

# A.P. U.S. History Notes

## Chapter 5: "Colonial Society on the Eve of the Revolution"

~ 1700 – 1775 ~

- I. Conquest by the Cradle
  1. By 1775, Great Britain ruled 32 colonies in North America.
    - a. Only 13 of them revolted.
    - b. Canada and Jamaica were wealthier than the 13.
  2. All of them were growing by leaps and bounds.
  3. By 1775, the population numbered 2.5 million people.
  4. The average age was 16 years.
  5. Most of the population was densely cooped up east of the Alleghenies, though by 1775, some had slowly trickled into Tennessee and Kentucky.
  6. About 90% of the people lived in rural areas.
- II. A Mingling of the Races
  1. Colonial America, though mostly English, had other races as well.
    - a. Germans accounted for about 6% of the population, or about 150,000 people by 1775.
      - (1) Most were Protestant (primarily Lutheran) and were called the Pennsylvania Dutch.
  2. The Scots-Irish were about 7% of the population, with 175,000 people.
    - a. Over many decades, they had been transplanted to Northern Ireland, but they had not found a home there (the already existing Irish Catholics resented the intruders).
    - b. Many of them reached America and became squatters, quarreling with both Indians and white landowners.
    - c. They seemed to try to move as far from Britain as possible, trickling down to Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas.
    - d. In 1764, the Scots-Irish led the armed march of the Paxton Boys.
    - e. They were very hotheaded.
    - f. Many eventually became American revolutionists.
  3. About 5% of the multicolored population consisted of other European group, like French Huguenots, Welsh, Dutch, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Swiss, and Scots Highlanders.
  4. Americans were of all races and mixed bloods, so it was no wonder that other races from other countries had a hard time classifying them.
- III. The Structure of the Colonial Society
  1. In contrast to contemporary Europe, America was a land of opportunity.
  2. Anyone who was willing to work hard could easily go from rags to riches, and poverty was scorned upon.
  3. Class differences did emerge, as a small group of aristocrats (made up of the rich farmers, lawyers, officials, clergymen) had much of the power.
  4. Also, armed conflicts in the 1690s and 1700s enriched a number of merchant princes in the New England and middle colonies.
  5. War also created many widows and orphans who eventually became to charity.
  6. In the South, the hugely rich plantation owners had lots of slaves.
  7. Far less fortunate than the indentured servants of America were the paupers and the criminals sent to the New World.

- a. Some of them were actually unfortunate victims of Britain's unfair laws and did become respectable citizens.
- 8. The least fortunate were the Black slaves, who had little or no hope of freedom again.
  - a. Slavery became a divisive issue because some colonies didn't want slaves while others needed them, and therefore vetoed any bill banning the importation of slaves.

#### IV. Clerics, Physicians, and Jurists

- 1. The most honored profession in the colonial times was the clergy, which in 1775, had less power than before but still wielded a great amount of it.
- 2. Physicians were not highly esteemed and many of them were bad.
  - a. Bleeding was often a favorite, and deadly, solution to illnesses.
- 3. Plagues were a nightmare.
  - a. Smallpox (afflicting 1 of 5 persons, including George Washington) was rampant, though a crude form of inoculation for it was introduced in 1721.
  - b. Some of the clergy and doctors didn't like it though, preferring not to tamper with the will of God.
- 4. At first lawyers weren't liked, being regarded as noisy scumbags.
  - a. Criminals often represented themselves in court.
  - b. By 1750, lawyers were recognized as useful, and many defended high-profile cases, were great orators and played important roles in the history of America.

#### V. Workaday America

- 1. Agriculture was the major leading industry (by a huge margin), since farmers could seem to grow anything.
  - a. In Maryland and Virginia, tobacco was the staple crop, and by 1759 New York was exporting 80,000 barrels of flour a year.
- 2. Fishing could be rewarding, though not as much as farming, and it was pursued in all the American colonies especially in New England.
- 3. Trading was also a popular and prevalent industry, as commerce occurred all around the colonies.
  - a. The "triangular trade" was common: A ship, for example, would leave New England with rum and go to the Gold Coast of Africa and trade it for African slaves. Then, it would go to the West Indies and exchange the slaves for molasses, which it'd sell to New England once it returned there.
- 4. Manufacturing was not as important, though many small enterprises existed.
- 5. Strong-backed laborers and skilled craftspeople were scarce and highly prized.
- 6. Perhaps the single most important manufacturing activity was lumbering.
  - a. Britain sometimes marked the tallest trees for its navy, and colonists resented that, even though there were countless other good trees in the area and the marked tree was going toward a common defense (it was the principle).
- 7. In 1733, Parliament passed the Molasses Act, which, if successful, would have struck a crippling blow to American international trade by hindering its trade with the French West Indies.
  - a. The result was disagreement, and colonists got around it through smuggling.

#### VI. Horsepower and Sailpower

- 1. Roads in 1700s America were very bad, and not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century did they even connect large cities.
  - a. It took a young Benjamin Franklin 9 days to get from Boston to Philadelphia.
- 2. Roads were so bad that they were dangerous.

- a. People who would venture these roads would often sign wills and pray with family members before embarking.
- 3. As a result, towns seemed to cluster around slow, navigable water sources, like gentle rivers, or by the ocean.
- 4. Taverns and bars sprang up to serve tired travelers and were great places of gossip.
- 5. An inter-colonial mail system was set up in the mid-1700s, but mailmen often passed time by reading private letters, since there was nothing else to do.

#### VII. Dominant Denominations

- 1. Two “established” (tax-supported) churches by 1775 were the Anglican and the Congregational.
- 2. A great majority of people didn’t worship in churches.
- 3. The Church of England (Anglican) was official in Georgia, both Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, and a part of New York.
  - a. Anglican sermons were shorter, its descriptions of hell were less frightening, and amusements were less scorned.
  - b. William and Mary was founded in 1693 to train young clergy members.
- 4. The Congregational church had grown from the Puritan church, and it was established in all the New England colonies except for Rhode Island.
  - a. There was worry that people weren’t devout enough.
- 5. For Anglicans, **not** having a resident bishop proved to be a problem for unordained young ministers.

#### VIII. The Great Awakening.

- 1. Due to less religious fervor than before and worry that so many people would not be saved, the stage was set for a revival, which occurred, and became the Great Awakening.
- 2. Jonathan Edwards was a preacher with fiery preaching methods, emotional moving many listeners to tears while talking of the eternal damnation that nonbelievers would face after death.
  - a. He began preaching in 1734, and his methods sparked debate among his peers.
- 3. George Whitefield was even better than Edwards when he started four years later.
  - a. An orator of rare gifts, he even made Jonathan Edwards weep and persuaded Ben Franklin to empty his pockets into the collection plate.
  - b. Imitators copied his emotional shaking sermons and his heaping of blame on sinners.
- 4. These new preachers were met with skepticism by the “old lights,” or the orthodox clergymen.
- 5. However, the Great Awakening led to the founding of “new light” centers like Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth.
- 6. The Great Awakening was the first religious experience shared by all Americans as a history.

#### IX. Schools and Colleges

- 1. Education was most important in New England, where it was used to train young future clergymen.
- 2. In other parts of America, farm labor used up most of the time that would have been spent in school.
- 3. However, there were fairly adequate primary and secondary schools in areas other than New England.
- 4. In a gloom and grim atmosphere, colonial schools put most of the emphasis on religion and on the classical languages, as well as doctrine and orthodoxy.

5. Discipline was quite severe, with such punishments as a child being cut by a piece from a birch tree.
6. Also, at least in New England, college education was regarded more important than the ABC's.
7. Eventually, some change was made in emphasis of curriculum from dead languages to live ones, and Ben Franklin helped by launching the school that would become the University of Pennsylvania.

#### X. Culture in the Backwoods

1. Though there was little time for recreation (farm work, fear of Indians, etc...), the little free time that was there was used on religion, not art.
2. Painters were frowned upon.
  - a. John Trumbull of Connecticut was discouraged, as a youth, by his father.
  - b. Charles Willson Peale, best know for his portraits of George Washington, also ran a museum, stuffed birds, and practiced dentistry in addition to his art.
  - c. Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley had to go to England to complete their ambitious careers.
3. Architecture was largely imported from the Old World and modified to meet American needs.
  - a. The log cabin was borrowed form Sweden.
  - b. The red-bricked Georgian style was introduced in about 1720.
4. Colonial literature was also generally undistinguished.
  - a. However, a slave girl, Phillis Wheatley, who had never been formally educated, did go to Britain and publish a book of verse and subsequently wrote other polished poems that revealed the influence of Alexander Pope.
  - b. Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* was very influential, containing many common sayings and phrases, and was more widely read in America and Europe than anything except for the Bible.
5. Ben Franklin's experiments with science, and his sheer power of observation, also helped advance science.

#### XI. Pioneer Presses

1. Few libraries were found in early America, and few Americans were rich enough to buy books.
2. On the eve of the revolution, many hand-operated presses cranked out leaflets, pamphlets, and journals signed with pseudonyms.
3. In one famous case, John Peter Zenger, a New York newspaper printer, was taken to court and charged with seditious libel.
  - a. The judge urged the jury to consider that the mere fact of publishing was a crime, no matter whether the content was derogatory or not.
  - b. Zenger won after his lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, excellently defended his case.
  - c. Afterwards, freedom of the press was pretty much assured in America.

#### XII. The Great Game of Politics

1. By 1775, eight of the colonies had royal governors who were appointed by the king.
2. Three had governors chosen by proprietors.
3. Practically every colony utilized a two-house legislative body.
  - a. The upper house was appointed by royal officials or proprietors.
  - b. The lower house was elected by the people.
4. Self-taxation with representation came to be a cherished privilege that Americans came to cherish above most other rights.

5. Most governors did a good job, but some were just plain corrupt.
  - a. Lord Cornbury, first cousin of Queen Anne, was made governor of New York and New Jersey in 1702 but proved to be a drunkard, a spendthrift, a gafter, and embezzler, a religious bigot, and a vain fool.
6. The right to vote was not available to anyone, just white landowners.
  - a. However, the ease of acquiring land to hard workers made voting a privilege easily attainable to many people.

### XIII. Colonial Folkways

1. Americans had many hardships, as many basic amenities that we have today were not available.
  - a. Churches weren't heated at all.
  - b. Running water in houses was nonexistent.
  - c. No plumbing was available either.
  - d. Garbage disposal was primitive at best.
2. Yet, amusement was permitted, and people often worked on house-raising, apple parings quilting bees, husking bees, and other merrymaking.
3. In the South, card playing, horse racing, cockfighting, and fox hunting were fun.
4. Lotteries were universally approved, even by the clergy because they helped raise money for churches and colleges.
5. Stage plays were popular in the South, but not really in the North.
6. Holidays were celebrated everywhere in the colonies (New England didn't like Christmas, though).
7. America in 1775 was like a quilt, each part different and individual in its own way, but all coming together to form one single, unified piece.

### XIV. Makers of America: The Scots-Irish

1. Life for the Scots was miserable in England, as many were too poor, and Britain still taxed them, squeezing the last cent out of them.
2. Migrating to Ulster, the Scots still felt unwelcome, and eventually came to America.
3. They constantly tried to further themselves away from Britain.
  - a. Most went to Pennsylvania, where tolerance was high.
4. The Scots-Irish were many of America's pioneers, clearing the trails for others to follow.
5. Otherwise independent, religion was the only thing that bonded these people.
6. Their hatred of England made them great allies and supporters of the United States during the Revolutionary War.