



# History 201

## Lectures 2

### Of Pilgrims and Puritans

The first enduring settlement of Englishmen in New England was the result of the discontent of a congregation of Puritan separatists from the little town of Scrooby in England.

I need to take a minute here to define a few terms. There were three kinds of Protestants in the early 17th century that were given the derisive name, Puritan. All of these groups were Calvinists, and all agreed that only a few people had been chosen, *were predestined*, for salvation. They differed most in terms of how the church should be governed, and over what the relationship should be between the church and the political state. The first were Presbyterians. Presbyterians wanted to reform the Church of England by getting rid of bishops, and replacing them with a sort of “congress” of church leaders called a synod. The synod would then make rules governing the churches and church doctrine. Presbyterians generally felt that there should be no separation between church and state, but that there should be no bishops.

The second group, and in 1630, the largest are called Non-Separating Congregationalists. They believed that the Church of England (Anglican Church) required reform, they believed that each church should have the right to interpret scripture for itself, to hire its own minister, and to make decisions about who should and should not be a full church member (decide who was elected to Grace and who was not). But they had not given up on the Church of England completely. From the late 1500s until 1620, most of this group accepted the Anglican Church so long as they could consider its ministry and bishops godly. But in the late 1620s, under Charles I, several new bishops made decisions about church services and theology that Congregationalists felt moved the church back in the direction of Catholicism. Many Non-Separating Congregationalists chose to immigrate to America rather than stay in England, which they considered damned. In the 1640s these Puritans led the English Revolution that unseated (and unheaded) Charles I. But no matter what they did, they still considered that their practices and churches were the legitimate Church of England.

The third group were called Separating Congregationalists. This group, also called Separatists, had given up on the Church of England and considered themselves a separate entity. To be separate, however, they knew that they would have to leave England, because in the 1600s, to dissent from the established church was heretical, and, since the ruling monarch was the head of the church, to be a heretic was also to be a traitor.

In 1608, a congregation of separatists from Scrooby, England, began to quietly leave England for Holland. Once settled in Leyden, they began to worship in their own fashion without much trouble. But there were

problems. First, they watched their children grow up in a Dutch community, and feared that their children would gradually become Dutch rather than English. Second, they were not happy with the religious worship and habits of their Dutch neighbors. Their neighbors were also Calvinists, members of the Dutch Reformed Church. but Dutch Protestants celebrated Christmas and Easter (pagan holidays), they sang and played music in services and did other things that their English neighbors found unacceptably uncalvinist. The "Pilgrims" as they came to be called were, as you may have already figured out, not the most tolerant people when it came to religion, and they began to feel that their Dutch Reformed Protestant neighbors were no better than the Anglicans.

Leaders of the Scrooby group obtained permission from the Virginia Company to settle as an independent community in Virginia. They arranged financing by getting several English Puritan merchants to agree to finance the trip in return for a share of the profits of the new colony. In September, 1620, the *Mayflower* with 35 "saints" and 67 "strangers" (that is, non Puritans) set sail for America. They were supposed to set up a colony in northern Virginia, but they found themselves in the Cape Cod area, instead. After some exploration, they settled at Ply-

mouth. Since Plymouth lay outside the any chartered colony, the Pilgrims realized that they would have no government or law unless they created it for themselves. Some of the "strangers" began to argue that since their indentures had been set up to send them to Virginia, where they weren't, they were then free. One of the "saints" drew up an agreement, called the *Mayflower Compact*, which 41 passengers signed (some possibly under duress). The compact was a church covenant of sorts, creating a Congregationalist religious community, but also establishing a colonial government and professing allegiance to the king of England. Then, on December 21, 1620, the pilgrims stepped ashore.

December is not a good time to start a colony. The first winter Pilgrims froze and starved, in that order. 50% died that winter. Of 18 wives only 5 survived. That any survived at all is attributable to a lonely Indian named Squanto. Squanto had lived in England for nine years, and had returned to America with John Smith, only to be taken into slavery in Cuba by the Spanish. Squanto escaped and had, himself, only recently returned to New England, where he discovered that his entire tribe was dead. So Squanto adopted the Pilgrims. Before his arrival things had gotten so bad that Pilgrims had even resorted to digging up Indian graves to get the corn offerings



buried there. Squanto helped the Pilgrims find food, plant corn, and make friends with the local tribes. Pilgrims planted English vegetables next to Indian corn, only to find that the corn grew, but not the English veggies. The first thanksgiving was a celebration that there were any crops at all. They invited the local Indian chief who showed up with the entire tribe. Once the tribe saw the sorry condition of their strange neighbors, the chief sent a few of his men to hunt, and got a couple of deer, a few ducks, a few eels (but no turkeys), and shared some of the tribe's corn, and made a three-day meal of it. The affair became annual. The Pilgrim colony, the Plymouth Plantation as it was called, thrived thereafter for about a decade, when it was incorporated into the Massachusetts colony.

Massachusetts Bay was settled by Non-Separating Congregationalists. Their purpose was to create an example of a godly Congregationalist state. Or as Puritan leader, John Winthrop, called it, “a city on a hill.” It was to be a Bible Commonwealth, a state on a mission from God—a shining example for mankind in general, and for England in particular. They proposed to take the “true English religion” out of England to save it for when God might decide to punish England for its sins, where they would survive, pure and true in the American wilderness while England received God's punishment, and return to introduce the true faith. They believed that God held the entire community responsible for individual sin.

The Massachusetts Bay leader, John Winthrop, and the government of Massachusetts felt that they had to enforce their religion. They closed political participation to “visible saints.” They believed that if they allowed “strangers,” the unregenerate, to participate in government the Bible Commonwealth would vanish. They could not pass a law that said that only saints could vote or hold office, but they could say that any church member of any church could vote and hold office. Since there was only one denomination (the Congregationalist Church) in the colony, and since only saints could be full members of the Congregationalist churches, that did the same thing, restricting government to saints. The leadership of the colony also had no intention of letting England interfere with the colony. When the Puritans left England they took the Massachusetts Bay Company charter with them. The

company existed where the charter was, so the headquarters of the Massachusetts Bay company was Boston, Massachusetts, not London, England. By transferring the company 3,000 miles from London, English interference was put off for a while.

Winthrop and company would go through any required form, so long as the real power resided in Boston, so, when necessary, the English flag was hoisted above the state house, just long enough for a navy ship to see it, and then taken down and put in the closet. The leaders of Massachusetts sent letters of loyalty to whomever they needed to in England, then did as they pleased (or, as God pleased, which was same thing to them).



In terms of religion, their plan succeeded so well that it failed. In order to explain that remark I need to talk a little about the basic ideas of Protestantism in general, and of Congregationalists in particular. An important idea of Protestantism is that each Christian should read the Scriptures and interpret them for themselves. Another important idea is that the Bible is the revealed word of God. These two ideas create a dilemma for organized religion. If the Bible is God's revealed truth, then there isn't really much room for interpretation. So if I inter-





pret the Bible in a specific way, since it is from the Bible, and thus absolute truth, I must be right and anyone who disagrees with me must be wrong. So long as an established church hierarchy interprets and requires belief of its members, there is no dilemma. This was the case with the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics. But the central idea of congregationalism was congregational independence. Each congregation is expected to interpret Scripture for themselves. In England where the Congregationalists were a persecuted minority there is no real problem, but once independent churches became free in the Massachusetts wilderness, some began to develop new ideas, and congregational independence was a central idea among these Puritans. Some congregations began to shift their theology and ideas. If all the churches began to find their own way, then the solidarity of the Massachusetts Bay community would be broken, the Puritan Utopia fragmented, the Puritan experiment would fail, and the city on a hill becomes, figuratively, a series of unconnected villages in the wilderness, a collection of strangers in a strange land. But, for Massachusetts to force the churches of the colony to comply violated the idea of congregational independence. If Winthrop and company did so, they would be no better than the Anglican bishops they sought to escape. The Massachusetts government developed a different way to deal with dissent; what one scholar, Edmund Morgan, calls the “New England Way.”

The New England way of dealing with dissent included:

1. Informal meetings among ministers to try to iron out differences and bring the erring minister back into the fold.

2. A formal “synod” (but not called that) where the leading ministers in the colony pointed out the wayward minister's errors and demanded that the offending church or minister conform.
3. If the above failed the civil authorities took the appropriate measures to either force conformity or expel the nonconformists.

Now, I would like to talk for a few minutes about two of the nonconformists who were the most troublesome to Winthrop and the early colony, Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson. The cases of these two should illustrate the methods of "the New England Way."

Williams was a dissenting Puritan minister who had been chased out of England by the Anglicans and was initially welcomed to Massachusetts with open arms. Williams was, in fact, a sort of Puritan superstar, with a reputation for godliness and a for his extraordinary sermons. But Williams quickly became rather disturbing in Massachusetts. When he first arrived, he was invited to speak at the churches in the Boston area, and what he said disturbed the parishioners, and especially the leaders of the colonial government. He began to announce that New England Puritans were living in sin and practicing false doctrine. He argued that the Bible didn't really offer a blueprint for government, and thus, church and state should be separate. He stated, to Winthrop's horror, that “forced worship stinks in God's nostrils!” He also began to argue that the Indians had been cheated in two ways. First Williams criticised the missionary efforts of the colonists and questioned whether the Indians weren't better off with their own traditional religion; second he questioned whether the Crown of England had the right

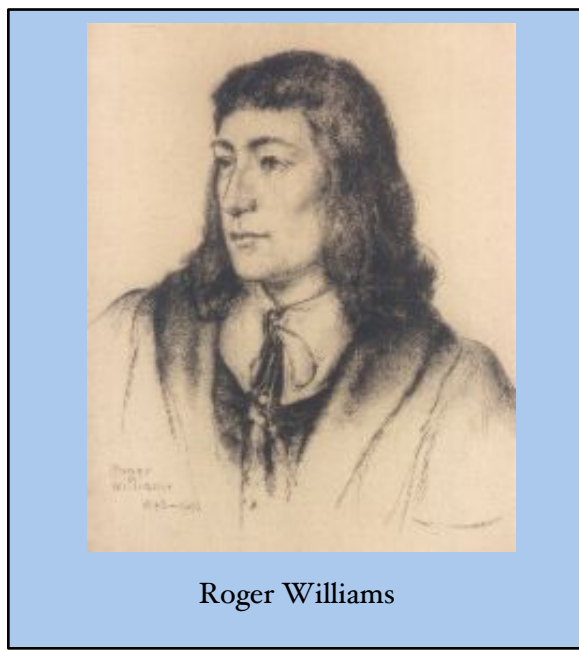


to give land to the Massachusetts Bay Colony that belonged, not to the king of England, but to the native Indians who had lived upon it when the English arrived. How could anyone give what was not theirs?

Williams sermon gigs dried up fairly quickly. His ideas were very unpopular in the Boston area, and Winthrop and the other colonial leaders decided that, if he couldn't get work, Williams would cease to cause trouble, or leave the colony.

Williams got elected to a ministry at Salem, Massachusetts, one of old Plymouth Pilgrim towns. There he began to regularly preach the ideas that worried the Massachusetts government. Winthrop told the Salem congregation that if Williams continued to preach, Salem would receive no more land grants. The fact is that this act should have made John Winthrop's blood run cold. The offer he made was either stand by your chosen minister (adhere to the ideal of congregationalism) or go for more land. Righteousness or pure greed? Politics or religious principles? Salem opted for the land and dismissed Williams. Once Williams was cut loose from his church the colonial government banished him. Williams bought land in Rhode Island from the local Indians there, and acquired a charter from the Crown to found Rhode Island. Rhode Island became a safe haven for refugees from the Puritan colonies. Williams required a strict separation of church and state. Members of all religious faiths, including Jews and Anglicans, Quakers and even Muslims (but not Roman Catholics) were welcome in Rhode Island, and even granted civil rights. It became a kind of renegade colony, very independent. You might become sick by the end of the semester of hearing me say all of the colonies did such and such *except Rhode Island*.

Anne Hutchinson immigrated to Massachusetts in 1634, very soon after its founding, and settled in Boston. Several people from the ship that she arrived on told some of the Massachusetts leaders that she had expressed some rather odd ideas on the passage over. A minister who had traveled on the ship even recommended to Winthrop that she should be put back on the ship and sent back to England. Several ministers examined her on her arrival and she said the right things to impress them with her orthodoxy. But shortly after settling in at



Boston, she began to hold Bible readings in her home. This wasn't too worrisome because Puritans had traditionally done this in England where it was illegal to hold Puritan meetings and discussions in public. But Hutchinson began to say some very troubling things at them. First, she began to teach that when a person had received Grace, the Holy Spirit entered them, spoke directly to them, and kept them on the path of righteousness (this is a kind of Christian heresy called Antinomianism). Election essentially offered a Saint a sort of hotline to God. This was contrary to Calvinist teachings. Next Hutchinson began to complain that God had told her that only two ministers in Massachusetts were saved, and all the rest had not found Grace and were damned. She became a threat to the Bible Commonwealth. A person who has the Holy Spirit handy to tell them that they are saved and how to behave doesn't need ministers, a congregation, or a government to tell them how to behave or worship. Winthrop saw a threat of enormous proportions here.

Hutchinson had support from the merchant communities on the coast. The government, not the market, controlled prices in New England. If you took too large a profit, this hurt the community, and is therefore sinful. Prices were strictly regulated; profits of more than 10% were not acceptable. To overcharge was both a crime and a sin, so a merchant who charged too much could expect both civ-



Anne Hutchinson Disputes Scripture in Boston

il punishment and damnation. As more people arrived in the colony and the amount of goods remained relatively limited, prices rose as demand rose. Merchants were caught in the middle between the demands of outraged consumers and an inflating economy. Hutchinson offered them an out. Hutchinson said that works (doing good) has nothing to do with sin, which only requires faith and the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. So God doesn't care if you make bigger profits. The merchants liked this message. Farmers and other consumers were considerably less well pleased; they liked it better when God was on their side. Hutchinson, thus, triggered not only a theological rift, but also a social one.

Winthrop and some of the other ministers went through the roof. Hutchinson was dragged before ministers and magistrates several times, and generally argued circles around them. Ultimately, Hutchinson and her followers (some 5 or 6 churchloads of them) were banished from Massachusetts. They settled in Rhode Island. This controversy seriously eroded the doctrine of congregational independence. What was rapidly growing up in Mas-

sachusetts was the notion that any congregation could believe any doctrines that they felt were right so long as they were the same as those accepted by Winthrop and the Massachusetts leadership. Lots of folks fled Winthrop's regime.

The missionary effort to convert the natives turned rapidly into a land grab, and a long series of wars between Puritans and Indians gradually pushed the latter out of the picture. Massachusetts leaders often told the Indians that if they wanted to avoid war, they should disarm. When they did so, they were often enslaved and sold off to the Spanish. The best example of these relations was the war that began in 1675 between the colonists and the Wampanoag tribe that is called King Philip's War.

In 1675, three tribal members were tried and executed by the English for the murder of a converted Wampanoag. The execution touched off more than a year of hostilities. Beginning in June 1675, the Wampanoags attacked a series of settlements and killed dozens of men, women and children. The English retaliated in kind by destroying native villages and slaughtering the inhabitants. Soon other tribes, joined the fray on one side or the other, and the entire region fell into conflict. In May, 1676, hostilities ground to a halt when King Philip, the Wampanoag chief was betrayed, captured and killed. Philip's son was sold into slavery in Bermuda and many other captives were forced into servitude in homes throughout New England. After the death of Philip and most of their leaders, the Wampanoags were nearly exterminated; only about 400 of them survived the war.

In 1686, King James II created the Dominion of New England. It comprised the five New England colonies. In 1688, the colonies of New York and New Jersey were added to the Dominion. James chose as his governor an old hand in colonial administration, Sir Edmund Andros. The Dominion government consisted of the governor and his council. The colonial assemblies of the various member colonies, including Massachusetts, were dissolved. In 1688, England underwent the Glorious Revolution (we'll talk about it later), and the folks in Massachusetts had a revolution of their own. They arrested Andros and his cronies who were sent back to England, then they requested a new charter. Unfortunately, the Lords of Trade in London were not

James II (below)

Sir Edmund Andros (right)



The Dominion of  
New England



amused at the antics of the Massachusetts revolutionaries. Massachusetts would have to wait until 1692 to receive a new charter and governor from England. In the meantime, the leaders of Massachusetts fought an expensive and futile war with the French in Canada, fought with each other over government, laws and religion, and generally made a mess of things. In long sermons called Jeremiads, ministers announced that Massachusetts was being punished by God because the colony had fallen from grace and into sin. God, it seemed, had turned his back on the city on a hill and Satan walked the roads and trails of New England. At this time and under these circumstances, the colony got involved in a strange controversy that took place in the little town of Salem.

In the village of Salem in 1692, Betty Parris, age 9, and her cousin Abigail Williams, age 11, the daughter and niece (respectively) of Reverend Samuel Parris, fell victim to what was recorded as fits “beyond the power of Epileptic Fits or natural disease to effect,” according to John Hale, minister in Beverly, in his book *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft* (Boston, 1702). The girls screamed, threw things about the room, uttered strange sounds, crawled under furniture, and contorted themselves into peculiar positions. They complained of being pricked with pins or cut with knives, and when Reverend Samuel Parris would pray over them, the girls

would cover their ears, as if dreading to hear the prayers. When a doctor could not explain what was happening to them, he said that the girls were bewitched. Others in the village began to exhibit the same symptoms.

The first three people accused of witchcraft were arrested for allegedly afflicting Ann Putnam, Jr., age 12. They were Sarah Good, a debt ridden widow, Sarah Osburne, a bedridden old woman, and Tituba, a slave. Tituba, as a slave of a different ethnicity than the Puritans, was an obvious target for accusations. Sarah Good, a poverty-worn, easily angered old woman often muttered under her breath as she walked away from failed attempts of obtaining food and/or shelter from neighbors, and people interpreted her muttering as curses. Sarah Osburne was an irritable old woman who had entered into a number of nasty disputes with several of her neighbors. All of these women fit the description of the “usual suspects,” largely disliked and unsupported in the community. Additionally, neither Osburne nor Good attended church, which made them especially vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. These women were brought before the local magistrates on a complaint of witchcraft on March 1, 1692, and held in prison. Other accusations followed in March and April. All told, over sixty persons were arrested and would be tried for witchcraft. By the time the hysteria had spent itself, 24 people had died. Nineteen were





hanged on Gallows Hill in Salem Town, but some died in prison. Giles Corey at first pleaded not guilty to charges of witchcraft, but subsequently refused to plead either guilty or innocent. This refusal meant he could not be convicted legally. However, his examiners chose to subject him to interrogation by the placing of stone weights on his body. He survived this brutal torture for two days before dying. Several historians have offered a number of explanations for the Salem witchcraft episode, some interesting, some a bit silly. Here are a few.

1. Puritan weaning practices! Enough said. But if weaning practices led to the problem, why only in Salem? Weaning practices in Salem weren't different from anywhere else in Massachusetts.
2. Agricultural historians argue that the witch hysteria was caused by the growth of a fungus on New England wheat called ergot. Ergot produces a hallucinogenic byproduct that taints flour, and causes both hallucinations and odd behavior and blood poisoning. In short, they argue, witches were tripping. But again, why just Salem?
3. In his 1969 book, *Witchcraft at Salem*, a historian named Chadwick Hansen begins with the premise that not all of those accused of witchcraft were all that innocent. Some were, by the standards of the day, witches. There is good physical evidence. To Hansen, what is really astonishing is that so *few* were executed, and in the growing hysteria no one was lynched. All of the defendants were given all of the possible protections available under the law of the

time. There was little torture. Nothing on the order of the witch trials and persecution that took place in England, Scotland, or Europe at the same time. If you confessed you might be redeemed and released, but no one who confessed was executed. This attests to the strength of faith of those who refused to confess. There were no water trials, few of the tortures associated with European witch hunts. Both men and women were executed, and both men and women were acquitted. No one was burned alive, only hanged.

All of this was considered a mark of God's disfavor, and the Massachusetts leaders didn't know why. The colony was a tremendous commercial success, a sure sign of God's favor, yet bad things were happening to God's chosen. Success was producing selfishness, communities in conflict, even ungodliness. By 1670, Puritans were no longer as concerned about taking the true faith back to England as they were with getting their own house in order.

Even as early as 1662 Massachusetts Congregationalists began to fall upon spiritual hard times. In that year, New England Puritans who felt that the people of their colonies were drifting away from their original religious purpose created the Half-Way Covenant. First-generation settlers were beginning to die out, while their children and grandchildren often expressed less religious piety and more desire for material wealth. Fewer and fewer of the new generation were confirming their election through a confession of faith that would allow them to join the

elect, the church, and the civil community of Massachusetts. In response, the Half-Way Covenant provided a partial church membership for the children and grandchildren of church members. Those who accepted the Covenant, who agreed to follow the creed and rules of the church, could become church members, but they did not have to entirely devote themselves to the strict principles of the church. Despite the growing influence of materialism, preachers hoped that this plan would maintain some of the church's influence in society. It was hoped that these "half-way members" would see the benefits of full membership and eventually comply with the requirements of "sainthood." Many more religious members of Puritan society rejected this plan as they felt it did not fully adhere to the church's guidelines.

The colony began to reproduce the class system of England, gradually the rich became fewer and richer, and the poor more plentiful. The wealthy trade aristocrats began to leave the Puritan Church in favor of the Anglican Church because it was a good business move. Even the Puritans began to aim their talents away from godly pursuits toward commercial, scientific and secular ones.

The Winthrop's are a good example. John Winthrop was devoted to the creation and maintenance of a religious utopia. His son with the same energy that dad had devoted to religion, was a scientist, a salt magnate, founded metal mines, and invented methods of making all of them more productive and profitable. Father was governor of Massachusetts. John senior's son, John Winthrop, Jr. was governor of Connecticut. John Junior hanged no Quakers, banished no heretics. Here we see in graphic detail the transition from Puritan to Yankee that took place in one generation. By 1763, the Puritan city on a hill was long dead, mentioned only in sermons from time to time, and Massachusetts had come to closely resemble the England that righteous Puritans 100 years before had worked so hard and struggled so long to escape.

Next time we will look at the goals, expectations, and realities of Virginia.



## Virginia: from Gold to Sotweed

The earliest English settlement in North America was motivated, not by religion, or any real felt need to escape the Old World to find freedom, or any such noble goal. The stimulus for American settlement was primarily for profit. Expecting to profit from western colonization as the East India company had in India, a group of merchants and wealthy gentry set up a joint-stock company called the Virginia Company in 1606, it proposed to found a settlement in North America to produce gold.

Joint-stock companies had been developed in England during the 16th century as a mechanism for pooling the resources of a large number of small investors. These forerunners of modern corporations were funded through the sale of stock. Until the founding of the Virginia Company, they had been used primarily to finance short-term trading voyages; for that purpose they worked well. No one person risked too much money, and investors usually received quick, and often large, returns. But joint-stock companies turned out to be a poor way to finance colonies, because the early settlements required enormous amounts of capital and with rare exceptions failed to return much immediate profit. The colonies founded by joint-stock companies accordingly suffered from a chronic lack of capital. This was because investors did not want to send good money after bad. And also because constant tension existed between stockholders, who wanted to see a return on their investments, and colonists who felt they were not being adequately supported, and had no desire to turn over the fruits of their labor to stockholders in England.

The Virginia Company was no exception to this rule. It was chartered by King James I as the London Company, in 1606. The company tried but failed to start a colony in Maine, and barely succeeded in planting one in Virginia. In 1607 it dispatched 144 men and boys to North America. Ominously, only 104 of them survived the voyage. In May of that year, they established the settlement called Jamestown on a swampy peninsula in a river they also named for their monarch. The colonists were ill equipped for survival in the unfamiliar environment, and the settlement was afflicted by dissension and disease.

By January 1608, only 38 of the original colonists were still alive (a survival rate of only about 20%). Many of the first migrants were gentlemen and professional soldiers unaccustomed to working



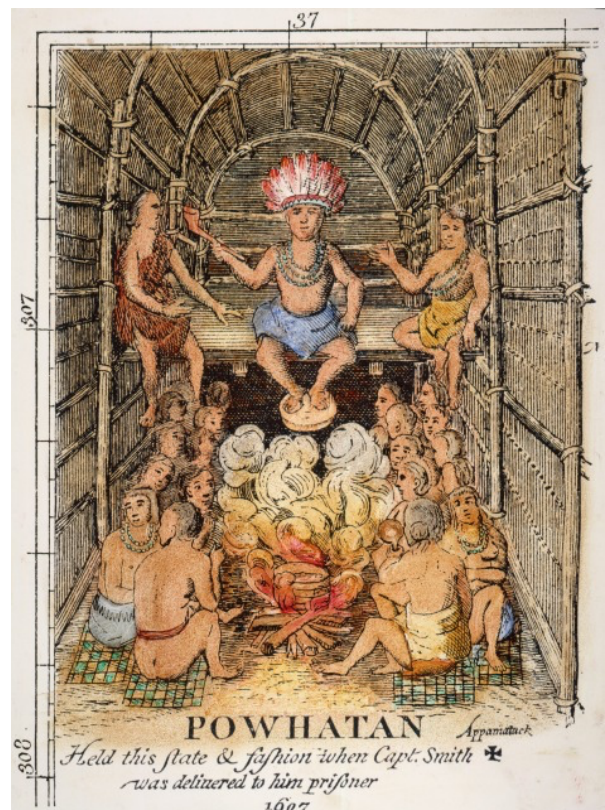


tion or so, this tribe had expanded their domination over eastern Virginia, forcing smaller and weaker local tribes into their confederation. When Captain Smith visited the tribe and presented gifts to the chief, called Powhatan (as was the tribe), the chief assumed that Smith was giving him tribute. Powhatan extended his protection to the English colonists, and in return, expected Smith and the colonists to help subdue some of the more difficult local tribes so that Powhatan could add them

with their hands, and artisans with irrelevant skills like glass making, jewelry making and watch making. Having come to Virginia expecting to make easy fortunes, most could not adjust to the conditions they encountered. They resisted living "like savages," retaining English dress and casual work habits despite their desperate circumstances. Such attitudes, combined with the effects of chronic malnutrition and epidemic disease took a terrible toll. The survivors began bickering among themselves. They refused to do the necessary manual labor required for their survival, like planting food, and finding clean water. They were gentlemen, after all, and proper English gentlemen didn't do that sort of thing. It became necessary for the group leader, Captain John Smith, to impose martial law on the settlement, and force his reluctant comrades to do the work that was necessary for their own survival. Smith famously nailed a sign on the gates of Jamestown that stated, "Who does nor Work Does not Eat."

Relations with the most powerful Native tribe in the area got off to a good, if rather confusing start. this tribe consisted of a rather large, well organized Algonquin group who had fairly recently moved into Eastern Virginia from somewhere farther north. Over the previous genera-

tion by actually doing what Powhatan wanted him to do. After 1620, relations between the colonists and the Algonquins became strained when Powhatan died and his brother became chief. The Powhatans and Virginia colonists fought a series of wars. By 1650, warfare and dis-



ease had all but eradicated the Powhatans, leaving the English as the dominant group in Virginia. By the way, Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, contrary to the Disney myth, married, not John Smith, but John Rolfe (the wedding is illustrated on the first page of this lecture).

It became fairly clear fairly quickly that there was no gold. Investors realized that the only way that they would ever see a return on their investment would be to find some kind of profitable cash

crop that might be produced in Virginia. That crop was tobacco. The tobacco produced in Virginia by the natives was very strong and harsh. Europeans would not buy it, but John Rolfe brought a sweet variety of Spanish origins into the colony in 1611 that grew well in Virginia and was popular with Europeans. Sweetweed (as tobacco was called) quickly became the most important crop in Virginia. By 1620, Virginians exported 40,000 pounds of cured tobacco to Europe, and by 1630 they were exporting 1.5 million pounds. In the 1620s, a visitor to



Jamestown reported that every square foot of cultivatable land in Virginia was planted in tobacco. It even grew in the streets of the town. Some worried that the colony was growing so much tobacco to the exclusion of everything else that Virginians would starve because they were neglecting to grow corn and vegetables.

The need to acquire labor in the colony grew with the production of tobacco. Tobacco is a very labor-intensive crop and the number of colonists who were available as labor was small. Virginians needed a way to bring in more labor. This was tough because it was reasonably well known in England, despite the tempting lies produced in travel books, that the survival rate for new colonists was very high. In order to lure more English colonists, the Virginia Company came up with the “headright system.” The trip to Virginia was too expensive for most people who might actually want to go to Virginia. In order to get there, colonists would sign a contract called an indenture. The indenture was an agreement to get you to Virginia in return for a period of servitude (usually seven years). The colonist made the contract with a ship captain. On arrival in the colonies, the captain would auction off the contracts to planters, who needed the labor. After the contract expired, the colonists, according to the headright system, would receive 50 acres of land per family member from the Virginia Company. In reality, land was plentiful and free, and planters felt obligated to help set up their ex-servants with tools and even tobacco plantings. This headright offer was very appealing to poor and especially displaced Englishmen. They could never expect to own land, and the prestige and political rights that went with it in England, so the Virginia company was offering perspective colonists not only land, but social mobility in return for their labor. Thousands of English families were willing to take the risk. For many, in the early period of Virginian settlement the risk paid off, and some of the greatest planter families came from the humble beginnings of indentured servitude.

The Virginia Company did not fare so well. Although after 1616 the planters of the colony began to prosper, by 1620, the company was bankrupt. In 1623 the company folded up. King James I decided to take over the company charter because, although the colony had not been profitable to the Virginia Company, it had been to the Crown. The reason for this was tobacco. James I hated tobacco. He even wrote a book on how horrid the stuff was. But customs revenues on tobacco, and



A meeting of the Virginia House of Burgesses in the 1650s.



export profits on it were enormous. The Crown took the colony over in 1624.

Virginia had been governed by the company in London, and by a colonial council and assembly called the House of Burgesses. After 1624 the king appointed a governor (usually English), and a council (increasingly made up of important Virginia planters) and the freeholders of Virginia elected their assembly. So the Virginia colony passed, relatively painlessly from a private concern to a royal colony.

Virginia, over the next 60 or so years began to become more socially stratified, and more like old England, just as Massachusetts had. But whereas Massachusetts society followed an English urban and merchant pattern (the central social feature of New England life was the town or village), Virginia followed the English rural pattern. As the earliest planters acquired more and more land, they began to resemble the great country gentry (the great commoner-landowner class) of England. Newer arrivals were able to start small farms on the periphery of the great estates, and came to resemble the small freeholders of England. By 1700, all of the great families of Virginia were well established. The Byrds, the Burvilles, the Carters, the Lees, and so forth were all great plantation families by 1700. By 1700 there were fewer and fewer En-

glishmen who chose to immigrate to Virginia. The traditional means of rising to wealth in Virginia was no longer possible. Traditionally the best way to join the planter aristocracy was to marry a rich widow. Women in Virginia could



William Byrd II of Westover, Virginia



William Byrd II's  
plantation home,  
Westover.



expect to outlive at least two, and sometimes three, husbands. But by 1700 the great planter families were well enough established that they tended to only marry within their own class. Also by then the life expectancy for men and women in the colony was generally longer.

These great planter families tried very hard to recreate English country society within Virginia. Their society more closely resembled an idealized squirarchy, than a nobility. Squires were the English landholding class just below the titled nobility. They tended to be more “country” than “city” in their view of life, and less refined than the English court nobility, but the Virginia tobacco barons were definitely aristocratic. They were not a nobility because nobility is a condition of blood; one must be born into a titled family to be a nobleman, but these powerful planter families were aristocratic nevertheless. They took the attitudes of the great squires of the 18th century and the English aristocrats of an earlier age. They believed that rich, wellborn and able were synonymous. They believed in *noblesse oblige*. The best and brightest (i.e. richest and most fortunate) should govern for the benefit of all. This is the culture that will build the likes of Jefferson, Washington, Madison, John Marshall, and others.

These great planters believed in representative government, but they believed that the role of a representative was not to reflect the will of the people (what 51% of the voters wanted), but to do what they felt was in the best interest of the people (the public good). They viewed the freeholders as a “vulgar herd” who could never have informed ideas about politics, and certainly could not be trusted to govern themselves. The commonality (as opposed to the quality) made decisions with their stomachs and their hearts, their passions, and not their heads. They were incapable of maintaining “disinterested” politics, so the duties of government had to be left up to their betters (the planter aristocracy).

To some extent the Virginia gentry’s insistence that representatives should represent the public good, has become a question that has vexed historians, political scientists and, especially, politicians in every representative republic. The question is even worth asking today. What is the purpose of representative government? Do elected representatives serve their constituents by reflecting the popular will, or is it the duty of representatives to give their constituents what is best for them? If politicians do the latter, do they actually *represent* their constituents

Elections in Virginia often took place in taverns.



at all? Virginian members of the House of Burgesses certainly believed that their job was to give the people of Virginia the benefit of their own “disinterested” wisdom, serving the public good. In New England, more often than not, elected representatives believed that it was their duty to serve the public will, and often communicated with their constituents to determine what they wanted. When you watch or listen to politicians on the news, try to determine whether they believe that they serve the public good or the popular will of their constituents.

In Virginia political selection (note, not election) went like this. Candidates did not actively seek office, to do so was crass and unfitting of the humility and modesty of a gentleman. They were called upon by their friends to run, and reluctantly agreed. Their friends nominated them and they, reluctantly, agreed to serve, if elected. Then, having agreed (with heavy heart), they withdrew from election politics. Their friends campaigned for them. They gave great “treats” to the voters, usually barbeques or picnics, most notable for the quantity of rum consumed at them. George Washington’s friends, for example, gave a treat for 391 voters in his county. They consumed 160 gallons of rum on the spot.

The small freeholders, the “vulgar herd” in Virginia expected to defer to the Virginia gentry.

Their only choice on Election Day was generally whether to vote for a candidate allied with one wealthy family or another. Voting requirements were fairly loose. In general, if you owned some farmland or a city plot, and were an Anglican, (and were, of course adult, male, and free) you could vote, but even the rules on landholding and religion were not always strictly enforced. In most cases the voting body of Virginia included all adult males who owned *some* property. Election sites were often taverns. Elections were held by voice vote, and were usually in order of social importance. For instance, in lord Fairfax’s county (Fairfax was the only real hereditary lord who actually resided in Virginia), he voted first, then any other important planters who resided in the county. Then the Anglican minister voted, then militia officers, and so forth on down the social ladder to the smallest freeholder. All of them generally voted for whomever Fairfax voted for (one man one vote. In Fairfax county, Fairfax was the man, he had the vote). Often in districts where there was a planter of great importance (like Fairfax) there was only one candidate. To run against Fairfax’s choice would be impertinent and disrespectful. Virginians only voted for two offices—their representative in the House of Burgesses, and the county sheriff. Compare this to other colonies, for instance Rhode Islanders voted for

two legislators per year, the colonial governor, justices of the peace, town councilmen, constables, etc., all the way down to the “dog killer” and the “viewer of butter in firkins.” The latter was the fellow who travelled from farm to farm inspecting finished butter for freshness and color.

Virginians had very different ideas about what constituted good government. They saw the Northeast as dangerously democratic (and, of course New Englanders believed that Virginians were dangerously aristocratic). But the most effective political power in the Virginia Colony was the House of Burgesses. By the early 1700s, the colonial assemblies had gradually come to dominate in other colonies as well as colonial assemblies gained greater and greater power.

When we looked at Massachusetts, we talked at length about the church there, which shouldn't be surprising, since the colony was founded for religious reasons. It's worth a little space at this point to take a brief look at the church in Virginia: First, note that Virginia was not Puritan. It was established as an Anglican colony. Still, it drifted over time to come to resemble congregationalism in some ways. Effective control of each parish church was in the hands of the vestry. Vestrymen were the most important members of the local church who met to decide important issues within their parish. No Anglican bishop was ever established in the American colonies. The Bishop of London was in charge of Anglican Church affairs for the colonies, so ministers of Anglican churches in Virginia were appointed by the Bishop of London or, on rare occasions, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The British government then sent the selected minister to his assigned church in Virginia. Once they arrived at their parish, the vestry was supposed to send a letter to the Bishop of London acknowledging his arrival, and from the point that the letter was received, the minister had a place for life. In fact, though, the vestry never sent that letter. Over time the vestrymen quit registering the minister with the Bishop. That meant that the minister was not officially installed into his parish. His tenure then became dependent on his pleasing the vestry. Essentially, he served on good behavior. If he kept his sermons short, and didn't preach on anything that upset the local planters, he was kept on, if not, he was out of a job. So, as Massachusetts drifted toward an enforced orthodoxy and a hierarchical church structure, Virginia Anglicanism became less hierarchical and more congregational. By the beginning of the revolution there existed a fairly broad consensus of what American Protestantism should be like, regardless of the particular sect.

By 1763 Virginia was a long way from the expectations of its founders. It was very like country England, with great squires (the planters), whose slaves resembled tenant English farmers. There was a sizable freeholder (small farmer) population comparable to the English freeholders. As was the case in England, the largest share of the wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few great landholders, who governed with the support and deference of the smaller freeholders. It should be pointed out that most of the other southern colonies rather quickly followed the social pattern begun by the Virginians.





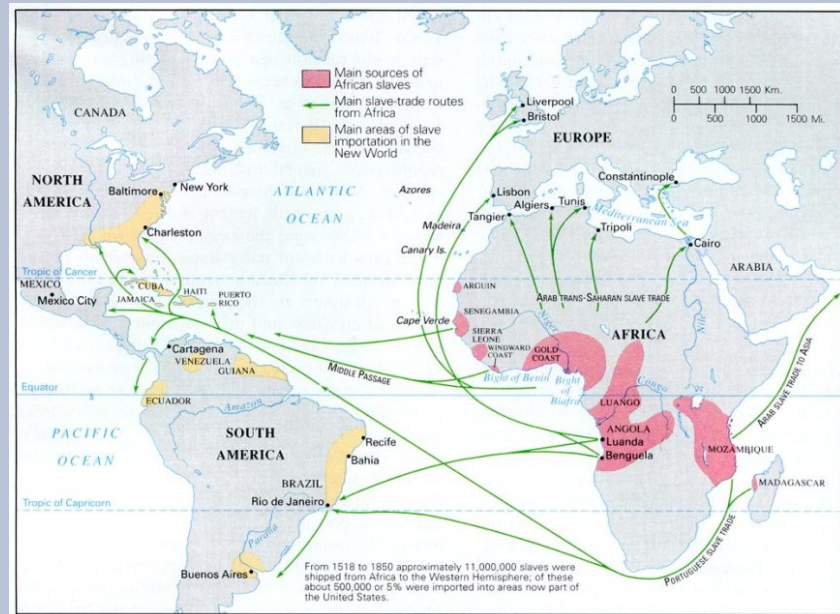
## Origins of the British Slave Trade

The first Africans in British North America arrived in the Upper Chesapeake in Virginia in 1619. We aren't sure whether these first arrivals were considered slaves, that is, individuals who were forced to spend their lives in servitude, as chattel property, or were treated as indentured servants were treated. There is evidence of the latter. Slavery as a legal condition didn't really exist under English common law, so, in 1619, chattel slavery, that is the treatment of human beings as movable property, was a foreign legal concept when the first Africans were unloaded on the shore of Virginia. Some historians argue, and the evidence indicates, that the first Africans to arrive in the English North American colonies were treated as indentured servants, a concept that was familiar to the colonists. There is evidence that some free small planters and farmers of color lived in Virginia, and perhaps Maryland by the 1630s, and that they were treated much the same as white freeholders. We know that people of color existed on the county tax rolls and avoided county sheriff's summons to perform jury duty just like their white neighbors. As we will see, Virginians soon learned enough about slavery, possibly from their Spanish and Dutch neighbors to make changes in the law that made chattel slavery a permanent condition that was very different from indentured servitude.

The African slave trade is very old. Africans were traded into slavery from East Africa into Egypt and Asia as early as the Bronze Age. Slavery was the lot of conquered peoples in Europe, Asia and Africa from at least that period. By the 8th century A.D., Muslims in Egypt and the Near East had spread East African Bantu slaves into Arabia, India and even China. By the 12th century, Arabs had connected their slave trade to the kingdoms of West Africa, especially with the Kingdom of Mali, where West Africans were purchased from West African states further south, or captured by Malian traders, and sold to Arabs in North Africa and the Near East. The slave trade continues today in Libya, Somalia and other areas of Africa and the Middle East. It has been estimated that over 9 million people currently live in slavery in Africa alone. (See, <https://globalsecurityreview.com/africas-modern-slavery-problem/>)

The first European/African slave trade of the post classical period began in 1444 when Portuguese traders acquired slaves from coastal tribes of West Africa and took them to Portugal and Spain. Slavery quickly became a racial condition rather than only a legal condition. In the ancient and classical worlds, slavery had nothing to do with race or skin color. People might become slaves because they were conquered, or went into debt, or, in the Roman World, sometimes because there were more opportunities for non-Romans to be-

The map to the right shows the extent of the African slave trade from the 7th through the early 19th centuries.



come rich and Roman as slaves and later freedmen. Another difference was that slavery was never a permanent condition for all slaves in the ancient or classical worlds—it was to become so in the pre-modern era.

The European/African trade lasted for 400 years, during which some 30 million Africans were taken from that continent, and 15-20 million came to the New World. The majority went to Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the West Indies and Central and South America.

By the 1650s the slave trade was very profitable. Traders netted as much as 5,000% for their efforts. We could say that the trade was the most profitable economic venture of the period. The Spanish, Portuguese, French, Swedes, Dutch, Prussians and British all invested in slavery, and were enriched by it. Slaves were generally members of the smaller tribes of inland West Africa. They were captured and brought to the coast by Arabs, Moors, and powerful coastal tribes, and were there sold to Europeans for the middle passage.

In the passage from Africa to America the death rate was appalling. Packed together closely, Africans died from disease, suicide, madness, or mutiny. There were over 100 recorded cases of successful mutinies on slave ships, and who knows how many mutinies failed. We do know that slavers took out

mutiny insurance at the London Coffee House (later Lloyd's of London) to protect their investments. The death rate only slowed slightly once they reached land. They were worked in the West Indies for a year or two, in order to “season” them to the rigors of the New World. Some survivors were then sold to the mainland.

It made some difference where slaves ended up. In the Spanish colonies slavery was never as complete



Slaves attending Mass in Brazil



as it became in British North America by at least 1660. Spanish masters were not prevented by law from manumitting their slaves as British masters often were. In Spanish colonies some form of citizenship followed manumission. In Brazil there was a state official whose only duty was to protect the rights of slaves. In the Latin colonies, some days were set aside by law or custom for slaves to work for themselves. In the Latin colonies slave marriages were recorded, and thus given some legal status—this was not the case in the British colonies after about 1650.

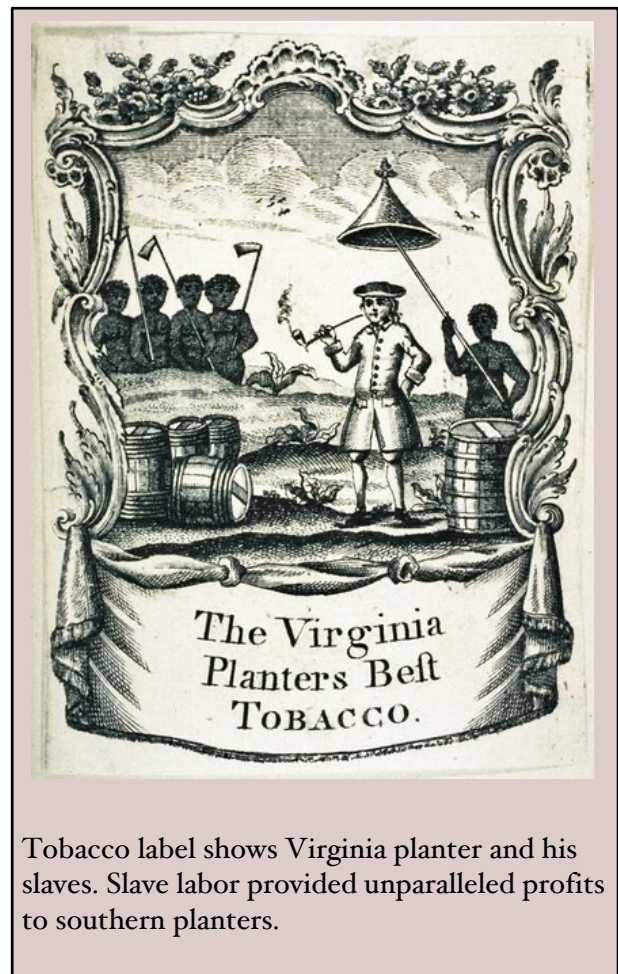
In British colonies slaves were taught a sort of pacified version of Christianity and given a carefully expurgated Bible. In Latin colonies slaves were catholicized, and observed Roman Catholic rites.

So why were the Latin and British systems so different?

1. Different legal traditions: Spanish and Portuguese law was based on the Roman law. So when these Latin colonies reinstated slavery they used Roman law to govern it. Roman civil codes had fairly strict rules governing the treatment of slaves and a process in place for their manumission. Slavery was a stranger to the English Common Law, so it lacked institutional checks. In essence, the English colonists made up slave law as they went along because they had no long-term traditional laws with which to enforce slavery as an institution.
2. The Catholic Church was both a powerful religious institution and a powerful political institution in Latin colonies. Where its interests were at stake, the Church stood between the slave and the master. The Church often insisted that marriage, a holy sacrament, be performed for slaves just as it was as for free persons, and that the institution of marriage be respected, and that families, sanctified by marriage, not be split up. This was not the case in the British Protestant practice in North America and the Caribbean.
3. The Spanish and Portuguese had a much longer history of dealing with slavery at home before colonization, the British simply did not.

Ironically, slavery came to North America because it offered so much freedom to Europeans. It was hard to get free people to work for someone else. There was too much land for the taking (generally from the Indians), and too much opportunity to rise socially by independent labor. Indentured servants didn't solve the labor shortage problem. The first year that they were in America they were usually so sick as to be unfit for work. The next six years, if they survived, their labor was profitable to the planter who owned their indenture. But then, once freed they expected to be given land of their own (headright), often became tobacco planters themselves, and would then enter into competition with their previous employers. In the long run, more tobacco planters meant more tobacco, and more tobacco meant declining tobacco prices. So, in effect, the servants whose labor once provided you with profits, was now your competitor in a business with shrinking profits. Slavery solved the problem. A seasoned slave was capable of productive labor immediately after purchase, and since their condition was for life, they would always produce for their master, never compete with him.

British slavery began in the West Indies. It was very profitable. By 1660, blacks outnumbered whites in Barba-



Tobacco label shows Virginia planter and his slaves. Slave labor provided unparalleled profits to southern planters.



dos. It became cheaper in some West-Indian colonies to work slaves to death over 5 years and replace them than to adequately feed and care for them. By the 1660s, smaller white farmers were forced out of the English Sugar Islands by slave labor on the larger plantations. Many of them went to North America (especially the Carolinas) and once they had settled there, they wanted slaves. In the North, agricultural labor on a large scale was rarely feasible. Slaves usually served as domestic servants, artisans or artisan's assistants, and owning a slave was a status symbol.

By the 1640s or 50s the major characteristics of slavery in British North America were pretty much already in place. Slavery had become a life condition. Slave status was transmitted to children by the mother. We know both of these were transmitted in bills of sale in the period. By the 1640s, the slave trade had become a regular feature of the New England merchant trade. A great deal of northeastern capital was invested in it. Yankee (that is, New England) shippers bought slaves in the Caribbean and on the west coast of Africa, and sold them in the South. So slavery and the slave trade made up a significant portion of the northern as well as the southern economy.

The classic system of North American slavery existed in the staple production areas of the South. It first developed in Virginia and Maryland. Punishments became worse for slaves than for indentured servants (who had more legal protection). By 1649, bills of sale routinely included the children, present and future, of female slaves. The growing fear of slave rebellions in the southern colonies held negative consequences for both enslaved and free blacks, whom, it was feared, might aid in an insurrection. In Virginia and other colonies, it became illegal for free people of color to carry weapons, serve with the militia, serve on juries, or to testify against whites in court. Inheritance, which passed from the father under common law, went through the mother in the case of a slave, so no matter who the father happened to be, the child of an enslaved mother was a slave. By 1669, Virginia passed a law that stated that if a master accidentally killed a slave during an act of punishment, the death was presumed to be accidental, and thus carried no penalty. Who would deliberately destroy his own property? By 1700 in southern colonies from Maryland to South Carolina, slavery provided the major source of labor, and had become a fixed institution in the economic, cultural and social life of the Caribbean and the southern colonies of British North America.



## The Colonies in 1763

Now let's look at the British Empire in 1763, its hour of triumph, historically speaking. In the past two decades Britain had beaten most of her important enemies. Just that year she signed a peace treaty with France at the end of the Seven Years' War (called the French and Indian War in the colonies) that gave her Canada and the American West all the way to the Mississippi River. France and Spain no longer threatened the British Empire, which stretched from India to Illinois.

Now let's narrow our focus to His Majesty's 13 colonies in North America. By 1763, the population of the Colonies had reached 2 million. About half lived in the South. About 1 in 5 colonials were Virginians. There were 4 fairly distinct regions in the colonies – New England, the Middle Colonies, the South, and the Backcountry. The Backcountry was the first “national” region, that is, despite the colony that they were located in, Backcountry people had more in common with each other than the other regions had with each other. Folks who arrived in America after around 1720 were culturally different from those who had arrived earlier. They came from the West of England, or were Scotch-Irish (Scottish Protestants who had settled for a while in Ireland), or Scottish. They were more likely Baptist or Methodist or Scottish Presbyterian rather than Congregationalist or Anglican. When they arrived in the colonies, there was little land available on the coastal plain, so they crossed into the Appalachians and flowed down the valleys to settle on small farms. So, this broad band of Backcountry people who settled the valleys from Pennsylvania to Georgia, had more in common than they had with the colonists who lived on the seaboard.

About 95% of the colonial population was engaged in agriculture. The largest city was Philadelphia (30,000), then New York (20,000), then Boston (15,000). The only southern city of any size was Charleston, S.C. But, even though most people lived in the country, the cities, with only 5% of the population were very, very important. Cities were the centers of culture and government. Cities were where colonial policies played out, where colonial governments met, where customs and other taxes were collected, where the movers and shakers of all facets of colonial civilization moved and shook. Cities were where imperial policies were the most apparent, and, as we will see, where those policies were protested, and ultimately where the American



Revolution would begin. We will be getting to those imperial policies soon, but first, we need to take a look at the way that colonial government worked, and perhaps more importantly, how colonists saw their place in the British colonial system.

By 1763, most of the British colonies in North America were royal colonies. That is, they were colonies that belonged, in a political sense to the British Crown. There were a couple of exceptions to this rule, however. Pennsylvania, founded in 1681, was a proprietary colony under the control of the Family of William Penn, created as a refuge for Quakers. Maryland was a proprietary colony as well, founded in 1632 under the control of the George Calvert, Lord Baltimore. It was founded as a refuge for English Roman Catholics, and continued as a

proprietary colony under one or another of the Baltimores until the Revolution. Each colony had a charter that acted as a sort of constitution. Colonists believed that their charters created a contractual relationship between the colony and the Crown (or, in the cases of Pennsylvania and Maryland, between the colony and the proprietors and the Crown). Thus, colonists considered that they were connected to the British Empire by an agreement between the ruling monarch and themselves. The colonial charters also defined the shape of colonial government.

The “chief executive” of each royal colony was the King (or Queen). Since the monarch happened to also be the ruler of Great Britain as well as each colony, and resided in London, a little over 3,000 miles away, they were represented by an agent in each royal colony, the royal governor. The governor was appointed by the king to look after his interests in the colony. The governor appointed officials and judges in most colonies, and he had a veto over colonial legislation. On paper, the governor’s position was very powerful.

Under the governor, each colony had a royal council. How the council was chosen differed somewhat in different colonies. In most colonies the governor chose the Council members, but in Massachusetts, the Assembly chose them. Either way the royal council was supposed to be made up of men who had influence, power and prestige in the colony, men who represented a sort of local aristocracy. The council advised the governor and the assembly, and had the power to vote down legislation from the assembly.

The largest and most important institution of colonial government was the colonial assembly. The assembly was elected by the freeholders of the colony, and was thus the representative body. Freeholder were landowners, and only the freeholders could vote for their representatives in the assembly. But the system could still be described





Governor Jonathan Belcher of Massachusetts, Gov. 1730-1741.(top left) a Royal Council (Left) and the Virginia Assembly (above).

as relatively democratic in each colony, since the land requirements were not particularly large, and most colonists owned some land. The assembly passed legislation that made the laws and raised taxes for their respective colony. The laws passed by the assembly had also to be accepted by the council, the governor, and the king, all of whom might refuse to assent to them.

The shape of each colony's government, if you squinted just so, looked like the shape of government in Britain. Each colony was ruled by a monarch. Each had a Royal Council comprised of a group of important citizens, "aristocrats" if you will, like the House of Lords in England. Each had an elected assembly that represented the freeholders of the colony. Colonial assemblies resembled the English House of Commons. Thus, each colony looked, politically, a bit like a little England with King, Lords and Commons ingrained in their king, council and assembly. They looked like English governments, and colonists believed that they served the same purpose. So what did colonists, and

Englishmen in general, believe to be the purpose of government?

To British subjects in the 18th century this was a very important question. Great Britain was surrounded by nations that had absolute monarchies. In absolute monarchies like 18th century France or Spain, the government consisted of the ruler and his servants--his bureaucrats and soldiers-- and existed to make sure that things stayed that way. The people existed to serve the ruler's purposes--to provide the king with wealth, soldiers, and servants. To the British political observer, people who lived under an absolute monarch were slaves. By that they meant that the people had no part in their own government, had no control over their own personal wealth or property, which the absolute ruler could take at his convenience, and had no representative government.

Britain was different. The British believed that they had rebelled against absolute monarchy in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and replaced James II, who they regarded as a Roman Catholic tyrant, with



George I Hanover (1714-1727)

the Protestant Dutch Prince William and his wife Mary Stuart (the Protestant daughter of James II). According to British understanding of what the Glorious Revolution was all about, when William and Mary became joint rulers of Britain, they agreed to rule the nation in a sort of alliance with Parliament—essentially they created a constitutional monarchy.

For Englishmen on both sides of the Atlantic, the Glorious Revolution created representative government by the consent of the governed. Britons believed that the purpose of their government was to protect the lives, liberty, property and Protestant religion of the English people. Englishmen considered the House of Commons to be the fundamental protector of their rights and liberties, however, this role was duplicated and shared throughout the branches of government.

Colonists agreed, but in the context of their own governments. Colonists reasoned that their

assemblies, as popularly elected representative bodies, were best qualified to legislate the interests of the colony, but they believed that the king helped to secure the people's rights and protect them from tyranny and the forces of Roman Catholicism. As an English judge put the idea, "the prerogative of the Prince, and the People's Liberty, are a support and Security to each other, the King's interest and that of his posterity are inseparable from his People's." In short, colonists believed that the purpose of government was the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people who were governed. Sound familiar??

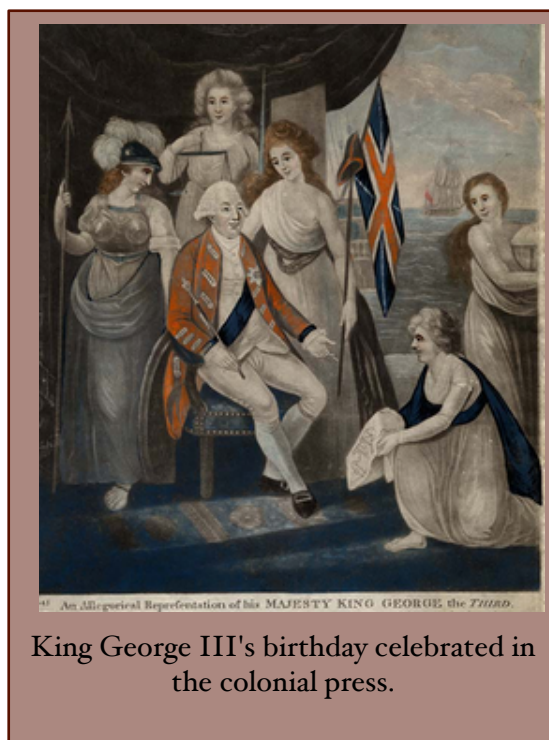
Now, usually when you hear people talk about the relations between British rulers and the colonies, the kings and queens were all tyrants and the colonists spent about 200 years trying to get rid of them, and finally do just that after the American Revolution. Well, that isn't really true. In fact, it's an explanation that has grown up since the Revolution, a sort of myth that is the result of 20/20 hindsight. The fact is, from the 1690s until the 1770s, American colonists *REALLY* liked their kings!

I've already mentioned that when William and Mary came to the throne colonists believed that they had ushered in a new kind of English monarchy where the ruler worked together with Parliament for the good of the people. In 1714, a new royal family, the Hanovers, came to rule Britain. The Hanovers were a family of German monarchs who were chosen to rule England because they were Protestant cousins of the Stuarts, and had a reputation in Germany as being defenders of Protestantism. Most Colonists, and most Englishmen, viewed the Hanovers as the protectors of English Protestantism. The Hanovers simultaneously became the protectors of English liberty. Protestantism and liberty went together in the minds of Englishmen in the same way that they linked Catholicism with absolutism and slavery. Hanoverian rulers thus acquired a reputation as protectors and defenders of the civil liberties of

their subjects. George I and George II were most often characterized in colonial sermons and newspapers as benevolent fathers of their country. These rulers were very, very popular in the American colonies. Colonial ministers frequently described the king as a “nursing father,” that is, a ruler who loved and cared for his subjects “with the tenderness and affection” of a good parent. A Congregationalist minister from New England described George II this way in 1730:

Such rulers are political rulers of their People . . . our King is a Nursing Father and our Queen a Nursing Mother, who have expressed their tender Care of, and Concern for us, their poor but dutiful People in these distant Parts of their Dominion.

Colonial newspapers, pamphlets and sermons conveyed an interest in the private lives of the monarch and royal family that was often very personal—Royals were the superstars of the age. Newspapers frequently carried stories about the day-to-day activities of the royal family, the parties and events that they attended, their dress, and their appearance. Royal family weddings were celebrated and royal deaths were mourned in print and from the pulpit. Americans’ preoccupation with the monarch and royal family even permeated the landscape of North America as colonists named towns and counties, streets and even the physical features of the land after kings and princes, queens and royal consorts, from Lake George on the Vermont frontier to Fort King George in Georgia, from the Williamsburg to the Cumberland Gap. So the kings and queens of Britain from the 1690s to the 1760s held a special place in both the political



structures, the constitutions, of the colonies and in the hearts of the colonists themselves.

There were two problems with colonists’ interpretation of their constitution and their place in the British Empire though. We need to spend a little time on both of them.

The first problem was the royal governor. If the king was the “chief executive” of the colony, and I should point out that political wisdom had it that the king could do no wrong, what about this royal governor fellow? He wasn’t

the king, he wasn’t usually even an elected official; he was supposed to look after the king’s interests, but when the king’s wishes were at odds with the interests of the colonial assemblies, royal governors often found themselves accused of corruption and disloyalty. After all, the king’s interests should be identical to the interests of the people, and the king could do no wrong, so there should not be any conflict of interests between the king and the people of the colony as represented by their assembly. Governors who tried to fulfill the king’s instructions were often amazed when the assembly refused to cooperate. To make matters more confusing, colonial assemblies often claimed the king as an ally in their refusal.

So, let us suppose that the king instructs the governor to get a law that the king wants in his colony. Following his royal instructions, the governor requests that the assembly pass this law. The assembly refuses to comply. The governor says, but the king wants this passed. The assembly says, we know that the king would never ask for such a law because it violates the rights of the people, so



we won't pass it. If the governor pushes the point, demands that they pass the law, the assembly accuses the governor of acting like a tyrant toward the colony, *and* of disloyalty to the king, of being corrupt and wicked and greedy. So, even though royal governors were supposed to represent the king and his interests in the colony, since the governor was not the king, he couldn't always do so.

Now all this stuff isn't taking place in a vacuum, or even just in the American colonies. The politics of the Empire took place in London as well.

Every colony had one or more paid agents to represent their interests in London. Every colony had very influential citizens who communicated with friends, often very powerful friends, in Britain. So, if the governor makes enough enemies in the colony, or doesn't play ball with the colonial assembly, colonists can, and often do, exert pressure to get the governor recalled.

Since the royal governor depended on the colonial assemblies for their salaries, some assemblies got in the habit of, essentially starving a governor who refused to cooperate. This was the case with unpopular executives like New Jersey's first royal Governor, Lewis Morris. The New Jersey legislature refused to pass any legislation for support of the colonial government until the council and Morris assented to their bills. Sometimes colonial legislatures even deprived popular governors of support. This appears to have been almost the rule with several royal governors of North Carolina. In 1746, for instance, a very popular and respected royal governor, Gabriel Johnston, complained that he had not received a single penny of pay from the colony for over eight years. By withholding the governor's salary, the provincial legislature might force the king's most important colonial representative—the



Lewis Morris, Governor of New Jersey, 1738-1746

king's eyes, ears and hands in the colony—to become literally powerless.

The second problem in royal colonial government has to do with colonists' understanding of their constitution. Now, I've already mentioned that colonists believed that their government consisted of king, council and assembly working together to protect their rights, liberty and religion. The problem was, though, that the British government believed that the

British Parliament had a part in colonial government, and that all Englishmen everywhere were represented in Parliament—even if they didn't elect a representative there!

This concept was called "virtual representation." It meant that the House of Commons represented every Englishman, everywhere. Now, this was a very important concept to British politics because only about one out of every eight adult male English residents could actually vote for a member of the House of Commons, so the House only represented about one-eighth of the population of England. Three of the largest cities in England, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, sent no representatives to Parliament, for instance. But, the House of Commons voted taxes and laws that applied to all English subjects. Since an important idea in British political thought was "no taxation without representation," British politicians came up with the "virtual representation" idea to rationalize the fact that so few Englishmen were actually represented. No matter who elected members of the House of Commons, the members claimed to represent *every* Englishman, *everywhere*! So, stop complaining and pay your taxes! But supporters of the idea of virtual representation insisted that Parliament represented

not only Englishmen in England, but all Englishmen, everywhere as well. If Parliament represented even those people in England that didn't elect members, it wasn't a very big stretch to argue that Parliament also represented Englishmen who resided in the colonies. One member of Parliament put it like this:

Manchester, Birmingham, and many of our richest and most flourishing trading towns send no members to Parliament, [and] consequently cannot consent by their representatives, because they chuse none to represent them. . . . If the towns of Manchester and Birmingham, sending no representatives to Parliament, are represented, why are not the cities of Albany and Boston equally represented in that Assembly? are they not alike British subjects? are they not Englishmen?

Well, colonists didn't buy virtual representation, and they couldn't see any way that Parliament could possibly represent their interests. Colonists had long asserted without serious contention from Britain that the American colonies were, essentially, "perfect States, no[t] otherwise dependent upon Great Britain than by having the same king, . . . having compleat legislatures within themselves." According to the prevailing theory among most colonists, the first settlers, at great personal risk, had come to the American wilderness and set up their own governments modeled on the English constitution and "within the king's allegiance." Americans viewed each colony as a realm of the king of Great Britain, distinct and independent from the government of Great Britain, and connected to the mother country only by their charters and a shared king. Each colony had its own assembly to pass laws and raise taxes.

Parliament might pass taxes and other laws that governed the working of the Empire as a whole. So, it was fine for Parliament to pass customs duties that were meant to control trade for the good of the whole British Empire. But, Parliament had no right to tax any colony for the purpose of creating revenues because it did not represent the subjects there, nor even hold any authority over internal matters. That the Parliament of Great Britain should presume to tax his Majesty's provinces in North America violated colonists' understanding of their fundamental relationship with the mother country. From the early 1700s up to 1763, the government of England had done little to contradict colonists' notions. This period is called by some historians the era of salutary neglect. Essentially, the Government left the colonies largely alone and let them govern themselves, but in 1763, this state of affairs began to dissapate. As a result of salutary neglect, this fundamental difference of understanding between Britain and the colonies didn't really come up in any serious way until about 1763, but when it did, it really did some damage, as we will see next time.