

## THE FOUNDING OF NEW SOCIETIES, 1607-1763

Directions: As you read the article, highlight main ideas and answer questions in the spaces provided.

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This period covers 156 years -- from the first permanent English settlement in North America (at Jamestown, Virginia) to the end of the Seven Years' War (known in North America as the French and Indian War). A comparable period of American history would stretch from the first inauguration of George Washington (1789) to the first inauguration of Harry S Truman (1945). And yet the colonial period blurs into one shapeless mass ....

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### I. The Differentness of the Colonial World

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This "differentness" includes several key components:

- Newness:** We tend to forget just how comparatively new the American world is. A good, unsettling illustration is to recall the 1992 fire at Windsor Castle, and then realize that that castle was standing long before any European settlement in the Americas. The colonies were the first "new" societies in thousands of years of European history. The colonists who came to the Americas knew that they were taking part in the founding of new societies, the success of which was not foreordained by any stretch of the imagination. They remembered the Roanoke experiment (1584) in present-day North Carolina, and several other, less famous failed colonial ventures. They knew about the appalling loss of life in the first years of the Jamestown colony (1607) and the Plymouth colony (1620). The colonies' political structures were likewise new, and their fragility helped exacerbate the contentiousness of colonial politics throughout the period. The problem of "newness" is further illustrated by the development of the colonies of Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut. Originally, there were two settlements in Massachusetts -- Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth -- and two settlements in Connecticut -- Connecticut and New Haven. By 1700, Massachusetts Bay had swallowed up Plymouth, and Connecticut had absorbed New Haven.
- Monarchic Society:** This element of differentness is captured in the very word "colonial." The idea of being "colonial" is inextricably bound up with the political and constitutional status of the colonies as appendages of England (after 1706, Great Britain). The English colonies were monarchic societies, acknowledging the sovereignty of the English Crown (except for the Commonwealth period, 1649-1660, following the execution of Charles I, when the colonies acknowledged the sovereignty first of the Commonwealth, and then of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector). This monarchic context had important consequences for the internal social and political structures of the colonies. Although classes in the colonies were neither so fixed nor so complex as the English social system, there were important distinctions between gentlemen, or "the better sort," and ordinary people, sometimes subdivided into "the middling sort" and "the lower sort." We see these distinctions, which at times achieved mind-numbing complexity, most clearly in the ways that Harvard and other colonial colleges ranked their students -- not by academic distinction, nor by alphabetical order, but by social rank.

These distinctions mattered most in colonial politics. In each of the colonies, a system of factional and familial loyalties and animosities formed the context within which particular disputes played themselves out. To cite the most famous example, the 1735 case of the New York printer John Peter Zenger was not an isolated attack on freedom of the press by a tyrannical royal government; Zenger was an ally of the Livingston-Alexander faction in opposition to the Delancey faction, which dominated New York's executive and judiciary. Another important illustration is the longstanding opposition pitting the Hutchinsons and Olivers against the Otises and their allies in Massachusetts. When one faction took the part of the Crown and the mother country, the other faction gravitated to the "popular" or "democratic" side. These patterns persisted through the Revolution and early national periods, eroding only under the assault of Jacksonian democracy in the 1820s and 1830s.

Explain the historical significance of the Zenger case:

These distinctions in social rank were not ironclad -- for example, in 1706 Benjamin Franklin was born the youngest son of a "middling sort" printer in Boston; within forty years, on his retirement from the printing business, he had established himself as a gentleman in Philadelphia. Still, it would be almost inconceivable in the seventeenth-century colonial world, and extremely difficult in the eighteenth-century colonial world, for someone like Bill Clinton to aspire to high (or, indeed, any) political office.

- **Agricultural Society:** ...Only a comparative handful of Americans in this period -- maybe five percent, as of 1787 -- lived in "cities" (that is, towns of 5,000 people or better). Virtually all Americans -- even ministers, doctors, and lawyers (the main "gentlemanly," non-farming occupations of this period) -- got most or at least a major part of their income from farming. To the extent that it is ever possible for a family to be self-sufficient, many colonial American families were self-sufficient, visiting "towns" only for religious services, an occasional purchase of fabrics or manufactured imported goods, "court day" (to sue and be sued, or to listen to their neighbors suing and being sued), and political and social gossip.
- **Neighbors, Strangers, and Foes:** The British North American colonies coexisted uneasily with a remarkable range of neighbors. First, of course, there were the several Indian nations, whom the colonists sometimes esteemed as friends, sometimes valued as trading partners, and sometimes feared as savage enemies. Second, there were the rival colonies founded by other European nations -- the Spanish to the south and west, the French in Canada and the Ohio Valley, the Dutch and Swedes in the mid-Atlantic coastal region. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the colonies of British North America periodically lived in fear of their conquest or annihilation by the French and their Indian allies, and throughout this period the colonists and their British governors and military protectors labored to establish defensive alliances with friendly or neutral Indian nations. A vital point about this subject is that the colonial wars -- usually misnamed the "Indian wars" -- were almost always adjunct to conflicts between the European powers in Europe. These "Indian wars" were actually the American front of "mini-world-wars" fought regularly for a century, and ending (finally) with the Treaty of Paris in 1763 (distinct from the Treaty of Paris of 1783 that ended the Revolutionary War).
- **The Marginality of the Colonial World:** Although modern Americans may view the colonial past as the central drama of the period, the colonists were seen at the time, and for the most part saw themselves, as marginal to the great drama of the period -- the struggle for pre-eminence in world affairs among Britain, France, and their European allies. Moreover, because the colonists were on the cultural margins of the Atlantic civilization, until the middle of the eighteenth century they tended to be regarded by inhabitants of the mother country as backward, parochial, and almost as savage (by cultivated metropolitan British standards) as the Indians who shared the continent with them.

Summarize the characterizations of Colonial Society:

What is the significance of colonists being viewed as backward, parochial, and savage?

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## II. The Diversity of the Colonial World

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The colonies of British North America were founded by different people and groups, at different times, and for different reasons. There was no "master plan" to create a large, organized political entity called British North America; it just evolved that way. This diversity was not just political, although there were several types of colonies; it was also religious, ethnic, and cultural. To be sure, the diversity of colonial life may look like various kinds of vanilla to a citizen of the United States, circa 1993, but it was considerable and remarkable in the view of any European visitor to the American colonies.

**Political Diversity:** The colonies fall into three broad categories:

- Charter colonies were organized either by groups of economic speculators and investors or by those seeking to found a polity where they could follow their own religious practices and beliefs. They were granted a document, called a charter, by the Crown; this document represented a partial and conditional grant of sovereign power over an area of North America (sometimes specified with precision, sometimes not) where the grantees could found a colony. (One of the reasons the Pilgrims entered into the Mayflower Compact was that they knew they had landed outside the territory specified in the charter they had been issued.) Charter colonies include Virginia and Massachusetts Bay.
- Proprietary colonies were organized by one powerful individual who received authority from the Crown to found and administer a colony; he and his descendants were known as "proprietors." Pennsylvania was the principal proprietary colony.
- Crown colonies were organized as direct possessions of the monarch -- although some of these colonies had charters as well. Sometimes they were founded from scratch (North Carolina); just as often, they were conquered territories that had been founded by another nation (New York, formerly Nieuw Netherland).

**Ethnic/Religious Diversity:** In his most recent work on immigration and demographic history, Bernard Bailyn has pointed out that even if the American Revolution had never taken place this period would be an extraordinarily important one, for it witnessed one of the greatest mass migrations of people in human history. He calls it "the peopling of British North America" -- a phrase, of course, that seemingly slights the presence of the Indians, though Bailyn's point is that these waves of European immigration dramatically increased the population density of North America and transformed the life of the continent.

Two types of diversity are especially important -- diversity of ethnic origins (among various types of Northern Europeans) and diversity of religious belief (mostly among varieties of Protestant Christianity, although Catholics and a smattering of Jews are present in the colonies from a very early period).

Thus, for example, the Church of England, or Anglican Church (after independence, known in America as the Episcopal Church), dominated the southern colonies -- Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia.

Although the Anglican Church was dominant in Maryland, it had to contend with a large and flourishing Roman Catholic population (as Maryland had been founded to provide a haven for English Catholics).

Pennsylvania, dominated by Quakers, was a hospitable home to those of practically every Christian denomination, and Philadelphia even boasted one of the few Jewish congregations (others were founded in New York City; Savannah, Georgia; and Newport, Rhode Island).

New Jersey, again, was dominated by the Anglican Church but was also home to most Protestant Christian denominations.

New York, which began as a Dutch colony, was a crazy-quilt of religious groups and loyalties, almost as diverse as Pennsylvania -- though the beleaguered Anglicans still sought to confirm their pride of place as the established church in the counties that made up what we would recognize as New York City. New York was more a sphere for forced religious diversity than a center of religious liberty.

Rhode Island was the second great island of religious liberty, with Pennsylvania.

The other New England colonies were dominated by various Calvinist denominations -- Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists -- in an uneasy truce with Anglicans; these denominations united only in resistance to Catholics, Baptists, and Quakers.

Summarize the ethnic and religious differences among the 13 colonies:

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### III. Colonial Prototypes of American Politics

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Two aspects of the colonial experience are notable because they appear to us to be prototypes of later political and constitutional doctrines that are critical to the course of American history. While we are right to acknowledge their significance and to note connections between them and their successors, we should not assume that the later developments were implicit in their colonial precursors, nor should we view these features of the colonial period through the lens of subsequent history.

- **Religious Liberty:** Although the old conventional wisdom has it that the religious dissenters came to America to seek religious liberty, the newer conventional wisdom notes, correctly, that the dissenters sought that liberty for themselves and were at times notably harsh on those who wanted religious liberty for views differing from those of the majority religious group. At the same time, some colonies (Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania) practiced religious toleration, under which the majority chose to stay its hand rather than slapping down dissident minorities. Religious toleration was thus a very different thing from religious liberty, which recognizes the right to hold different opinions on religious questions.

It is still a matter of vigorous historical and jurisprudential dispute what an "established church" was in the colonial, Revolutionary, and early national periods. History, in this as in so many other cases, mingles uncomfortably with constitutional law because those who seek to interpret the religion clauses of the First Amendment often have recourse to the history of religion, and of religion's relationship with government, during the colonial, Revolutionary, and early national periods. For this reason, this issue requires somewhat extended treatment here.

Those - the "non-preferentialists" or "accommodationists" -- who oppose Thomas Jefferson's concept of a strict "wall of separation" between church and state maintain that an established church could only be a single church, allied closely with the state, like the Church of England in Great Britain. They maintain that no such religious establishment ever existed in the American colonies, therefore that no "wall of separation" prohibits government aid to religion, and thus that government need not remain neutral as between religion and no religion -- only that the government may not pick and choose which religion it seeks to aid.

Their adversaries, the "separationists," maintain that there was such a thing as a "multiple establishment" -- a legal arrangement by which several different churches all received government tax moneys and official support -- and that those who sought to establish separation of church and state by adopting the First Amendment were aware of this situation and sought to prevent the federal government from reviving it on the national level.

To what extent did the 13 colonies have religious freedom and religious tolerance?

(Remember when addressing a prompt like this... you must clearly state extent... to a small extent, to a great extent, etc.)

- **Intercolonial Union:** Although the colonies were not founded on any "master plan," and usually regarded one another with wariness and suspicion, pressures from outside often prompted efforts to forge inter-colonial unions. In 1643, the New England Confederation was a notable success in coordinating colonial efforts in the seventeenth-century "Indian wars." But it broke up when Massachusetts Bay absorbed Plymouth and Connecticut swallowed New Haven. In 1685, the English sought to impose union from above and outside -- the Dominion of New England abrogated colonial charters, dissolved colonial legislatures, and created one unified administration for New England and New York. The colonists finally rebelled against the Dominion government, as the American counterpart to the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689. Finally, in 1754, delegates from most of the colonies, meeting in Albany, New York, crafted the Albany Plan of Union -- which, unfortunately, was rejected both by England (which resented its proposed cession of powers to an intercolonial government and legislature) and the individual colonies (which resented their loss of local sovereignty).

Define the following:

New England Confederation:

Dominion of New England:

Albany Plan of Union:

Which was most successful? Defend your answer with one fact.

At the close of the Seven Years' War (or the French and Indian War), fewer British subjects were more loyal to the Crown and more proud to be Britons than the inhabitants of British North America. The colonists had fought side-by-side with British forces against the French and their Indian allies, and had contributed to a tremendous victory that reshaped the power balance of the Atlantic world. It was thus all the more stunning that, within five years, divisions between the colonies and the mother country first erupted, inaugurating more than a decade of polemical argument and then popular violence that culminated in the first colonial revolution of modern times, and the first successful colonial revolution in history