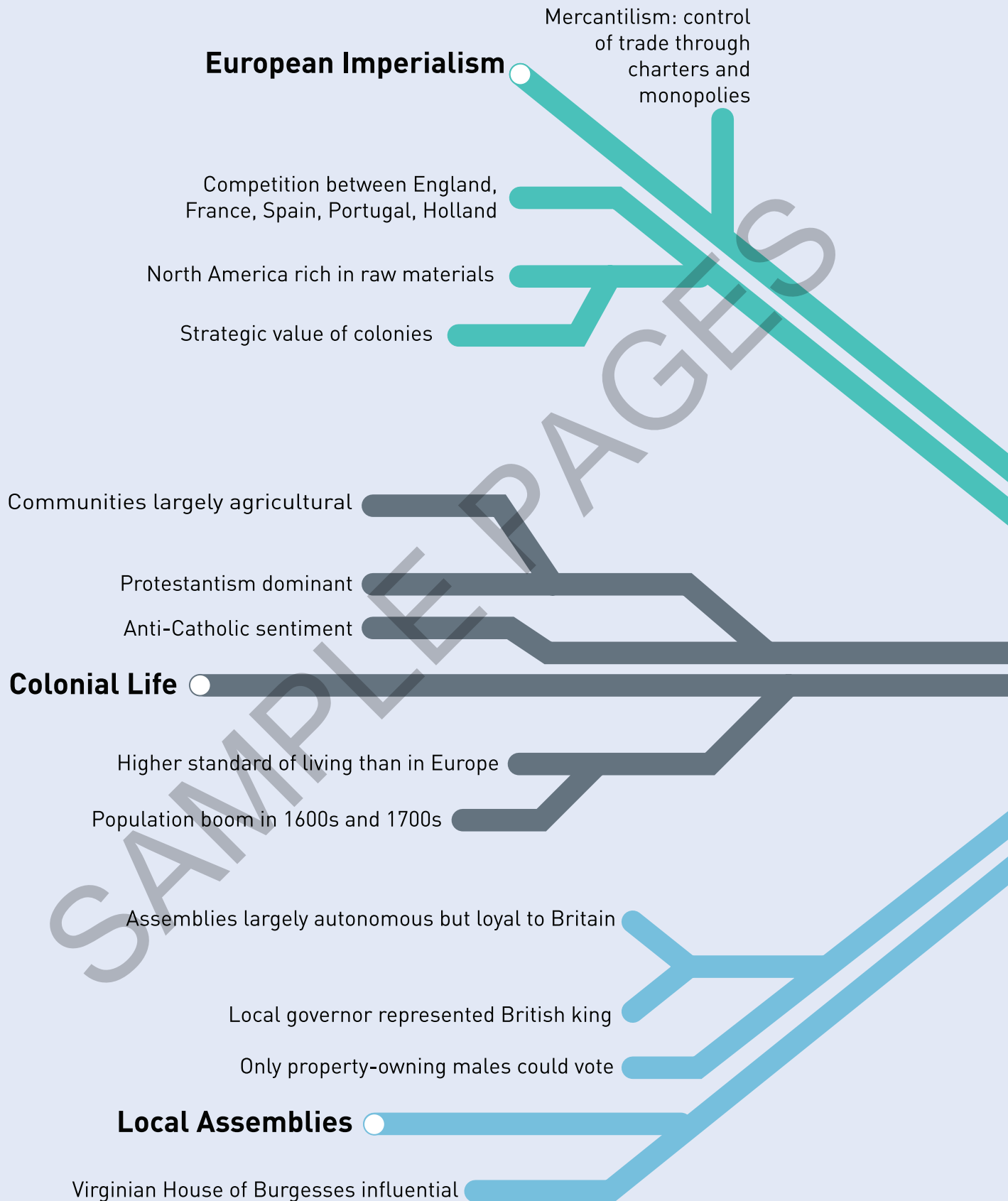


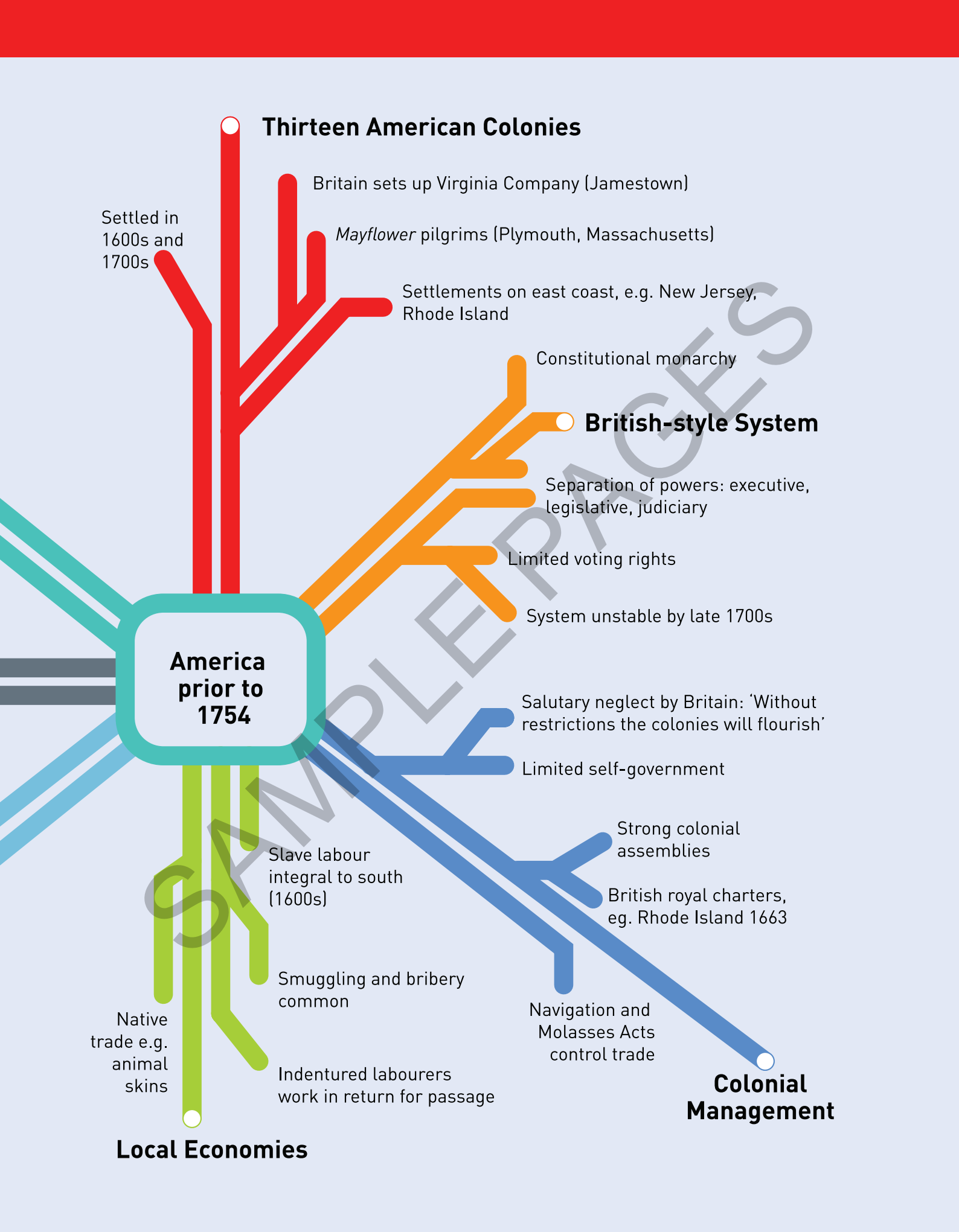
CHAPTER

1

# INTRODUCING AMERICA

(PRE-1754)







African American slave being sold.

A questionable representation of Columbus 'discovering' America.



## INTRODUCTION

The story of the United States began in Europe, with competition among imperial powers to settle the great landmass of North America. From the 1500s onwards the wealthy but land-strapped kingdoms of Europe – England, France, Spain, Holland and Portugal – became aware of the economic and strategic potential of this bountiful new continent across the Atlantic. Explorers, settlers, conquistadors,<sup>1</sup> captains, merchants and speculators braved perilous sea voyages into the unknown to plant their flag in a land they knew little about. By the late 1600s, several European powers had claimed their own piece of North America, leading to territorial competition and nationalist tensions. For a time it seemed as if this 'new world' might develop as a mirror of the old, divided Europe.

Arguably the strongest of these imperial powers was Great Britain. Britain's military strength, naval dominance and mastery of trade gave it the edge in matters of empire; this was reflected in the claim that 'Britons ... never will be slaves!'<sup>2</sup> in the popular anthem *Rule, Britannia!* The true purpose of British imperialism, however, was not to conquer or rule but to make money. London maintained the colonies as a valuable source of raw materials and a market for manufactured products. Most imperial legislation was therefore concerned with the regulation of trade. By the mid-1760s, British America had evolved into a remarkably independent colonial system. Under a broad policy of 'salutary neglect', each of the thirteen colonies had become used to a significant degree of self-government. Distance and distraction, loose imperial policy, ineffective governors, local assemblies left to their own devices and independent-minded colonials saw the American colonies come to be governed by Americans, for the most part.

The sowing ground of revolution was American colonial society, often stereotyped and simplified, but in reality diverse and divided. Not all colonial Americans hailed from Britain. Not all of them came voluntarily. Some had come for religious freedom but they did not all belong to the same religion. Most colonists lived comfortably and happily in small agricultural communities, yet this made them inclined to be suspicious of outsiders. They pledged loyalty to Britain but only on their terms. They tended to distrust central authority, evidenced by the small but regular frontier rebellions against their own colonial governments. At the apex of this society were

the landed gentry<sup>3</sup> and wealthy merchants; these colonial elites imitated the aristocrats of Britain, whom they thought of as equals (though those in Britain thought otherwise). As landlords and legislators, the elites considered themselves masters of their own domain, yet the events of the 1760s would challenge their confidence and disrupt the equilibrium between Britain and her American colonies.

1 Spanish explorers/conquerors of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

2 Britons: the British.

3 Land-owning upper class.

# THE UNCHARTED WORLD

The North American continent is a vast landmass with enormous diversity of terrain, climate, natural resources, flora and fauna. Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the east, the Pacific to the west, the Gulf of Mexico in the south and the Arctic Ocean to the north, it is the third-largest continent on Earth after Asia and Africa and spans almost 25 000 000 square kilometres. Today it is dominated by two countries, the United States and Canada; however there are at least forty other North American independent states, including Greenland, numerous island nations in the Caribbean and several Central American countries. These countries are today home to more than 528 000 000 people.

The modern-day United States began in the easternmost third of the continent, between the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi River. The topography of this area varies widely, from broad flat plains, rolling hills and temperate forests in the north to coastal swamps and flatlands in the south. A long mountain range, the Appalachians, runs for 2400 kilometres in a north-east direction, several hundred miles inland from the Atlantic coast. West of the Appalachians are the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and, along their valleys, large swathes of fertile land suitable for farming. The region's climate changes appreciably from north to south: the north is temperate and mild but prone to bitterly cold winters and heavy snowfalls, while southern regions enjoy warm, sub-tropical weather punctuated by intense humidity, storms and hurricanes.

The eastern sector of the continent was rich with natural resources, making it attractive to colonisers. It was scattered with forests containing tall stands of timber, almost ready-made for construction and shipbuilding. There were no significant deposits of high-value metals like gold and silver but some areas were rich with iron ore and coal; these minerals would be exploited by later generations. The Atlantic coastline was brimming with fish, as were inland lakes, rivers and waterways. Bison, bear, deer, rabbit and possum were all abundant and would later be hunted extensively for their meat and skins. Beaver and mink were prized for their fur which commanded good prices on the European market. The most precious commodity in North America, however, was the land itself. Despite its inhabitation by hundreds of native tribal groups, Europeans considered the continent a vacant land ripe for seizure, settlement and colonisation.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Mississippi is the second-longest river in North America, after its tributary, the Missouri. Its name is derived from the Algonquin 'Misi-ziibi', meaning 'great river'.

## DID YOU KNOW?

A forest-dwelling species of bison was abundant in wooded areas of north-east America at the time of English settlement. By the end of the revolution this species had been hunted to extinction.



The Mississippi River.

## CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE – ANNOTATED MAP

Investigate the settlement of one of the thirteen British colonies and consider how landscape, climate and natural resources shaped its economic development. Show your findings on an annotated map or infographic.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Californian cities Los Angeles ('the angels') and San Francisco ('Saint Francis') were named by the Spanish. Louisiana and New Orleans were named for the French king and a port city in France respectively.

## THE FIRST EUROPEANS

Britain was not the first European power to lay claim to North America, neither was it the most dominant when the revolution began to unfold in the mid-1700s. Almost the entire western half of the continent – and most of Florida – was occupied by Spain. French-speaking settlers occupied the fertile areas immediately to the north and the west of the British colonies. These possessions, referred to as New France, stretched from the Appalachian Mountains in the east to the Mississippi River in the west; from Quebec (in present-day Canada) in the north to New Orleans in the south. British colonial settlements were small in comparison, confined to a relatively narrow strip of thirteen colonies, drawn out along the eastern seaboard.

## EUROPEAN COLONIES IN THE AMERICAS, 1700s



## DID YOU KNOW?

Spain constituted the largest global empire at the time of the American Revolution. Today more than 500 million people speak Spanish – a legacy of this imperial dominance



The first British settlers in America arrived mainly in pursuit of gold. Their hopes were based on exaggerated stories and myths like that of the fabled El Dorado and rumours of Spanish conquistadors finding fabulous golden cities in South America. Between 1585 and 1587 there were several attempts to establish English settlements in present-day Virginia and North Carolina, the most notable of these instigated by Sir Walter Raleigh, an explorer and courtier of Queen Elizabeth I. These early efforts at colonisation failed miserably – the settlements were either abandoned or they vanished without trace. More than a hundred men, women and children disappeared mysteriously from Raleigh's settlement at Roanoke Island, North Carolina; it is speculated that they assimilated into local tribes, perished at sea on their return voyage to England, or were wiped out by disease or starvation,

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Lost Colony DNA Project is an ongoing scientific and historical research program, seeking to locate DNA strands of the Roanoke Island settlers among surviving members of the area's native tribes.

## BRAINSTORM

On the board, list dangers and difficulties faced by early British colonists in North America.

## ACTIVITY

## JAMESTOWN: THE TROUBLED COLONY

A lasting British foothold in North America did not eventuate until 1607, when three ships commissioned by the Virginia Company left London to establish a colony. They landed at the mouth of the James River, Virginia, and selected a site on a thin strip of marshy land between river and coastline. They chose this position, named Jamestown, specifically for its defensive capacity and the absence of 'hostile natives' – though in time, the terrain and climate would contribute more to their near-destruction than any aggressive tribe. The heat and humidity of the area was thick and oppressive, the river water was brackish, and the



JAMESTOWN  
INTERACTIVE



A replica of the *Susan Constant* sailing ship that brought English settlers to Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Today Jamestown is an important site for historians and archaeologists; over one-million artefacts have been found there. The site also features a historical recreation of the early Jamestown settlement, which is popular with tourists.

## FOUNDING OF JAMESTOWN



## DID YOU KNOW?

Pocahontas was later captured by British settlers, held prisoner for some time and eventually taught both English and Christianity. She eventually married John Rolfe and emigrated to London, where she enjoyed brief celebrity until her early death in 1617.

4 Frank Grizzard and D. Boyd Smith, *Jamestown Colony: a Political, Social and Cultural History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 46.

5 Cited in Robert Appelbaum, *Envisioning an English Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 215.

6 Narrow strip of land connecting two larger areas of land.

surrounding swamps were a breeding ground for mosquitos which plagued them in summer, spreading ague (fever) and malaria.

The most pressing problem for the Jamestown colonists was food. The soil in the area, dank and clay-ridden, was unsuitable for growing anything other than weeds. It did not help that the settlers themselves were both poorly equipped for and unskilled in farming. As a result, most of their crops either failed or returned disappointing harvests. The woods near Jamestown abounded with wildlife and edible native vegetation, but the settlers were not adept at hunting and were reluctant to try unfamiliar food. The native tribes were initially peaceful and offered help; this help was occasionally accepted but often ignored.<sup>4</sup> Between its establishment in 1607 and the early 1620s Jamestown was almost wiped out several times by famine and disease. During the 'starving time', a period

## DOCUMENT

### GEORGE PERCY, JAMESTOWN GOVERNOR, 1609

Now all of us ... [are] beginning to feel that sharp prick of hunger, which no man truly describes but he who hath tasted the bitterness thereof. A world of miseries ensued ... so much that some, to satisfy their hunger, have robbed the store, for which I caused them to be executed. Then having fed upon horses and other beasts as long as they lasted, we were glad to make do with [such] vermin as dogs, cats, rats and mice ... to satisfy cruel hunger [and] eat boots, shoes or any other leather ... and to do those things which seem incredible, as to dig up dead corpses out of graves and to eat them ... and some have licked up the blood which hath fallen from their weak fellows.<sup>5</sup>

## ACTIVITY DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

As a class, discuss the hardships of the 'starving time' in Jamestown for a range of people, suggesting reasons why food was scarce for the colonists.



Captain John Smith is rescued by Pocahontas.

of crop failure and food shortage during the winter of 1609, barely ten per cent of Jamestown's 500 settlers survived. George Percy, Jamestown's governor, recalled the hardships of this period in a report back to England:

No natives inhabited the Jamestown isthmus,<sup>6</sup> however several tribal villages of

Powhatan — a sub-group of the Algonquin nation — lived close by. Initial contact with the Powhatan, instigated by English soldier Christopher Newport, was convivial and established friendly relations. Other Jamestown expeditionaries, like Captain John Smith, were less diplomatic and their actions sparked tensions between the groups. Smith was captured by the Powhatan in December 1607



and, according to legend, was only saved from execution by Pocahontas, the daughter of a tribal chief. Smith later attempted to build forts in native territory and drove Powhatan families from land he coveted for farming. This led to further friction, conflict and open warfare between Jamestown and its indigenous neighbours. A speech reportedly given by the Powhatan chief in 1609 shows remarkable insight into the situation confronting his people:

7 Cited in David Price, *Love and Hate in Jamestown* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 102.

DOCUMENT

POWHATAN’S SPEECH TO JOHN SMITH, 1609

Captain Smith, you may understand that I, having seen the death of all my people thrice, and not any one living of these three generations but my self; I know the difference of Peace and War better than any in my Country ... you [have] come to destroy my Country, so much frighten all my people as they dare not visit you. What will it avail you to take by force you may quickly have by love, or to destroy them that provide you food? What can you get by war, when we can hide our provisions and fly to the woods, whereby you must famish by wronging us, your friends? Think you I am so simple, not to know it is better to eat good meat, lay well and sleep quietly with my women and children, laugh and be merry with you, have copper, hatchets or what I want, being your friend, than be forced to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon accords, roots and such trash; and be so hunted by you that I can neither rest, eat nor sleep; but my tired men must watch and if a twig but break, every one cryeth there comes Captain Smith: then must I fly. Let this therefore assure you of our love, and every year our friendly trade shall furnish you with corn; and now also, if you would come in friendly manner to see us, and not thus with your guns and swords as to invade your foes.<sup>7</sup>

SOURCE ANALYSIS

ACTIVITY

Read Powhatan’s speech to John Smith and complete the table below.

ACCORDING TO CHIEF POWHATAN ...	
How have the Powhatan suffered?	
How might the English continue to harm the Powhatan?	
How might the Powhatan harm the English?	
What are the benefits of cooperation for: a) The Powhatan?  b) The English?	

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Pilgrims hired a second ship, the *Speedwell*, to assist their emigration to the New World – however its crew, fearing months stranded in an unknown land, sabotaged the ship and forced it to return to England.

## MAYFLOWER AND THE PILGRIMS

A second but perhaps better known settlement was initiated by the 'pilgrims' in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Originating in the northern counties of England, the Pilgrims were a branch of the Puritan movement: religious separatists unable to reconcile with the state-linked Anglican religion and many of its practices. They broke away from the Church of England and began conducting their own worship, a practice that led to criticism, isolation and persecution. Between 1607 and 1609 small groups of Pilgrims fled England for Amsterdam and Leiden in Holland, where they survived and prospered. By the mid-1610s the Pilgrim leadership believed the riches and culture of Holland might lure away their members and fatally weaken their movement. They began searching for a corner of the New World where they could establish a community free from the spiritual, social and economic influences of other religions.



*Mayflower II* replica in Plymouth.

In September 1620 fifty Pilgrim settlers and fifty-two other passengers and crew departed for America aboard the *Mayflower*, a converted cargo ship. Initially destined for Virginia, the *Mayflower* was forced further north by stormy weather, eventually dropping anchor in a natural harbour in modern-day Massachusetts. They found the area agreeable: the land was flat, fertile and full of useable timber, while the seas were full of codfish (hence the name this place bears today: Cape Cod). One of their first acts was to draft the Mayflower Compact, a written agreement to form a local council for self-government. On landing, the settlers located and pillaged several empty native villages they found nearby, digging up graves and looting winter stores of corn.

This would prove an ominous sign for the Nauset and Wampanoag peoples, who had lived in the area for centuries. By Christmas 1620 the settlers had located a suitable site for a permanent settlement, naming it Plymouth after the English port from which they had embarked.



Landing of the pilgrims at Plymouth, 11 December 1620.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The American holiday Thanksgiving, held on the fourth Thursday each November, was first observed by the settlers in both Jamestown and Plymouth as a celebration of their survival in the New World.

## DOCUMENT

## THE MAYFLOW COMPACT, 1620

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread [awesome] Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

Having undertaken, for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the First Colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, Covenant and Combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid. And by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the 11th of November. Anno Domini 1620.<sup>8</sup>

8 1620 AD.

## SOURCE ANALYSIS

## ACTIVITY

Read the Mayflower Compact and complete the tasks below.

1. What does the opening paragraph reveal about the signers of the compact?
2. According to the compact, what were the Pilgrims' reasons for settling in North America?
3. What do you think is meant by the term 'civil body politic'? Why would this be important for settlers in the New World?



'The Pilgrims signing the compact, on board the *Mayflower*, 11 November 1620.'



## DID YOU KNOW?

Another contributing factor to American settlement was the European law of primogeniture – the eldest son's right to inherit the entire family estate, leaving younger children landless. Many settlers in the southern colonies were the younger sons of English aristocrats dispossessed by this legal convention.

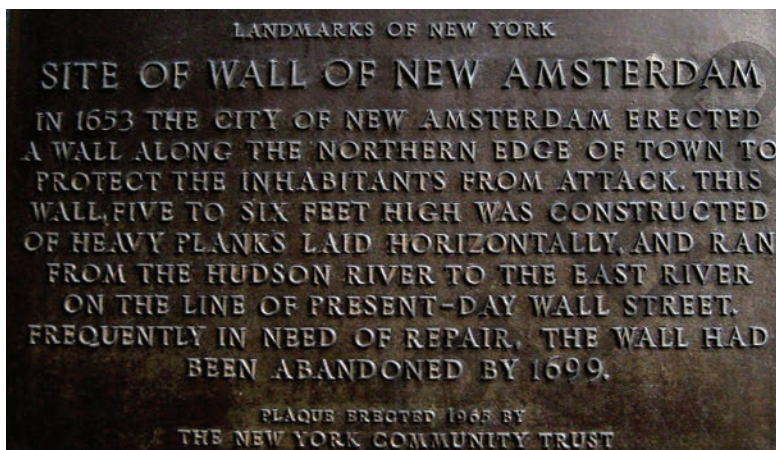
# THE BRITISH PRESENCE EXPANDS

The consolidation of the colonies at Jamestown (Virginia) and Plymouth (Massachusetts) provided encouragement for further settlement, as did a number of other factors. Shipbuilding techniques and the seaworthiness of vessels improved throughout the 1600s, as did mapping and navigation methods. This made journeys across the Atlantic faster and, in relative terms, safer and more reliable. Charter and joint stock companies in England set up enticing schemes to recruit settlers and colonise slabs of the New World in the hope of turning a profit. The disruption and violence of the English Civil War (1641–51) prompted many royalists to evacuate and take refuge in Virginia. Britain's growing population and shortage of land made resettlement in America an attractive option, for the industrious poor, the intrepid middle class and the younger sons of the aristocracy.

Over the next century another eleven colonies were settled or acquired by British interests. In some cases land was taken by force or coercion from colonists of other European powers. New York, for instance, was a Dutch possession called

New Netherland before the English captured it in 1667. The area later known as Pennsylvania was given by King Charles II to William Penn for the repayment of a debt. New Hampshire was settled by British fishermen, while the tiny colony of Rhode Island was settled and claimed by Roger Williams, a religious radical who had been expelled from Massachusetts. The southernmost colonies of Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina were settled, in part, to provide a buffer against French and Spanish colonies to the south and south-west.

By 1733 thirteen separate colonial entities – later to become the first states in the newly-formed United States – had been established as British possessions. They were loosely considered to exist in three regions: New England (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Rhode Island), the Middle Colonies (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware) and the Southern Colonies (Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas and Georgia). These groupings had no political structure or administration; the colonies within were governed independently of the others.



A plaque marking the site of the wall built by the Dutch in New Amsterdam (New York), on what became known as Wall Street.

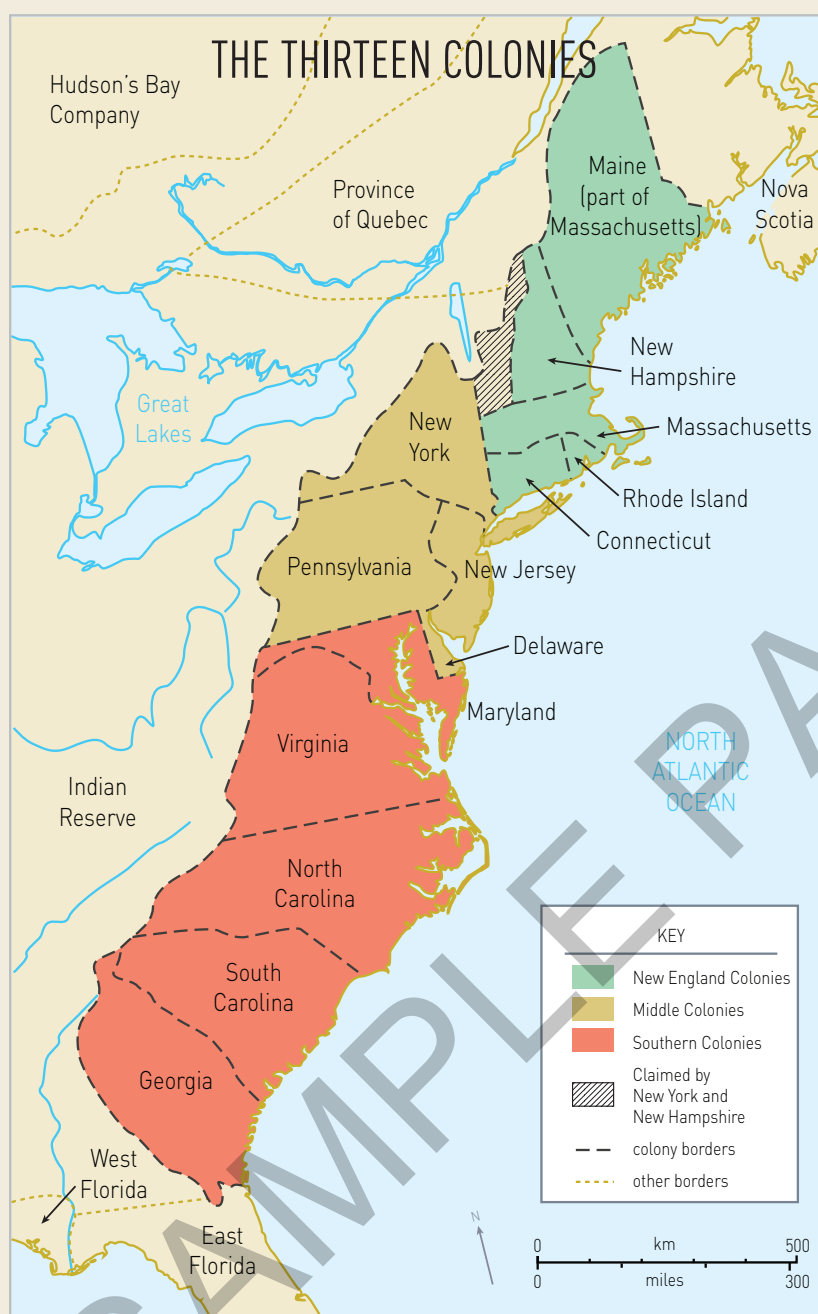
## DID YOU KNOW?

Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, was ahead of his time in many respects. As well as preaching religious tolerance (particularly in regard to Quakers and Jews), he argued that government should be independent from the Church.

## ACTIVITY

### RESEARCH

Find out more about one of the thirteen British colonies prior to 1754. Identify the colony's geography, natural resources, population and political system. Consider the relationships your colony might have had with its neighbours. Present your findings to the class.



### Thirteen British colonies (in order of founding):

#### Virginia

Founded: 1607, by London Company  
 Charter: 1606 (corporate) 1624 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 231 000  
 Economy: Plantation farming, tobacco, wheat, corn, cotton.

#### Massachusetts

Founded: 1620, by English Puritans  
 Charter: 1629 (corporate) 1691 (royal)  
 Population: (1750): 188 000  
 Economy: Fishing, corn, livestock, timber, shipbuilding, shipping.

#### New Hampshire

Founded: 1631, by English fishermen  
 Charter: 1679 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 27 500  
 Economy: Fishing, potatoes, textiles, shipbuilding.

#### Maryland

Founded: 1634, by English settlers  
 Charter: 1632 (proprietary)  
 Population (1750): 141 100  
 Economy: Farming, indigo, shipbuilding, ironworks.

#### Connecticut

Founded: 1636, by religious dissidents  
 Charter: 1662 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 111 300  
 Economy: Wheat, corn, fishing.

#### Rhode Island

Founded: 1638, settled by religious dissidents  
 Charter: 1663 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 33 200  
 Economy: Livestock, dairy production, fishing, timber.

#### New Jersey

Founded: 1664, seized from the Dutch  
 Charter: 1664 (proprietary) 1702 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 71 400  
 Economy: Timber, ironworks.

#### New York

Founded: 1664, seized from the Dutch  
 Charter: 1685 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 76 700  
 Economy: Farming, indigo, shipbuilding, ironworks.

#### South Carolina

Founded: 1670, by English settlers from Barbados  
 Charter: 1729 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 64 000  
 Economy: Plantation farming, indigo, rice, tobacco, cotton.

#### Pennsylvania

Founded: 1681, by William Penn  
 Charter: 1681 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 119 700  
 Economy: Farming, textiles, papermaking, timber, shipbuilding.

#### Delaware

Founded: 1682, seized from the Dutch  
 Charter: 1701 (proprietary)  
 Population (1750): 28 700  
 Economy: Fishing, timber.

#### North Carolina

Founded: 1710, after separation from South Carolina  
 Charter: 1729 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 73 000  
 Economy: Plantation farming, indigo, rice, tobacco, cotton.

#### Georgia

Founded: 1732, by a London expedition  
 Charter: 1752 (royal)  
 Population (1750): 5200  
 Economy: Plantation farming: indigo, rice, sugar, cotton.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Population growth was much faster in the British colonies during the 1700s than in New France and the Spanish empire, mainly because English companies advertised the benefits and advantages of emigration to the colonies.

# A DIVERSE SOCIETY

The trans-Atlantic migration of Europeans to the American colonies was a remarkable demographic event. In 1650 there were barely 50 000 settlers living in the English colonies, yet in just a century this number had increased to almost 1.2 million. This massive population boom continued apace through the eighteenth century – even as the revolution raged and a smallpox epidemic killed people in their thousands. Numbers doubled roughly every generation and not only from the mass influx of immigrants. By the late 1700s American birth rates were higher and child mortality rates markedly lower than in Europe; more than twenty per cent of children in Britain perished compared to just fourteen per cent in Massachusetts. There was better public hygiene, fresher food supplies and fewer fatal pandemics. Though childbirth remained problematic and a frequent cause of death, American families still had, on average, seven or eight surviving children.

American colonists, on average, enjoyed greater wealth, sustenance and standards of living than their counterparts in Europe. A significant factor in this was the availability of land, a commodity virtually monopolised by European elites (the economist Joseph Massie, writing in the mid-1700s, speculated that most British land was possessed by 310 ‘great families’ who owned between 100 000 and

## DOCUMENT

### COLONY POPULATIONS 1650–1770

POPULATION (THOUSANDS)	1650	1700	1740	1750	1770
Massachusetts	15.6	55.9	151.6	188.0	235.3
New York	4.1	19.1	63.7	76.7	162.9
Pennsylvania	0	18.0	85.6	119.7	240.1
Virginia	18.7	58.6	180.4	231.0	447.0
South Carolina	0	5.7	45.0	64.0	124.2
Georgia	0	0	2.0	5.2	23.4
All colonies	50.4	250.9	905.6	1170.8	2148.1

Source: Bureau of the Census, ‘Demography of the American Colonies’ (US Department of Commerce, 1998).

## ACTIVITY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE – DATA ANALYSIS

Look carefully at the population figures for the colonies and complete the tasks below.

1. Which were the fastest-growing colonies in terms of population? Investigate and note down possible explanations for this.
2. Suggest reasons why growth rates were comparatively slow in South Carolina and Georgia.
3. Find out the current population of Australia. If our population was to grow over the next twenty years at the same rate the American colonies did between 1750 and 1770, what would our population be? What problems and pressures might this create?

200 000 acres each).<sup>9</sup> Around forty per cent of Americans were independent or 'yeoman' farmers, with freehold ownership over small plots of land – a contrast with Europe, where most were tenanted farmers paying high land rental. Kulikoff notes that in Essex County, Massachusetts in the late 1600s, 'half the men owned land before they were 30, as did 95 per cent of the men over [the age of] 36.' He also suggests that land ownership in Pennsylvania was 'nearly universal' and that six-sevenths of the men in Connecticut were also landowners.<sup>10</sup>

Land was far from a limitless commodity, however, and by the early 1700s there were clear signs that the supply of cheap farmland was drying up. Land speculation by wealthier American colonists, natural population increases and the flood of immigrants all added to demand, forcing up the prices of available land. This bred new tensions and created pressure to open up the 'unsettled' territory that lay west of the Appalachian Mountains.

## THE POWERFUL COLONIAL ELITES

American colonial society, like that of Europe, was based upon structures, hierarchies and conventions. Expectations and affectations<sup>11</sup> shaped the way people lived, worked, dressed, behaved and responded to each other. There was a clear distinction between 'gentlemen' (those with wealth, particularly inherited wealth) and 'commoners' (those who worked for a living), particularly in rural areas. The gentry owned large tracts of the best land, wore the finest imported clothing and occupied the best pews in the local church. They participated in government both at town level – as aldermen or selectmen – and in many cases, in the legislative assembly of their colony. Politics was primarily the domain of wealthy men, who considered themselves the only class with the intelligence, civility and moderation for political thought and discourse. Members of the gentry also expected – and usually received – acknowledgement and deference from commoners, who addressed them as 'sire', 'mister' or other terms of respect.

While the American colonist of the lower ranks might be of English, Scottish, Scotch-Irish or German extraction, the majority of the colonial elite were of English heritage. They viewed themselves as Britons, loyal subjects of His Majesty and citizens of England. They revelled both in British culture and the glory of the British Empire. Their homes were filled with the same trappings and adornments one might find in a London home: furniture by Chippendale and Hepplewhite; pottery by Wedgwood or Royal Worcester, books written by notable British authors and poets. They ordered the finest fabrics and garments from the mills of Manchester and Birmingham and the tailors of London. If wealthy and intrepid enough they visited the mother country regularly, while many sent their children for education at great British schools like Rugby and Eton.

## THE AMERICAN FARMER

Agriculture was the dominant business in British America so the majority of colonists were farmers or farm labourers. Most lived in small villages of between 100 and 500 people, though there were a few larger towns. Bad weather, muddy tracks, unreliable livestock and equipment made transport slow, difficult and

DID YOU KNOW?

Doffing (raising) one's cap was a common mark of respect shown to both the British and colonial aristocracy. If the gentleman was of noble birth it would be done with an even greater flourish.



Chippendale chair.

9 Corrfield, 'Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth Century Britain,' in *History* (December 2007), 40.

10 Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 113.

11 Affectation: behaviour meant to impress others.



'Life of George Washington – the farmer'. Painted by Stearns.

dangerous, so it was rare for the average American farmer to venture far from his hometown. Other than in border regions, few ever left their own colony. Although this helped to build stable and strong communities, it tended to foster inward-looking views and cautious attitudes to outsiders. There were few schools and most education was completed at home; despite this colonial Americans were generally more literate than their European counterparts (Kenneth Lockridge's research into literacy rates in New England concluded that 85–90 per cent of white adult males in the late 1700s could read).<sup>12</sup>

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Both land prices and urban rents rose significantly in Massachusetts after about 1750. There was an increase in tenement and bunkhouse accommodation in Boston to house the working classes who could not afford to rent.

America's rural idyll began to decline in the mid-1700s when the availability of land in many colonies began to dry up. Land prices began to rise and yeoman farming became more expensive to pursue. Many rural economies began to transform, as those unable to acquire farmland either moved west in search of new land or took on waged occupations. Daniel Vickers' *Farmers & Fishermen: Work in Essex County* recounts this transformation in a small area of eastern Massachusetts, suggesting that by the late 1700s the colonial economies of New England were ripe for industrialisation and manufacturing growth. Other historians contend that the coming revolution – or more precisely, the mobilisation required to win the Revolutionary War – was a more important stimulus for establishing a manufacturing economy.

#### ACTIVITY

##### CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

As a class, discuss how high literacy rates in the American colonies might have contributed to the calls for political representation.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Prior to the 1700s, the average marrying age for females in Virginia was fifteen. By the late 1700s it had risen to twenty-five.

## THE INVISIBLE SEX?

While perceptions of colonial women are fraught with generalisations, for the most part their work was concentrated in the domestic sphere. Women generally supported their husbands, raised children and ran households. They enjoyed few rights and were not considered equal to men. There were few opportunities for formal education, other than some privately-run academies and finishing schools – in the larger cities – specialising in deportment, elocution, household management and the fine arts. The prevailing view – based largely upon religious conceptions of gender – was that women were the weaker sex, incapable of will power or reasoning, more easily tempted and prone to sin. The Salem witch trials of 1692–93, where fourteen women were hanged for exhibiting strange behaviour, were the most extreme manifestation of this view.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1974), 12.



Because of the financial burdens single women incurred for their families, women of all classes were under considerable pressure to marry: 'All of them are understood, either marry or bee married' wrote an anonymous lawyer in 1632.<sup>13</sup> The daughters of farming families were compelled to marry by their late teens; even widows were expected to remarry, particularly if they owned property (which by law would then pass to their new husband). Most unions were marriages of arrangement or convenience rather than love, and in some places approval from the bride's father was a legal requirement. Once married, a woman became, legally speaking, little more than an extension of her husband. She carried his name and was bound to abide by his will; she surrendered her property to his ownership and could not instigate divorce action. Women could not sign contracts or testify in court; they were not permitted to enter taverns, other public buildings and most town meetings; and they certainly had no right to vote.

Colonial America was a deeply religious society that cherished 'family' as the basis of social stability. Motherhood was consequently celebrated as an honourable and sacred vocation. It was also a dangerous one, with childbirth frequently claiming mother or child or both. One revolutionary-era grave in modern-day Vermont contains the bodies of a forty-year-old mother and her thirteen infants.

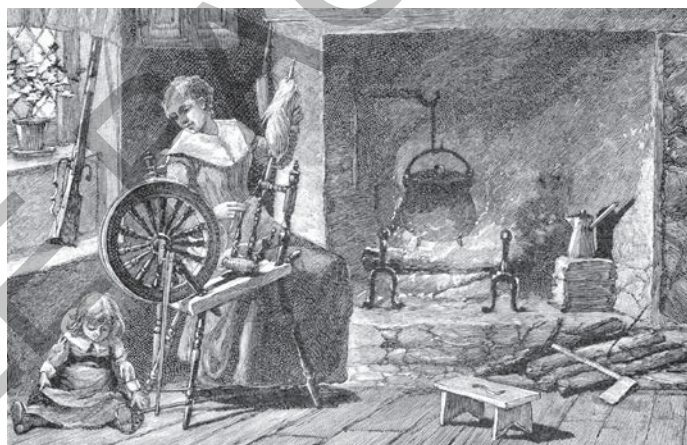
It was possible for independent-minded single women to take up paid employment. The most common jobs were in domestic service, cooking, seamstressing, teaching and the like – however it was not out of the question for women to run hospitals, orphanages, boarding houses and stores. Some historians have unearthed examples of colonial women managing businesses, running taverns, even printing and publishing newspapers.<sup>14</sup> The slow shift from an agrarian society to a wage-based economy in the latter half of the 1700s created opportunities for capable women, just as it did for men.

The story of Sybilla Masters of Pennsylvania is evidence that individual colonial women could prosper, albeit within the limitations of their male-dominated world. In the early 1700s Masters had watched native women hand-grinding maize to produce grits, a thick corn-based porridge that was widely eaten in the colonies. Eager to find a less labour-intensive method, Masters drew up plans for a hammer-driven mill that could grind large amounts of cornmeal. She also invented a new technique for hat-weaving using straw and palmetto leaves. In 1712 Masters travelled to London alone and spent three years there trying to obtain patents for her inventions. They were eventually granted – not to Sybilla but to her husband, Thomas, since women were not permitted to obtain patents.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Between ninety and ninety-five per cent of all colonial women who reached adult age would bear children at some stage in their lives.

In parts of colonial America, marriages often hinged on the bride supplying a suitable dowry: a collection of valuable goods such as money, land or household items.



Colonial kitchen with woman spinning.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 1750 nineteen-year-old Martha Dandridge married Daniel Custis, a wealthy Virginia planter. After Custis died in 1757, Martha married another Virginian, George Washington, who then inherited Custis' entire estate.

## DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Construct a fact file on the different social groups in North America prior to 1754, including women, Native Americans, indentured workers and slaves. Speculate on what a typical day might have looked like for each group.

## ACTIVITY

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Carla Pestana, ed., *Inequality in Early America* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 25.

<sup>14</sup> Berenice A. Carroll, *Liberating Women's History* (Chicago: Illini Books, 1976), 29.

## DID YOU KNOW?

John Winthrop's 'city on a hill' sermon is often cited today as an example of American exceptionalism: the belief that the United States exists as a role model for democracy, diversity and religious tolerance.

In 1768 noted revolutionary Samuel Adams said, 'I did verily believe, as I do still, that much more is to be dreaded from the growth of popery [Catholicism] in America, than from the Stamp Act.'

# RELIGION: THE COLONIAL LIFEblood

Religion was a powerful element in colonial society. Many of the European settlers who crossed the Atlantic did so in search of religious freedom as much as economic prosperity, so religious values and structures loomed large in the New World. Several colonies, including Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland, were settled explicitly as 'plantations of religion'. The more pious settlers saw America both as a haven for religious liberty and an opportunity to create a new society in God's image, free of the corruption and immorality of Europe. In a sermon given to Pilgrims crossing to Massachusetts in 1630, John Winthrop described their new home as 'a city upon a hill' and told them that 'the eyes of all people are upon us'.<sup>15</sup>

Almost all Americans were Protestant Christians. American Protestantism had been shaped and re-energised by the Great Awakening, a wave of religious reform beginning in the 1730s. It led to archaic rituals and ceremonies being discarded in favour of new forms of worship. Preaching in American churches, once dull and foreboding, began to transform: a new wave of preachers delivered emphatic, passionate and charismatic sermons. Worshippers were no longer quiet and passive followers; they were encouraged to participate in their faith by

discussing and debating, studying the Bible and other texts, actively worshipping and praying at home. This energetic, independent and questioning spirit may well have contributed to the revolutionary sentiment that began to unfold in the 1760s.

The grand ideal of religious tolerance was often preached but not always practised. The existence of many different churches with conflicting views made it a difficult principle to uphold. American Protestantism included a multiplicity of churches: Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists,



Pilgrims going to church.

Lutherans, French Huguenots, the Dutch Reformed churches, the Mennonite Amish and various Brethren groups. The Quakers (Society of Friends) had sprung from English Puritanism but lacked its dogmatic fundamentalism; they established a foothold in America through William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania. The Anglican Church (Church of England) was large and influential, particularly in New York and New England, and maintained close links with both the Church and state in Britain. Documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth century reveal tensions, bickering and conflict between these Protestant churches as they competed for parishioners and ascendancy in settled areas. It was not at all uncommon for one church to launch a rhetorical attack on the leadership, religious doctrine and practices of another.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 179.



If Protestant Americans were suspicious of each other then they were downright fearful of Catholicism, often to the extent of hatred (the prominent historian Arthur Schlesinger called it 'the deepest-held bias in the history of the American people').<sup>16</sup> Anti-Catholic sentiment and the marginalisation of Catholics were commonplace. Charters and laws in most colonies banned Catholics from holding public office, even from voting, while Catholic services, religious texts and regalia were outlawed in some areas. The colonial press routinely ridiculed and castigated Catholics as 'Papists' under the control of a Roman dictator. In contrast there was more tolerance shown to America's small Jewish population (the first national census in 1790 counted just 3000 Jews). Though sometimes shunned and disregarded, they generally enjoyed better treatment than Jews in Europe. Colonies such as Rhode Island and New York allowed them to settle, build synagogues and participate both in commercial life and local government.



Poster promoting Pennsylvania, showing an Amish family.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

More than 200 000 Amish still live in the north-eastern United States, mainly in Pennsylvania. They live in a similar manner to their ancestors in the 1700s, shunning electricity, telephones and motor vehicles.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) was the first and so far only Catholic president of the United States. His Catholicism was targeted by some opponents and satirists.

### DOCUMENT

#### JON BUTLER, *NEW WORLD FAITHS*

Before the revolution, religion reinforced popular arguments about the need for virtue and morality in society and politics. In politics this was called Whiggism, because it overlapped the rhetoric of England's eighteenth-century Whig political party. Several important political tracts distributed in the colonies supported this view ... A wide variety of colonial clergymen reinforced Whig political ideas. Throughout the eighteenth century, the public discussion of virtue and morality came most often from the clergymen. Laymen and clergymen alike assumed that political liberty depended on having a virtuous public. The ministers emphasised virtue, responsibility and the importance of moral choices. In doing so, they created important standards that colonists used to criticise English actions in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>17</sup>

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

Read the extract from Jon Butler and complete the tasks below.

1. In your own words, explain Butler's view of the connections between religion and politics.
2. According to Butler, what did many American clergymen do that contributed to the coming revolution?
3. What is meant by 'Whig political ideas'? Find out about the Whigs in Britain and explain why they were relevant to the American Revolution.

### ACTIVITY



#### RELIGION IN COLONIAL AMERICA

<sup>16</sup> Cited in David Gibson, *The Coming Catholic Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Butler, *New World Faiths: Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 135.

## DOCUMENT

### THOMAS FLEMING, *LIBERTY! THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*

Recent research into American ethnic origins have led historians to revise the conventional picture of the colonists as English. Only 60.9% of colonial Americans came from England. Another 14.3% were Scots and Scotch-Irish from Northern Ireland, 8.7% were German, 5.8% were Dutch, 3.7% were southern Irish, and 6.6% miscellaneous.

Religion was also more diverse than is usually thought. America boasted thousands of churches: 749 were Congregational churches, 485 Presbyterian, 457 Baptist, 406 Anglican, 328 Dutch or German Reformed, 240 Lutheran and 56 Catholic. There were also 200 Quaker meetinghouses and five synagogues. Hostility between religious denominations was common. Catholics were tolerated only in Maryland and Pennsylvania; Quakers were not welcome in most of New England; Presbyterians regarded Anglicans as a threat to their religious freedom because they feared the importation of English bishops and a push towards a central state religion.

The impression that on the eve of the revolution most Americans were poor is incorrect. Each of the thirteen colonies had a highly stratified, class-conscious society but it lacked the impoverished lower levels of Europe. In the northern colonies the richest ten per cent of free colonists owned 45 per cent of the wealth; in the southern colonies it was 75 per cent. Yet around 40 per cent of American colonists were yeoman (independent) farmers; while the cities and larger towns had a thriving middle class of artisans, shopkeepers, tavern owners and merchants who earned in excess of 300 pounds a year. A skilled worker might have made between 45 and 90 pounds per year; schoolteachers received a paltry 30 pounds per year.

Americans as a whole enjoyed the highest per capita income and one of the best standards of living in the Western world. They were also lightly taxed, paying less than half the taxes due in England.<sup>18</sup>

## ACTIVITY

### DATA ANALYSIS

Read the extract from Thomas Fleming and complete the tasks below in a small group.

1. Present the statistics on the ethnic and religious make-up of American colonial society in a graph, table or infographic.
2. Discuss possible reasons for the significant difference in the distribution of wealth in the northern and southern colonies.
3. Identify three aspects of colonial American society that contributed to revolutionary sentiment against Britain, as suggested by the data.

## FORCED LABOUR: SLAVES AND INDENTURED SERVANTS

The European slave trade emerged in the mid-1400s when Portuguese ships were searching western Africa in search of gold and spices. They failed to find these commodities but quickly learned from Arab slave-traders of the equally lucrative demand for human labour. African slaves trickled into the American colonies not long after European settlement. Within a half-century the institution of slavery had become an integral part of American socio-economics, particularly in the southern colonies. Slaves became the chattels (property) of their 'owners' after Virginia legally endorsed the practice in the early 1600s.

The experience of slavery was horrendous and demeaning. Most transported slaves were acquired from the west coast of Africa, either purchased *en masse* from African or Arab slave-traders or, less often, netted and herded onto ships by

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Fleming, *Liberty! The American Revolution* (Viking, 1997).



Photograph showing an army guard and other men in front of a building designated Price, Birch & Co., dealers in slaves.



African slaves crowded onto a boat.

Europeans. Captives then endured the infamous Middle Passage, the maritime route across the Atlantic Ocean. With passengers crammed below deck, chained together leg-to-leg and with scarcely enough room to lie down, the voyage could take between six weeks and six months, depending on the weather and the skill of the captain. On arrival in the Americas they were herded onto auction platforms where they were bought and sold like cattle. Once sold they could be worked and whipped, maintained and moved, married and bred as their 'owners' saw fit.

The economic demand for slaves emerged chiefly because sowing and cultivating certain crops – particularly cotton and tobacco – was extremely labour-intensive. The colonies of the south, remote and with a difficult climate, found it hard to attract free settlers, so plantation owners came to rely on slavery and indentured labour. The continuation of the trade and procreation among slaves led to rapid increases in the slave population. Slavery had a profound impact on the social structure and culture of the southern colonies; among whites (Anglo-Saxon Americans) in the area, for instance, the fear of a slave uprising was ever-present.

A lesser-known form of colonial servitude was indentured labour or 'debt bondage', a term of unpaid labour imposed upon free whites unable to pay outstanding debts. Defaulting debtors would be arrested, detained and 'sold' to companies, which drew up an indenture (contract) containing a minimum amount of labour. They worked for this set period, usually several years, after which they were released. Bonded workers received no salary, only food, clothing and shelter. Indenture contracts and the people bound by them could be bought and sold as property; their masters could treat them as brutally as they treated African slaves. Hofstadter suggests more than half the white immigrants to the British colonies in America in the 1600s and 1700s arrived under some form of indenture.<sup>19</sup> Also transported to America by the British between 1610 and 1763 were more than 50 000 convicts – some felons, some political prisoners or captured rebels from Scotland and Ireland.

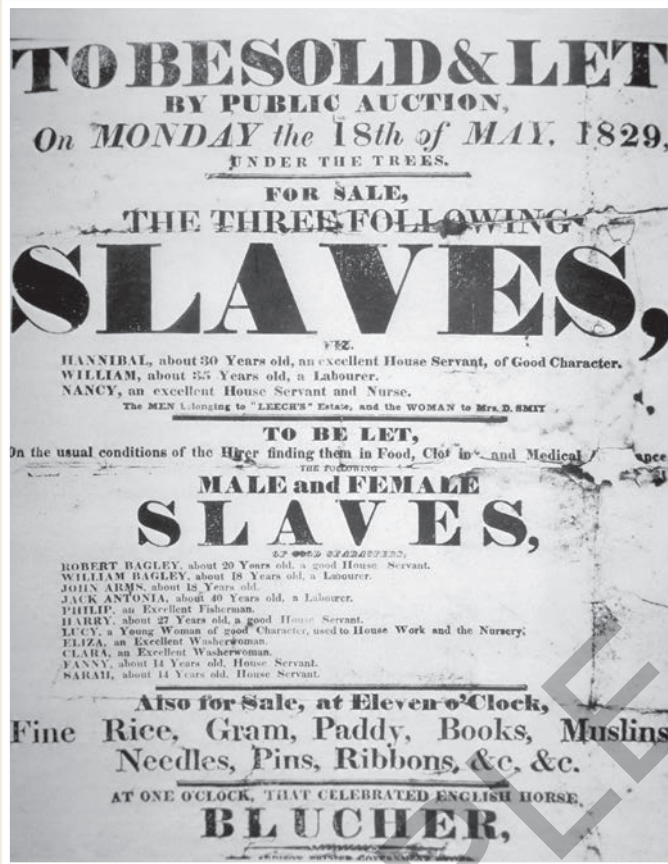


SLAVERY IN COLONIAL AMERICA

<sup>19</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *White Servitude*, [www.laurahenderson.com/genealogy/corder/ecsmemorallibrary/articles/1750\\_WhiteServitude.pdf](http://www.laurahenderson.com/genealogy/corder/ecsmemorallibrary/articles/1750_WhiteServitude.pdf).



# THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLAVERY IN AMERICA: TIMELINE



Poster for a slave auction, 1829.



African American men, women and children being auctioned.

1619

Twenty African slaves are landed and sold in Jamestown, Virginia.

1641

Massachusetts legalises slavery, the first of the thirteen colonies to do so. Other colonies follow suit over the next three decades, including Connecticut, Maryland, New York and New Jersey.

1703

Rhode Island decrees that Native or African Americans cannot walk about after dusk without a pass.

1705

The Virginia Slave Code restricts the rights and movements of slaves. The code determines that slaves are property and that masters who kill slaves during corporal punishment are exempt from trial.

1712

New York forbids free African Americans and mulattos (people of mixed race) from owning property or real estate.

1715

Maryland declares that any slave entering the colony must remain a slave for life.

1733

Elihu Coleman, a Quaker minister, publishes an essay describing slavery as an 'anti-Christian practice'.

1740

Following a significant slave uprising, South Carolina passes the harshest slave laws of the 1700s, decreeing that slaves are not to be permitted to learn to read and write English, to earn money or to assemble in groups.

# NATIVE AMERICANS

Indigenous Americans were descendants of Asian tribes that crossed the land bridge between Russia and Alaska around 14 000 years ago, before sweeping south and populating the continent. By the mid-1700s there were hundreds of language groups scattered across the North American continent, each containing disparate numbers of tribes, sub-tribes and settlements. Many lived in the east, in or near British-settled areas. The powerful Iroquois nation, for example, was resident in the area east of the Great Lakes, in close proximity to the colony of New York. Other notable tribes near the English colonies included the Delaware, Powhatan, Mohawk, Cherokee, Shawnee, Miami and the Chickasaw. Further north, along and beyond the Canadian border, were the Algonquin, Huron and Ottawa nations.

Misleading representations of Native Americans in colonial times abound, thanks to popular writers, artists and Hollywood. While not true of every native group, points of similarity have emerged, such as: the practice of electing a *sachem* (chief); decision-making by a council of *sachem* or elders; communal obligations to the sick, the weak and the elderly; and environment-based spiritual beliefs similar to those of indigenous Australians. Most native tribes were hunter-gatherers, the men responsible for hunting meat and trading while women gathered other foods and prepared meals. Most tribes in or near the thirteen colonies were not naturally nomadic, although contact with and pressure from white settlers saw many relocate west or break into smaller groups. Relationships between natives and settlers were variable – much depended on the attitudes of individual leaders on both sides. In many areas European settlers traded with, and were assisted by, native tribes, though suspicion and language barriers saw social contact kept to a minimum.

Some conflict between settlers and native tribes was inevitable. Many Europeans, such as Jamestown's John Smith, had no regard for native land claims; the 'Indians' were to be driven from arable land. Some tribal groups chose to retaliate against frontier colonists. In July 1764 four Delaware warriors entered a school in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, where they murdered and scalped the teacher and ten children. This brought on a brutal campaign against all native tribes in the region, not only the Delaware. The Pennsylvania assembly inflamed the situation by introducing a cash bounty for every dead native over the age of ten. Scalping – the removal of the hair and top of the head using a tomahawk, as a trophy of war – is commonly associated with Native Americans, though not all tribes practised it. Scalping was also adopted by the settlers, who used it against the natives in retaliatory attacks. The warring French and British encouraged the practice by offering their natives bounties for the scalps of enemy soldiers.

## DID YOU KNOW?

According to legend, Native Americans were labelled 'Indians' by Christopher Columbus because he believed he had landed somewhere in the Indian Ocean. The terms 'Indian' and 'Red Indian' are generally not used today.



A Native American chieftan.



'The Murder of Miss Jane McCrea', propagandist art intended to portray Native Americans as savages.

## BRITISH GOVERNMENT: AN OVERVIEW

Because disputes over politics and political philosophy are a key theme in the American Revolution, an understanding is needed of eighteenth century British government and its relationship with the American colonies. Britain itself was a constitutional monarchy: its head of state was a king or queen but the monarch's



### DID YOU KNOW?

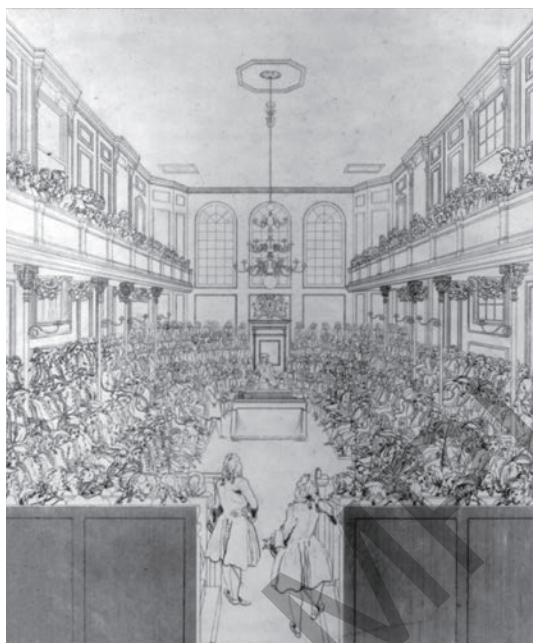
In 1755 the Massachusetts assembly, tired of skirmishes with the Penobscot natives, promised: 'For every scalp of a male Indian brought in: forty pounds. For every scalp of a female Indian or male Indian under the age of twelve: twenty pounds.'

power was constrained by a parliament of two chambers. There was, theoretically, separation of powers, so that the monarch, the aristocratic House of Lords and the elected House of Commons were largely unable to act without each other's approval, minimising the potential for tyranny. The British prime minister, appointed by the king from within the parliament, selected other MPs to form a cabinet of ministers. The House of Commons was dissolved and reformed at general elections, held on average every six years. The British system had representation, rule of law and democracy, so Britons lauded it as one of the freest and most democratic on the globe.

### ACTIVITY

#### BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

With your class, offer reasons why members of the British middle class in the mid-1700s might have taken pride in Britain and her empire.



The House of Commons.

Yet the system was not perfect, nor was it democratic by modern standards. The composition of the House of Commons was certainly decided by general election, however the right to participate in general elections was enjoyed by a small minority of Britons. In rural counties a resident was required to own land worth at least forty shillings before he could vote; a similar property qualification existed in the city boroughs. People of colour, Catholics, indentured servants, customs and taxation officials were all excluded from voting, regardless of their wealth. Olsen suggests that as little as seven per cent of adult males and three per cent of adult women had the right to vote in eighteenth century Britain.<sup>20</sup> It was not until the Reform Act of 1832 that suffrage increased dramatically – but even after this, only 700 000 men out of a population of 14 000 000 people were eligible to vote, while women were prohibited from voting altogether.

In addition to the limited franchise there was no secret ballot in Britain until 1872. Voting was done in public with a show of hands; consequently, voters were subject to influence and intimidation. Powerful aristocrats, landlords or employers could bribe or coerce their employees or tenants to cast a particular vote. Some seats in parliament were referred to as 'pocket boroughs' or 'rotten boroughs', because they were elected by very small numbers of voters who were corruptly controlled by the landowner. There were at least two members of the House of Commons who were elected to parliament by fewer than ten votes. William Pitt the Younger, a future prime minister, first entered the Commons as the representative for Old Sarum, which had just seven electors. In contrast, Manchester – a fast-growing industrial city with a population of 60 000 – was not allocated a representative in parliament until the mid-1800s.

In the modern-day Westminster system, most parliamentarians belong to a well organised political party. The party with a lower-house majority forms the government. The English parliament of the eighteenth century did not have organised parties and therefore lacked discipline and stability. Members were

<sup>20</sup> Kirstin Olsen, *Daily Life in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 6.

inclined to act, speak and behave independently. With no parties or obvious majority it was left to the king to select a suitable MP and 'invite' him to become prime minister and form a cabinet (a council of ministers). British policies were formulated by this cabinet and tendered to the king, who gave his assent. The success of any prime minister and cabinet was largely dependent on how much support they enjoyed within the parliament. Unfortunately for the young King George III, British government in the latter half of the 1700s was beset with division and instability. This led to uncertainty, bickering, disruption and frequent changes of ministry.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the twenty years between the end of the French and Indian War (1763) and the end of the American Revolutionary War (1783), Britain had nine different prime ministers. The longest-serving was the Tory Lord North (1770–82).

## COLONIAL DECISION-MAKING

In America, each of the thirteen colonies had its own provincial government, modelled to some degree on the British political system. Each had its own charter – a document signed by the monarch authorising it to form a local government in the king's name – providing both political legitimacy and instructions. The highest internal authority was the royal governor, who was charged with representing the king, upholding his laws and implementing his policies. Each colony had a local legislature or assembly, responsible for formulating and passing internal acts and overseeing revenue and expenditure. The members of these legislatures were elected by property-owning residents in each colony, usually on an annual basis. The governor, as the king's representative, possessed the authority to override the colonial assembly; this occasionally led to tension, dispute or stalemate. The colonial assemblies, however, generally managed to wield influence over the governor, largely because they had control of revenue.

21 Alvin Rabushka, 'The Colonial Roots of American Taxation, 1607–1700,' in *Policy Review* (August–September, 2002).

### DOCUMENT

#### ALVIN RABUSHKA, 'THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF AMERICAN TAXATION'

During most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the [Virginia] governor's salary and expenses depended on annual votes of the legislature. Seeking a source of revenue independent of the legislature, in 1680 the governor threatened to increase quitrents [land taxes] and enforce their collection. In exchange for withdrawing his threat, the legislature granted him a permanent export duty of two shillings per hogshead of tobacco, in place of the previous annual allowances. While this duty was largely evaded by tobacco exporters, it provided enough revenue for his annual salary and executive expenses. Other colonial legislatures, such as Massachusetts and New York, never accorded their governors permanent sources of revenue, giving their taxpayers greater control over their executives. In most cases, colonial governors had more in common with their subjects and their growing prosperity than with a distant English government. Many 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial governors were already more American than English.<sup>21</sup>

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Read about colonial decision-making and complete the tasks below.

1. Why did colonial governors tend to be compliant with the wishes of the local assembly?
2. How did the Virginia assembly manage to avoid paying its governor a regular salary?
3. Why might the legislatures of Massachusetts and New York have refused to provide a permanent source of revenue for their governors?
4. Elected legislatures are still responsible for managing revenue and determining governmental salaries in the United States and Australia. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such a system?

### ACTIVITY

### DID YOU KNOW?

The town meeting was an important political institution in colonial America. New England towns held several meetings a year and they were open to all free whites. Women could usually attend but were generally discouraged from speaking and voting.

Within each colony there were several counties: units of local government modelled on those of England. By the 1760s Massachusetts had fourteen counties, including Suffolk County, which contained the city of Boston. Each had its own county seat: a large town containing a meeting hall, a county court and some form of organised militia. Moderate-sized towns had regular meetings and elected a board of selectmen or aldermen (in effect, a town council). It was not uncommon for these men to sit also in the colonial legislature – many leading revolutionaries were involved at both levels of government. One of the striking features about the American Revolution would be that town meetings and county boards met, discussed the issues of the day and drafted resolves or affirmations of their rights. Histories such as Pauline Maier's *American Scripture* have located, interpreted and pieced together these local resolutions, identifying the growth of revolutionary sentiment as a more decentralised phenomenon than was previously thought.

CAUSES OF THE  
REVOLUTION:  
MERCANTILISM



## MANAGING THE EMPIRE

Colonies, by definition, are ruled by their 'mother country'. In British America this was true in theory – the thirteen colonies were under the nominal control of the king and a colonial governor – but things differed considerably in practice. Britain's imperial policy of 'salutary neglect' to the mid-1700s did not interfere excessively in the management of the American colonies, allowing them to exercise a significant degree of self-government. The arrangement was articulated by Sir Robert Walpole, a long-serving British prime minister, who declared that 'if no restrictions were placed on the colonies they would flourish'. Parliament's decision to rein in this colonial autonomy and enforce firmer colonial policy would strongly contribute to revolution in America.

Another emerging problem between Britain and her colonies was their changing perception of each other. The prevailing British economic theory was mercantilism, which held that the more trade, resources and gold reserves an empire possessed, the more powerful it was. In line with mercantilist theory, colonies benefited and enriched the mother country by supplying natural resources and materials, and by providing a market for manufactured goods. America, rich in forests and farmland, supplied the raw materials needed by England's growing industrial economy – cotton for its textile mills, iron for its forges, timber for its furniture makers and shipbuilding yards. The end products were then sold back to the colonies. This arrangement provided the British with ample raw materials and the Americans with a stable market for whatever they grew, gathered or harvested.

For mercantilism to work, however, economic development in the colonies had to be kept in check. Local manufacturing must be constrained so that colonials would continue to import finished goods – furniture, clothing, iron goods and so on – from England, rather than producing their own. From the late 1600s the British parliament passed legislation banning or limiting the manufacture of certain items in the American colonies. The Iron Act of 1750 encouraged America's production of pig (raw) iron but prohibited the internal manufacture of iron tools, farming equipment or tinplate. Excessive production of certain types of clothing, such as woollen garments, was also restricted. American development

was stunted by this prohibitive legislation – even after almost two centuries of settlement, agriculture was still the lifeblood of the colonies, while industrial and manufacturing existed only on a small scale.

### HISTORICAL QUESTIONS

What were the aims of Britain's Navigation Act of 1660? What rules did it impose and how was it received? Devise a further question of your own.

### ACTIVITY

Britain also sought to prevent the American colonies from trading with the French, Spanish and Dutch, all of whom had commercial operations in North America and the Caribbean. A series of laws called the Navigation Acts, dating back to the mid-1600s, banned the trade of certain commodities, called enumerated goods, with non-British entities. Some items could be traded with foreigners but only if American merchants paid an additional customs fee. The Molasses Act (1733) required Americans to pay a sizeable duty on sugar or molasses (sugar syrup) purchased in the French West Indies. These regulations were intended to protect English companies and shipowners; however they were not always heeded by colonial merchants and shipping companies.

### DID YOU KNOW?

One of the more unusual mercantilist laws was the Hat Act of 1732, which placed restrictions on the number of hats that colonials could produce, sell and export. Most people had to buy expensive imported hats from Britain.

### DOCUMENT

#### ALVIN RABUSHKA, *TAXATION IN COLONIAL AMERICA*

A fundamental mercantilist principle was that colonies should supply useful commodities to strengthen the mother country. In order of importance were precious metals, commodities that could not be produced in England, naval stores, and products that could be profitably traded in international markets. Mercantilism provided the ideas that governed colonial economic relations ... that colonial interests were subordinate to the mother country; that trade with its colonies should be restricted to English subjects; that the trade and resources of a colony should be sent to the mother country; and that the trade and resources of a colony should be kept out of the hands of rivals. Colonies were to provide a captive market for English manufactured goods. Monopolised trade with its colonies could stimulate domestic employment and industry, thereby reducing industrial unrest, poverty and idleness. In political terms, colonies were regarded as possessions, not an integral component of the English state. Even though colonists were granted the political rights of Englishmen, colonies were to be administered for the economic and military benefit of the mother country.<sup>22</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Molasses was highly valued because it was used in the production of rum, the most popular alcoholic beverage in colonial America. Historians suggest that colonial Americans consumed almost fourteen litres of rum per person per year.

### KEY IDEAS – MERCANTILISM

#### FLOW CHART

Create a chart showing the flow of raw materials and manufactured goods between Britain and America under mercantilism.

#### LIST

List the advantages and disadvantages of the mercantilist system for both Britain and the American colonies.

### ACTIVITIES



A barrel of rum.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 95–6.

### DID YOU KNOW?

John Hancock later became famous as the first signatory of the Declaration of Independence. His signature is also by far the largest on the document. In the United States today, a 'John Hancock' is colloquial for a signature.

## TRADERS AND SMUGGLERS

Despite the restrictions and regulations imposed by mercantilism, some American colonists had become very wealthy through trade. The economy of Britain boomed through much of the 1700s and the Navigation Acts virtually guaranteed colonial exporters a market for their goods. Meanwhile, the fast-growing colonial population, with its thirst for all things British and few local industries to draw upon, saw imports flourish. Most merchants lived in the great colonial port cities – Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charlestown (later Charleston) and others – where they often played a role in local government. Most merchants were of the affluent middle classes but a few did so well, through inheritance, talent and economic circumstance, that they became the wealthiest people in America. Their number included men like John Hancock of Massachusetts, Henry Laurens of South Carolina, Robert Morris and Edward Shippen of Pennsylvania.

Many American merchants increased their profits by circumventing trade regulations. Smuggling – illegal shipping, the evasion of customs duties and the bribing of customs officers – was a common practice in colonial trade, dating back to the 1600s. America's expansive coastline, its great distance from England and the lack of any concerted naval presence made evading goods checks or customs inspectors relatively easy. The willingness of poorly-paid customs inspectors to accept bribes also helped, so much so that some were virtually on John Hancock's payroll. Most of this illicit trade was conducted with the other European powers: France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Italy and the German states. By far the most commonly smuggled commodities were molasses and sugar, spirited into America from the French colonies in the West Indies.

It is difficult to gauge the extent of smuggling in colonial America, since the merchants obviously kept no records of it and arrests were rare; however it is so frequently mentioned in letters, newspaper articles, governors' diaries and other incidental documents that it must have become common practice. American captains and sailors tended to be blasé about smuggling; some even viewed it with a sense of romance. The British were not unaware of the problem, having agents in European and Caribbean port cities – an American ship loading contraband goods would have been quite conspicuous. The more conscientious officials reported suspected smugglers to their governors, some of whom reported them to London. The question was not whether it was happening but what action, if any, should be taken to stop it.

### DID YOU KNOW?

While some colonial Americans (particularly the wealthy) saw smugglers as criminals, others portrayed them as daring, romantic heroes undermining the loathsome Navigation Acts.

### DOCUMENT

#### BOSTON EVENING POST, 1763

There is no error so full of mischief as making acts and regulations oppressive to trade without enforcing them. This opens a door to corruption. This introduces a looseness in morals. This destroys the reverence and regard for oaths, on which government so much depends. This occasions a disregard to those acts of trade which are calculated for its real benefit. This entirely destroys the distinction, which ought be preserved in all trading communities, between 'merchant' and 'smuggler'.<sup>23</sup>

23 *Boston Evening Post*, 21 November 1763.



## SOCIAL TENSIONS

Despite its apparent order and hierarchy, colonial American society had its share of tensions: churches against other churches, colonies against neighbouring colonies, colonists against colonial politicians, northerners against southerners, rich against poor, rural areas against cities. The latter was particularly true for those who lived on the western frontier, the very edge of the British Empire. The dangers of the frontier and their distance and disconnection from colonial cities meant that these Americans made their own decisions in their own interests. They developed an independent spirit and, in many cases, a pointed disregard for their colonial government, which they perceived as doing little other than regulating land claims and collecting taxes. Occasionally this anti-government sentiment boiled over into uprising and rebellion, evidence that some parts of colonial America nursed a restive and independent spirit long before the revolution.

### FEATURE

## COLONIAL REBELLIONS

### Bacon's Rebellion (1676)

Nathaniel Bacon led a 500-strong mob against the Virginian governor, looted his home and burned the colonial capital, Jamestown, to the ground. The governor's 'offences' were his peaceful and tolerant policies regarding Native Americans, particularly his refusal to grant Bacon permission to drive neighbouring tribes off farmable land.

### The Maryland Restoration (1689)

Maryland was the only British colony in which Catholicism was tolerated and Catholics held most positions of power – a situation that outraged the growing Protestant population. The restoration of a Protestant king in England prompted John Coode to lead an army of 700, overthrow the colonial government and burn Maryland's Catholic churches.

### The Stono River Rebellion (1739)

A group of eighty slaves raged through South Carolina, murdering twenty whites, burning seven plantations and seeking to march to Spanish Florida where they would be free. A white militia met with the mob near the Stono River. Half the slaves were killed in the ensuing battle and the other half were decapitated; their heads were displayed as a warning to other slaves.

### The New York Fire Plot (1741)

A series of fires broke out in New York City during March and April 1741, including a severe blaze in

the governor's residence. It was discovered that a number of slaves and indentured whites, angered by a winter of food and fuel shortages, had conspired to destroy the city by arson. A number of the alleged conspirators were captured and executed.

### The 'Paxton Boys' (1763–64)

In the wake of the French and Indian War, a group of vigilante settlers in central Pennsylvania despaired that the colonial government was incapable of defending them from further attacks by natives. They formed a militia and embarked on a killing spree, slaughtering several members of the peaceful Conestoga tribe.

### The Pennsylvania 'Black Boys' (1763–69)

A small group of Pennsylvania farmers conducted a series of raids on British and colonial supply wagons. The Black Boys – so called because they carried out their attacks with blackened faces – were angered by the restoration of trade with native tribes they had fought against during the French and Indian War.

### The 'Regulators' (1764–71)

In North Carolina, public fury over corrupt sheriffs and tax collectors led to calls for government accountability and the fair distribution of revenue. Residents calling themselves the Regulators harassed officials, closed courts and ruled isolated areas, before their defeat at Alamance in 1771.

**CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE – PRESENTATION**

In a small group, research a colonial rebellion or slave uprising that occurred in the American colonies between the early 1600s and mid-1700s. Identify the causes and context of the rebellion (e.g. who was involved, what were their grievances, what sparked the rebellion?) and its consequences. Share your findings in a presentation or dramatic re-enactment.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The term 'Yankee' originally referred to any American colonist. It was used mainly by British officers stationed in America. It was later used by southerners to describe residents of northern colonies or states.

**IN SEARCH OF UNITY**

Travel between the American colonies was rare. Most people described themselves as British subjects, or as Virginians, Carolinians, New Yorkers and so on. Few used the term 'American', which referred to something from the continent, not a people or a national mindset. Few colonists knew much about other colonies or the people in them, other than rumour, suspicion and stereotype. Southerners considered New Englanders to be crafty business people but stiff, conservative and weighed down by Puritanism. Conversely, those of the south were thought of as poorly educated, decadent and made idle by an abundance of slaves. Attitudes to foreigners – particularly the French – were even worse, fed by anti-Catholic sentiment, jingoism and lampoonery in the British press.

There was an attempt in the mid-1700s to foster unity between the thirteen provinces. In 1754 delegates from seven colonies attended the Albany Congress in New York, mainly to discuss defence measures in the event of conflict with France. There Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania tabled a plan for a quasi-national government, consisting of colonial delegates overseen by a representative of the king (see Chapter 2). The congress passed the Albany Plan, a modified version of Franklin's proposal, however it was later rejected by all seven of the colonial assemblies and never made it to England for endorsement. The quest for unity would instead become a challenge for Americans of the next generation.

**FEATURE****HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

More than two centuries of historians have researched British North America with a wide range of themes in mind: for example, settlement, demography, gender, class, politics and the environment. Daniel Vickers notes that 'the colonial period is at once the most disparate and collective field of study in America's past. Colonial history contains thousands of strands, stories, perspectives and interpretations; while this renders it diverse, complex and fascinating, it also makes the job of drawing conclusions a challenging one.'

The first histories of the American colonies painted colonial America as the sowing ground for liberty, democracy and enlightenment. These historians focused mainly on frontier settlements and their struggles. They emphasised the uniqueness of the American experience and drew distinctions with the 'old world' of Britain and Europe. Early settlements such as Jamestown and Plymouth formed the basis of a type of narrative in which the historical actors were heroic and brave. Native Americans also featured in the story, either as

warriors (the ever-present threat) or as savages (in contrast to the 'civilised' colonials). Slaves were considered as units of labour and women's roles were conceived as revolving around the household.

In the early-mid twentieth century, in the context of experiencing two world wars, historians shifted their focus somewhat. They acknowledged the tensions that formed the backdrop to colonial American society, such as social inequalities, class conflict and exploitation. Concepts of expansion, development and political evolution were redefined

and reinterpreted. These early-twentieth-century historians considered competition and self-interest to be the defining drivers of action.

In the 1960s, the focus of historians changed once again. Bernard Bailyn rediscovered the documents of revolutionary leaders and examined their themes and rhetoric. Gordon S. Wood and Edward Countryman wrote a form of social history while Joan Hoff-Wilson and Pauline Maier examined colonial women and the role they played in shaping society.

## DOCUMENT

### GORDON S. WOOD, *THE RADICALISM OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*

In our enthusiasm to contrast the 'traditional' society of the mother country with the 'modernity' of the colonies, we have often overlooked how dominantly British and traditional the colonists' culture was; indeed, in some respects colonial society was more traditional than that of the mother country. Most colonial leaders in the mid-eighteenth century thought of themselves not as Americans but as Britons. They read much of the same literature, the same law books, the same history, as their brethren at home, and they drew most of their conceptions of society and their values from their reading. Whatever sense of unity the disparate colonies of North America possessed, it came from their common tie to the British crown and their membership of the British empire. Most colonists knew more about events in London than they did about occurrences in neighbouring colonies. They were provincials living on the edges of the pan-British world, and all the more British for that. Their little colonial capitals resembled, as one touring British officer remarked of Williamsburg, nothing so much as 'a good Country Town in England.' Philadelphia seemed only a smaller version of Bristol. Most English visitors in fact tended to describe the colonists simply as country cousins – more boorish, more populist, more egalitarian perhaps, with too much ... religious nonconformity – but still Englishmen, not essentially different from the inhabitants of Yorkshire or Norwich or the rest of rural and small-town provincial England.<sup>24</sup>

## HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Read the extract from Gordon S. Wood and complete the tasks below.

1. How does Wood suggest that British culture and values were dominant in the American colonies?
2. To what extent do you agree with Wood that the American colonies were 'British'? Find evidence from two or more other historians to support your case.
3. Find out more about Wood's view of colonial America. What evidence can you find about his view of the revolution and whether or not he believes in American exceptionalism (the notion that America was unique and groundbreaking)?

## ACTIVITY

<sup>24</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 12.

# CONCLUSION

Given the rivalries that existed within Europe over land, resources and imperial power, it was only a matter of time before North America would be colonised. This large new continent across the Atlantic, rich in raw materials and arable land, was a shining beacon for expeditionaries, merchants and migrants.

British colonisation began in the early 1600s and continued apace. Thousands crossed the ocean to stake a claim in one of the thirteen colonies that sprang up along the east coast. These provinces grew into thriving agricultural and commercial concerns. Most colonists lived a more comfortable and prosperous life than their counterparts in Europe, while the merchants, companies and factory-owners of England grew

fat on American trade and resources.

By the 1750s the relationship between Britain and her American possessions had reached a delicate state. The British government had, largely, left the American colonies to their own devices, thus allowing an ominously independent mindset to flourish there. Colonial legislators believed they were masters of their own domain, while American merchants openly flouted trade regulations. Though aware of these developments, Britain saw no need to interfere while Atlantic trade was booming – its rivalry with France, Spain and others was more pressing. A long and dramatic war with France would upset this shaky co-existence and challenge the principle of 'salutary neglect'.



## CHAPTER REVIEW

### ANNOTATED MAP

Construct an A2 or A3-size annotated map of the thirteen American colonies in c. 1754. For three of the colonies, identify the following:

- date of colonisation
- name of local Native American tribes
- key towns
- local industries
- population
- system of government.

TEST YOUR  
LEARNING



INTERACTIVE MAP

### CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT – ESSAY

Write an essay of approximately 800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- To what extent were the thirteen colonies still 'British' by the mid-1750s? In what ways were they becoming 'American'? Refer to one or more colonies in depth.
- How did the American colonies change between colonisation and the mid-1750s? Referring to one or more colonies in depth, consider different types of change and a range of experiences. (See Section A timeline for an example of types of change.)

### DIVERSE EXPERIENCES – DISCUSSION

Find out more about the Native American experience of colonisation. For example, read about Powhatan in this chapter and in the Who's Who, and about Native American society on the eve of British colonisation at [www.ushistory.org/us/1.asp](http://www.ushistory.org/us/1.asp). In general, how might the Native American experience of colonisation have differed from that of European pioneers? To what extent did this vary according to location?