



Chapter 3

The English Colonies in North America

What were the similarities and differences among the colonies in North America?

3.1 Introduction

In the mid-1700s, a German schoolteacher named Gottlieb Mittelberger boarded a ship bound for the colony of Pennsylvania, in far-off North America. Mittelberger had borrowed the cost of his passage by signing on as an indentured servant. He would have to settle his debt by working for several years for the master who bought his services.

The voyage across the Atlantic was horrible. Most passengers suffered from illness and hunger. “The people are packed densely,” Mittelberger wrote, “like herrings so to say, in the large sea vessels. One person receives a place of scarcely 2 feet width and 6 feet length . . . There is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of seasickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water.”

When the nightmarish voyage ended, Mittelberger had to stay on board until his service was bought. Most indentured servants had to work for their masters for three to six years, but commitments varied according to the servants’ age and strength. As Mittelberger noted, “young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.”

Why were people willing to go through such hardships to come to the colonies? Many colonists came to North America for the chance to own land and start a new life. Others were seeking freedom to practice their religion. There were also some who did not have a choice. A number of convicts (people in jail) were forced to go to North America to work off their debts as indentured servants. Millions of Africans were kidnapped from their homelands and brought to the colonies as slaves.

In this chapter, you will learn about the people who settled the English colonies. You will read in detail about 8 of the 13 colonies. As you do, pay attention to similarities and differences among the colonies in such areas as geography, **economy**, religion, and government.

◀ This illustration from 1731 shows the harbor of Boston, a city in the English colony of Massachusetts.



Pilgrims from England landed at present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts, on December 22, 1620.

mercantilism an economic policy in which nations tried to gain wealth by controlling trade and establishing colonies

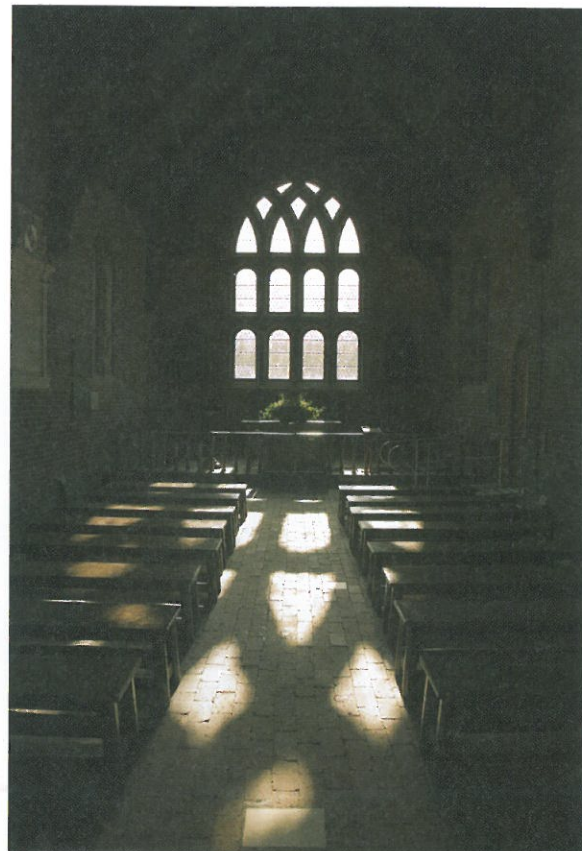
3.2 The New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies

English settlers established colonies in North America for many reasons. Some colonies were set up by groups of businesspeople who hoped to profit from resources found in the Americas. Several colonies were settled by people looking for a place to practice their religion freely. One colony was established as a refuge for debtors (people who owe money), who would otherwise have been tossed into prison.

The English government supported all these efforts in part because it was competing for land in the Americas with such nations as France and Spain. England had another reason for establishing colonies: it was also competing for wealth. Like most western European nations in the late 1600s, England followed an economic policy that is called **mercantilism**. Under this policy, nations tried to gain wealth by controlling trade and establishing colonies. The colonies made money for England by supplying raw materials for its industries. England turned the raw materials into goods that it could sell to other nations and to its own colonies.

By 1733, there were 13 British colonies strung along the Atlantic coastline. They can be grouped into three distinct regions: the New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies. These regions had different climates and resources that encouraged settlers to develop different ways of life.

In New England, the church was at the center of both religious and political life. This church's pews could be removed to make room for tables used in town meetings.



The New England Colonies The New England region included the colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. As you will read, the first settlers of these colonies came to America seeking religious freedom.

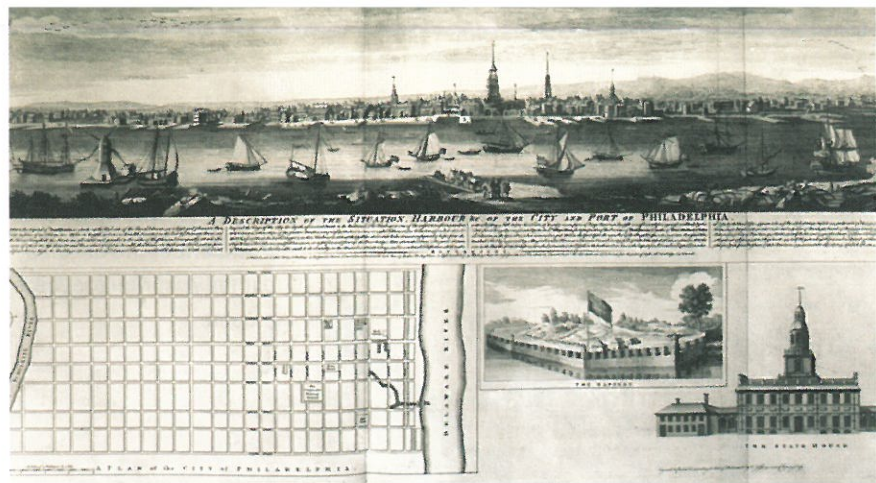
In New England, farming was difficult because of the long, cold winters and the region's rocky, hilly wilderness. But the forests and the sea provided useful resources and ways to make a living. New Englanders built their economy on small farms, lumbering, fishing, shipbuilding, and trade.

The Middle Colonies The four Middle Colonies were New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. The landscape of this region ranged from the rich soil of coastal New Jersey and Delaware to the valleys and wooded mountains of New York and Pennsylvania. Farmers in the Middle Colonies raised a variety of crops and livestock. Lumbering, shipbuilding, and other occupations added to the many opportunities here.

The people who settled the Middle Colonies represented many cultures and religions. One important group, the Quakers, started the colony of Pennsylvania.



By 1770, the 13 American colonies had developed a distinctive way of life that would affect the development of America for years to come.



By the 1700s, Philadelphia, in the Middle Colony of Pennsylvania, had become a bustling trading center and one of the most important cities in the English colonies. It was the first city in America to use a grid to set up its streets.

cash crop a crop, such as tobacco, sugar, and cotton, raised in large quantities and sold for profit

charter a formal document issued by the king that outlined a colony's geographic boundaries and specified how it would be governed

democratic ruled by the people. In a democracy, the power to govern belongs to the people.

Like the early settlers of New England, the Quakers were looking for freedom to practice their religion. Others seeking religious freedom soon followed. Settlements of French, Dutch, Germans, Swedes, Danes, Finns, Scots, Irish, and English spread throughout the Middle Colonies.

The Southern Colonies The five Southern Colonies were Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. This region featured broad rivers and vast wetlands that gradually merged with the sea. The soil and the hot, wet climate were ideal for growing tobacco, rice, and other **cash crops**.

Wealthy colonists took advantage of these conditions by establishing large farms called plantations. Plantation owners relied on indentured servants and enslaved Africans to sow and harvest their fields. After being harvested, the crops could be brought by river to the coast and loaded on ships for transport to other colonies and to Europe.

Government in the Colonies All the colonies were settled with the permission of the king of England. For each colony, the king issued a **charter**, a formal document that outlined the colony's geographic boundaries and specified how it would be governed. Because the colonies were so far from England, however, they needed to be able to make their own laws and keep peace and order.

The colonies developed different forms of government, depending on the settlement's purpose. Most of the colonies were self-governing. Colonists elected members of their community to a general assembly, which made their laws.

Many colonies also had a governor appointed by the king. As the king's representative, the governor could overrule the elected assembly. Some colonies also had councils, groups of men who represented the English businessmen involved in starting the colony.

In Massachusetts, religious colonists established a theocracy, a government whose leaders ruled in the name of God. In time, however, a system of town meetings evolved in which colonists voted for representatives to govern them.

In many ways, the colonies were more **democratic** than England. Still, not all colonists had a voice in the government. Usually, only free, white, landowning men were allowed to vote. In some colonies, voters also had to belong to the preferred church. Other colonists—including women, servants, slaves, and skilled tradesmen who were not landowners—had no voting rights.

3.3 Massachusetts: A New England Colony

In the early 1600s, religion was very important in England. The king ruled the official Church of England, also called the Anglican Church. However, not everyone agreed with the church practices.

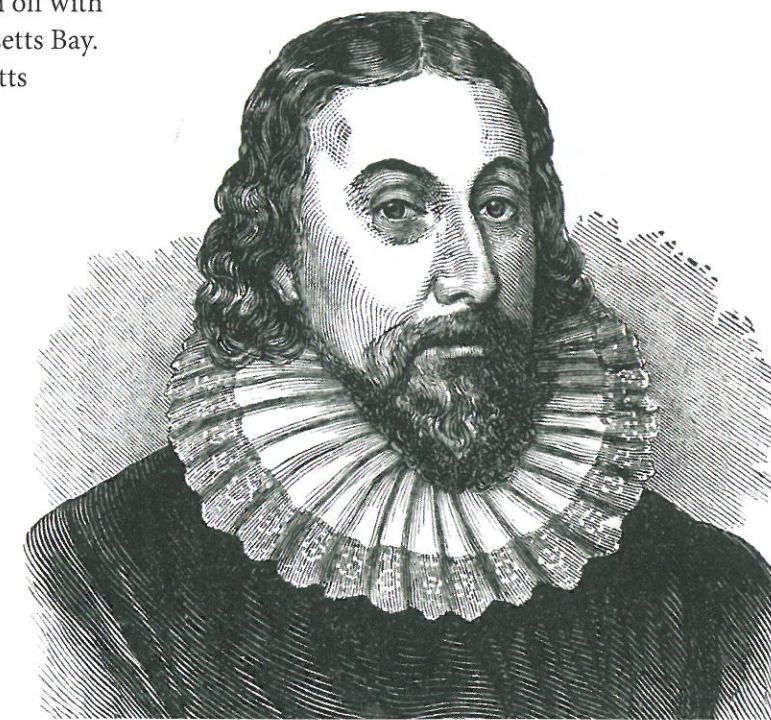
One group, who came to be called Puritans, wanted to “purify” the Anglican Church by making services simpler and doing away with ranks of authority. Another group, called Separatists, wanted to separate from the English church and form their own congregations. When the king began jailing Separatists for not attending Anglican services, some of them moved to Holland, where they could practice their religion freely.

But Holland wasn't home, and the Separatists wanted their children to grow up in an English culture. In 1620, about 102 Separatists set sail for America aboard the Mayflower. The Separatists were called Pilgrims because they traveled for religious reasons. The Pilgrims hoped to build their idea of a perfect society in America. During their voyage, they signed an agreement called the **Mayflower Compact** that described the way they would govern themselves in the Americas.

After a long, uncomfortable journey across the Atlantic, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, near Cape Cod. Luckily for them, the local Indians welcomed them. Without the help of these American Indians, the Pilgrims might not have survived their first winter. The Indians taught them how to plant crops, trap animals, and catch fish. In 1621, the Pilgrims invited the Indians to share their first harvest in a three-day feast of thanksgiving. Americans still celebrate this holiday.

Ten years later, a large group of Puritans decided to follow the Pilgrims to America. The king was relieved to see them go and sent them off with a charter for the colony of Massachusetts Bay. The charter said that the Massachusetts colonists would govern themselves. The Puritans were pleased with the charter because they wanted to build a community governed by the rules of the Bible. They hoped to set an example for the rest of the world. Their governor, John Winthrop, said, “We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.”

John Winthrop was a founder and, later, governor of Massachusetts.



Mayflower Compact an agreement that Pilgrims wrote and signed describing how they would govern themselves in the Americas

Massachusetts New England Colony

- **Founders** Pilgrims led by William Bedford (1620) and Puritans led by John Winthrop (1630)
- **Settlers** Puritans escaping religious persecution
- **Climate** Harsh winters, warm summers
- **Geography** Sandy coast with good ports, rich pastures, forests
- **Economy/Occupations** Crop and livestock farming, lumbering, shops, shipping
- **Religion** Puritan
- **Government** Self-governing, with strong religious influence

slave trade the business of capturing, transporting, and selling people as slaves

Rhode Island New England Colony

- **Founders** Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson
- **Settlers** People seeking religious freedom
- **Climate** Hot, humid summers; cold, snowy winters
- **Geography** Coastal lowlands; flat, rocky woodlands
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (large cattle and dairy farms, small independent farms), lumbering, shipbuilding, fishing, whaling, trade
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** Self-governing

Roger Williams founded Providence after being forced to flee the Massachusetts colony. Here he is shown befriending the American Indians who would care for him after he fled religious persecution.



3.4 Rhode Island: A New England Colony

The Puritans of Massachusetts gained the freedom to practice their religion the way they wanted to. But instead of granting similar freedom to others, they set up a government that required everyone in the colony to worship as they did.

When a young minister named Roger Williams began preaching different ideas, the Puritans put him on trial. Williams believed that all people should be able to worship in any way they chose. “Forced worship,” he declared, “stinks in God’s nostrils.”

The Puritans ordered that William be sent back to England. But instead, on a cold winter day in 1636, he left his wife and children and fled south. After trudging through snow for days, he met a group of Indians near Narragansett Bay. The Indians cared for him until spring. When his family and a few followers joined him, Williams bought land from the Indians for a settlement. He called it Providence, a word meaning “the guidance and care of God.”

Williams welcomed people with different religious beliefs. Two years after he and his followers settled Providence, a colonist named Anne Hutchinson was also forced to leave Massachusetts for preaching against the Puritans. She and her family followed Williams and established a settlement called Portsmouth. In 1647, these and other settlements joined together to become the colony of Rhode Island. In 1663, Rhode Island elected an assembly to govern the colony.

The ideal of freedom in Rhode Island did not extend to enslaved Africans. Sea merchants soon discovered the riches that could be made in the **slave trade**. As a result, Rhode Island became one of the largest slave-trading centers in the world. Slave trading helped make the fortunes of some of the wealthiest families in New England. At the

same time, the **isolated** coves along the Rhode Island coast provided perfect hiding places for pirates and smugglers.

Puritans in other colonies were disgusted by these activities. Reverend Cotton Mather of Boston called Rhode Island “the sewer of New England.” To these Puritans, the actions of slave traders in Rhode Island justified having rejected these people and ideas from their own communities. Using a word that implied “criminals,” they invented their own name for the colony: “Rogues’ Island.”



3.5 Connecticut: A New England Colony

Even in Massachusetts, not all Puritans shared exactly the same ideas. Thomas Hooker was a Puritan clergyman who lived in New Towne, a fast-growing community next to Boston. Hooker didn’t always agree with the laws and leadership in Massachusetts. When he heard about a fertile valley along a river to the west, he convinced his family and about 100 other people to move there with him.

It took Hooker and his followers two weeks to travel to the Connecticut Valley with their animals and belongings. There they established a settlement on the site of an old Dutch fort, where an earlier group of English colonists had settled. They called their new community Hartford. In 1639, Hartford joined with two other settlements to form the colony of Connecticut.

Hooker believed that government should be based on “the free consent of the people,” to whom belongs “the choice of public [officials] by God’s own allowance.” He helped draw up the first written plan of government for any of the colonies. This document was called the Fundamental Orders. The Fundamental Orders guaranteed the right to vote to all men who were members of the Puritan church.

Meanwhile, other Puritans formed a separate colony nearby called New Haven. The Puritans of New Haven agreed to live by the “word of God.” Their laws were stricter than those in Hooker’s Connecticut colony.

Neither of these colonies, however, was legally **authorized** by the king. Then, in 1662, King Charles II granted a charter for a new Connecticut colony that included New Haven. The charter gave Connecticut colonists more rights than those enjoyed by any other colonists except Rhode Island’s. Legend says that when King James II sent Governor Andros to Hartford 15 years later to take back the colonists’ charter, someone stole it and hid it in the trunk of a huge white oak tree. The “Charter Oak” became a symbol of Connecticut’s freedom.

King Charles II authorized the settlements in Connecticut by granting a charter for a Connecticut colony. Legend has it that when King James II attempted to revoke the charter, someone hid it in the trunk of an oak tree. The “Charter Oak” is an important symbol to Connecticut and was even represented in the Connecticut state quarter.

Connecticut New England Colony

- **Founder** Thomas Hooker
- **Settlers** Puritans seeking a new settlement
- **Climate** Cold winters, mild summers
- **Geography** Forested hills, sea-coast
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (crops and livestock), shipbuilding, fishing, whaling
- **Religion** Puritan
- **Government** written constitution (Fundamental Orders), self-governing

New York Middle Colony

- **Founders** Dutch West India Company (1624); James Duke of York (1664)
- **Settlers** Dutch and English seeking new lives
- **Climate** Cold, snowy winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Wetlands along the coast and Hudson River, forested mountains to the North
- **Economy/Occupations** Fur-trapping, lumbering, shipping, slave trade, merchants and tradesmen, farming, iron mining
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** British-appointed governor and council alternating with elected assembly

Ships navigated the harbor of New Amsterdam in the 1660s. The city was later renamed New York and became one of the busiest and most important ports in the world.

3.6 New York: A Middle Colony

The English took control of the settlement of New Netherland in 1664. The English renamed the colony New York in honor of its new **proprietor** (owner), James, the Duke of York. The duke gave huge chunks of his colony to two friends, Sir George Carteret and Lord John Berkeley. These men then established the colony of New Jersey to the south of New York.

The duke also awarded large estates along the Hudson River to wealthy Englishmen. The new landowners charged high rents to farmers working their land. This practice created a great difference in wealth between the landowners and their poor tenants. It also discouraged people from settling in New York.

The duke of York expected his colony to be a moneymaking business. As its owner, he appointed people to run the colony. He also issued his own laws and decided what New Yorkers should pay in taxes.

New York's rich landlords approved of the duke's approach to governing his colony. But farmers, fishers, and tradespeople did not. They demanded the right to elect an assembly to make laws for New York. The duke refused, saying that elected assemblies had a habit of disturbing the "peace of the government."

After years of protest, the duke finally allowed New Yorkers to elect an assembly in 1683. This first assembly passed 15 laws. The most important was a charter listing a number of rights that most colonists thought they should have as English citizens. Among them were the right to elect their own lawmakers, the right to trial by jury, and the right to worship as they pleased.

When the duke saw what the assembly had done, he abolished it. New Yorkers did not get a new assembly until, under the leadership of Jacob Leisler (LIES-ler), they rebelled in 1689. Leisler was elected commander in chief of a democratic council that governed until 1691. That year, New York was finally granted the right to elect an assembly with the power to pass laws and set taxes for the colony.



William Penn made a treaty with Indians in about 1683. Penn insisted that the Delaware Indians be treated fairly and paid for their land.

3.7 Pennsylvania: A Middle Colony

When William Penn asked King Charles II to let him establish a colony in America, the king had two very good reasons for granting Penn's request. First, he could repay a large debt that he owed to Penn's father, Admiral Penn. Second, he could get rid of William. The younger Penn had been a thorn in the king's side for a long time.

William Penn was a member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. The Quakers believed in a simple lifestyle and in treating all people equally. They refused to bow before the king, fight in wars, or pay taxes to the Church of England.

In 1668, the king had thrown Penn in jail, hoping to stop him from preaching the Quakers' ideas. To the king's dismay, Penn continued preaching after his release.

With the Quakers unwelcome in England, Penn wanted to establish a colony in America where they would be safe. In 1681, the king granted Penn a huge area of land between the Puritan colonies of New England and the Anglican colonies of the South. In honor of Penn's father, the colony was called Pennsylvania.

Penn advertised his colony all over Europe. In his Great Law of 1682, he promised that people of all faiths would be treated equally.

Penn's appeal attracted settlers from several countries. An early colonist in Pennsylvania marveled at the prosperity and peace in the colony. He wrote, "Poor people (both Men and Women) of all kinds, can here get three times the Wages for their Labour they can in England or Wales . . . Here are no Beggars to be seen . . . Jealousie among Men is here very rare . . . nor are old Maids to be met with; for all commonly Marry before they are Twenty Years of Age."

Penn named his capital city Philadelphia, which is Greek for "City of Brotherly Love." From there, he wrote great documents of government that made Pennsylvania the first democracy in America.

Pennsylvania Middle Colony

- **Founder** William Penn
- **Settlers** English Quakers and other Europeans seeking freedom and equality
- **Climate** Cold winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Rolling hills, trees, and fertile soil
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (crops and dairy) merchants and tradesman, lumbering, shipbuilding
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** Self-governing

Maryland Southern Colony

- **Founder** Cecil Calvert (Lord Baltimore)
- **Settlers** Catholics and Protestants seeking religious and political freedom
- **Climate** Cold, rainy winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Low, fertile land surrounding Chesapeake Bay
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming and ranching (crops, beef, dairy), lumbering, shipping, fishing, iron mining
- **Religion** Various faiths, particularly Catholic
- **Government** Self-governing

3.8 Maryland: A Southern Colony

The founding of Maryland was a family enterprise. Sir George Calvert, named Lord Baltimore by King James I, was an English gentleman who became a Roman Catholic. In England, with its official Anglican Church, Catholics were treated harshly. Calvert wanted to start a colony “founded on religious freedom where there would not only be a good life, but also a prosperous one for those bold enough to take the risk.” As a businessman, he also hoped the colony would make his own family more **prosperous**, or wealthy.

Unfortunately, Calvert died while he was still bargaining with the king. The new king, King Charles I, granted a charter for the colony to Calvert’s son Cecil, the new Lord Baltimore. The charter gave the Calverts complete control of the colony, which was called Maryland.

Armed with these powers, Cecil named his brother Leonard to be governor. To make money from the colony, Cecil needed to attract both Protestant and Catholic settlers. He told Leonard to be “very careful to preserve unity and peace . . . and treat the Protestants with as much mildness and favor as justice will permit.”

Leonard’s expedition arrived in Maryland in 1634. There he and his followers built St. Mary’s City on a high, dry bluff that they purchased from American Indians. The following year, Leonard agreed to let Maryland elect an assembly to govern the colony.

As more and more settlers arrived, Leonard could see that Catholics would always be outnumbered in the colony. To protect their rights, in 1649 he helped pass America’s first law guaranteeing religious liberty, the Act Concerning Religion. This law, however, applied only to Christians. Atheists (people who do not believe in the existence of God) and Jews were not included.

Despite the Calverts’ efforts, Protestants and Catholics remained suspicious of one another and waged a tug-of-war in Maryland for more than a century. During this time, the colony’s founding family lost and regained power several times. Still, George Calvert’s dream was fulfilled. Catholics in Maryland worshiped freely and took part in the colony’s government alongside Protestants.



Sir Cecil Calvert, or Second Lord Baltimore, was the founder of Maryland. Calvert established laws to protect Catholics from persecution in the colony.

3.9 Virginia: A Southern Colony

Jamestown, Virginia, was the first successful English settlement in America. After a shaky start, Virginia began to grow and prosper. By 1700, the descendants of those early settlers were wealthy landowners and the most important people in Virginia.

The economy of Virginia was based on tobacco. Tobacco planters needed vast areas of land to be successful. They also needed a large number of workers to grow their crops.

At first, planters tried putting Indians to work. But Indians in this area were not used to farming. Worse, many of them died of diseases they caught from the colonists. The others faded into the forests and disappeared.

Next, tobacco planters tried bringing poor people from England to work their land. In exchange for free passage to Virginia, the workers agreed to become indentured servants for a period of five to seven years. Many men, women, and children came to Virginia as indentured servants. After completing their service, they were given their freedom along with a small plot of land, some clothing, tools, and seeds.

The first Africans brought to Virginia were also treated as indentured servants. At first, they had the same rights and freedoms as white servants. Once their service ended, they could buy land and servants of their own.

Gradually, however, planters turned to slaves to solve their labor problem. Slaves brought from Africa cost twice as much as servants, but they did not leave after a few years.

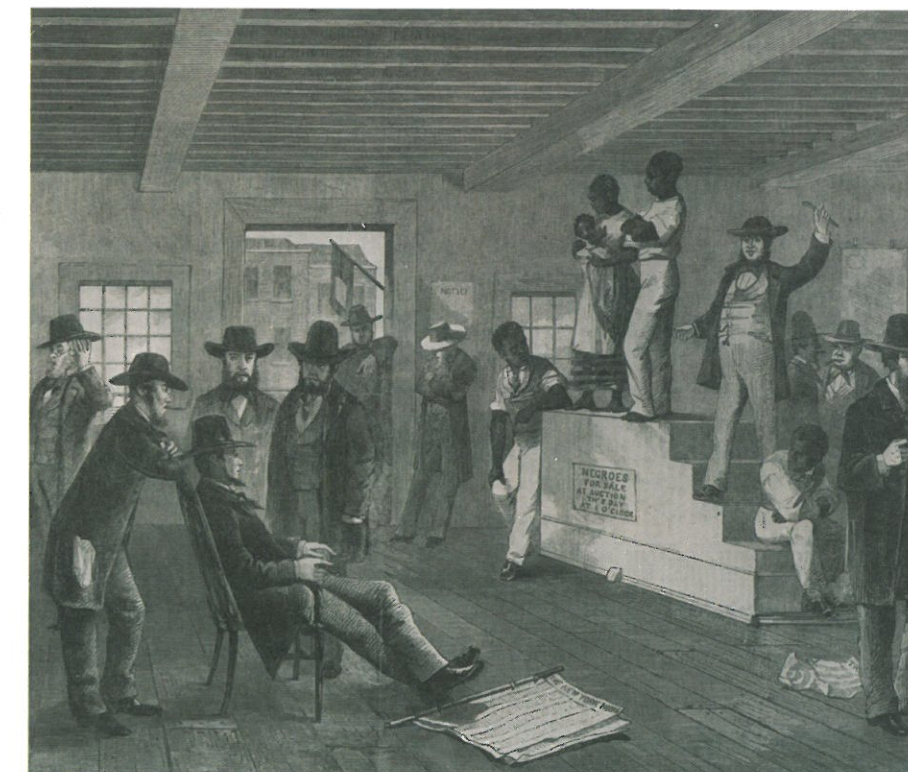
For the planters, enslaving Africans had other advantages as well. Most Africans were hard workers who were used to farming. And because of their dark skin, it was hard for them to escape from their owners and blend into the rest of the population.

Virginia elected an assembly, called the House of Burgesses, in 1619. In 1661, the House of Burgesses passed a law that made African workers slaves for life. By 1700, Virginia had more than 16,000 enslaved Africans—more than one-fourth of the colony’s population. For Virginia, slavery had become a way of life.

Virginia Southern Colony

- **Founders** Sir Walter Raleigh and the Virginia Company
- **Settlers** English landowners, skilled laborers (shoemakers, bricklayers, tailors), people seeking profit
- **Climate** Mild winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Coastal lowlands, wooded mountains
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (plantations and small independent farms)
- **Religion** Church of England
- **Government** Self-governing, with elected assembly (House of Burgesses)

The first Africans were brought to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, the year before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Here is a scene of a slave auction in Virginia.



James Oglethorpe founded the colony of Georgia. He is shown here wearing Scottish clothing and greeting colonists.



3.10 Georgia: A Southern Colony

Georgia, the 13th and last colony, was founded by a group of Englishmen whose business plan was based on a grand and noble idea. They wanted to help poor people in England stay out of debtors' prison. In England, at this time, people who couldn't pay their bills went to jail. James Oglethorpe inspired wealthy Englishmen to give money to help establish a colony where the poor could build better lives instead of going to jail.

King George II and his government liked this plan because the Georgia colony would help keep the Spanish from moving north out of Florida. Georgia would stand between Spanish Florida and the rest of the British colonies to the north.

The Englishmen's plan depended on getting the cooperation of settlers. But there weren't many poor debtors who wanted to start new lives in the wilderness of North America. Some thought prison would be a safer place.

Instead of an army of poor people, the colonists who went with Oglethorpe to Georgia in 1732 were adventurers much like the settlers in the other colonies. In addition, many Protestants, Catholics, and Jews came to Georgia in search of religious freedom.

As many had feared, life was not easy in Georgia. The Spaniards in Florida wanted to control Georgia, and they continually attacked the new settlements. The Georgians fought them off without any help from the other British colonies. To make matters worse, Oglethorpe had specific ideas about how the colonists should live. He established laws against drinking alcohol and owning slaves. He thought the settlers should live on small farms and learn to farm their land themselves.

Georgia Southern Colony

- **Founders** George II and James Edward Oglethorpe
- **Settlers** Debtors from English prisons, Europeans seeking religious freedom and cheap land
- **Climate** Short, mild winters; long, hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Wetlands and red-clay plains; forested mountains
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (plantations and independent farms), trade, skilled labor
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** Self-governing

The settlers weren't about to go along. They wanted to farm large plantations and own slaves like the wealthy planters in neighboring colonies. They disliked some of Oglethorpe's other rules as well.

After 12 years of governing the colony, Oglethorpe returned to England. In 1752, the people of Georgia elected an assembly.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you read about the settlement of the 13 English colonies in the future United States.

Settlers and Slaves Settlers had many reasons to come to America in the 1600s and 1700s. Two important reasons were freedom of religion and the chance to start a new life. However, even though colonists treasured freedom for themselves, they had Africans brought to America by force to work as slaves.

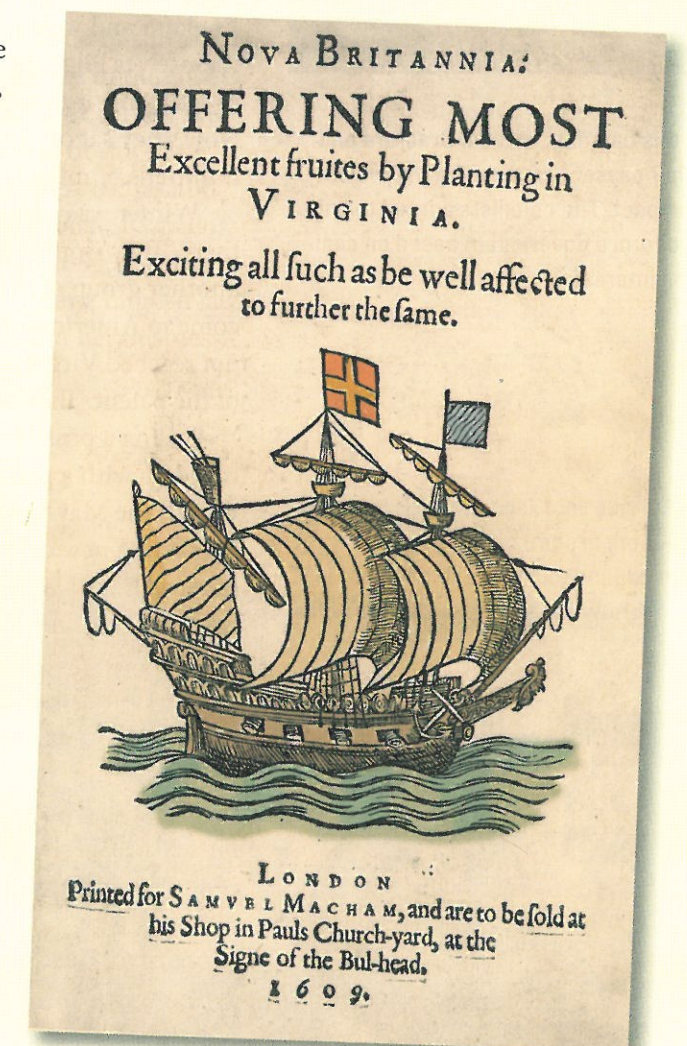
Regional Development The New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies had distinctive geographies and natural resources. As a result, different ways of life developed in each region. Colonies also varied in their form of government, but all were democratic to some degree.

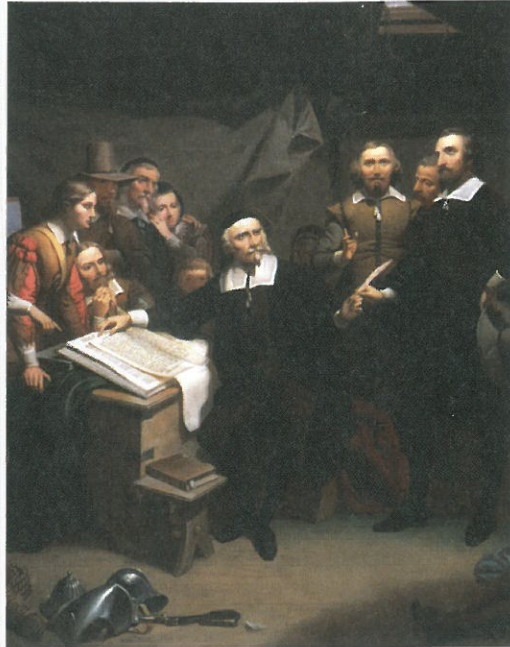
New England Colonies Religion and geography were key influences in these colonies. Although Puritans sometimes disagreed, they hoped to establish model communities based on their religious faith. New England's forests and coastline made lumbering, shipbuilding, and trade very important to the region's economy.

Middle Colonies These colonies were geographically, culturally, and religiously diverse. Catholics, Quakers, Anglicans, and members of other Protestant faiths all found homes in this region.

Southern Colonies In these colonies, climate and geography encouraged the planting of cash crops and the development of large plantations. In time, slave labor would become a major part of this region's economy.

Handbills like this one lured colonists from Europe to the American colonies.





In this painting, William Bradford and other passengers sign the Mayflower Compact. The colonists agreed to unite and form a government based on common interests.

A Colonial Cast of Characters

Many kinds of people settled the English colonies of North America. There were Pilgrims and planters, merchants and craft workers, enslaved Africans and indentured servants. Some came seeking freedom and opportunity. Others came because they had no choice. All of them contributed to life in the colonies. Here are four of their stories.

William Bradford was worried. It was November 1620, and he had just arrived in America on the *Mayflower*. He and his fellow passengers had survived a long and difficult voyage. But they had not reached their intended destination, and trouble was brewing.

Bradford was one of the leaders of a group of Separatists on the *Mayflower*. The Separatists had broken away from the Church of England and were seeking religious freedom in America. They called themselves Pilgrims. They had been granted a patent—a royal permit—to settle in Virginia. But violent storms had blown their ship off course. Now, they sat off the coast of what would become Massachusetts, hundreds of miles from Virginia.

Winter was coming, so the Pilgrims decided to found their colony there. They would call it Plymouth, after a coastal city in England. But another group of people on board had different ideas. They had not come to America for religious reasons, but to own land. Since they had not reached Virginia, they argued that they were not bound by the terms of the patent. They said that no one had the “power to command them.”

Facing a possible rebellion, Bradford and the other Pilgrim leaders came up with a plan to unite the colony. They drew up an agreement we call the Mayflower Compact. By signing this document, the members of the new colony agreed to form a “civil body politic,” or a form of representative government. They agreed to obey “just and equall laws” created “for the generall good of the Colonie.” This was the first written framework for self-government in the English colonies.

Bradford would later become governor of Plymouth Colony. He had never lived under any form of self-government. He had always been ruled by kings. But he did have a strong belief in his rights as an Englishman. This idea of the “rights of Englishmen” would be a foundation for self-rule in the colonies. The idea was rooted in Magna Carta (a 13th-century document limiting royal power) and the English Bill of Rights.

Margaret Hardenbroeck: Dutch Trader

William Bradford came to America to practice his religion. He wanted to build a new society based on religious principles. Margaret Hardenbroeck came for a very different reason. She moved to the colonies to do business, and she became very successful.

Hardenbroeck was born in the Netherlands. In 1659, she moved to New Amsterdam, the Dutch colonial city that later became New York. Unlike most colonists, she had a job when she arrived. She worked as an agent for her cousin, a merchant in Holland. Hardenbroeck sold goods like cooking oil and vinegar and bought furs to send back to Holland. She quickly established a reputation as a skilled trader.

New Amsterdam was a growing trade center at the time. It reflected the commercial spirit of Holland, a country that thrived on trade. The city had an open, tolerant feel. It was a place where people of different religious and national backgrounds could live and do business.

Hardenbroeck benefited from this commercial spirit. She also benefited from the more relaxed Dutch attitude toward women’s rights. In Holland, women could get an education and own property. They could conduct business on their own. Women did not enjoy such rights in England at the time.

Not long after Hardenbroeck arrived, she married a wealthy merchant. When he died soon after, she inherited his land and business. In a short time, she had become one of the wealthiest citizens in the colony.

A year later, Hardenbroeck married another trader. Together, they continued to expand their business. They owned a fleet of ships and moved goods from the colonies to Europe and the West Indies and back. They also owned a lot of land, including a plantation in Barbados.

After England took control of New Amsterdam in 1664, Hardenbroeck maintained good relations with her English rulers. English law allowed her less freedom to manage her own affairs, but her business continued to thrive. She remained one of the colony’s leading citizens until her death in 1691.



Margaret Hardenbroeck took part in New Amsterdam’s growing trade in the 1660s. Merchants in this port city bought and sold goods from around the world.



Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano: African Slave

Most people came to the colonies of their own free will. For one group, however, coming to America was not a choice. Many black Africans were captured in their homelands and sold to slave traders. Packed onto ships, they were transported to the American colonies. This journey, known as the Middle Passage, was horrific for the enslaved Africans.

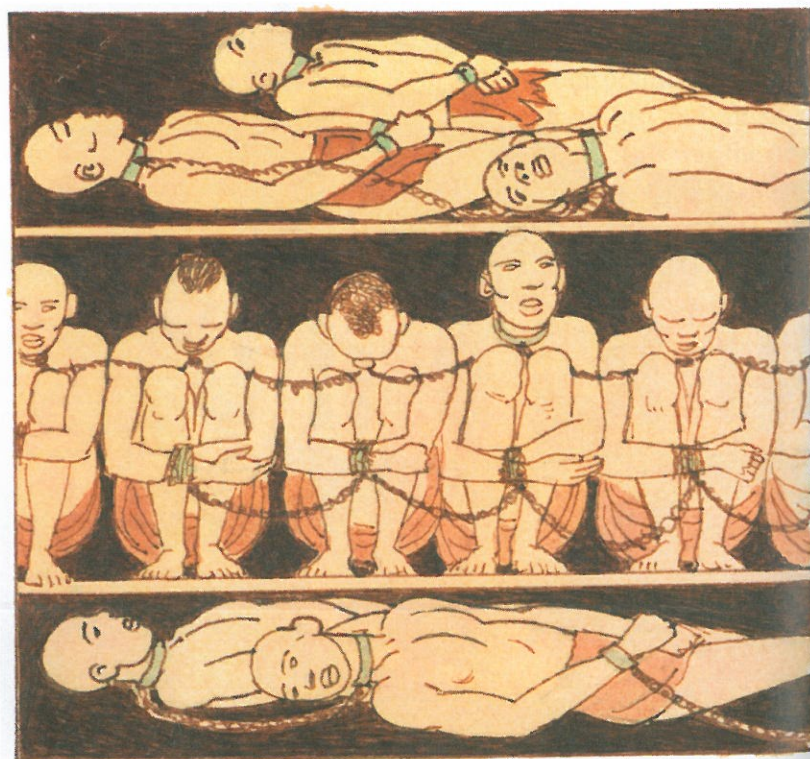
One man who made this journey was Olaudah Equiano (oh-LAU-duh ek-wee-AHN-oh). In 1789, he wrote a book about his life, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. He described his early life in Africa, his enslavement, and his eventual freedom.

Equiano was born in the kingdom of Benin, in West Africa. His father was a village chief, and Olaudah was expected to follow in his footsteps. When he was 11, however, he was kidnapped and taken to the coast, where he was loaded onto a slave ship. There he was beaten and chained to the deck, along with other slaves. "I inquired of these what was to be done with us," he wrote. "They gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them." Equiano was relieved, since he had believed that the white men meant to kill him. But his trials were not over.

When the ship was about to set sail, the Africans were put into cramped quarters below deck. Equiano recalled,

The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us . . . The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

Olaudah Equiano was taken to America on a slave ship. Ship captains tried to pack as many people on board as possible. Many people died from overcrowding and disease. This picture is an artist's view of enslaved people on a slave ship.



Equiano spent several weeks at sea. He was first taken to Barbados, and then to a plantation in Virginia. There, after less than a month, he was sold to an English naval officer. Equiano traveled the world as this man's servant, and after seven years he was able to buy his freedom. He was relatively fortunate. Hundreds of thousands of Africans were brought to America and never knew freedom again. Most of their children were born into slavery, too.

Matthew Lyon: Indentured Servant

Another large group of people came to the colonies as indentured servants. In fact, around half of all European colonists arrived as indentured workers. As with enslaved Africans, some of these people were brought against their will. Some were kidnapped, while others were convicts who were transported in chains. Most indentured servants agreed to come voluntarily, however, and to work for several years to pay off their ship passage. One of these people was a young Irishman named Matthew Lyon.

Lyon was just 14 when he came to the colonies in 1765. Under the terms of indenture, young people were supposed to work until age 21. But Lyon bribed the ship captain to say that he was 18. So when Lyon was auctioned to a buyer in New York, he was sold for a three-year term of service.

Lyon was too clever to remain a servant for even that length of time, however. A year into his service, he arranged to buy two bulls from a local farmer, promising to pay the farmer when he was free. He then sold the bulls to his master in exchange for his freedom. At that point, Lyon went to work for the farmer to pay back his debt.

Lyon next got a job at an ironworks in Connecticut. He married the owner's niece, and they eventually settled on land to the north that would later become part of Vermont. There, Lyon joined the Green Mountain Boys, a volunteer fighting force set up to protect settlers' rights. In 1775, at the start of the American Revolution, this force captured Fort Ticonderoga, a British fort in upstate New York. Lyon became an officer and led troops in two more important battles of the revolution.

After the war for independence was won, Lyon served as a legislator in the new state of Vermont. He would go on to have a long career in politics and government.

From his early days as an indentured servant, Lyon had worked hard to build a new life in America. Like others who came to the colonies, his spirit and determination helped form the new American nation.



Owners of small businesses, such as this colonial plumber, bought the indentures of workers like Matthew Lyon. The growth of the colonies depended on the labor of indentured servants.