

Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution



1700 - 1775



The Thirteen Colonies

- 1775 – Britain controlled 32 colonies in New World, from Canada to West Indies
 - 13 decided to fight for independence
 - The “why” can be found in distinctive “American” social, economic, and political structures of these 13 colonies



Conquest by the Cradle

- There was a huge increase in population in America during the 1700s
 - In 1700 there were 300,000 people in America; 20,000 blacks
 - By 1775 there were 2.5 million people in America; 500,000 were black
 - 400,000 were new immigrants; an additional 400,000 were black slaves
 - The rest was due to the natural fertility of Americans; colonists doubled their numbers every 25 years



Conquest by the Cradle

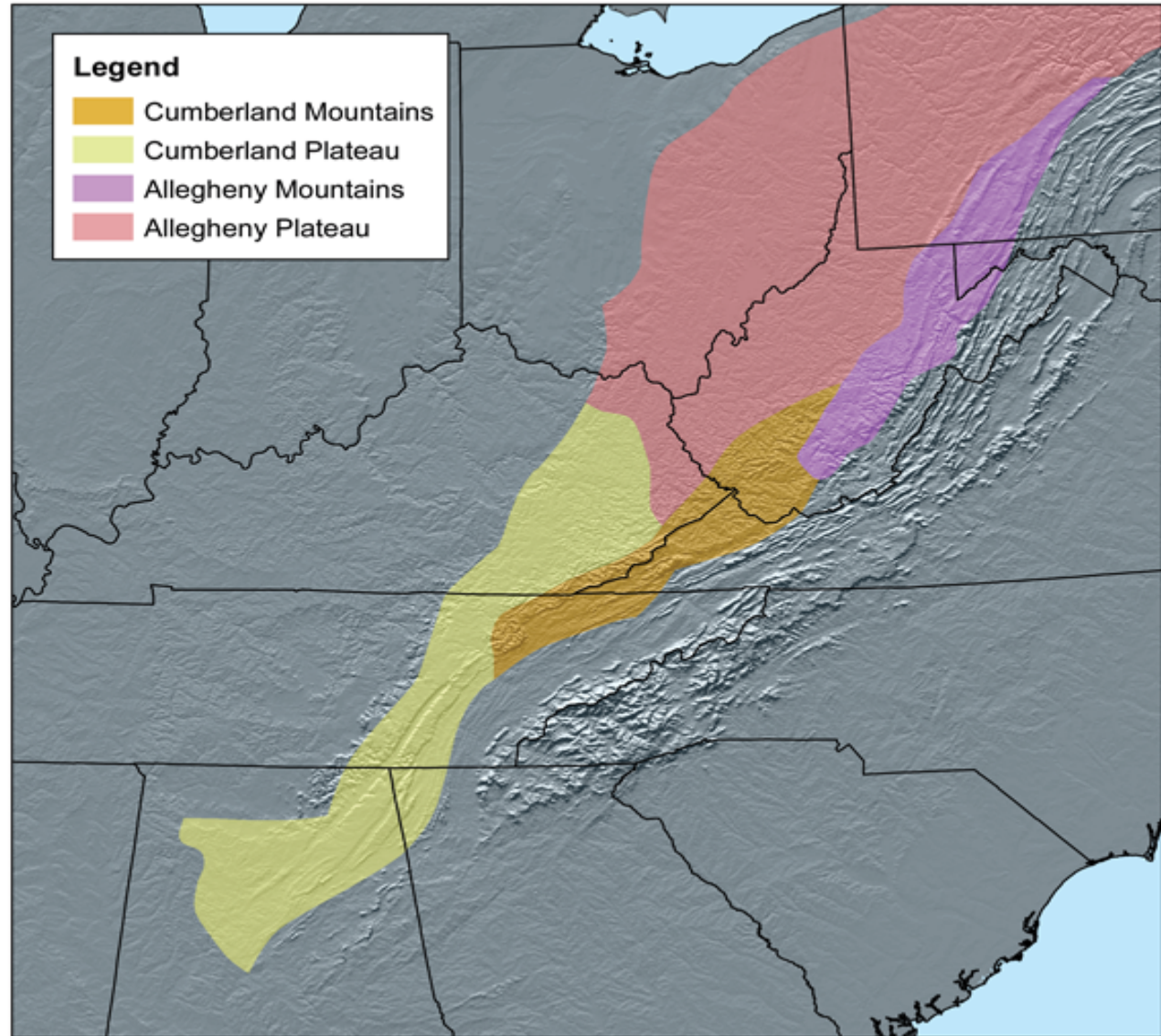
- The political importance of increasing population
 - In 1700 there were 20 English subjects for every American colonist
 - In 1775 there were 3 English subjects for every American colonist
 - Political power was shifting to the American colonies



Conquest by the Cradle

- In 1775, most people lived east of the Alleghenies (the Western part of the Appalachians from Pennsylvania to Virginia)
- Some pioneers were moving into the frontier of Tennessee and Kentucky

Map Showing the Allegheny Mountains





A Mingling of the Races

- America as a melting pot: Many foreign groups mixed with predominantly English people, creating a distinctively American group

Europeans and Africans in the Eighteenth Century





A Mingling of the Races

■ Germans

- By 1775 were 6% of the population (150,000)
- In the early 1700s, they settled chiefly in Pennsylvania
 - Known as Pennsylvania Dutch (“Deutsch” means German)
 - Moved to the backcountry and worked industriously
- Primarily Lutheran
- Not loyal to British crown
- Clung to German heritage and language



A Mingling of the Races

■ Scots-Irish

- By 1775 were 7% of the population (175,000)
- Scottish who had been exiled to Ireland before emigration to America
- In the early 1700s, settled chiefly in Pennsylvania as squatters, but also rural Maryland, Virginia, and Carolinas
- Quick to attack and retaliate against Indians
- Had no loyalty to British government that had persecuted them in Europe
- But also rebelled against colonial governments dominated by eastern elites



A Mingling of the Races

- Other ethnic groups

- In 1775 they were 5% of the population, including: French Huguenots (Protestants), Welsh, Dutch, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss, Scots Highlanders
- Generally they had little loyalty to British

- African slaves

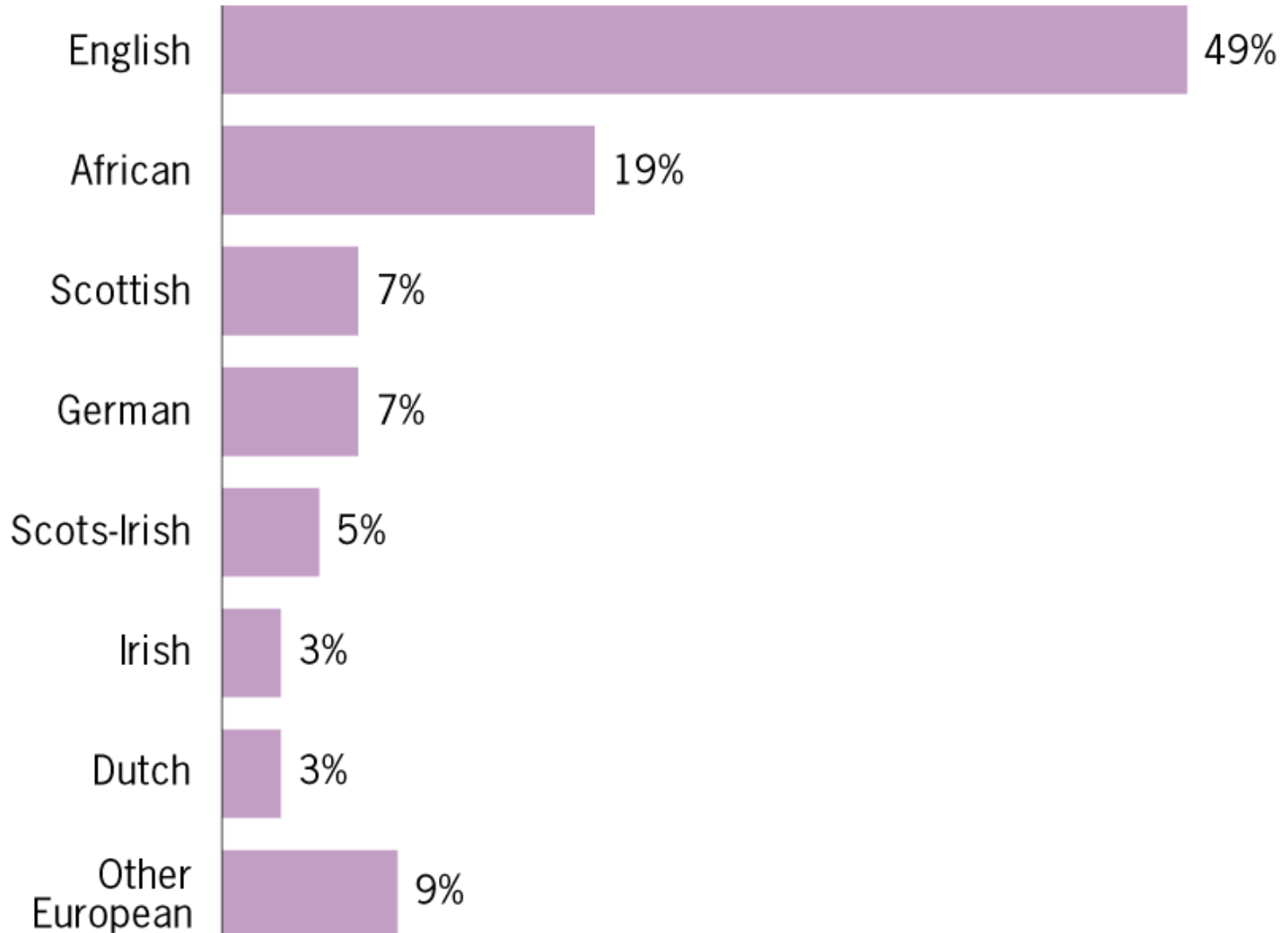
- By 1775 they were 25% of the population and heavily concentrated in South



A Mingling of the Races

- The population of the 13 colonies was primarily Anglo-Saxon, but was the most ethnically diverse population in the world at the time
- The South was mixed black and white (with 90% of all slaves)
- The North was primarily Puritan and the least ethnically diverse
- The Middle colonies were the most ethnically diverse (especially Pennsylvania)

Ethnic and Racial Composition of the American People, 1790





A Mingling of the Races

- The immigrant groups intermarried (with each other and with English colonists)
 - These people created a new American national identity separate from anything in Europe
- African slaves intermarried with other slaves of diverse tribes
 - Slaves created a new African American identity different from blacks in Africa



The Structure of Colonial Society

- America in the 1700s was a land of equality and opportunity (for whites) compared to Europe
 - No titled nobility
 - No poor underclass
 - Most Americans were small farmers who owned their own land, although there were small groups of skilled workers and tradespeople in the cities
 - Hard working colonist could raise their social status, which was impossible in England



The Structure of Colonial Society

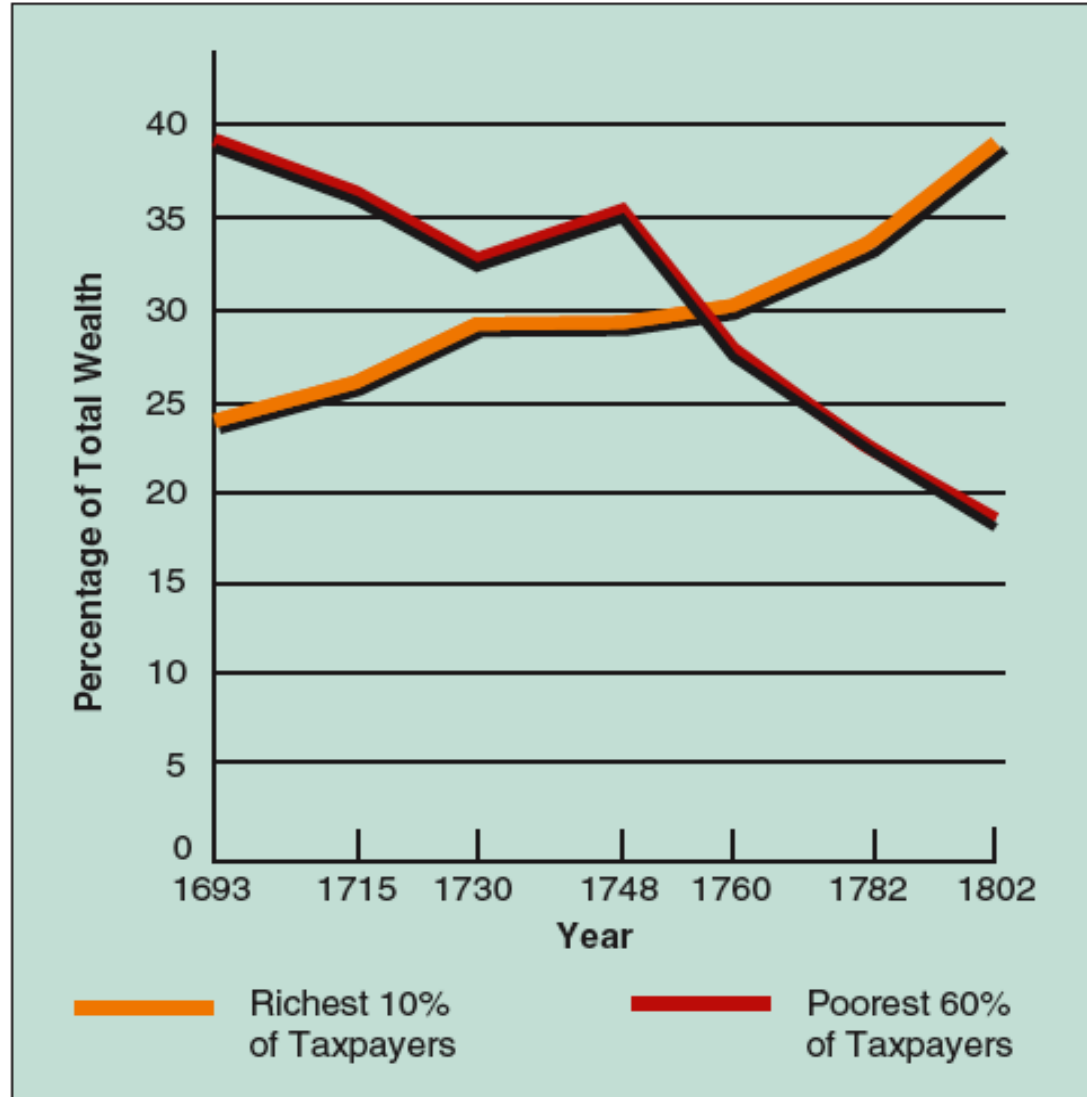
- Wars began to lead to the stratification of American society
 - Merchants (New England and middle colonies) were enriched by war contracts (between England and France and with the Indians)
 - These merchants lived well (imported clothing, china, silverware); people began to sit in churches and schools according to social rank
 - The richest 10% in Boston and Philadelphia owned 2/3 of the wealth



The Structure of Colonial Society

- Widows and orphans created because of the men killed in England's wars
 - These people became dependent on public charity for survival
 - The number of poor was still small compared to England (where 1/3 were poor)

Distribution of Assessed Taxable Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Chester County



Beggar Women and Children





The Structure of Colonial Society

- In New England, the descendants of the original settlers faced more limited prospects
 - Supply of land dwindled (near coast and major cities and away from Indians) as estates repeatedly subdivided
 - Younger sons and daughters were forced to work as wage laborers or move west (beyond the Alleghenies) for unclaimed land
 - Many landless poor looked to public charity for survival in major cities

Movement into the Backcountry, 1720 – 1760





The Structure of Colonial Society

- In the South, rich planters held power and riches because of their disproportionate ownership of slaves
 - Wealth was concentrated among the largest slave owners
 - Slavery widened the gap between planters and poor whites



The Structure of Colonial Society

- Some indentured servants continued coming to America, many ultimately achieving prosperity
- The poor and convicts from Europe were involuntarily shipped to America
 - About 50,000 were shipped to America from England
 - They generally remained in the lower classes



The Structure of Colonial Society

- Black slaves had no equality with whites and no hope of improving their social status
 - They were the closest approximation to England's oppressed lower classes
 - There was a real fear in the South that they might rebel
 - Some in the South (like South Carolina in 1760) tried to ban importation of more slaves, but all efforts were vetoed by Britain, who wanted a cheap labor supply for colonies



Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

- Clerics were the most respected profession in the colonies
 - By 1775, they had less power than in early colonial days (especially New England), but were still well-respected



Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

■ Physicians

- Were poorly trained and not well-respected
- They had little medical knowledge; bleeding was a common (and deadly) practice
- Apprentices worked with older trainers and then were turned loose
- Epidemics (for which doctors could do little) killed many (such as smallpox and diphtheria)



Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

■ Lawyers

- Were not favorably regarded
- Most parties in dispute presented their case themselves in court



Workaday America

■ Agriculture

- 90% of the colonists were involved
- In the Chesapeake, mainly tobacco was grown, but wheat was also spread
- In the Middle colonies, primarily grain (the “bread” colonies) was grown
- Americans enjoyed a higher standard of living because of agriculture than any other people in history



Workaday America

- Fishing (including whaling)
 - Principally in New England
 - Cod exported to Europe
 - Stimulated shipbuilding
 - Served as training for future navy



Workaday America

- Commerce (trade)

- Especially in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania
- Shipped food and forest products to Caribbean
- Brought gold, wine, and oranges to Europe
- Brought industrial goods from Europe to America

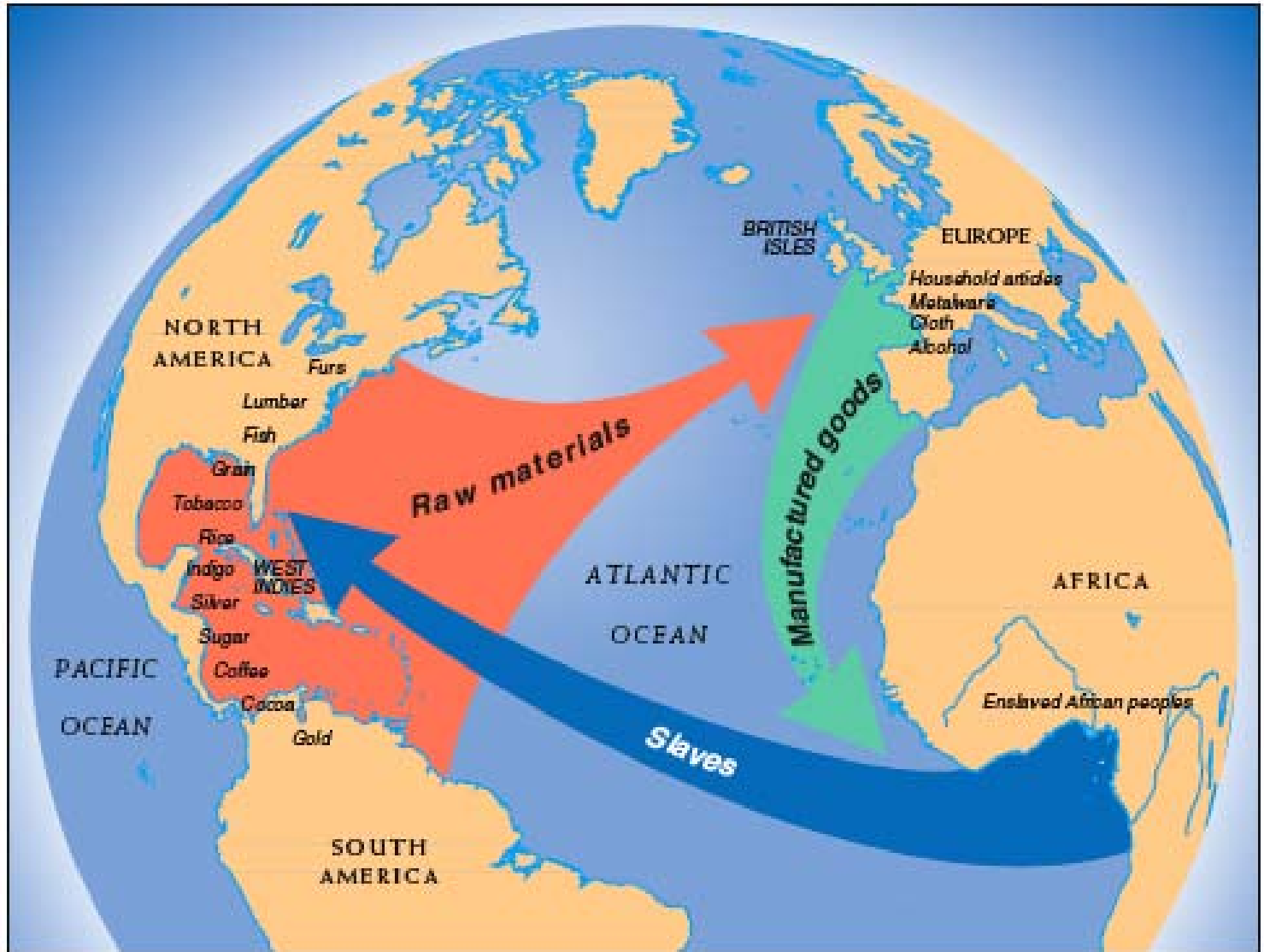


Workaday America

■ Triangular trade

- Very profitable, though small in relation to total colonial commerce
- Rum shipped from New England to Africa and traded in Africa for slaves
- Slaves shipped to West Indies and traded for molasses
- Molasses shipped to New England and distilled into rum

Triangular Trade across the Atlantic





Workaday America

■ Manufacturing

- Secondary because of ease of finding good land to farm and British restrictions
- Rum, beaver hats, iron forges, household manufacturing (spinning, weaving), carpentry
- Lumbering was the most important single manufacturing activity for shipbuilding (primarily in New England)

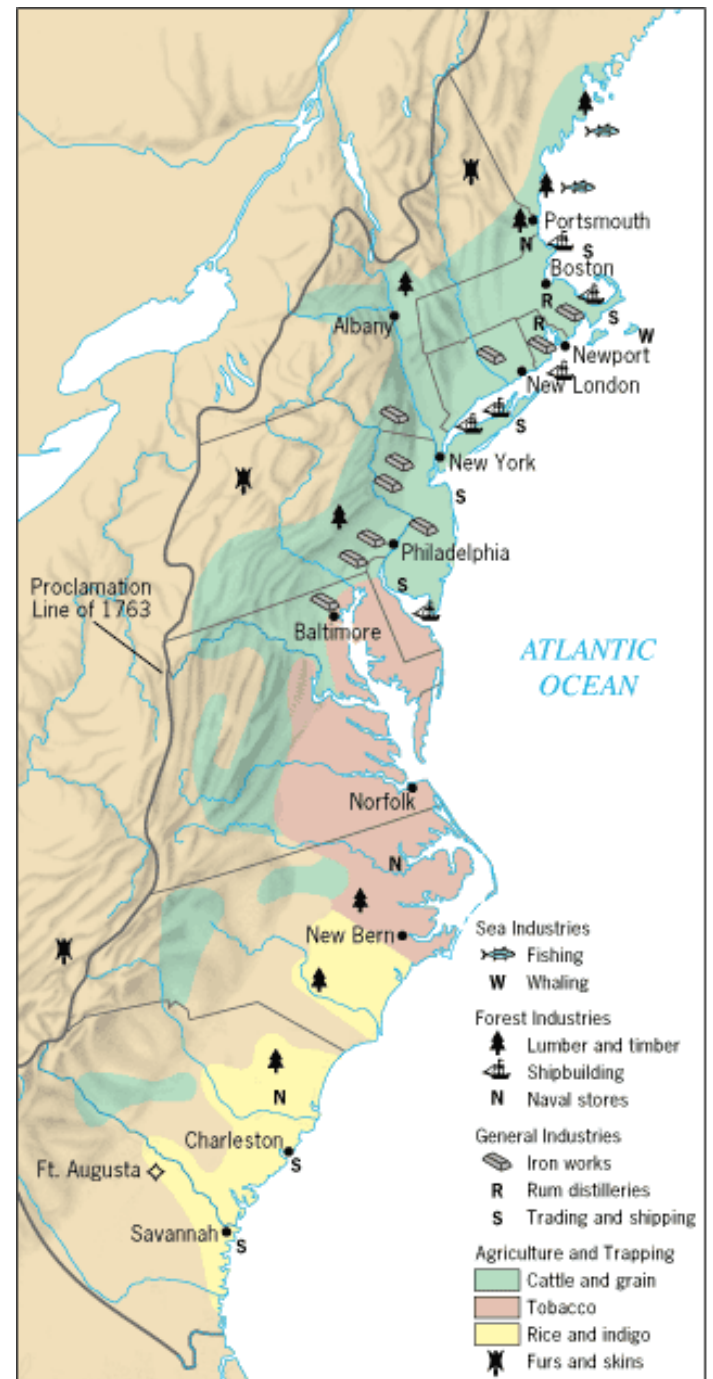


Workaday America

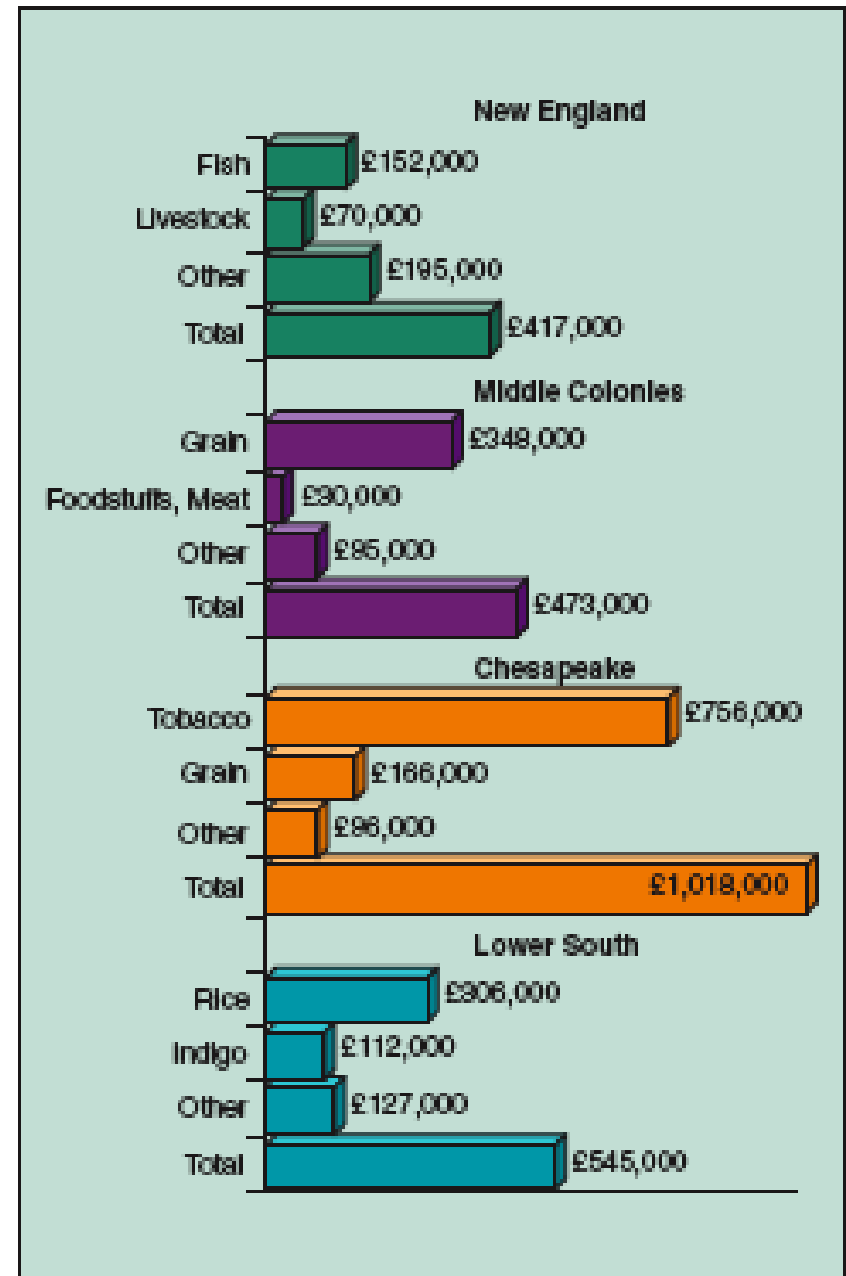
■ Shipbuilding

- Colonies had important (and relatively rare) materials such as tar, pitch, rosin, and turpentine
- Huge trees in colonies used for British ships; colonists were restricted from cutting some down because of this

The Colonial Economy



Value of Colonial Exports by Region, Annual Average, 1768 - 1772





Workaday America

- As early as the 1730s, there was a growing trade imbalance between Britain and colonies
 - Americans (with increasing population) demanded more and more British products
 - British population was reaching a saturation point for imports from America
 - How could colonists sell enough goods to make money to buy what they wanted in Britain?
 - The answer: by seeking foreign (non-British) markets



Workaday America

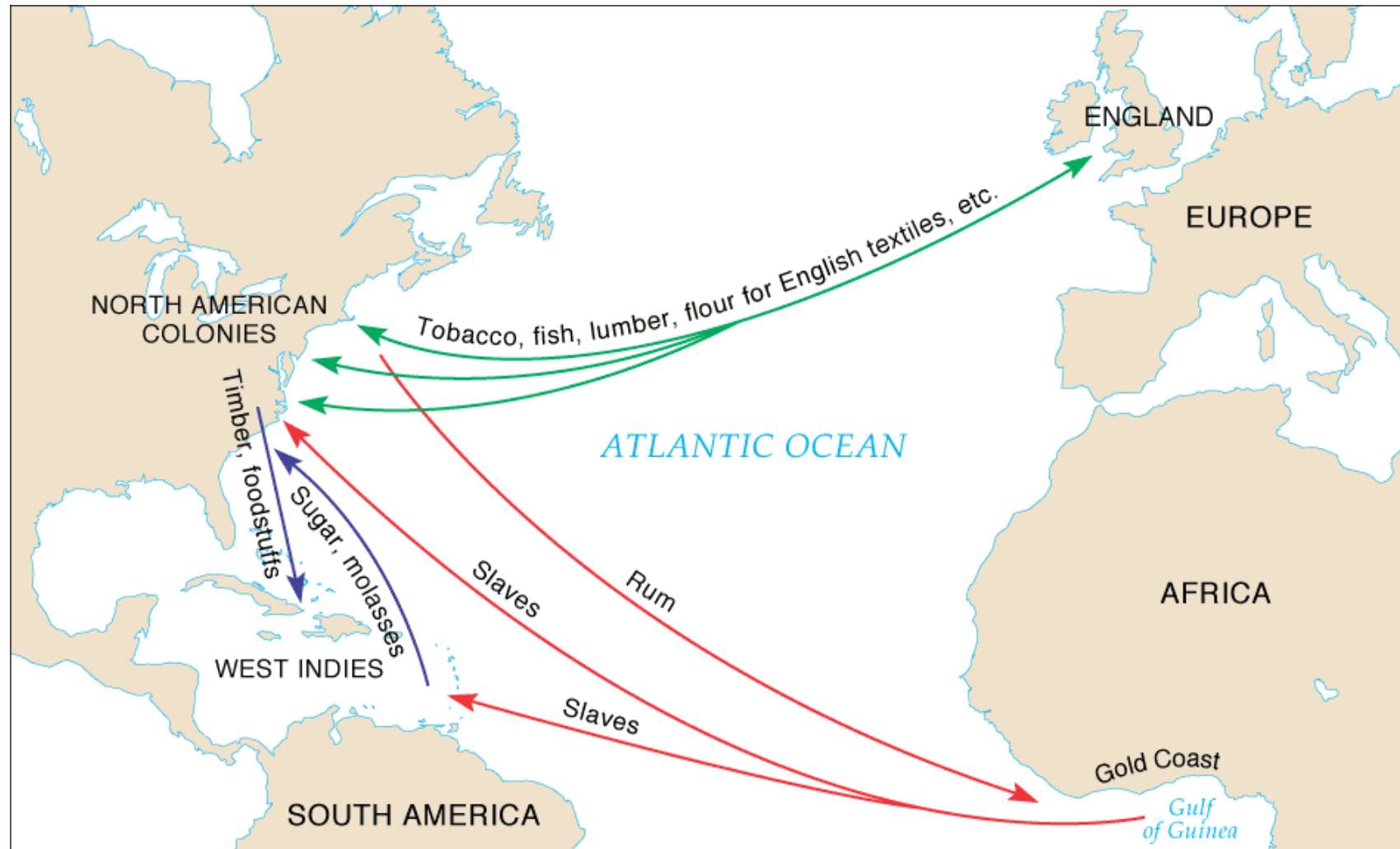
■ Foreign trade

- Exports to Europe had to pass through Britain where re-exporters took a slice of the profits
- Most important trading partner for colonists was trade with West Indies

■ 1733 – Molasses Act

- British West Indian planters pressured Parliament to stop American trade with French West Indies
- Would cripple American foreign trade and hurt colonists' standard of living
- Colonists got around law by smuggling and bribing

Colonial Trade Patterns, c. 1770





Horsepower and Sailpower

- Transportation was a huge problem in America because of:
 - Sparse population
 - Huge expanse of land
 - Scarcity of money and workers



Horsepower and Sailpower

■ Roads

- Dirt roads; dusty in summer and mud ditches in winter
- Dangers of stagecoaches – fallen trees, rickety bridges, overturning of carriage, runaway horses



Horsepower and Sailpower

■ Waterways

- Heavy reliance on waterways because of bad roads
- Population clustered around banks of navigable rivers
- Also much traffic along coasts



Horsepower and Sailpower

- Taverns along the main routes
 - Provided amusements (gambling, bowling, pool, bars)
 - All social classes mingled together
 - Gossip (and political talk) spread through taverns
 - Important for crystallizing public opinion
 - Centers of agitation as revolutionary movement became stronger



Horsepower and Sailpower

- The colonial postal system
 - Private couriers also worked
 - Service was slow and infrequent
 - Privacy was a problem: mail carriers might pass the time by reading mail



Dominant Denominations

- Two “established” (tax-supported) churches in 1775 – Anglican and Congregational
 - Considerable part of population did no worship at any church
 - In those colonies that had an established religion only a minority of people belonged to that church



Dominant Denominations

- Established churches in the colonies:
 - Congregational in Massachusetts (including Maine), Connecticut, New Hampshire
 - Anglican in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, New York (only in NY City and 3 neighboring counties)
 - No established church in Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania



Dominant Denominations

- Church of England (Anglican) church
 - Propped up king's authority in colonies
 - Royal authorities tried to expand into other colonies, but were strongly opposed
 - Faith that was less fierce (and more worldly) than Puritanism
 - In 1693 the College of William and Mary was founded to train better Anglican clergy



Dominant Denominations

- Congregational church
 - Grew out of individual Puritan churches
 - Established in all of New England except Rhode Island
 - Presbyterianism associated with Congregationalism, but was not established in any colony



Dominant Denominations

- Religious ministers and politics
 - Presbyterianism and Congregationalism encouraged rebellion against British
 - Anglican clergymen generally supported the crown

Religious Diversity in 1750





Dominant Denominations

- Anglican church was handicapped by not having a bishop in the New World
 - Ministers had to travel to England to be ordained
 - Plan to ordain an American bishop was stopped by protesting colonists who felt this would increase the power of the Anglican church (and therefore crown)



Dominant Denominations

■ Religious toleration

- People could generally worship (or not) as they pleased
- Roman Catholics were discriminated against, as in England
- However, fewer Catholics in America meant anti-Catholic laws were less strict and less enforced



The Great Awakening

- By the mid 1700s, religion was less fervent than in the 1600s, when the colonies were first settled
 - The Puritan church had 2 burdens:
 - Elaborate doctrines
 - Compromises to liberalize membership requirements



The Great Awakening

- Puritan elaborate doctrines
 - Puritan preachers preached overly complex, intellectual, and boring sermons, beyond the understanding of the membership



The Great Awakening

- Puritan compromises to liberalize membership requirements
 - Ministers worried members were no longer motivated by hell and damnation
 - Some members questioned established doctrines:
 - Good works might save people instead of predestination to heaven or hell
 - Arminians (followers of Dutch Jacobus Arminius) believed individual free will, not divine decree, determined a person's eternal fate
 - Some churches (in response to these liberal beliefs) allowed non-converted members into church membership



The Great Awakening

- In the 1730s and 1740s, the Great Awakening occurred
 - A series of spiritual revivals that swept through the colonies

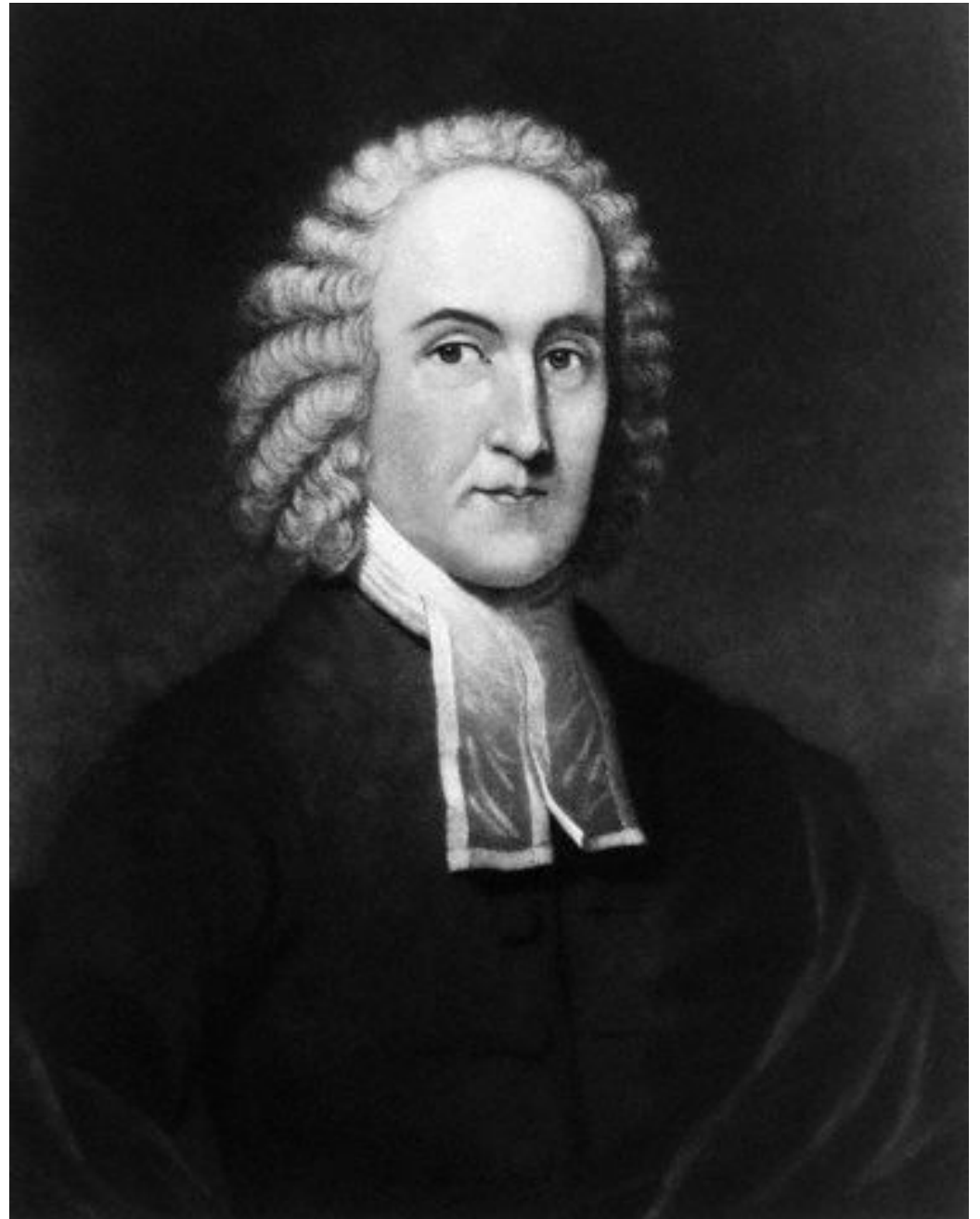


The Great Awakening

- Began in 1734 in Northhampton, Massachusetts with Jonathan Edwards
 - Edwards preached “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”
 - Fought idea that good works were enough to be saved – God’s grace was only way to get to heaven
 - Preaching style was learned and closely reasoned, but used brutal doctrines to catch people’s attention



Jonathan Edwards

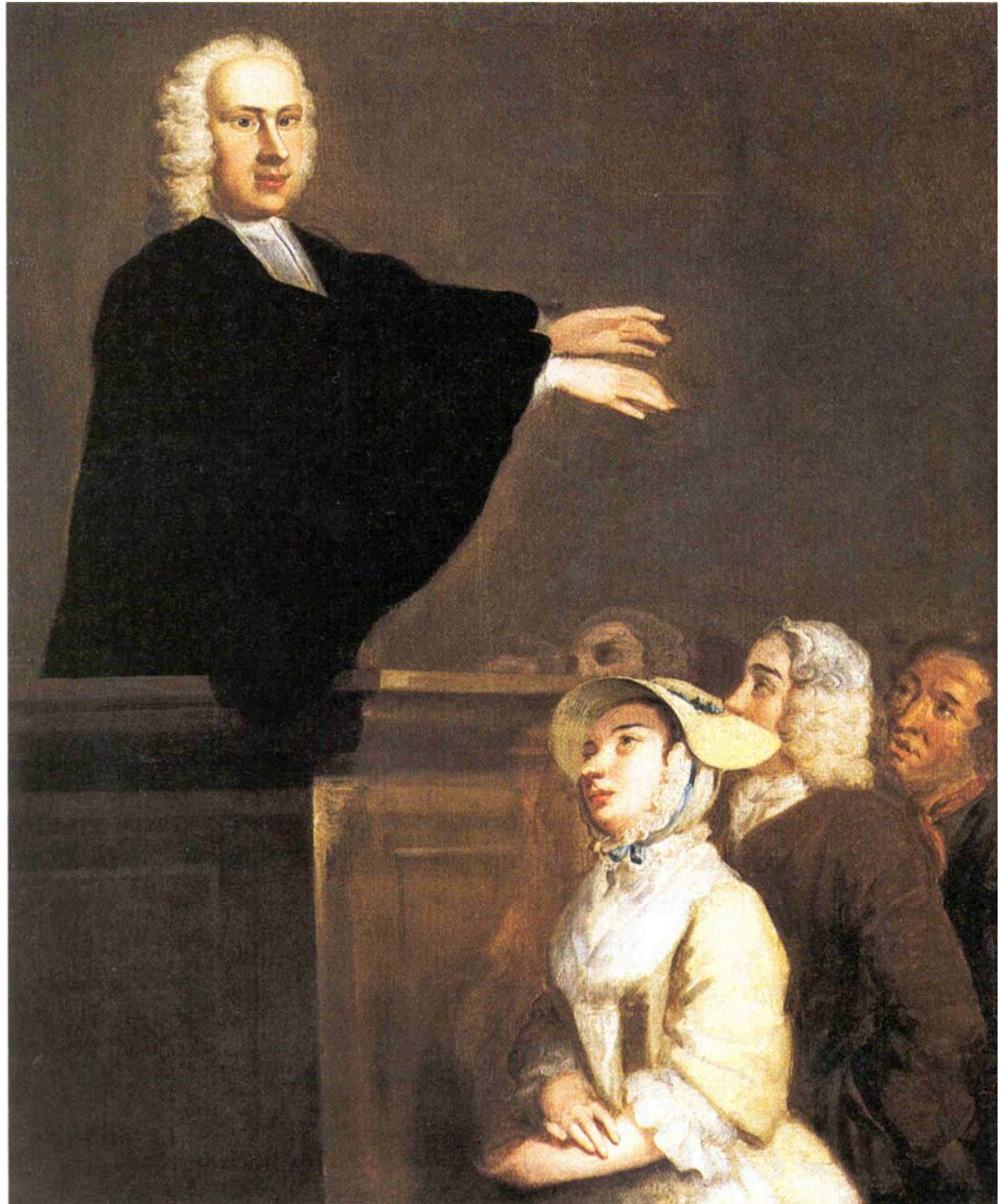




The Great Awakening

- In 1738 George Whitefield became prominent
 - Powerful preacher who used speaking skills to reach people
 - Traveled the colonies, preaching in outside forums to thousands of people
 - Preached message of human helplessness and divine omnipotence
 - Countless sinners converted; the “saved” groaned, shrieked, and rolled around on ground under influence of God’s power
- Whitefield also inspired many imitators

George Whitefield



George Whitefield Preaching





The Great Awakening

- “Old lights” vs. “new lights”
 - Old lights did not believe in the emotionalism and theatrical antics of the revivalists
 - New lights defended Great Awakening for revitalizing American religion
 - Congregationalists and Presbyterians split on this issue:
 - Congregationalists were associated with old lights; Presbyterians were associated with new lights



The Great Awakening

■ Effects of the Great Awakening

- Increased membership of “new light” churches (Baptists, Presbyterians)
- Undermined of “old light” religions (whose authority had come from education)
- Increased number and competitiveness of American religions
- Encouraged missionary work among Indians and black slaves
- “new light” universities founded (Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, Dartmouth)
- First mass movement of American people
 - Broke down sectional and denominational lines
 - Gave Americans sense that they were a single people



Schools and Colleges

- Traditional English view of education
 - Reserved for aristocratic few (leaders, and males), not for regular citizens
 - This idea was only slowly broken by the colonists



Schools and Colleges

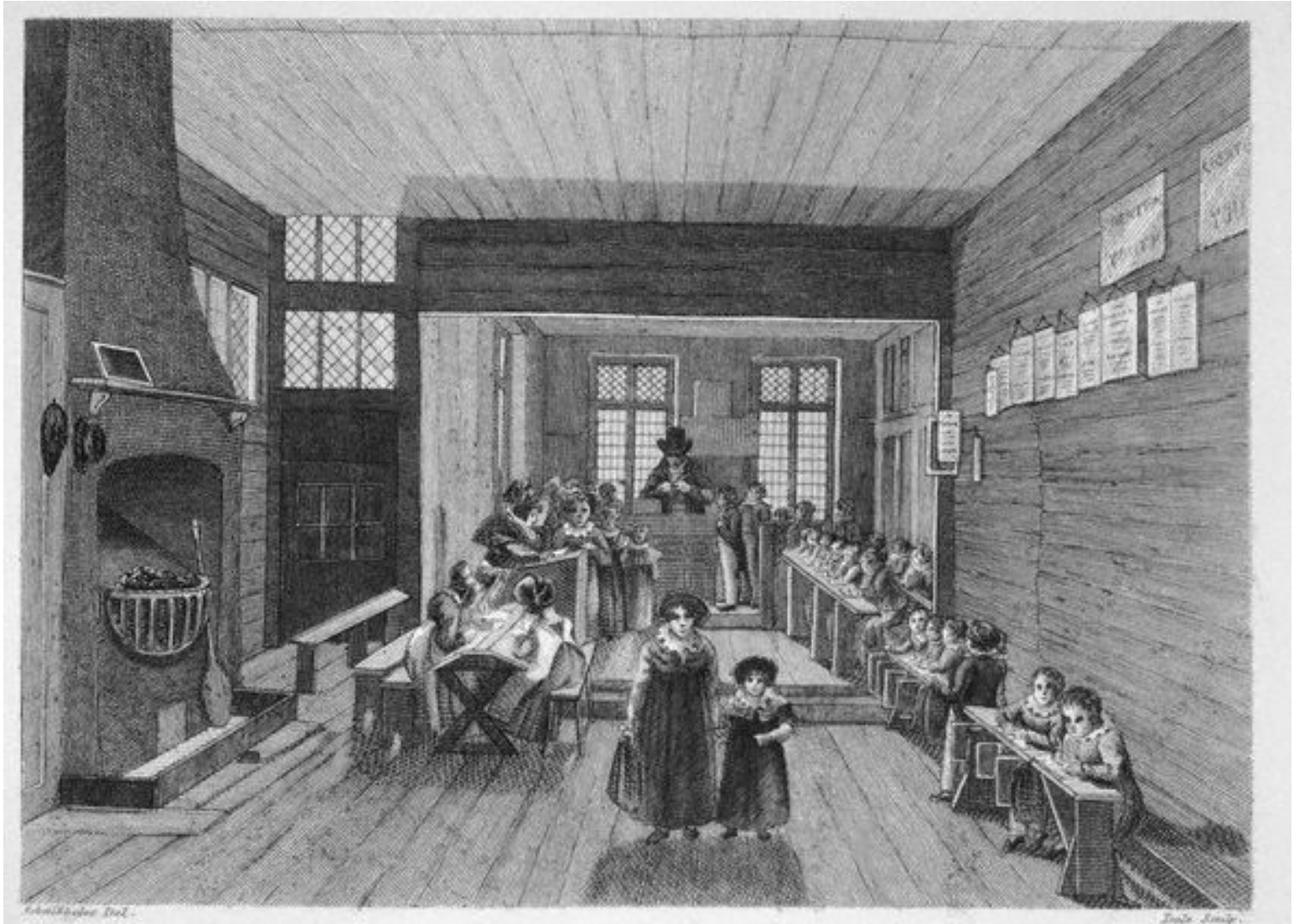
- Puritan New England pushed education more than other colonies
 - Done primarily for religious reasons: to encourage learning needed for reading and understanding the Bible



Schools and Colleges

- Education in New England
 - Primarily for boys
 - Primary and secondary schools
 - Varied in quality and length of time open
 - Farming took much time
 - Many graduates from Cambridge (strongly Puritan university in England) and other English universities

School in a Puritan Meetinghouse





Schools and Colleges

- Elementary schools existed in middle colonies and South
 - Some tax-supported, some private
- Schools in South hampered by population spread out over large areas
 - Wealthy families used private tutors for their children



Schools and Colleges

- The general atmosphere in school
 - Focus on religion and classical languages (Latin and Greek)
 - Focus on doctrine and dogma (not experiment and reason)
 - Independent thinking discouraged
 - Discipline severe (for example, students were “birched” – spanked by a branch from a birch tree when they misbehaved)

Corporal Punishment in Schools





Schools and Colleges

- College education

- At first (especially New England) geared toward preparing men for the ministry
- Rich families (especially in South) sent boys to England to get a “real” (refined, philosophical, worldly) education



Schools and Colleges

- Nine colleges established during the colonial era
 - These schools had enrollments of only 200 (at the most)
 - Curriculum leaned toward the “dead” languages (Latin and Greek)
 - After 1750, the trend was toward more modern subjects
 - Ben Franklin played major role in founding (what became) the University of Pennsylvania



A Provincial Culture

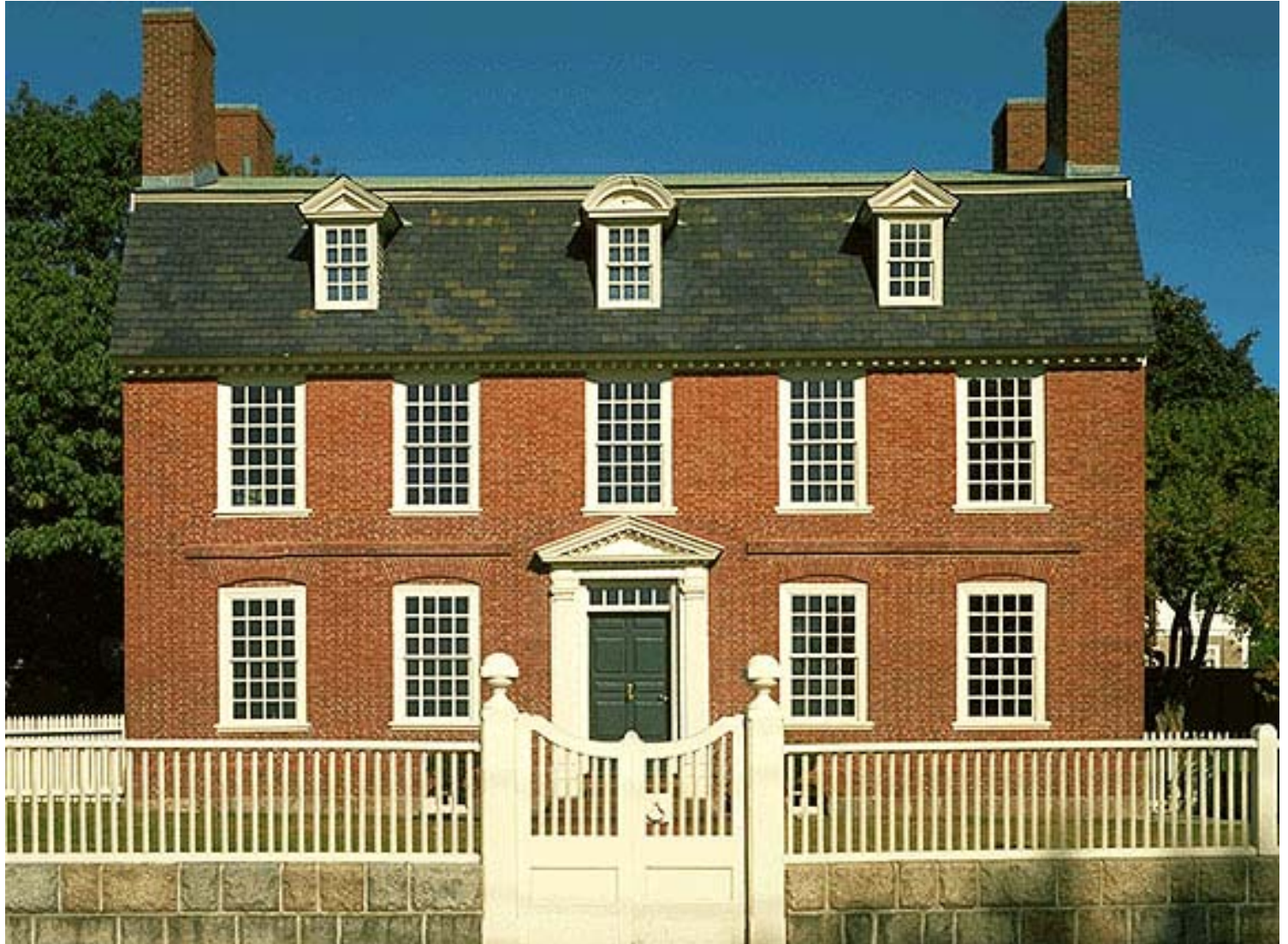
- In art and culture America still responded to Europe
 - American painters went to Europe to paint and complete training
 - Some seen as Loyalists (pro-British) during Revolution because of the influence Britain had on them
 - Important colonial painters
 - John Trumbull, Charles Willson Peale, Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley



A Provincial Culture

- In architecture also, America copied Europe
 - Even the “American” log cabin copied from Sweden
 - In 1727 the red-bricked Georgian style building was introduced in America

An Example of Georgian Architecture





A Provincial Culture

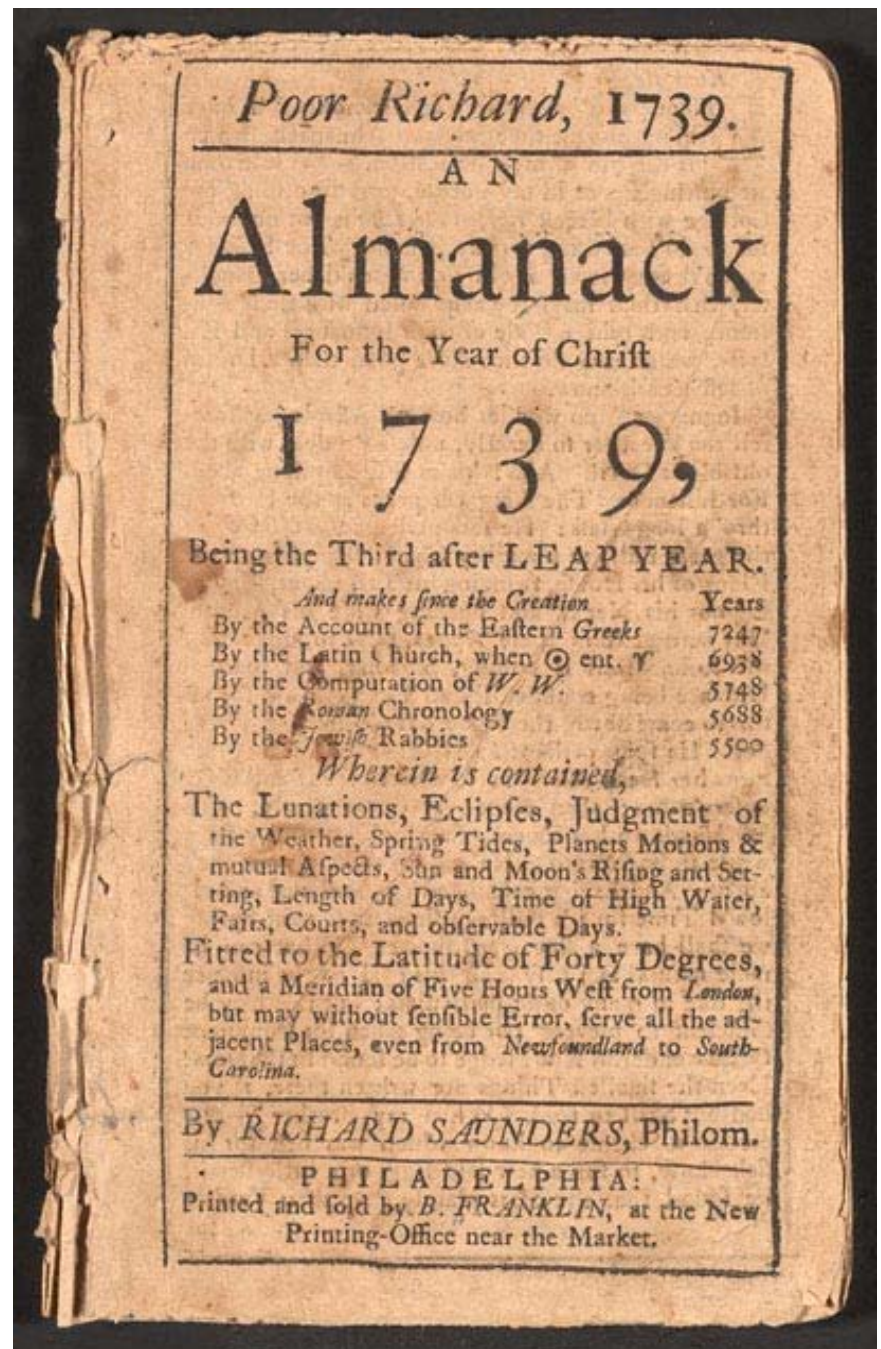
■ Literature

- Was generally undistinguished
- Phyllis Wheatley
 - Was a poet who as a slave girl was brought to Boston at age 8
- Benjamin Franklin
 - Edited Poor Richard's Almanack (1732 – 1758)
 - Collection of quotes and sayings; homespun wisdom like "Honesty is the best policy"
 - More widely read in America than anything else but Bible
 - Also wrote his famous Autobiography

Phyllis Wheatley



Poor Richard's Almanack





A Provincial Culture

■ Science

- Was generally behind that of Europe
- Ben Franklin was America's only first-rank scientist
 - Performed dangerous experiments like flying a kite to demonstrate that lightning was a form of electricity
 - Invented bifocal spectacles, highly efficient Franklin stove, and lightning rod

Ben Franklin's Kite Experiment with Electricity





Pioneer Presses

- A few private libraries existed
 - Byrd family in Virginia had largest (4,000 books)
- Circulating libraries also existed
 - Ben Franklin established first in Philadelphia
 - By 1776, there were about 50 in America
- Americans generally too poor to buy many books and too busy to read many



Pioneer Presses

- Pamphlets, leaflets, journals
 - Printed by hand-operated printing presses
 - By 1775, 40 colonial newspapers were in print
 - Weeklies consisting of 1 large sheet, folded in 1/2
 - Long, complex essays signed with Roman-sounding names
 - “news” might lag weeks behind the event (especially overseas events)
 - Newspapers were powerful way colonists could rally support around rebellion against British

Colonial Newspapers





Pioneer Presses

■ The Zenger case

- Arose in New York (middle colony, with many different ethnic groups competing for power)
- John Peter Zenger, a newspaper printer, was brought to court for criticizing a corrupt royal governor
- Zenger was charged with seditious libel (sedition means inciting to rebellion; libel means printing something that damages someone's reputation)
- British law said that the truth or falsity of what Zenger wrote did not matter
- Zenger's lawyer (Alexander Hamilton) eloquently argued that "the very liberty of both exposing and opposing arbitrary power" was at stake

The Trial of Peter Zenger





Pioneer Presses

■ The Zenger decision

- Jury sided with Hamilton, returning verdict of not guilty
- Pointed way to open discussion in open society that America was becoming
- Because it was contrary to existing law, it was not immediately accepted by other judges
- Eventually helped establish the legal doctrine that true statements about public officials were not libelous
- Made newspapers (eventually) free to publish responsible criticism of powerful officials



The Great Game of Politics

- In 1775, the 13 colonies had governments that took a variety of forms
- Colonial governors
 - 8 had royal governors
 - 3 (Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware) were under proprietors who appointed governors
 - 2 (Connecticut, Rhode Island) elected their own governors under self-governing charters



The Great Game of Politics

- Colonial legislatures (assemblies)
 - Most had 2-house legislatures
 - The upper house was chosen by those who appointed the governor (the crown, proprietors, or voters in self-governing colonies)
 - The lower house was chosen by people (those with enough property to qualify)
 - Backcountry voters were generally underrepresented and resented governmental elites
 - Self-taxation through direct and local representatives was an important privilege colonial voters



The Great Game of Politics

- Royal governors

- Many were good and able; a few were corrupt and incompetent
- Even the best ones had trouble with colonial legislatures because they represented a far-off authority across the Atlantic



The Great Game of Politics

- Colonial assemblies' attempts to assert their authority
 - Withheld governor's salary unless he did what they wanted
 - The governor was normally in need of money (otherwise he would not be in America); most governors gave in
 - The London government should have paid governors from independent sources
 - 1767 – Townshend taxes arranged to pay governors independent of legislatures; but by that time colonists were already angry over taxation became angrier over new taxes



The Great Game of Politics

- Local government
 - South – county government
 - North – town-meeting government
 - Middle – mixture between these 2



The Great Game of Politics

■ Voting

- Upper classes refused (and feared) full democracy
 - 1/2 of all adult males were disenfranchised
- Religious and property qualifications; even stricter for office-holding
- Ease of getting land meant fulfilling property requirement was attainable by most
- Many eligible voters did not vote
 - Allowed upper classes (“betters”) to run colonial affairs
 - Voted more to kick out bad leaders than to elect good ones



The Great Game of Politics

■ Democracy

- In 1775, America was not a true democracy
- America was far more democratic than England and the rest of Europe, and America was moving toward democracy



Colonial Folkways

- Colonial life was drab and tedious, but compared to Europeans, Americans lived well



Colonial Folkways

■ Food

- Plentiful, but coarse and monotonous
- Americans ate more (especially of meat) than people in the Old World
- Only the lazy or sick went hungry



Colonial Folkways

- A lack of basic comforts
 - Churches were not heated, even in the cold winter
 - Drafty homes were poorly heated by inefficient fireplaces
 - No running water, no plumbing, no bathtubs
 - Candles and whale-oil lamps gave off faint light at night
 - Garbage disposal done by hogs or buzzards



Colonial Folkways

■ Colonial amusement

- Militia musterings (trainings) interspersed with merrymaking
- On the frontier: house-raisings, quilting bees, husking bees, apple parings
- Funerals and weddings
- Lotteries approved (used by churches to raise money)
- South – card playing, horse racing, cockfighting, fox hunting, dancing, stage plays (but forbidden in North)



Colonial Folkways

■ Holidays

- Christmas was celebrated by most colonists, but frowned on by Puritans because of its association with Catholicism
- Thanksgiving Day became an American festival, combining God and eating



Colonial Folkways

- By the mid 1700s, the colonies were growing together and becoming more similar
 - All basically English in language, customs, and Protestantism
 - Widespread presence of diversity (ethnic/religious) led to some toleration
 - Ambitious people had opportunities for social mobility that Europeans did not have
 - All had some self-government (though not full democracy)
 - Communication and transportation among the colonies was improving
 - Separated from the ruling authority (England) by 3,000 miles