

Life in the Colonies

Colonial Society, Education, The Great Awakening, & The Zenger Trial

Colonial Society

- **Gentry:** Top of society. Included wealthy planters, merchants, ministers, lawyers, and royal officials.
- **Middle Class:** Below the gentry. Included farmers, skilled crafts-workers, some trades people. Nearly three quarters of all colonists belonged to the middle class.

Colonial Society

- **Indentured Servants:**

- The lowest social class included farmhands, indentured servants, and slaves
- Indentured servants signed contracts to work without wages for a period of four to seven years for anyone who would pay their ocean passage to the Americas.
- When their service was complete, they would receive freedom dues: a set of clothes, tools, and 50 acres of land.

Colonial Society

- **Women in the Colonies**
 - Taking care of household, husband, and family
 - Cooking, milking cows, watching the children, making clothing
 - Backcountry: worked along with their husband out in the fields, killing livestock, etc.
 - Cities: maids, cooks, nurses, midwives, seamstresses
 - Some were even butchers, shoemakers, silversmiths, and printers

The Great Awakening

- A religious movement in the colonies in the 1730s and 1740s.
- Jonathan Edwards
 - In powerful sermons, he called on colonists to examine their lives.
 - Preached of the “sweetness and beauty of God”
 - Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

The Great Awakening

- Impact of the Great Awakening:
 - People who supported the movement often broke away from their own churches and formed new ones
 - Forced colonists to become more tolerant of people with different religious beliefs
 - Contributed to the spread of democratic feelings in the colonies
 - People began to think differently about their political rights and their governments
 - Figured that if they could figure out who to worship on their own, they could govern themselves too

Education in the Colonies

- New England colonists were the most concerned about education.
- Puritans taught that all people had a duty to study the bible. If they did not learn how to read, how could they fulfill this duty?
- In 1642, Massachusetts passed a law ordering all parents to teach their children to “read and understand the principles of religion.”
 - All towns with 50 or more families had to hire a schoolteacher
 - All towns with 100 or more families had to set up a school to prepare boys for college.
 - Massachusetts – set up the first public schools

Education in the Colonies

- Middle and Southern Colonies:
 - Private Schools
 - Only wealthy families could afford to educate their children
 - South – some hired tutors or sent their sons to school in England
 - Slaves denied any kind of education

The Enlightenment

- During the 1600s, European scientists began to use reason and logic instead of superstition to understand the world.
 - Theories and Experiments
- Enlightenment: Use of reason and scientific methods to be applied to the study of human society.
- John Locke: wrote works that were widely read in the colonies. Said people could gain knowledge of the world by observing and experimenting
- The Enlightenment spread better among educated colonists.

Benjamin Franklin

- The best example of the Enlightenment spirit
- Poor Richard's Almanac
- Wanted to use reason to improve the world around him.
 - Lightning rod
 - Smokeless fireplace
 - Bifocal glasses

Zenger Trial

- The growth of colonial newspapers led to a dispute over Freedom of the Press
- **John Peter Zenger**
 - Published *Weekly Journal* in NYC
 - Arrested in 1734 for publishing stories that criticized the governor and put on trial for **libel**.
 - His lawyer argued that since the stories were true, his client had not committed libel. The jury agrees and he is freed.
 - Freedom of the Press eventually becomes a basic American right.