

Colonial America in the Eighteenth Century

JAMES T. LEMON

University of Toronto

The founding of Pennsylvania in 1681 and of Georgia in 1732 confirmed what had become clear earlier in North America: that Europeans, mostly British, were here to stay. Between 1700 and 1775 the population of the eastern seaboard colonies grew nearly ten times, as did the area occupied. This expansion was reflected in the growth of the economy and the spread of population. Economic specialization and diversification were both evident, and living standards continued to remain high. Spaces between the discrete settlements of the 17th century were filled in along the coast, especially south of the Chesapeake. The result was an increased sharing of colonial experiences leading toward greater homogenization and broader regional expressions. Colonists initiated the massive overtaking of much of the continent that was to be a feature of the next century. As the 18th century progressed, neither the natives nor their allies in New France could hold back this interior movement. Yet, even as the French were defeated at Quebec in 1759 and the British became undisputed masters of North America, British rules and regulations came unstuck in the 13 colonies. By 1775, most settlers had come to see themselves as Americans despite the fact that the colonies appeared to be converging demographically and socially with the mother country. The first successful colonial revolt in the New World was to produce a robust new nation poised to create its own stamp on North America and the world. The new northern colonies in Canada, partly peopled by American loyalists, would gradually achieve their own self-governance over the next 200 years.

POPULATION: GROWTH, EXPANSION, AND COMPOSITION

Growth

By 1775 the population of the 13 colonies had reached almost 2.5 million, compared with only

250,000 in 1700, a tenfold increase (Table 6.1). Between 1700 and 1775 the rate of growth averaged about 3 percent: even higher before 1750 and falling gradually thereafter. This rate was very rapid for the time; the population jumped from one-twentieth to about one-third of Britain's. The gap would continue to narrow after 1776 so that, by 1820, the population of the United States had surpassed that of Britain. In contrast to many poor Third World countries today with similar rates of growth, the colonies possessed the space, resources, and organization to maintain the highest standard of living in the world. Few experienced starvation or even malnutrition. The gloomy, late 18th-century prediction of the English Reverend Doctor Thomas Malthus—that high population growth would eventually outstrip resources and lead to starvation—was irrelevant in white and even in black America, where people continued to spread themselves over more and more land, land that the native Indians gradually were forced to give up.

In the mid-18th century, Benjamin Franklin, a newspaper editor and social philosopher living in rapidly growing Philadelphia, described population change quite accurately. In his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, he saw that earlier and more frequent marriages and larger families were drawing America's total population closer to Britain's. He predicted correctly that economic power also would eventually shift across the Atlantic. Let us consider first the process of demographic growth.

Birthrates continued to be high, although probably no higher than in parts of western Europe. Between 1720 and 1760 in New England births averaged around seven children, about the same as in England, but still higher than in the Chesapeake. Earlier marriages, however, partly accounted for the more rapid growth of population in America. Although few married as teenagers in England or in America, women married on the average at 21

Table 6.1 Estimated Populations of the American Colonies, 1700-1780

Colony	1700	1720	1740	1760	1780
(Maine) ^a	—	—	—	20,000	49,133
(Vermont) ^a	—	—	—	—	47,620
New Hampshire	4,958	9,375	23,256	39,093	87,802
Massachusetts	55,941	91,008	151,613	202,600	268,627
Rhode Island	5,894	11,680	25,255	45,471	52,946
Connecticut	25,970	58,830	89,580	142,470	206,701
New York	19,107	36,919	63,665	117,138	210,541
New Jersey	14,010	29,818	51,373	93,813	139,627
Pennsylvania	17,950	30,962	85,637	183,703	327,305
Delaware	2,470	5,385	19,870	33,250	45,385
Maryland	29,604	66,133	116,093	162,267	245,474
Virginia	58,560	87,757	180,440	339,726	538,004
North Carolina	10,720	21,270	51,760	110,442	270,133
South Carolina	5,704	17,048	45,000	94,074	180,000
Georgia	—	—	2,021	9,578	56,071
(Kentucky) ^a	—	—	—	—	45,000
(Tennessee) ^a	—	—	—	—	10,000
Total	250,888	466,185	905,563	1,593,625	2,780,369

^aNot organized as provinces or states by 1780. Maine part of Massachusetts; Vermont part of New York (disputed); Kentucky originally an extension of Virginia, and Tennessee of North Carolina.

and men at 24 in the colonies. While the age of marriage fell in England during the 18th century, in the latter half of the century women took their vows on the average three years later, and men two than a century before. Later marriages in England functioned as a birth-control measure. So, in America continued earlier marriages led to earlier births, thus adding more quickly to the population. Yet women who bore children earlier tended to stop earlier. This would help to explain why American families would appear not to have been much larger than those in England, even though white growth remained much more rapid. The black reproduction rate slowly became similar to whites, as the sex ratio came into balance late in the century (Table 6.2).

While high birthrates were the basis for rapid 18th-century growth, low death rates and immigration were contributing factors. In some regions of continental Europe, growth was kept in check by extremely high death rates, particularly among infants, as high as 40 per thousand yearly. In America, estimates have been calculated at from 15 to 25, probably only slightly below the English rate. By 1700 the birthrate had fallen and generally stabilized, with some

exceptions. Communicable diseases brought on by unsanitary water and sewage conditions increased the rates in more densely settled cities, if not nearly as seriously as in much larger London. The hazards of fishing and whaling and losses from war, especially in mid-century, took a toll of men, particularly in New England. Childbirth complications led to the death of one in every six or seven mothers. In England approximately two-thirds of those born lived to the age of 15, and perhaps three-quarters did so in America. And chances were high of survival beyond then to the biblical three score years and ten. Death rates among blacks were not substantially different, and far lower than in the morbid working environments of the Caribbean sugar islands.

The low rates of death were the result of a healthy population; colonial Americans were a people of plenty. More than enough food, a diverse and excellent diet, adequate clothing, an abundance of wood for winter fuel, low levels of communicable diseases with only occasional epidemics in rural areas and, not least, modest working hours for much of the year—all kept premature death largely from the door. Although unacceptable by mid-20th century

Table 6.2 Comparison of White and Black Population by Region, 1700 and 1775 (in percentages)

	1700			1775		
	White	Black	Percentage of total population	White	Black	Percentage of total population
Lower South	81	19	6	59	41	17
Upper South	77	23	35	63	37	31
Middle	92	8	21	94	6	24
New England	98	2	37	97	3	26
West	—	—	—	83	17	1
Total population	89%	11%	100%	79%	21%	100%
(Population in millions)	0.22	0.03	0.25	1.94	0.52	2.46

Lower South: Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina.

Upper South: Virginia, Maryland, Delaware.

Mid-Atlantic: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York.

New England: Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, (Vermont).

West: Kentucky, Tennessee.

Note: 1775 interpolated from 1770 and 1780 figures. Percentages do not add to 100 because of rounding.

standards, one and a half infants (statistically) of seven born failed to survive, so that the completed family perhaps reached 5.5 children, compared with about 5 in England. Actual households were larger, on the average, because many families kept servants. Although colonial demographic growth remained impressive, economic growth occurred largely by the expansion of this population repeating the setting up of new farms. Only slowly did America catch up to Britain's level of overall development; there were few signs of this before the 19th century. It could be argued, however, that Britain's more successful expansion overseas by 1750 in comparison with France or Spain was partly a consequence of a healthy population. America continued and eventually improved upon British conditions.

Immigration into the mainland colonies was heavier after 1700 than before; about 370,000 Europeans and 250,000 Africans emigrated between 1700 and 1775. The influence of immigration on 18th-century population growth was obviously marked. Yet over time the *relative* importance of arrivals fell considerably. One estimate suggests that white immigration between 1700 and 1775 added 25 percent to the population. By the 1770s, after a decade of slower movement, whites born outside the colonies possibly added up to no more than 10

percent. The number of blacks in 1700 was little more than 30,000, but the impact of their immigration persisted longer because of the increasing importance of slavery. Although new immigrants brought new and fresh ideas and great energy, the chief implication of the rising proportion of American-born whites meant that fewer had experienced British or European life. While the Atlantic could be crossed more speedily and more safely in larger ships than was the case in the 17th century, the ocean ironically became more of a gulf, perhaps weakening and distorting images of the homeland. This may have made independence easier. An unknown but probably small number of settlers eventually returned to the Old World, an option that blacks, of course, did not enjoy.

Distribution and Expansion

Regionally, all colonies grew in numbers, but considerable population shifts occurred (Tables 6.1, and 6.2; Fig. 6.1). The oldest settled areas, the upper South (Chesapeake) and New England, together dropped from nearly three-quarters of the colonial total to less than three-fifths. Virginia, however, maintained the lead as the most populous province. Massachusetts, partly because of a lower birthrate, lost second place to Pennsylvania, the major success story of the century. New England produced the

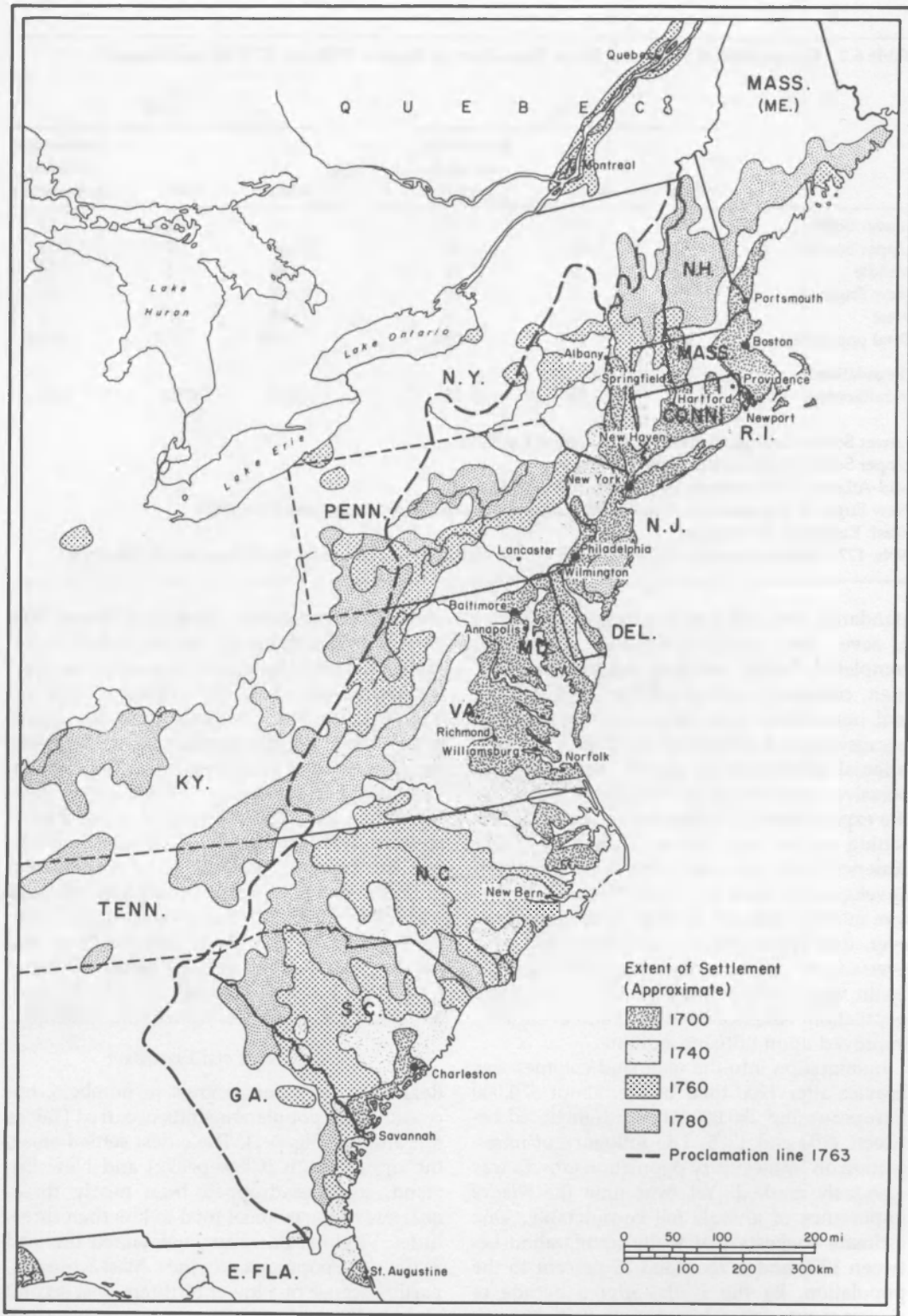


Figure 6.1 Population Distribution, 1700–1780

slowest growth, rising only 7 times between 1700 and 1775. By contrast, the lower South jumped by a factor of 27, as the Carolinas and Georgia expanded rapidly. The Middle Colonies grew 11 times, and the upper South by a factor of 9. The Mason-Dixon line drawn between Pennsylvania and Maryland divided the population almost equally to the south and north by 1775. Almost 90 percent of the rapidly increasing black population was located south of the line.

By 1700 settlements were virtually contiguous from Norfolk, Virginia, to Portland, Maine; south of Norfolk only small discrete settlements were established, the largest around Charleston (Charles Town). Penetration inland everywhere was still limited—no more than 30 miles above tidewater, except up the Connecticut and Hudson valleys.

By 1740 almost all of southern New England was occupied except the rougher, interior hill lands. Settlers were moving west from the Hudson along the Mohawk valley. Much of New Jersey was filled except for the southern pine barrens. The strongest thrust was in southeastern Pennsylvania, up to 150 miles to the west, and in Maryland and Virginia where settlers were spilling beyond the tidewater on to the Piedmont and even beyond the Blue Ridge. Immigrants landing at Philadelphia provided much of this impetus toward the backcountry. In the lower South population was confined largely to northeastern North Carolina and up the valleys from the coast.

Almost all land east of the Appalachian Mountains was populated by the time of the Revolution, as well as many fertile valleys within the Appalachians in northern New England, and the western reaches of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Beyond the mountains the Nashville Basin of central Tennessee and the Bluegrass country of Kentucky beckoned. By then the Carolinas were virtually occupied, while Georgians still largely hugged the coast and the South Carolina border. The 2.5 million people in the 13 colonies who were on the verge of unification had produced a rate of geographical expansion that equaled the rate of population growth.

Population was overwhelmingly rural because nearly all families engaged in production from the soil. Densities of rural population varied with the timing of settlement, with ac-

cess to seaports and the coast, and with the quality of the land. After a thickening of the original settlement of an area, the population leveled off at densities that were relatively low when compared with much of lowland England. At least this was true in Pennsylvania; much of Chester County to the west of Philadelphia achieved densities of 30 to 40 persons per square mile by 1760. Another stage of thickening began about 1790, partly as a result of new forms of manufacturing organization and the intensification of agricultural land use. But a more strictly social reason can be advanced: landholding was a widely respected virtue. Hence people spread out over a much greater area than necessary from a strictly economic point of view, even given the relatively low level of technology of the period. Not everyone bought land, but the majority did. In the Chesapeake and southern New England, the thickening may have continued closer to the economic, or better, Malthusian limits than in Pennsylvania, but there was no material reason for anyone to starve in affluent America.

In 1775 only about 5 percent of the population lived in urban places, where agricultural activity was limited to garden plots, if at all. In fact, the proportion of urban dwellers may well have fallen during the period, even while most of the seaports and new inland towns continued to grow. The urban places seem to have been able to handle the regional needs of the more rapidly increasing rural population. The highest urban-to-rural ratios actually occurred during the 17th century in most colonies; once established, seaport towns could service the ever-increasing rural populations reasonably well. Other processes contributed to the slower growth of urban population. Boston, the largest city before 1740, stagnated after then, and the scarcity of urban places remained characteristic of the Chesapeake tobacco-producing areas. Not until well after the War of Independence did urban populations begin to surpass rural growth. But even in 1850, after the decade of most-rapid urban growth ever in the United States, the urban population stood at only 15 percent.

Composition

By national origin, race, and religion, the people of the 18th century became more heterogeneous than before, including what had been

very English New England and Virginia. By 1775 the number of colonists with English ancestry may have fallen to two-thirds of the white population and to nearly half of the total population. Although estimates of various groups are virtually impossible to make (even working backward from the problematic 1790 census and with other data), it is clear that other parts of the British Isles, especially northern Ireland (Ulster) but also lowland Scotland and south Wales, sent people to the colonies. The so-called Ulster Scotch-Irish settled thickly in Pennsylvania, the backcountry of the southern colonies, and in New Hampshire. They may have accounted for 250,000 people, or one-tenth of the total population. The Welsh were most conspicuous in eastern Pennsylvania, the Scots in the Carolinas and in East Jersey. Beginning in the 1680s, German-speaking settlers arrived from the Rhine Valley and Switzerland in increasing numbers until 1755, when flows stopped during the French and Indian War, and did not reach the same levels again until the middle of the 19th century. In 1775, 250,000 colonists, approximately one in ten, were of German ancestry, with Pennsylvania easily the most preferred province. Like the Scotch-Irish, many German-speaking settlers went to the backcountry of Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. The Dutch who had come in the 1620s expanded their numbers but still added up to less than 5 percent (about 100,000), especially in New York and New Jersey. Except for some Germans, most settlers, and even more so their descendants, spoke English. Presciently, Ezra Stiles of Connecticut predicted that English would likely "become the venacular tongue of more people than any one tongue on Earth except the Chinese."

Historical interpretation in the late 19th century and well into the 20th attempted to draw sharp distinctions in attitudes and practices between ethnic groups, particularly between German-speaking groups and the Ulster Scotch-Irish in Pennsylvania. More recent scholarship does not support this view. Distinctions have been drawn also within national groups and even among blacks on the basis of Old World regional origins. But all the secondary and tertiary differences pale before the enormous gulf between black and white in colonial America. By 1775 blacks constituted one of every five persons, up from one in ten or so in

1700, reflecting the continued forced immigration from West Africa (Table 6.2). Regionally, blacks increased in all southern colonies, reaching at least one-third of the population there (excluding Delaware) and almost 55 percent in South Carolina. In the North, only in the city of New York did blacks represent as much as 10 percent. These numbers signaled a social question of major political importance: at least 90 percent of blacks were slaves, and most of the few freed blacks in the North remained on the bottom rank of the social hierarchy.

While the treatment of, and attitudes toward, blacks remained a serious problem, even after they fell proportionately in the overall population after 1800, the issue of the Indian was of a totally different order. Although the destruction of Indian populations through disease transmission had largely ceased, surviving Indians continued to be pushed westward. During the 18th century several groups, such as the Iroquois Confederacy, and the Cherokees and Creeks in the Southeast, remained formidable adversaries, especially in the 1750s and 1760s. But the British government's proclamation of 1763, which marked off the watershed of rivers flowing directly into the Atlantic as the settlement limits to the colonies, did not prevent resentful settlers from entering land at least reserved temporarily for Indian populations (Fig. 6.1). Indeed, some settlers were already there before 1763, symbolizing the inability of authorities to stop independent searches for new agricultural lands.

Although most early Americans were of Protestant religious persuasion, religious affiliations were as diverse as population compositions. Bishops did appear eventually in the Church of England overseas, but traditional ecclesiastical arrangements were weakened considerably. In fact, the Church of England found itself increasingly in a minority position except in the tidewater South, as did an even smaller number of Roman Catholics. Eighteenth-century America continued and expanded the trend toward diversity that began in the Protestant Reformation in 16th-century western Europe. Eighteenth-century groups replicated European regional denominations: the reformed Calvinistic tradition was represented by Presbyterians largely from northern Ireland and Scotland, and by the Reformed churches of the Netherlands and the west Ger-

man states; the Lutheran church tradition from adjacent states in Germany was strongly represented; and the anabaptist dimension of the Reformation was continued through Baptists from England and Wales, together with Menonites, Amish, Dunkers, and others from Germany and Switzerland. Almost every strand of theological possibility within the Christian framework was found in England and thus also in America, most obviously in Pennsylvania and adjacent provinces. Friends, pejoratively known as "Quakers" because of their vibrant rhetoric, were prominent from 1680 onward, following a half-century after the so-called Puritans of New England. By 1700 the latter had evolved from their hard-line Calvinism that stressed otherworldly salvation into Congregationalism, and others would develop Unitarianism later. Methodism was yet another English development that would become powerful in America, but it was only gathering steam between 1750 and 1775. It is ironic that as a working-class group in England, Methodist churches elected bishops, although in a more democratic fashion than in the established Church of England (renamed Episcopal after the American Revolution). This European melange was the basis for 19th-century religious developments that increasingly became generated internally. Although American religious pluralism has been renowned, 17th-century England, especially, was the basis for this diversity. Blacks, while retaining some West African religious practices, gradually took on Christian forms, especially those of the Baptists.

The implications of these national and religious patterns varied. Certain national distinctions persisted, and occasionally antagonisms came to the fore. Because the majority were of English ancestry, they did not see themselves as an "ethnic" group, and few writers since then have considered them so. How people behaved in organizing their households and community life, and their economy, differed only in secondary ways from one ethnic group to another. English legal, customary, and governing institutions remained the basis for action, and set the ground rules and the limits to colonial ambitions.

Among non-British settlers social associations derived from religious beliefs were stronger than those emanating from national backgrounds. In contrast to Europe and even

England by 1700, religious groups had to learn to live with one another as "denominations," more or less as equals. The Quakers, for example, had to accept others after their early dominance in West Jersey and Pennsylvania. Lutheran and Reformed groups, not originally friendly in Germany, often shared buildings for worship in the colonies. This is not to say that some denominations did not carry more status than others, a persistent fact in American life. High-income persons in cities were frequently Anglican. In the rural South the aristocracy was Anglican, while poor whites were Baptist and also increasingly Methodist. As a consequence, the congregation was extremely important in defining community life. There were, in addition, connections of pluralistic religion to society through what might be called aesthetic and moral individualism. The frequent public revivals, most conspicuous in the so-called Great Awakening of the 1740s, were emotional outlets for substantial numbers of people. And no one could escape the "Protestant ethic" with its emphasis on individual success through action. Religion in America bolstered personal initiative through theological pronouncements strongly stressing individual salvation and exhibited by worldly improvement, balanced to a lesser degree by more general communitarian concerns.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

As people spread themselves over the 18th-century landscape, they continued to organize themselves spatially. The terms *rural* and *urban* provide one set of spatial parameters; another set concerns local, county, regional, and national levels of organization and, in our case, the British Empire and the Atlantic world.

The distinction between rural and urban settlement, while time-honored in the literature and the censuses, cannot be rigidly applied to colonial America. If the hustle and bustle of trading, of the courts, and of the ale and coffee houses were concentrated in densely built-up cities, clusters of a few houses, a tavern, and perhaps a church at many crossroads were hardly distinguishable from the countryside. In fact, reversing the picture, many functions associated with urban life were also found in the

country. This was most obvious on large southern plantations. Recently, greater attention has been paid by scholars to non-farming activities by farmers themselves and not only by those stating particular occupations. Manufacturing—that is, processing goods extracted from the soil and indirectly from animals or from stone—was frequent outside of towns.

Dispersed Rural Settlement and Property

Land in both city and country continued to be viewed as a resource and as property. With property, there were dealers, speculators, and lawyers to handle transactions that included government operations, such as courts for resolving disputes, registry offices for recording deeds, and then legislative and regulatory bodies, and so on, to taxes for the support of public service systems. As Ben Franklin said, "nothing is more certain than death and taxes." Much of colonial political life revolved around the level of taxation, most conspicuously when Britain taxed its colonies without providing them with representation in the British Parliament.

Although all institutions were important, the family and then the local community continued to be the most basic. Located on the land held by a family were the farmstead—house, barn,

other outbuildings such as a piggery, smokehouse, bake oven, and springhouse. The land was divided into woodlots and fields of hay, pasture, and grain, connected by lands to the cluster of buildings, with adjacent garden and orchard. A lane led to the public road usually only a short distance from the farmstead. Other similar farms were nearby but usually were beyond earshot (Fig. 6.2). A church or religious meeting house and a store or tavern were not far away, and together they completed the rural scene.

Irregularity in the shapes of lots largely marked settlement in every 18th-century colony, as shown in today's aerial photographs and road patterns. One exception was in Pennsylvania, where the settlers in the first two decades after 1681 were located within presurveyed rectangular lots and townships (Fig. 6.3). But after the first ranks of lots and townships were occupied, Penn and his officers failed to follow through. Settlement subsequently occurred where the first people into an area, after obtaining a warrant from the Land Office (though often not), had their chosen land surveyed. Although many people settled near friends and relatives, they sought land with adequate drainage and a good water supply. The ad hoc process led, as in the 17th century,

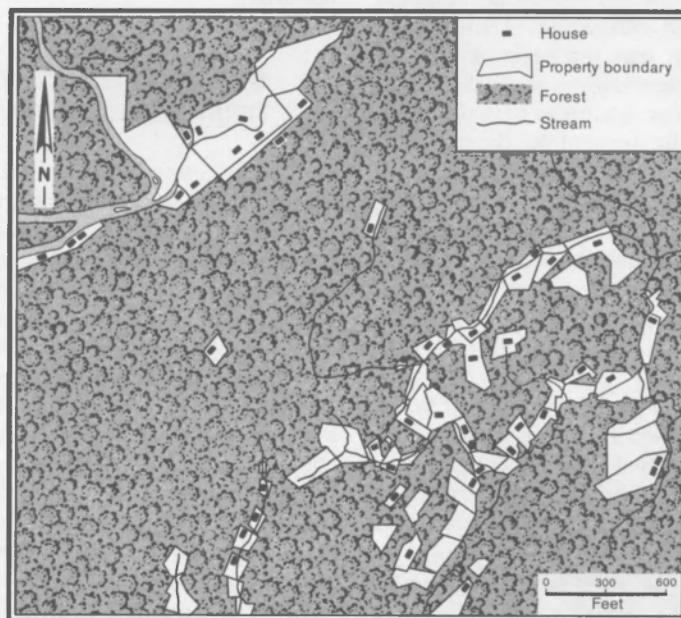


Figure 6.2 Dispersed Settlement in Northern New Jersey, Middle of the 18th Century (after Wacker)

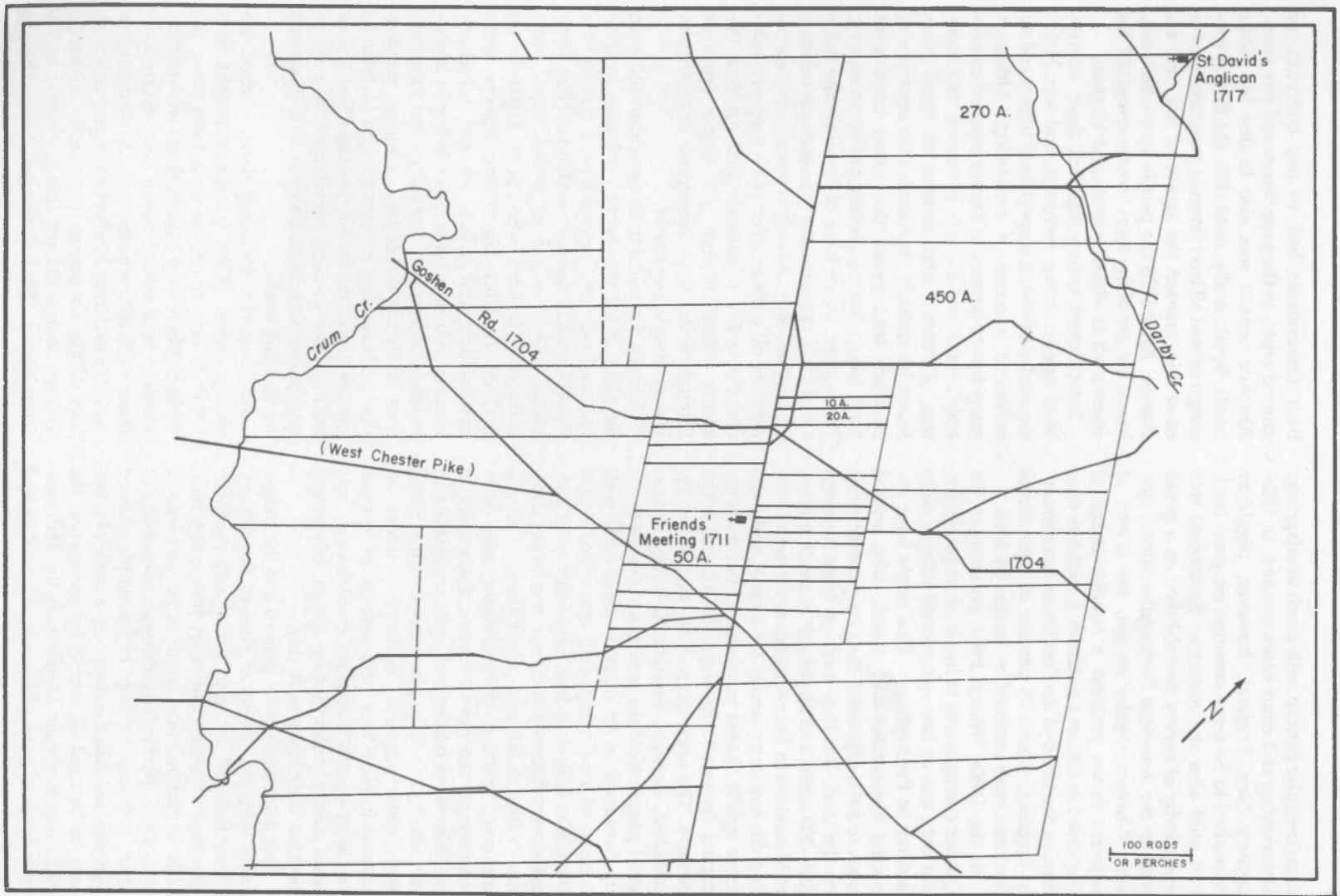


Figure 6.3 Newtown, Pennsylvania (after Lemon)

to an irregular pattern with much overlapping. Resurveying and court cases resulted. In 18th-century New England, however, regularity continued to be more common on good land. Not until after the American Revolution was the priority of survey reestablished on a grand scale in the American Rectangular Survey system. Whether regular or not, the layout of adjacent farms presents a familiar image of dispersed settlement to North Americans continuing the trend of the "enclosure movement" in England, where 75 percent of agricultural land had been enclosed by hedges by 1760.

In the 1680s William Penn encouraged his Quaker coreligionists to live in close proximity. But only one or two agricultural villages were laid out in Pennsylvania. One might have expected Mennonites and Amish, who arrived later, to have expressed their cooperative spirit on the land. But they took up large holdings (200-300 acres) and dispersed. A small number of Moravians in Pennsylvania and North Carolina did live communally for a time, and even more tightly shared possessions, but most occupied dispersed settlements by the end of the century. The organizers of the last colony established, Georgia, brought all kinds of marginal people from the streets of London to set up Savannah as an utopian community with communal ownership and operation. Again there was failure; indeed Savannah and Georgia soon replicated Charleston and South Carolina with slaves and plantations. Thus, a dispersed pattern of settlement was overwhelmingly the norm, varying from small to medium-sized holdings of ordinary farmers in all colonies, to large plantations in the South with slave quarters, to large patroons or manors in New York with tenants, or to small holdings (mostly craftsmen and laborers) who lived close together not by design, but simply because their lands were tiny.

The dispersed spatial pattern and the irregularity reflected the social aims of the settlers. While they did not reject community organization (and no society can), they sought considerable independence from tight community structures, particularly through ownership of land. Although freehold or fee simple allowed virtually unlimited power over a piece of property to be used or rented by the owner, the right was not quite absolute; in the 18th century in some proprietary colonies, settlers and

their descendants had to pay quitrents, or ground rents, to the proprietors and pay taxes. Absolute control was also limited by public needs. Symbolically, until 1776, the British sovereign owned all land (even in proprietary colonies) and granted the rights of use and exchange. After 1776 the people as a whole did, hence the use of the term "commonwealth" for states such as Massachusetts and Virginia.

Independent tenure signified three interrelated values: status, exchange, and use. Holding land established respect from others and so enhanced a sense of well-being. Although many tenant farmers in Britain enjoyed considerable status and security of tenure, vast numbers of tenants and owners on small plots found life difficult. In America the existence of so much land meant that many could own land, which created a leveling effect on society. There were, as we have observed, some holders of large properties in the southern colonies and in New York, as well as among land speculators in all colonies. For most property-holders, the ability to provide land for their offspring, either through gifts before death or through wills, was considered important in maintaining family status.

Tenancy continued to be significant and even increased in the 18th-century colonies. In affluent southeastern Pennsylvania, a quarter to a third of families did not own land in 1760. Their status among neighbors varied. Some were substantial families who, as in England, remained in that condition; others were smallholders with skills to sell; and still others, inmates and married families living in households of others, had low status. But most tenants in Pennsylvania held a higher position than poor renters, for example, on Maryland's proprietary lands. In the tidewater South poor tenants (and owners) maintained their status only in comparison with slaves, who possessed no standing at all.

All property, including land, carried exchange value. When a holding passed from father to one or two or even three sons, the other children were paid by those with money, acquired land elsewhere, or were given some other valuable consideration. A money value was attached to all kinds of work and commodities. While advocating community solidarity, William Penn sold land, first to wealthy speculators called "First Purchasers," and then to

land companies that were responsible for settling people from Britain. Leases for rented land specified the value in money, the term of years, and certain obligations on the renter and sometimes on the owner. Like Britain and much of the Western world by 1700, the upper rank of society reeked of calculation. The value of slaves was reckoned carefully. In their wills middle-status men frequently were careful to specify the goods and/or money their widows should receive, apparently not always trusting their children to provide for their mothers. But no part of early America was outside the pressures of land, commodity, and labor markets. Lands with easier access to external trade—those nearer ports and with better quality soils—were certainly the most valuable.

Use value refers to the immediate or end consumption of a good: food, clothing, shelter, or some service. Land was cultivated, grazed by livestock, and forests cut; how much home production and how much exchange of material goods and of services will be considered below. The land produced a superabundance of goods most of the time in most places, so that people had plenty of time and energy over the year for other activities. Control over resources provided the security to do so.

Early Americans, even more than their counterparts in western Europe, were individualistic, stressing the autonomy of the nuclear family. The 18th-century household might be extended at times to include grandparents as well as servants and apprentices, and to depend on labor for harvesting and other work. But the independent organization of activity on a piece of land was central. Farms were businesses even while directly providing goods for use. The independent farm and other operations were also a way of life, the "natural" way to organize society.

Local Government

Yet it would be a mistake to overstate the independence of families from the social milieu, both local and regional. They and their properties were located formally within minor civil divisions and counties in each province. They were responsible to those who governed and were expected to participate in local affairs, in some areas even if they did not hold property. All heads of households were named on the tax rolls. Less formally they belonged to

congregations, trading areas, and kin and other social networks.

Minor civil divisions continued to be labeled with English terms—towns, townships, hundreds, or parishes. The particular label depended on the timing of settlement and on the ideological concerns of the founders. The proper names of places often was the collective decision of the first settlers, and were sometimes named after the home place in Europe, a biblical site, a saint, or the local Indian name. The higher-level local region was called the county almost universally after 1700 (parishes in South Carolina were the equivalent of counties) and they were frequently named after English counties or persons.

The size and shape of local and county units varied considerably, and so did the terminology defining officials. When counties finally appeared in the North, they were larger than in the South. Individually they embraced as many as forty towns and townships and populations of 15,000 to 25,000 by 1775. The splitting of large counties occurred only after 1780, but even then northern units remained larger. By contrast, in the Chesapeake the typical tidewater counties included about 5,000 white and 2,000 black settlers, within an area only a quarter to a third the size of those farther north. Inland on the Piedmont, counties were larger and, despite later divisions, attained sizes comparable with those in the North. Shapes varied greatly, generally following topography more than arbitrary lines.

By 1700 local and county powers were generally well defined by provincial legislature and councils. But like all the earlier colonies, Pennsylvania and Georgia went through a period of what might be called experimentation in sorting out powers at different levels. The customary view of the division of powers between the local and county levels holds that in New England the towns predominated; in the South, the county; and, as one might expect, in the Middle Colonies they were more balanced. But such sharp distinctions are no longer valid. Local administration was found everywhere. In Pennsylvania, it has been suggested recently, a larger and indeed expanding role emerged during the century for township officials such as constables, overseers of the poor, road supervisors, fence viewers, and poundkeepers. But their power was circumscribed by very limited

taxing power. That local positions were rotated among men suggests not only local egalitarian democracy, as in New England, but also that they were seen primarily as obligations and less as routes to higher status, as in the case of more sought-after county and provincial offices. Also paralleling New England, Pennsylvania township meetings elected most officials, but also nominated candidates for constables, who were then appointed by county justices.

In the North some county officials were elected and others appointed by provincial authorities. Justices who presided over the courts were powerful figures. The keeping of public order—of trying persons for criminal acts, resolving disputes over lot boundaries that could be dealt with locally, recording of inheritances, debts, verbal attacks, and the like—continued to be a central concern. Maintaining records such as deeds and wills was another critical role. In all colonies, representatives in the legislature assumed considerable influence in running their counties.

In the South the much smaller counties close to tidewater took on more of the local power than in the North. In Maryland the parishes only created in 1692 were apparently not very important, because they were abolished in 1776; but, as elsewhere, people served on juries. In Virginia, despite the counties being even smaller, parishes retained some functions, mainly to raise money for the Anglican clergy. One of the more interesting secular obligations of the vestry or parish government was "land processing." Because inaccurate surveys had led to so many law suits, the assembly ordered vestries to view property lines and renew markers every four years.

Churches and Other Local Networks

Churches probably provided partial social cement at the local level. But as in England, denominational preferences divided people, and theological disputes within congregations could separate neighbors. By 1700 many local communities had more than one church, even in New England where the Congregational churches, and in Virginia and Maryland where the Anglican (Episcopal) church, had been officially established by the provincial authorities.

The importance of other local institutions is hard to measure. Local trading and work patterns were not only economic in the sense of

people competing with one another, but social in bringing people together. These cut across town and county boundaries. Barn raisings and husking bees, celebrated in the 19th-century literature as signs of voluntary cooperation, probably did not bring every neighbor out. Kinship ties were perhaps the strongest local glue, often reaching over boundaries like trade ties. If extended families were not common, celebrations certainly were. Funerals were as important as weddings, and more so than baptisms, in bringing families together and were often shared with neighbors. Neighboring everywhere was important for casual, usually uncontroversial, conversation as well as for crises. Although encouraged in some provinces, schools were probably infrequent in the 18th century and normally only for the elite; children learned mainly at home, or as apprentices. Black children too learned manual skills, but also a special set of abilities—to be deferential to owners yet maintain the integrity and solidarity of their families and the community of slave barracks on plantations. Black rebels against the social system could pay dearly with their lives.

Whatever the variations, the working of local government and other ventures in each colony was basically the same. In fact, 18th-century America operated very much like Britain, and some authors have argued for a stronger anglicization of institutions over the century. Ripples of differences were ironed out in the meting out of justice and in the managing of society and the public environment. It is paradoxical that taking neighbors to court may have been one of the ways society held together. Certainly it strengthened the legitimacy of legal institutions. At the same time, the wide variety of positions and distribution of powers between the local level and the county enhanced democratic participation, possibly more so in the North than in the South.

Higher Authorities

Places within counties were located within colonies and within a larger imperial system. The New England provinces had come under royal governors just before 1700, and New Jersey, Maryland, and the Carolinas would soon follow. If the governors and their executives were responsible to the Crown and Parliament, the legislatures were run by the colonial leaders.

Tensions between the two were frequent, culminating finally in the events of 1776. Colonial representation in the House of Commons in London might well have headed off separation. But the existence of colonies peopled predominantly by migrants from the homeland of Britain was unprecedented. As Britain, like America, haltingly moved toward wider representative government, it was not clear to enough people of authority in Britain how to reach a more democratic way of governing colonies. In Canada it took from 1791 to 1931 (even 1982) to work out an acceptable system of self-government under the Crown.

Urban Development and Regional Organization

Although most settlers and their descendents lived in rural communities, urbanization continued in the 1700s as many new places were established to service the increasing population. A hierarchy of places in all colonies or regions appeared much more obvious than in the 17th century, enough so that a central-place model can be applied. Theoretically, a central-place system has one large center, two at the second level, and more and more at the third, fourth, and even fifth levels. The larger the place, the larger its hinterland. The regions of smaller places nest, as it were, within the larger ones. The range and intensity of services and goods define where a place fits. Population and function reflect one another, as does the level of wealth. The real world does not neatly fit the theory, but it does provide a useful starting point and a model for comparison.

Before 1700 the promoters of colonies founded capitals for maintaining public order, facilitating commerce and trade, and focusing provincial social life. By 1700 Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Newport (Rhode Island), and Charleston were well established at the top of their colonial regional hierarchies, all under London as the dominant center. Still, only Boston exceeded 5,000 people. On the Chesapeake Bay no large center had appeared, and indeed few urban places, in the conventional sense. By 1775 Philadelphia and New York (both with about 25,000 people, as large as provincial cities in Britain), followed by Boston (16,000), Charleston (12,000), Newport (11,000) and the two new cities of Norfolk (6,250) and Baltimore (6,000) had become the leading places as the pattern filled in.

Philadelphia and its region provide the case closest to central-place theory (Fig. 6.4); describing it first will permit a clearer understanding of other areas. In 1681 Philadelphia was established as the capital at the same time as the province was founded. Government operations, such as the provincial courts, the land office, and regulatory bodies, provided people with jobs directly and, in turn, multiplied other occupations to supply them with goods and services. Merchants dealing with fur traders, inland shopkeepers, and farmers settled in the town, a small-scale replica of London in its early years. Many occupations organized by merchants and associated with shipping added to its strength. Ships were built, manned, and supplied with food to sail the Atlantic, bringing imports from England and elsewhere and taking exports to the West Indies, southern Europe, and Britain. As Boston had thrived earlier in the carrying trade, so did Philadelphia to a degree, although the produce of the region, notably wheat, flour, beef and pork, was more prominent.

In addition to governmental and economic functions were the central structures of the churches. The yearly meetings of Friends brought in prominent Quakers, many of whom were leaders in local economic affairs, who came to transact business. Quarterly meetings corresponding with the county courts also met there, and other church bodies held regional meetings. From the beginning Philadelphia was the richest place in the colony; many merchants and top government officials earned high incomes through trade, administrative salaries, and speculation in land. Hence the glitter of good living was more conspicuous than in the countryside. As the century progressed Philadelphia prospered further; in 1775 it shared with New York the title of "metropolis" in the British Empire after London. If its administrative region was restricted to the province, its economic and social hinterland extended far beyond, into half of New Jersey, Delaware, and the eastern shore of Maryland, and into the Appalachian valleys of Maryland and Virginia. After 1750 it had to share some of the latter areas with the rapidly growing port of Baltimore.

The second-level places were the county capitals or seats. For decades, Philadelphia overshadowed Chester and Bristol (Bucks County),

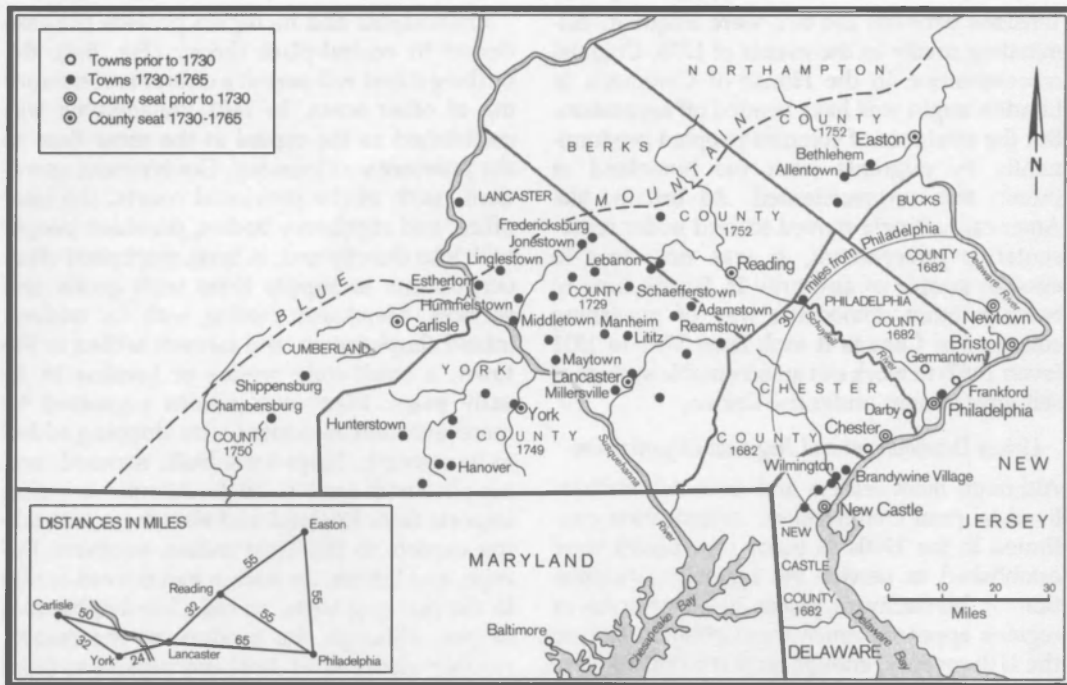


Figure 6.4 Urbanization in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1652–1765 (after Lemon)

Burlington, Salem, and Gloucester in New Jersey, and New Castle in Delaware, so much that they failed to grow significantly. Their status could not overcome the far stronger economic pull of Philadelphia nor the relatively greater importance in earlier years of the central government. But eventually, as the increasingly populous backcountry prospered, the obvious need for further and stronger counties and county towns arose.

Lancaster in 1729 and four more towns in the 1740s and early 1750s were laid out by the Penn family or their friends, successfully earning revenues from subdivided urban lots. In fact, by 1775 Lancaster resembled an English market town and was recognized as the largest inland town in America, a miniature Philadelphia with about 3,000 people. Its courthouse set in the central square was a busy place. The local government paved the streets, built bridges, ran the marketplace, even eventually piped water. The creation of these colonial counties and county seats for governing, trade, and social interaction was a successful case of collective planning. They were far enough from Philadelphia, centrally accessible in their counties, and large enough to encourage strong

growth. Intensification came later from further county subdivision.

Some post-1776 county seats were created by private entrepreneurs in anticipation of county status. Harrisburg, named after its founder, soon became not only a county seat but also capital of the state, more central to the population than Philadelphia. But some that became seats had been laid out earlier by speculators. Indeed, between 1740 and 1775 they established more than 50 places, two-thirds of them in the late 1750s and early 1760s. Town-making then and later came in waves as investors sought to cash in on subdividing, although only a few were very successful. Thus third and fourth levels of towns appeared; the former were accessible economically, while many in the fourth rank gained little activity or status for their developers. Some managed to become villages of a hundred people by 1775, but others never got off the drawing boards. Crossroad hamlets provided a final level in the urban hierarchy. Their taverns provided lodging, food, and drink to waggoners and other travelers; on main roads, taverns were as frequent as every two miles. Like larger towns, local taverns or stores housed post offices after

1776 to serve surrounding populations. Thus in Pennsylvania we can think of a hierarchy of five levels; even if it fails to fit the theory precisely, it comes closest in early America, though in other colonies the same processes were at work.

We must also note the intrusion of "religious" manufacturing and mining towns into this service-oriented pattern. Moravian Bethlehem combined both aspects; Germantown was set up soon after Philadelphia with a strong contingent of weavers, and several mills followed. Other towns developed at milling sites. By 1775, at Brandywine village adjacent to Wilmington (a third type of town noted above), clusters of mills had appeared to take advantage of the fall of water. Mines and iron works induced "urban villages," too. Soon afterward, textile manufacturing factories appeared at waterfall sites, also in New Jersey and New England, further complicating late 18th-century urban patterns.

In other regions the urban systems fit the model less clearly. In New England the original founding of a string of seaports and fishing villages created a point pattern along the coast. Rhode Island was small but Newport had to share economic and political power with Providence. Connecticut was originally two colonies with two capitals, so that New Haven and Hartford continued to be more or less equal. In Massachusetts, while Boston was the dominant center, in the Connecticut valley Springfield continued to be central, although it was less focused on the fur trade than it earlier had been. Settlement from the east and the west only coalesced west of Worcester in the mid-1700s. Other inland urban places were settled slowly, partly because shorter distances rendered access to coastal towns easier than in Pennsylvania. Besides, the whole area west of the Connecticut River fell more and more under New York's economic dominance that undercut Hartford, New Haven, and even Boston by 1775. Political and economic dimensions of activity did not fit as closely as in Pennsylvania.

New York also dominated New York province, as one might expect, although Albany up the Hudson paralleled Springfield in its relative autonomy, more than any county town in Pennsylvania. Along the Hudson and on Long Island, counties and their towns were established. New York also controlled East Jersey,

while Philadelphia controlled the west, more or less along the line between the original two colonies. New Jersey, even when it was unified, could not generate a first-rate center; politics and economy again were divided geographically.

The upper South experienced the most complex pattern of urban growth. Before 1700 urbanization had been slight for several reasons. First, the tobacco trade was organized from London to a far greater degree than was the grain and livestock production in the North, which was controlled more directly by Boston, New York, and Philadelphia merchants who had more economic leverage relative to London. Second, the numerous small counties inhibited strong secondary towns. Many courthouses controlled by large planters were virtually free standing without urbanization. Third, large planters dominated economic life and, in a sense, their plantations operated as urban places. The larger Chesapeake planters possessed relatively more power than farmers in the North. Fourth, many plantation owners shipped from their own wharves on the deeply indented coasts without the need to be serviced by central places. Despite a good deal of talk about the need for market shire towns, English-style, none had appeared.

Where the tobacco trade continued to dominate in the 18th-century the situation held to a large degree. The creation of Williamsburg as Virginia's capital in 1699 confirmed this. Unlike northern capitals, the flow of activity was far more discontinuous. Only four times a year, when the legislature and courts met, did large planters and their entourages and merchants converge on the place. Annapolis, Maryland's capital after 1694, attracted only a modest number of merchants. Economic transactions were thus secondary to administration and the social whirl. Tidewater planters increased their power in the 18th century, further dampening urbanization in the best tobacco-growing areas. Tobacco inspection warehouses were set up in the 1730s in Virginia and the 1740s in Maryland to ensure good quality, but did not induce a great deal of urbanization. Factors or agents of Scottish merchants from Glasgow set up stores in the Virginia Piedmont and strengthened the "forward linkage," the control overseas.

But Virginia and Maryland did experience profound settlement changes, especially after

1740. The Piedmont and Great Valley regions, as they were settled, took on more of a northern quality. Mixed grain and livestock farming came to dominate land use, as it did in Pennsylvania. Baltimore took off at mid-century to compete with Philadelphia in controlling this backcountry. By this time it had become unnecessary to combine the capital with major economic activities. Small Annapolis remained the capital, a disjunction that came to be even more obvious after 1775. The rising overseas demand for wheat led merchants to turn Baltimore into an important milling center using local falls, as in Wilmington, which drew not only on Maryland and Virginia, but also on Pennsylvania west of the Susquehanna River. Richmond too emerged as an important if smaller city after 1730. After the Revolution it became the capital and a milling site, causing Williamsburg to atrophy. Some entrepreneurs took advantage of the heads of navigation and falls, as well as backcountry crossroads, to found new settlements that added further levels to the settlement hierarchy. Finally, Norfolk rose to prominence early in the century, trading corn and livestock for West Indian rum and sugar. By the time it was burned by the British in 1776 it was already slowing down, because its merchants did not enter the rising wheat trade.

In the lower South the picture was also complex. In North Carolina, which had separated from South Carolina in 1691, urbanization was slight in 1775 even when compared with Virginia. This was the result in part of the lack of a large local center, the late and relatively slow settlement from the coast at various points by different groups, the spilling over of Virginia settlers into the northeast, the influx from the north into the Piedmont and backcountry by settlers from the Middle Colonies and others who had immigrated via Philadelphia, and the invasion of tobacco planters into the northeast and then gradually toward the southwest. In the southeast, Wilmington and other towns shipped naval stores—pitch and tar from pine trees. In the Piedmont more towns like Salem emerged as wheat became important. Again, as in eastern Virginia, small counties meant fewer large shire market towns.

Charleston was the largest place in the South, an exception before Norfolk and Baltimore arose. In 1700 it may have reached 2,000, only to slow again until the 1730s. Then it reached about 12,000 in 1775, about half the

size of Philadelphia and New York and not far behind Boston. Beside its status as capital, its merchants dealt with the Indian trade, engaged in re-exports to the West Indies and, especially after 1730, financed the rice and indigo trades. In the 1760s they tapped the expanding wheat production of the backcountry for export as the wheat belt emerged southward through Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina to South Carolina. A distinctive social feature was Charleston's summer resorts for rich planters. While northern merchants built suburban villas and Virginia's planters visited Williamsburg quarterly, Carolina's planters sought summer sea breezes to escape from oppressive heat and malaria on their tidewater plantations. Other coastal ports appeared: Georgetown and Beaufort, and Savannah in Georgia, replicating Charleston's style. In the backcountry small places such as Camden emerged slowly.

Even though urban populations were exceedingly modest by modern standards, urban places obviously played an important role in organizing points for administration, trade and commerce, and social life. Where these fit together, most clearly in Pennsylvania, the system was most regular—at least at the second level of county seats. Baltimore's rise signified a separation of economic and political activities; a big city could prosper without being the capital. Perhaps it was a harbinger of the future; after 1776 Philadelphia lost the capital to Harrisburg and New York to Albany, without economic harm. Indeed, London was the undoubted center of the empire in all respects until 1776. It would continue as America's major financial center, and even as an important social and cultural focus, for decades to come.

MATERIAL LIFE: AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY, TRADE AND COMMERCE, AND INCREASING INTERREGIONAL TIES

The rise of Baltimore signaled a separation of the economy from public administration. But in a real sense, a strong degree of autonomy from direct regulation had been practiced much earlier in Britain. Money values were attached to property, goods, and services, even when barter rather than money was used for exchange. Merchants, shopkeepers, millers and many farmers kept account books, for reckoning with others. Contracts were signed when necessary,

although many were informal. If there were fewer attempts to control prices as the century wore on than in early 17th-century urban places, legislated and customary standards for weights and measures could hardly be avoided, nor could taxes, even if they were minimal. The discipline of prices set in London markets were the basis for those in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and far into the countryside. And those with economic power could dictate economic events to a degree. One could say that in all colonies there was a free enterprise economy, but there were limits. Adam Smith's famous treatise *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776 and often cited in support of the "hidden hand" of the market, was far more sensitive to social needs than we generally realize.

Farming

In contrast to today, the production, processing, and distribution of food, fiber and wood, and brick and stone were far more decentralized and small-scale. Whereas virtually every consumer today depends on the huge corporations for groceries and other goods, in the 18th century most goods were produced at home or locally on farms and in shops. This did not mean complete self-sufficiency, as has often been stated in past writings. Smallholders could produce a good deal in their gardens, but had to trade their labor for wheat or flour and for hay. Even more well-off persons practiced trades as well as farming. They sold farm produce to millers and others for export as well as for local trade. Regionally, New England imported wheat from colonies to the south. From time to time crop failures occurred, creating short-term dependency, although the soil generally provided a high standard of living. Those who were marginal in the society were more likely to be socially, rather than materially, deprived. They acquired debts they could not repay and could not provide property for their children. This was especially conspicuous in the tidewater South, where small planters became increasingly dependent on large planters or on Scottish factors of overseas merchants for credit and imports of English goods. Obviously, too, slaves provided their labor for production, but had little say in distribution.

Farms produced a wide range of crops and livestock. The number of improved acres was the prime determinant of how much of the

production was consumed at home and how much was sold. Few new techniques in caring for land and livestock were devised during the 18th century, and they probably did not account for much increase in productivity. Among grains, wheat and Indian corn were the most important for food and trade, the latter relatively more so in the South and New England, the former in the Middle Colonies (Fig. 6.5). Parts of New England continually suffered from stem rust, a disease of wheat. Wheat expanded into the southern backcountry and even into the Chesapeake after 1730. In southeastern Pennsylvania, central New Jersey, and along the Hudson, wheat production was emphasized on the best land. Most wheat was milled into flour for bread, and much entered trade regionally and increasingly overseas as markets opened up in the Caribbean during the 1740s.

Corn was used both for human consumption, primarily as corn meal, and increasingly for fattening livestock. Rye was grown primarily for whiskey and barley for beer and, to a considerable extent in New England, for bread. Oats were raised for horses and, according to the famous English commentator, Samuel Johnson, for Scotsmen's porridge, although persons of other ethnic groups ate it also. Buckwheat was a minor crop; apparently the poor made it into pancakes. In South Carolina and adjacent Georgia along the coast, rice became increasingly important after 1730, especially for export.

Garden crops and orchards provided a large but unknown share of vegetable and fruit. The addition of potatoes early in the century to the turnips, peas, cabbage, and herbs earlier brought from Europe was an important step. Pumpkins, squash, and beans from the Indians were still widely grown. Fruit was preserved, fed to animals in the late summer and fall, and pressed into cider and distilled into brandy. In New England at least, cider became more important than beer. Hay, with improved English grasses, clover, and alfalfa, was a major crop for feeding animals in the winter, obviously more so in the North. For much of the year animals ranged on pasture or in woods; many were raised on rangeland beyond the limits of settlement.

In all regions pork in its various forms was preferred over beef, and mutton and lamb were of lesser importance. Cows provided milk,

some of which was converted into cheese and butter. Improved cattle breeds adapted to different environments appeared by the early 1770s, chiefly from English stock. New England may have raised more livestock than elsewhere: coastal Massachusetts emphasized sheep and fattened cattle were raised in the backcountry, while horses were especially important in Rhode Island. Horses or oxen ploughed, harrowed, and pulled carts. As commercial production of wheat expanded, especially in Pennsylvania and adjacent regions, four-horse teams pulled large wagons loaded with wheat to merchant mills increasingly concentrated near the coast. Riding, buggy, and racing horses bred for speed, not strength, were widespread; the finer the horse, the higher the status of the owner. Chickens, often referred to as "dunghill fowl" because they scratched around in manure heaps, have probably been underestimated by scholars as a source of protein (eggs and flesh). Geese and ducks provided food and feathers for bedclothing. The now-extinct passenger pigeon and deer also added to the supply of animal products. Bee-produced honey was used to sweeten bland foods, and in New England and New York maple syrup was popular. Sugar was also imported increasingly from the West Indies to supply the needs of urban dwellers and, gradually, those in the countryside as well.

Linen from flax grown on small plots, together with wool fleeces from sheep, provided fabric for clothing, bedding, curtains, and other uses. Wool was probably more important in New England than elsewhere. Dye crops were grown to add color: in South Carolina indigo, introduced from the Old World and yielding a rich blue color, became an important export to England and other colonies. Spinning was undertaken by women at home, but weaving was primarily a male occupation, and not only among the poor. In contrast to early 20th-century assertions of the "golden age of homespun," British woolen and Irish linen cloth were widely sold in America. On some farms, hemp, grown particularly in Virginia's Piedmont and Great Valley, was made into rope and bags. Farms, plantations, and even smallholdings thus produced what seems an almost endless array of goods for use and sale.

Tobacco, as in the 17th century, remained the key commercial crop of the Chesapeake tidewa-

ter. Over the century it contracted from some areas and its production expanded somewhat into North Carolina and on to the southern Virginia Piedmont. Large planters increased their production at the expense of smaller ones; the inspection acts of the 1730s and 1740s favored the larger producers. Since they were more likely to produce good-quality tobacco rather than "trash," inspectors accepted relatively more of what the large planters grew. Small planters grew only an acre or two, while the largest planters produced up to 60 acres on two or more plantations. In the latter half of the century, as tobacco specialization became less competitive, large planters tended to diversify into more crops, especially wheat and corn.

In terms of agricultural practices, an average farm of 125 acres in Lancaster and Chester counties in Pennsylvania, between 1760 and 1775, devoted about 25 acres to grain, including 8 in wheat and 8 in corn. Possibly another 20 acres grew hay, and a few acres were devoted to flax and hemp, and garden and fruit crops. On the average farm were 6 or 7 cattle, 3 or 4 horses, 6 to 10 pigs, and 6 to 12 sheep. In New England most farms were smaller; in the plantation South farms continued to be considerably larger. The extent of woodland on farms decreased over the century in older settled areas, but large acreages remained for fuel and lumber (and speculation). Near cities cordwood was consumed in large amounts and exhausted easily accessible supplies, and iron-making used up forests through the burning of charcoal.

Yields of crops and livestock were lower than today. Most 18th-century commentators pointed to an average of 10 bushels of wheat per acre, the other grains being somewhat higher. Cattle on the hoof may have averaged 700 pounds, pigs 175, and horses 1,000 pounds. Critics of agriculture after 1750 complained of the low yields and the small size of cattle. But when one considers the low population levels by European standards, production was more than adequate for home use, local trade, and export. Manure fertilized gardens and orchards, but not usually grain fields. By the 1760s lime came into wider use as a rejuvenator of fields and so also did rotations with clover for hay. New evidence of higher yields in older-settled eastern Massachusetts in the early 1770s suggests more fertilizing or at least

more care than we usually associate with colonial farming. The usual way to renew worn-out fields was through resting, or long fallows of up to 20 years. Tobacco and corn were particularly severe in this regard. This did not mean that farms were abandoned, for which there is no evidence. Even later abandonments were not the result of exhaustion beyond the possibility of renewal; rather it was the consequence of the land not being good enough to support the level of commercial production needed to pay for farm properties.

Not all farms or households were able to produce their dietary needs. In 1771, 24 percent of households in Massachusetts held inadequate land, and 38 percent could not reach minimum requirements for self-sufficiency, at least as measured by grain. This is based on a somewhat more conservative estimate of need calculated for individual families and households than in other studies. Since undernourishment was not widespread, two-fifths or more of households bought grain and probably meat and hay from neighbors or from the open market. The inadequate diets of Boston's poor, for example, was a matter of food distribution, not of the inability of the country to produce. In mid-century no "agricultural crisis" hit New England, the region least able to feed itself. Indeed, better management of storage led to better and more-varied diets throughout the year than in the previous century. As a result, local trading was widespread, far more so than scholars previously have thought.

Households without adequate production had to pay their neighbors and storekeepers for local and imported goods. At least in the northern colonies and in parts of the South with few slaves, men worked as farm laborers for the more substantial farmers and as craftsmen selling their goods. The more affluent farmers needed the labor of these people and also often housed servants. Many of these were indentured immigrants who paid for their travel across the Atlantic by selling themselves for several years, generally from four to seven. Others were poor married "inmates," born in America. Although it is probably true that many families with mature unmarried children could for some years provide most of the work, it has become clearer through recent studies that interdependency was far more common than scholars once believed. The lower the

income, the more likely people were to be dependent.

Although farms needed work every day, seasonal patterns were distinct. Between May and July the first crop of hay was mown with a scythe. Harvesting of grain was most intensive in June (and July in New England) when winter grain ripened—wheat and rye sown the previous September. Spring grains—oats and barley—came later. A second hay crop often was harvested after winter grain, at least south of New Hampshire. Cutting grain with sickles was extremely time-consuming and had to be done quickly before the kernels fell out of the heads. Many people had to be mobilized. Poor residents of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for example, were drawn to the fields at harvest time. Sickles were in fact used because the worker grasped a sheaf of several stocks close to the ground for cutting to prevent spillage. Scythes fixed with cradles (and allowing a reaper to stand up rather than bend over) may have come into widespread use by 1760 for cutting some grains. Either way, sheaves had to be stacked for further drying, then hauled into the barn. This was followed by threshing (by wooden flails) which, if prices were high after harvesting, had to be done quickly.

Slaughtering livestock often needed outside help, particularly in the late fall. Clearing land of trees demanded arduous labor, and some men specialized in doing this. Some farmers engaged in other crafts in slacker times, and some persons specialized in the weaving of cloth, bricklaying, carpentry, clockmaking, haircutting, and so on. Even if permanent farm laborers were less common than in England at the time, the picture now emerging is less unlike the mother country than previously had been considered. The fact that the wages for labor remained higher in the colonies than Britain underlines the continuous need for workers not only in the cities and mines and iron works, but also in the countryside.

The South continued to differ from the North in its labor requirements. The longer growing season and the specialized types of crop—tobacco, rice, and indigo—demanded more and continuous labor, as did upland cotton after 1775. Thus the need for slaves had arisen where these crops predominated. The expansion of wheat, however, led to a deemphasis on slave labor in much of the backcountry South.

Many farmers with smaller holdings acted more like northern farmers in using wage labor; indeed, the export wheat boom of the late 1760s and early 1770s helped to force up wages. Indentured servants became more prominent once again, as they had been in the 17th century. Large plantations introduced wheat but also continued to produce tobacco. Needing less labor, larger planters sold surplus slaves, a pattern that would become especially obvious after 1790 when cotton began its march to the west in the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast plains. It is clear that planters, large and small, adjusted their labor needs and costs to changing economic conditions.

Although farming occupied most rural people's time, a gender division of labor was apparent. Men were largely responsible for the preparation of fields, care of most livestock, cutting wood, and selling produce. Women did help in reaping grain; they were also mostly responsible for the garden and the flower beds; and they also managed the homes. Even though widows were the only women to possess legal standing as persons, undoubtedly many, if not most, wives were influential in many, even major decisions. Law and practice did not, as always, correspond.

Industry

By 1775 the making of iron had become an important colonial industry, accounting for about 15 percent (30,000 tons) of world output. Iron was produced in all colonies, because "bog" iron and hardwoods for charcoal were widely available. In Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey more than 100 furnaces and forges turned out pig iron and its second stage, bar iron. Many made finished products such as stoves, pots, and kettles, despite Parliament's attempt to limit the production of final products to Britain and prevent colonial manufactured goods from competing with those of the mother country. Blacksmiths, who fashioned horseshoes and bands for barrels put together by coopers, and wheelwrights were to be found everywhere, while coopers were concentrated at major milling sites.

Iron production was the largest-scale operation in the economy. A good deal of capital was needed to buy mineral and timber rights, to construct a furnace and forge and other equipment, to house workers and their families, and

to buy food and the like. Hope Furnace in Rhode Island often employed up to 75 men by the 1770s; about half were laborers engaged in cutting and hauling wood. Some highly skilled workers received high wages; founders and charcoalers especially were in great demand. If the latter turned out poor charcoal, the iron ore could not be heated to the right temperature for good quality pig iron. Compared with the scale of steel production beginning in the 1840s, the level of colonial iron production was small, and many operations were intermittent. Yet these works were the basis for the larger iron and steel mills of the 19th century.

Small-scale and intermittent operations were true also for most other industries. Milling of flour from wheat and weaving of cloth concentrated some people at particular sites; the conversion of weaving from human to waterpower was beginning during the late colonial period. Even though Manchester and Leeds in England led the way in cotton and woolen goods, America was not far behind. Shipbuilding stood out as the major industry on the river edges in cities and towns from Pennsylvania to Maine. By 1775 the long-protracted "industrial revolution" that was to provide the basis for 19th-century industrialization was underway in the northern colonies.

Trade

The pace of trade quickened over the 18th century, although far more slowly than in 19th century. Local trading was widespread and became intensified. Little is known of its extent because most scholars, until recently, have underestimated the degree of interdependency among farmers. Around 1770, 90 percent of the corn and more than 80 percent of the wheat produced in Virginia was consumed there, but how much entered internal trade is unclear. Some goods were sold at formal markets and at fairs, but increasingly most produce was handled by farmers or through dealers such as shopkeepers and merchants. In most towns pedlars hawking produce competed increasingly successfully with marketplace stallholders. Cattle were driven from rangelands in the backcountry for fattening near markets on the coast. Some of the pig iron produced at furnaces was sold to those who traded specialized goods. The range of goods in local and intraprovincial trade was ex-

tremely varied and must have been substantial.

External trade, of which more is known because scholars have investigated the issues more closely, expanded enormously. To England alone, the value of exports tripled between 1720 and 1770, then briefly in 1775 reached four times that level (Table 6.3). Even

Table 6.3 Value of Exports to and Imports from England, 1700-1776 (in pounds sterling)

	Exports	Imports
1700	395,021	344,341
1720	468,188	319,702
1740	718,416	813,382
1760	761,099	2,611,764
1775	1,920,950 ^a	4,202,472 ^b
1776	103,964	55,415

^aPrewar peak.

^bPrewar peak year of 1771.

so, it amounted to only 9 to 12 percent of colonial gross output around 1770. Throughout the 18th century the value of commodity exports continued to be outweighed by imports, but the financial burden was balanced by earnings on shipping, insurance, and other business, as well as by British military spending in the colonies. The Navigation Acts restricted some colonial trade into channels set by Parliament, but they were not a major impediment to growth. Indeed, under the umbrella of the British Atlantic trading network, the colonies prospered. After independence the trade continued to expand, after an initial period of readjustment at the end of the 18th century.

Exports from the South exceeded those from the North by almost two to one. In the period between 1768 and 1772 (the years with complete customs accounts), the South on the average sent out commodities valued at three-fifths of the roughly £ 2,500,000 sterling (pound sterling, £, was worth about \$5 then). The North exported £ 900,000, nearly equally divided between the Middle Colonies and New England. By far the largest amount was Chesapeake tobacco, almost a third of all commodities shipped. Rice, indigo, wheat, bread and flour, Indian corn, boards, and barrel staves were also important southern exports. Bread and flour were the major exports of the Middle Colonies, although meat, iron, and potash also

contributed. The New England list was more diverse, with fish, livestock, whale oil, potash, and lumber standing out; the towering white pines of Maine became the masts of ships in the Royal Navy.

Great Britain, the West Indies, and southern Europe were the chief destinations of these exports (Fig. 6.5). As the major "enumerated" commodity under the Navigation Acts, tobacco was shipped to Britain. Shipments ranged from 35 to 50 million pounds (by weight) annually during the 1720s and 1730s; from 50 to 65 million pounds during the 1740s; from 60 to 80 million pounds during the 1750s; from 70 to 80 million pounds during the 1760s; and between 97 and 105 million pounds during the early 1770s before the outbreak of the Revolution. Most of it was re-exported to France (despite the wars), Germany, and other European countries by London merchants and, especially after 1750, by Scottish merchants from Glasgow. Between 1750 and 1775 the Scottish merchants increased their share of the tobacco trade from one-third to one-half. Their centralized control over this crop, both the forward and backward linkages, suppressed urbanization and a merchant class in the Chesapeake region, as we saw earlier. Indigo (900,000 pounds by 1757) too went to England for use as a dye in the textile and clothing industries. Most of the grain, flour, and bread were taken to the West Indies and southern European countries, the latter developing as major customers only after 1750. About two-thirds (50 million pounds) of Carolina and Georgia rice production also had southern European destinations by the 1770s. In all, between 1768 and 1772, about 58 percent of colonial exports went to Britain and Ireland, 27 percent to the West Indies, 14 percent to southern Europe, and less than 1 percent to Africa. Excluding tobacco, Britain's level fell behind that of the West Indies. Obviously, the luxury weed remained of paramount importance.

Imports continued to grow, in fact at a faster rate than exports. The West Indies sent sugar, molasses, and rum (derived from sugar) to the colonies, although rum was distilled from molasses in the colonies, especially in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Southern Europe provided wine and salt. Of the goods valued at £ 3,600,000 brought into the colonies in 1760, however, only 20 percent was of West Indian origin and 2 percent of southern European

origin. About four-fifths came from Britain, especially England (Table 6.3). The colonists spent money on consumer goods: woolen and linen cloth, finished clothing, hardware and metal goods, tea (from India), glassware, spices (from the East Indies), drugs, fine furniture, and many other ordinary and luxury products. It has been noted that slaves were clothed in British goods, and even that "homespun was not for the exigencies of the masses." The colonists' needs seemed insatiable and so were more and more locked into an expanding British industrial system; in turn, Britain depended more on the colonial market. Although British laws inhibited colonial manufacturing of iron and textiles to some extent, the cheapness of British goods was the major factor leading to increased imports over the period. These figures do not account for the trade in human beings that was needed if major economic expansion were to occur and profits to be made. Around 1770 payments yearly for people added £ 200,000 for slaves and £ 80,000 for indentured servants to the commodity deficit of £ 1,120,000. This human traffic was handled mainly by British merchant ships.

The colonies as a whole were able to balance the great annual debt around 1770 of £ 1,600,000 in three major ways. Shipping services and related earnings on insurance and commissions for managing trade on the Atlantic contributed £ 820,000. This amount, largely earned by the New England and Middle Colonies in the carrying trade, is a clear sign that merchants on this side of the Atlantic were increasingly significant contributors to the organization of commerce in the British Empire. The second category in balancing the books was the direct contribution of about £ 400,000 by Britain to military and naval defense expenditures, by 1770 an ambivalent blessing to America (Fig. 6.5). Most of the salaries of British civil servants, many placed to collect custom dues, were apparently paid from taxes in the colonies, especially after 1750. The remaining £ 40,000 debt was paid by metal money (specie), little of which was in circulation, or by recycling debt. Most of the "money" crossing the Atlantic was in the form of "bills of exchange," more or less like checks in recent times.

Much has been made in the past of the debts owed to British creditors by large plantation owners in the South, especially, and by mer-

chants in the northern cities. It is now believed that colonial indebtedness was modest and most individuals did not chafe under the load. Most businessmen understood the functioning of credit; economic development through capital investment depended on this flow. The tiny amount of taxation was a bigger problem—political far more than economic—since it was levied without representation. The presence of British army and navy units, even though they brought money to balance the trade deficit, seemed less necessary after the final defeat of France in 1763. By 1791 Americans owed British merchants twice as much as in 1776; credit indeed made the world go around.

Finally, interregional trade became increasingly significant, although calculations are not as complete as for external trade. Besides trading goods raised by one another, the colonies also redistributed imports and collected goods for export. It has been estimated that at least £ 1,300,000 yearly entered the coastal trade around 1770, about a quarter of the external trade. Because the data are based only on the main ports, that amount is probably lower than the actual colonial total, because many small ports were also engaged in coastwide activity. New Englanders were the major actors in this interregional drama. Gradually through the 18th century, their region became more dependent on the wheat of the Middle Colonies and, less so, on the Chesapeake. The affluent inhabitants of New England were able to exercise their preference for wheaten white bread over the rye and cornbread, eaten by the "ruder" sorts of people. Although interregional trade was mainly a marine activity, the overland movement of mail intensified (Fig. 6.5). Weekly service linked most places; service between large cities occurred daily. These connections brought leaders of all colonies into closer contact and so led the way to unity in 1776.

Economic Growth and Incomes

The expansion of the colonial economy thus was especially significant between 1700 and 1775. Most of the growth arose from the extension of settlement, that is, by adding more people, far less from new technologies and city building as was to occur in the 19th century. By 1775 the colonial gross product had reached £ 35,000,000 sterling, according to one estimate (\$2,300,000,000 in 1980 prices). This amounted

to about 40 percent of Britain's gross product, compared with a tiny 4 percent in 1700. Per capita annual income of £ 13 (\$845 in 1980 terms) was the highest in the world and probably had been after the first trying years of the 17th-century settlements.

Real incomes on the average probably rose modestly over the period. With the possible exception of New England, the rate of income growth accelerated after 1730, particularly in the late 1740s and 1750s. Overall the rate may have reached 0.5 percent a year between 1750 and 1775, certainly not as rapid as in some decades of the past two centuries. Economic development—that is, the intensification of activity and not just the extension of more people doing the same things—may have been the result of improved business practices and the strength of the “invisibles” noted above. Little can be attributed to labor- and land-saving improvements in agriculture. Milling for export came to be concentrated at coastal points, such as Baltimore, Wilmington, and Richmond, because it was cheaper to carry wheat for export there than to convert it to flour inland. This was a clear sign of tighter organization. But new technological devices were only beginning to appear in manufacturing and in agriculture. The economic quickening of the 1780s in England and soon after in the mid-1790s in the United States can be attributed largely to factories and machines and more rational farming methods such as the “scientific” rotation of crops.

LATE COLONIAL SOCIETY: DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

The United States has been characterized as a “business society,” meaning that the aims of businessmen dominate profit making through free enterprise and possess the right to keep and use the money as they see fit. Certainly, such a view is stronger in the United States than elsewhere in the world. The 18th century exhibited a clear tendency in that direction. A British traveler in 1744 noted Albany merchants whose “whole thoughts . . . turned upon profit and gain which necessarily makes them live retired and frugal.” This is a confirmation of what has been referred to as the “Protestant ethic” (although one could apply the term to

many Catholics as well). Religion in America has indeed bolstered individual action. Also, the elimination of English titles, such as lord, knight and squire, in the new nation appears to have been a step away from ranked aristocratic society. But “gentleman,” “esquires,” and “officials” topped the asset holders. Besides, the business ethic was strong in Britain, where many of the nobility and their sons engaged in commerce. The large planters of the Chesapeake and Charleston lived as if they were titled, and many merchants in northern cities built country estates just as successful merchants did in England. More ordinary white people in America drawn from Europe had, however, on balance greater opportunity and therefore were addicted with the expansionist view. Subsequent developments in the 19th century confirmed this trend.

Wealth, if less so than at the present time, was concentrated in fewer hands than is often thought. The elite class, making up no more than 20 percent of the population, held (by one calculation) 68 percent of total assets by 1775. They increased their share over time, but this tendency was already apparent at the time of initial settlement. The poor increased over time, although their condition was more likely to fluctuate over time. In the Middle Colonies the distribution was probably less skewed than in the New England or in the southern colonies. The importance of large planters and their slaves actually resulted in the rural population in late colonial America holding as much of the average wealth as those in cities. In New England wealth was more focused in urban places, although most rural New Englanders were not poor in basic needs. In Boston, and also at times in New York and Philadelphia, the poorest strata did suffer want, but mainly because those with the power were little interested in ensuring a minimum decent standard of living for everyone. The building of poorhouses after 1750 and minimal provision for indigents in hospitals did not solve the problem.

Class divisions were thus apparent in the distribution of wealth. Most people, rural and urban, were middle class or “middling sorts,” as they often said then. They were affluent enough to add to their worldly goods; in well-off rural Chester County, Pennsylvania, in virtually every township a clockmaker crafted ele-

gant grandfather clocks, a sign of status for buyers. Occupational distinctions even in cities did not separate an industrial class to nearly the same degree as in the 19th century. There were strikes and what was referred to then as "mob" action, such as British officials experienced at the Boston Tea Party. Marginal farmers rebelled periodically in some colonies, as in the Regulator Movement in North Carolina during the late 1760s, because they lacked money to pay bills. They agitated in fact for government-printed currency (something taken for granted today) and for easier credit terms on land. Even though ownership was far more widespread than in Britain and tenancy less frequent, a minority did not easily share the largesse. Because land was relatively cheap and accessible, however, new family farms continued to spring up on the frontier.

In the South the presence of blacks—by 1775 half the population—resulted in a peculiar set of class relations. The potential threat of a slave uprising pushed rich Anglican planters and poorer Baptist and Methodist whites into a tacit alliance; one needed the protection of the other. Ironically, white poverty may have been more widespread among southern whites because of this. Blacks diverted attention from the rich/poor division by being a "class," yet clearly lower than the bottom group of whites. In Britain the working people were not as deferential to the rich as in the southern colonies. When blacks rebelled or committed crimes, the

penalties were often severe, but no more brutal than the torture and executions meted out to free blacks and slaves in New York City who did not stay in their place. Slavery and, since the 1860s, the "otherness" of blacks created the greatest dividing line in the southern half of North America, making it strikingly different from the rest of the Western world. The deepening of this chasm began during the 18th century. If slavery was disliked by many, its persistence did not, however, prevent the North and South joining together in 1776.

Equally important, therefore, were unification and westward expansion. The colonies indeed coalesced. The discrete and separate English colonies of the 17th century grew together and so had to live together. By 1776 they were poised for nationhood, despite the fact that independence was not intended initially by many. The occupation of native lands to the west strengthened the cause of nationality and, within a century and a half, the United States had become the world's most powerful country. The westward movement also prolonged the colonial reality that Americans were a people of plenty, the most affluent society ever known. But plenty meant waste. Only in the late 20th century have Americans generally become aware that the United States' and the planet's resources cannot sustain the excesses set in motion by the assumptions of colonial settlers and spread by the ideology of the new nation after 1783.

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