakening in Boston and Virginia vividly shows the way in which its message fused with local social and economic tensions to threaten established authority.

5. Although many historians focus on the changing political arrangements in the colonies in the first half of the eighteenth century as a means of preparing for a discussion of the
Revolution, this chapter makes the point that the fluidity of American society itself must be understood as a prelude to the events of the 1770s.

(3) LEARNING GOALS

Familiarity with Basic Knowledge

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Name the major immigrant groups coming to the colonies in the early eighteenth century, describe their social backgrounds, find their destinations on the map, and summarize their relative opportunities for social and economic advancement.

2. Describe the cultural changes of the interior Indian tribes as a result of their contact with French, Spanish, and English settlements in economic, social, and domestic life; in their relation to the environment; in political organization; and in intertribal tensions.

3. Describe northern farm society and its most important social characteristics and problems, including family life and the ways in which the roles and rights of women changed in the colonies.

4. Give an account of the “profound social transition” of the Upper South, characterize the social and political nature of the southern gentry, and detail the social and economic differences between the tobacco and rice coasts and the backcountry.

5. Describe cultural features, such as religion and family, of enslaved African Americans during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

6. Contrast the practice of slavery in the plantation south with the northern colonies.

7. Describe the urban social structure, including the merchant’s pivotal role, and the work pattern and attitudes of urban artisans.

8. Explain the major events and message of the Great Awakening, including its comparative impact on New England and the southern colonies and its effects on colonial political life.
Practice in Historical Thinking Skills

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the development and maturing of English society in the farming northern colonies, in the plantation South, and in colonial cities.

2. Discuss the foundations of colonial political structures and ideology, including what colonists meant by a political balance of power and how it matched the reality of Whig ideology and local political arrangements.

3. Analyze how the changing mixture of ethnic, racial, religious, and regional settlements in North America, as well as class differences, provided awkward incongruities and threats of social unrest in the various societies of the New World.

(4) IMPORTANT DATES AND NAMES TO KNOW

1682   La Salle canoes down Mississippi River and claims Louisiana for France
1689-1697  King William’s War
1700   Spanish establish first mission in Arizona
1702-1713  Queen Anne’s War
1704   *Boston News-Letter*, first regular colonial newspaper, published
1712   First northern slave revolt erupts in New York City (New York)
1713   Peace of Utrecht
1714   Beginning of Scots-Irish and German Immigration
1715-1730  Volume of slave trade doubles
1718   French settle New Orleans
1720s   Natural increase of African population begins
1733   Benjamin Franklin publishes first *Poor Richard's Almanack*
1734-1736  Great Awakening begins in Northampton, Massachusetts
1735   John Peter Zenger acquitted of seditious libel in New York
1739  Slave revolt in Stono, South Carolina
1739-1740  George Whitefield's first American tour spreads Great Awakening
1740s  Slaves compose 90 percent of population on Carolina rice coast
        Indigo becomes staple crop in Lower South
1747  Impressment riot in Boston
1750s  Quakers initiate campaign to halt slave trade and end slavery
1760  Africans compose 20 percent of American population
1760s-1770s  Spanish establish California mission system
1769  American Philosophical Society founded at Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)

Other Names to Know

Jonathan Edwards    Benjamin Franklin
John Peter Zenger    James Davenport
George Whitefield    Cotton Mather

(5) GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

artisan: A skilled worker, using hand tools, usually in a small shop, such as a carpenter, cooper, shoemaker, or silversmith

Half-Way Covenant: An attempt by New England clergy in 1662 to counteract declining church membership by allowing the children of church members to join the church even though they had not experienced salvation; they were, however, denied voting and communion rights

franchise: The right to vote, widespread among colonial free white males

power of the purse: The power of colonial legislatures in the eighteenth century to initiate money bills, specifying the amount to be raised and its uses
1. Examine the contents of your household. What do the items of your house reflect about your culture and values? What do they reveal about the society you live in? What do you need to survive? What items would be considered luxury items? Referring to “Recovering the Past,” compare and contrast the possession of the Chandler brothers with Robert Oliver’s. What might the possessions reveal about class tensions during the eighteenth century?

2. If you live in the East, you will probably be able to visit a historic house that dates from this period. In the South, see the country houses of the new gentry class or their town houses in Williamsburg. In the North and the Mid-Atlantic states, there are fine old houses of the merchant class and often of German immigrants. What do the houses suggest about daily life and about the class structure of the eighteenth century? Do you see evidences of slaves or servants? What suggestions are there about the lives of women and children? What would you conclude about the nature of work and leisure? Does the historic preservation of a house present a romanticized version of life in the past?

3. Consider recent episodes of religious revivalism. What has changed and what is the same?

4. Does the existence of pluralistic ethnic, racial, religious, and regional groups strengthen or threaten American cultural and political life today?

(7) SAMPLE TEST AND EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

**Multiple choice:** Choose the best answer.

1. Which of the following correctly arranges the immigrant groups in terms of size in the eighteenth century (largest first)?
   a. Africans, Scots-Irish, Germans, Swiss
   b. Germans, Africans, Scots-Irish, Swiss
   c. Scots-Irish, Germans, Swiss, Africans
   d. Africans, Germans, Scots-Irish, Swiss

2. The fastest-growing area in the early eighteenth century was
   a. New England
   b. South Carolina
   c. the northern frontier
   d. the area south of Pennsylvania

3. Most eighteenth-century emigrants were
   a. wealthy landed aristocrats
   b. middle-class artisans and yeoman farmers
   c. slaves and indentured servants
   d. prisoners

4. Most eighteenth-century indentured servants
   a. died or ran away before their time of service was over
b. were brought from Africa  
c. usually were able to buy land after serving their time  
d. completed their time but rarely became independent property owners

5. Slavery never became the foundation of the northern colonial work force because northerners  
   a. had moral objections to it  
   b. used hired hands to work their labor-intensive crops  
   c. did not have any money to buy slaves  
   d. had small family farms and did not need slaves

6. Compared to slaves in the West Indies and Brazil, slaves in North America  
   a. died off quickly because of disease  
   b. had little opportunity to develop a culture because of their short life span  
   c. lived in a relatively healthy environment  
   d. had little opportunity for family life

7. Slave resistance in North America did not usually take the form of  
   a. avoiding work  
   b. running away  
   c. overt rebellion  
   d. arson and breaking work equipment

8. A major barrier to slave family life was  
   a. imbalance of women to men  
   b. polygamy  
   c. White male exploitation of enslaved Black women  
   d. slaves were too tired because of their work life to maintain families

9. In the backcountry of the South, settlers  
   a. were German and Scots-Irish  
   b. pursued mixed farming and cattle raising  
   c. had few institutions  
   d. all of the above

10. In the eighteenth century, what percentage of Americans lived in cities?  
    a. 5 percent  
    b. 10 percent  
    c. 15 percent  
    d. 20 percent
11. Urban artisans
   a. easily expected a rapid rise to ownership of their own shops
   b. took fierce pride in themselves as community leaders
   c. viewed themselves as “mere mechanics”
   d. read Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* regularly for advice

12. All of the following statements about eighteenth-century cities are true EXCEPT that they
   a. showed an increasing gap between rich and poor
   b. showed evidence of a new entrepreneurial ethic
   c. were marked by episodes of intensely violent social conflict
   d. devised new ways of dealing with the poor

13. In the early eighteenth century, most Americans
   a. were Congregationalists
   b. were Anglicans
   c. were Baptists
   d. belonged to no church at all

14. The Great Awakening
   a. decreased the number of religious sects
   b. undermined church-state ties
   c. led to the notion that community unity was attainable
   d. encouraged higher education by emphasizing that the clergy should be educated in the established church

15. American political assumptions included the belief that
   a. only free men with property should vote
   b. only men of wealth and social status should hold positions of political power
   c. people had the right to protest openly if power was abused
   d. all of the above

16. In the mid-eighteenth century, colonial assemblies
   a. gradually gained more powers, such as that of initiating money bills
   b. were mainly advisory bodies
   c. were regularly dissolved by royal governors
   d. ignored instructions from local constituencies

**Essays**

1. The three items under “Practice in Historical Thinking Skills” can serve as the basis for essays.

2. The Great Awakening transformed American life and thought in significant ways. Support this statement using appropriate evidence.

3. Rising tensions among social classes characterized colonial society in the eighteenth century and made political and religious struggles bitter. Discuss with evidence.
4. Explain how religion and family could be used a means of survival for the slaves and a means of social control for the slave owners.

**Identify and Interpret: Quotation**

(that is, state who, what, where, when, and why significant)

*The bow of God’s wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string; and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow; and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus are all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures. . . . The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire.*