



4

From Plantations to Provinces The Evolution of American Society and Culture, 1660-1763

Chapter 4 at a Glance

Colonial Society

- Pre-Industrial Colonial Economies*
- Colonial Family Life*
- Servants and Slaves*
- Schools and Scholars*

The American Enlightenment

- Literature: New Secular and Enduring Spiritual Concerns*
- The Waning of Artistic Provincialism*
- "And All Was Light": Science and the American Enlightenment*
- Practical Sciences: Medicine and Law*

The Great Awakening and Its Consequences

- George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards*
- Religious Realignments*
- Slave Religion*
- Colleges: "Nurseries of Piety"*

Conclusion: Growth, Revival, and Cultural Maturity

BY 1760 COLONIAL population on the American mainland had reached well over one and one-half million, roughly one quarter of them African Americans. The major cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia boasted populations in 1760 of around 15,000, 18,000, and 23,000, respectively. Setting aside gigantic London, these urban populations compared favorably with most English or Scottish towns.

The population surge in the first half of the eighteenth century resulted to a great degree from the presence of *families*. The early days when the number of males greatly outnumbered females in the colonies had now passed; natural increase could begin to compete with the steady arrival of immigrants. Since the eighteenth century only slowly developed a passion for counting things, all the numbers are approximations; statistics on America become more reliable only after the first federal census in 1790. The informed guesses of a generation before, however, demonstrated that the American colonies had arrived at a position of some stature, no longer mere stragglers desperately clinging to a few feet of rocky or marshy coastline.

Nor were Americans by 1760 any longer of a single ethnic stock, even among whites. Germans had moved heavily into the Middle Colonies in the first half of the eighteenth century, with Scots and Scots-Irish in that same time period also becoming a conspicuous presence in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In significantly smaller numbers, French Protestant exiles settled in Charleston, South Carolina, and New Rochelle, New York. The most conspicuous racial or ethnic diversity



New York City, 1742-1744 By the middle of the eighteenth century New York City was already fast becoming a cosmopolitan town with a busy harbor. The mapmaker has illustrated points of interest at the top of the map, among them City Hall, prominent individuals' homes, and several churches.

was, of course, created by the presence of Africans, who formed a majority of the population in South Carolina and a very sizable force elsewhere in the South. In Virginia, the slave population had grown from a modest 3,000 in 1680 to an imposing 120,000 by 1760. In all of New England, by contrast, out of a total population of nearly one-half million, slaves numbered only around five or six thousand.

Virginia, though it had no major cities, was nonetheless the most populous colony, with around 346,000 inhabitants, followed by Massachusetts and Pennsylvania (then including Delaware), each with more than 200,000 persons. The smallest colonies were Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Georgia. All other colonies had populations of around 100,000 or more, with their inhabitants widely scattered in small villages and on family farms. All colonial cities were coastal cities; major urban centers would not develop inland until the nineteenth century. The colonial institutions that mattered most, therefore, were not those limited to the cities, but those that sprang up in small villages and the open countryside as well.

The colonial economy was essentially a rural economy. And the fundamental institution of the family made its living, reared its children, and established its values in far greater numbers on the farms than in the

cities. Some families met the demand for labor wholly within their own circle; others turned to servant and slave labor to maintain the household, clear the fields and plant the crops, and help with the harvest that might go to a market only a few miles away — or might reach commercial centers across the Atlantic. With all this gathering and spending, mothers and fathers also concerned themselves with the education of their children. Somehow, formally or informally, the values and knowledge of the present generation needed to be passed on to the next.

In the decades just prior to the American Revolution, colonial culture expressed itself in a variety of forms. Frequently viewed from abroad as a cultural desert, eighteenth-century America made significant contributions in literature and the arts, in religion and education, in science and in law. But quite apart from any recognition in the Western world at large, the colonists themselves enjoyed a cultural life of surprising vitality and depth. In the life of the mind and the spirit, citizens of the New World were not content to be mere borrowers and imitators. On their own, they would create a culture that would be something more than Europe once removed.

COLONIAL SOCIETY

In economic as in family life, the dominant white population developed more intricate patterns that revealed wide diversity from colony to colony. At the same time African slaves struggled with harsh codes, unfavorable environments, and numerous efforts to ignore or destroy their culture. In the midst of these tensions, attempts to provide appropriate education for children

Eighteenth-Century American Folk Art This hand-painted pie plate, decorated in 1793, is a typical adornment of everyday household objects. The fanciful design conveys no higher symbolic purpose than a desire to bring simple enjoyment into family life.



took forms as varied as America's landscapes: from the southern plantations to the towns of New England.

35 *Pre-Industrial Colonial Economies*

In treating colonial economic history, scholars tend to concentrate on foreign trade, for this was so often the friction point between England and its plantations. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the colonial economy rested heavily upon the agricultural staples produced and consumed at home.

WORKING THE LAND

As in most of the Western world in this pre-industrial age, in the colonies the cultivation of land was the chief occupation and the chief source of wealth.

The ready availability of land and generous early grants to settlers ensured that the American farmer tended to do well — much better than his European counterpart. About half the white population owned and worked their own farms with little or no slave labor. The large plantations that did employ great numbers of slaves engaged in the export business: tobacco and timber, rice and indigo, and later wheat and cattle. But the abundance of land made all the difference in the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth — especially to farmers who were willing to move farther inland, beyond the initial areas of settlement. In addition, farmers could rise steadily on the social scale: more land, more political participation, more social and economic stability. Some indentured servants, if they survived their terms, might obtain land and thereafter acquire most or all of the privileges that England associated with the “freeholder.”

Farmers managed to produce enough food to feed their families, their servants or slaves, with often enough left over to sell or barter locally. Planting corn,

wheat, barley, oats, and rye as staple crops, the farmer (or more often his wife) also kept a vegetable garden and an orchard. Cattle, sheep, and hogs provided additional food, as well as hides and wool for clothing and other uses. Horses, which could feed on the grass or the agricultural surplus, were put to many tasks in transportation, hauling, and plowing. Chickens and other fowl added to the storehouse of food supplies on most farms. Crops flourished generally without extensive fertilizing; when the fertility of the soil began to decline, farmers simply moved to another plot of ten or twenty acres while the land lay fallow to regain fertility. Once initial supplies of farm animals were obtained, careful husbandry insured an ever-increasing number of cows, hogs, horses, sheep, and chickens to match the fertility of the soil. The rural population — the vast majority of all Americans — by 1760 could count on having the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. Compared to most European peasants, they lived well.

Corn was an especially popular crop since it could be grown in all the colonies and since it could be harvested over a long season. Adopting the Indians' technique of “hilling” the land into small mounds, colonists planted corn in fields not yet completely cleared. After the corn stalk reached a satisfactory height, beans could be planted between the mounds; sometimes the cornstalks served as ready-made beanpoles. Wheat developed as a major export crop in the Chesapeake region as well as farther to the north in Pennsylvania, New York, and even into New England. Much of the wheat, however, was consumed locally since most colonists preferred wheat flour to either corn or rye flour. Rice was produced in the South, but more for export than for local consumption, while tobacco and indigo remained major exports for the foreign markets.

FAMILY FARMS

Farm families were economic units. At harvest time, the farmer called on all hands to bring in the crop — servants, children, and wives. Female labor, whether of wives or servants, was not limited to the home, even apart from the season of harvesting. In the absence of a major labor force, such as on the southern plantation, women helped till the soil, planted and cared for the garden, tended the orchard, milked the cows, gathered the eggs, cured the meat, dressed the hides — and so on. In the house, women cooked, washed, cleaned, sewed, and spun; all this, of course, was simply added to their unique tasks of bearing, nursing, and training the young children. As South





Dockside at a Virginia Tobacco Warehouse Dating from 1777, this English illustration shows a typical scene as tobacco is loaded for shipment across the Atlantic. Because colonial Virginia lacked important seaports, tobacco was shipped from docks all along the navigable rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Planters from the interior had their slaves roll cured tobacco to these docks in large barrels, called hogsheads, similar to those shown here.

Carolina's Eliza Lucas Pinckney wrote in the 1740s, "I am resolved to be a good Mother to my children, to pray for them, to set them good examples, to be careful both of their souls and bodys, to watch over their tender mind, to carefully root out the first appearing and buddings of vice, and to install piety, virtue, and true religion among them."

If all this was understandably a large order for the rural housewife and mother, urban women also sometimes had to assume additional specialized responsibilities. They ran inns, operated grocery stores, and sold millenary goods. When their husbands went to war or left their wives widows, then the wives became managers of the shop, small farm, or plantation. Unaccustomed as most were to economic independence, some grew to appreciate their new status and to advise other young women to pursue "as much independence as circumstances will allow."

AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

Since cash was in short supply in the eighteenth century, trade frequently took the form of barter. In addition, a single staple crop — tobacco, for example — might serve as money. Taxes, court fees, and even salaries were payable in tobacco. In Virginia, farmers who deposited their tobacco crop in warehouses re-

ceived receipts that could circulate as readily as cash. Merchants, on the other hand, utilized a form of "book credit" that would be paid off with the arrival of the next shipment of goods, once again avoiding the necessity of hard currency or coin. In fact, since England forbade the export of her own coinage, the colonists used the silver and gold coins from Spain's New World when only a cash transaction would do.

Agriculture, of course, provided not only the livelihood for most Americans, but in addition a favorable balance of trade a good deal of the time. In 1700 the leading exports from the mainland colonies were tobacco, dyestuffs, skins, and hides. By 1725 rice had become an important export, its importance increasing steadily to 1760. Other less significant exports in the first half of the eighteenth century included timber, whale oil, and rum. But tobacco dominated the mainland exports, just as sugar did in the Caribbean.

Principally from the Chesapeake Bay, tobacco flowed to England and Scotland, and from there (after appropriate tariffs had been paid) to continental markets. Although Virginia tobacco was at first of poor quality, it improved so rapidly that by around 1700 Chesapeake tobacco was preferred above all others. Tobacco demanded careful cultivation, and small farmers and plantation owners grew more efficient in drying the leaf in a tobacco barn for three to six weeks, then grading, packing, and shipping the crop to a warehouse prior to transporting it abroad. Even a small farmer could, with the help of his wife and children, cultivate enough tobacco to bring in a cash income of around \$1,000 per year, in addition to the foodstuffs grown and cattle raised. On



a large Virginia plantation such as that of Robert Carter, the amount of tobacco sold in a single year (1736) reached the equivalent of about \$50,000 — an immense sum for the eighteenth century.

Tobacco made so much money for the farmer, the king, and all the middlemen in between that it became the measure by which the economy of the Chesapeake colonies rose or fell. Merchants extended credit to farmers who suffered a hard year, so that nothing would interfere with the next year's steady production. Or farmers could receive an "advance" on next year's crop, with which they could

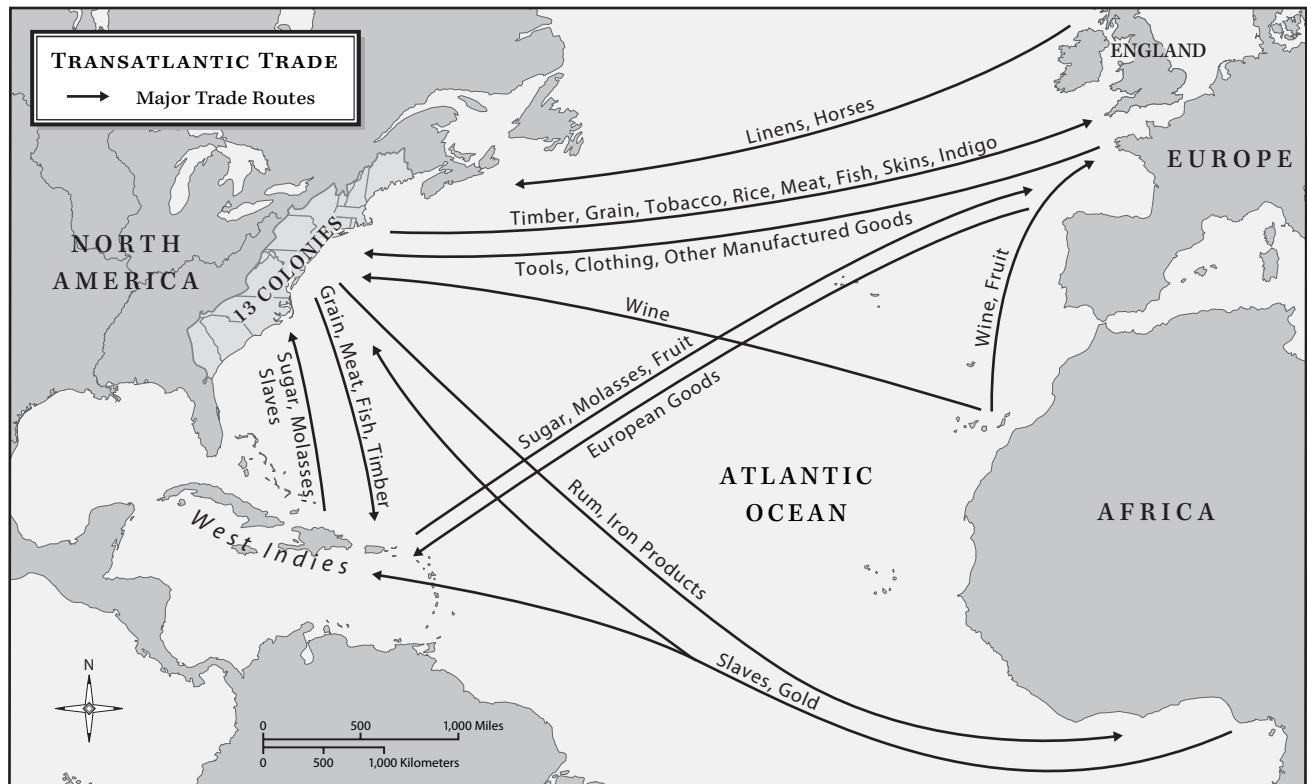
buy more land or slaves and keep production booming. London controlled the tobacco markets for the first century or so, but by 1740 Glasgow merchants were paying cash in Virginia as soon as the crop was loaded on the ship, rather than requiring the farmer to wait until the crop was sold in London weeks or months later. Since the centers for distribution remained abroad, and since Virginia and Maryland had such inviting waterways, no

cities developed in the Chesapeake region until the late eighteenth century.

From Pennsylvania northward, the farmers' surpluses often traveled no farther than the consumer markets developing in such urban centers as Philadelphia, New York, Newport, and Boston. Where large-scale foreign trade did grow, the products were more often processed commodities, such as rum and flour, rather than agricultural produce. Furs continued to be shipped from New York; lumber and wool from Philadelphia; horses and dairy products from Newport; whale oil, ship goods, and even ships from Boston or nearby ports. The Navigation Acts enriched England, but they did not prevent the colonists also from reaping a profit, sometimes, of course, through an avoidance of tariffs that the law imposed. The overarching reality of colonial economic life was that wealth accumulated gradually, that living standards improved steadily, and that colonists experienced an economic maturing to match their growing political assertiveness.

NEW WEALTH

Throughout the colonies, signs of affluence proliferated: more imported goods and finer clothing, dancing classes and French lessons, musical recitals, and, in Philadelphia, a theater that opened by the middle of



the eighteenth century. Even the muddy streets in that city were paved, and open sewers at last got covered. Income disparities persisted, of course, but in each region rising elites exerted their political power and set cultural standards that others strained to reach.

In the pre-Revolutionary generation, merchants in New England increased in wealth and eminence, outranked only by landed gentlemen and colonial officials. In the South, large plantation holders held the most wealth and, without question, the greatest political power. In the Middle Colonies, merchants also steadily strengthened their social position, followed by farmers and such professionals as doctors, lawyers, and clergymen. The wealthiest 20 percent of the population held nearly 70 percent of the total assets, a circumstance that did not vary widely throughout the eighteenth century.

But movement from the lower levels of society to a higher status did vary sharply. In Maryland, for example, about 90 percent of indentured servants became landowners at the end of their terms, and some of them ended with substantial estates. In Pennsylvania, on the other hand, only about one-third of contracted servants acquired land, and most of them only the prescribed minimum of fifty acres. Such limited holding did not allow them to enter even the middle class, much less the ranks of the wealthy. Yet in Newport, Rhode Island, a ship's cabin boy, Peter Harrison, managed in seven years' time — partly through a quite successful marriage — to join the local elite. Many may have dreamed of following Harrison's career curve, particularly since it was said that Newport "is as remarkable for pritty women as Albany is for ugly ones."

☞ *Colonial Family Life*

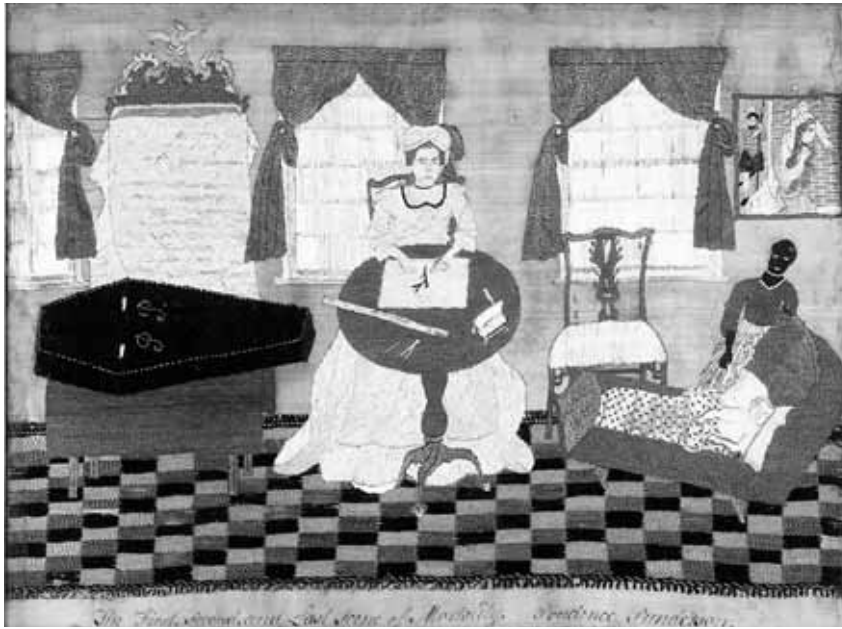
The most basic institution of all, the family, did not get off to an even start in every colony. The earliest immigrants, such as the English in Virginia and the Dutch in New Netherland, had been predominantly male: family formation had to await a more even sex ratio, achieved through the immigration of women. Elsewhere, in such regions as New England and Pennsylvania, families settled from the beginning, giving distinctive shape to the early social history of both areas. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, family life — whether on plantation or farm, in village or town — provided the essential social foundation in every colony. In laying and building upon that foundation, women played the critical and determinative role.

GETTING MARRIED

In those societies where males greatly outnumbered females, marriageable women were spoken for at an early age, the average age in some Chesapeake communities being sixteen and a half. Moreover, when a husband died, the widow did not normally have a long widowhood, since proposals of marriage came quickly, especially if she now held considerable property. If after the second marriage the woman was still of childbearing age, then almost always a second family was added to the first. If she were beyond the age of childbearing, then her chances of survival greatly increased, as well as her chances of accumulating more wealth with the death of her second or even third husband. In choosing a mate in the Chesapeake, sons and daughters enjoyed considerable latitude since often one or both parents would have already died. Of course, the Anglican Church exercised careful supervision in the South: a 1662 Virginia law provided that "no marriage be solemnized nor reputed valid in law but such as is made by the ministers according to the law of England." These and similar regulations remained in effect down to the Revolution.

A more favorable gender balance obtained in New England, and consequently women did not marry quite so early; the age of nineteen or twenty tended to be the rule. And since New England males lived much, much longer (into their seventies, as opposed to the forties in Virginia), men as well as women remarried upon the death of a spouse. (Divorces were quite rare in the colonial period.) A wife's death in childbirth was all too common an experience; when it happened, the distraught husband searched quickly for a new wife to look after an orphaned infant together, perhaps, with other small children. New England parents regularly supervised their children's marital choices, and the increased life expectancy made it likely that they would be alive long enough to exercise their authority. Although the parish church and its Congregational minister provided their own oversight of proposed unions, the magistrate conducted the ceremony itself. Marriage was a civil ceremony in Puritan society even though the married life was blessed by God — indeed more blessed than bachelorhood or spinsterhood.

Among the Quakers of Pennsylvania and elsewhere, marriage and the choice of a mate was, if anything, even more saturated with religious prescriptions and concerns. A good Quaker marriage presumed both bride and groom to be of like faith and sufficiently mature to enter upon the responsibilities of faithfulness to each other and religious nurture for their children. "The



The Four Stages of Life An eighteenth-century American woman created this homely, melancholy reflection on the crucial stages of her life: birth and infancy, betrothal and marriage, maturity, and death. Such thoughts about the essentials of the human experience formed a psychological foundation for most colonial Americans, surrounded as they were by ever-present reminders of both birth and death.

honorable marriage,” said the Pennsylvania Quakers, “is when the bed is undefiled, transgression finished, freedom from sin witnessed, victory over the world known.” These hard requirements did not prevent the vast majority of Quaker young men and young women from entering into matrimony, the women at around twenty-two years of age, the men at around twenty-six. Parental consent was required, of course, though it was not given in the face of either a son’s or a daughter’s opposition to the match. The Quaker meeting¹ also had to give its blessing and could, on occasion, intercede with a particularly obstinate parent. The Quaker meeting withheld its blessing from “mixed marriages,” in which one of the partners was outside the faith. Not only would that marriage not be blessed, but also the Quaker partner stood in danger of being “disowned” or expelled from membership in the community. Quakers did not forbid remarriage, but encouraged the surviving spouse to wait at least one year, demonstrating “chastity, and virtue, and temperance.”

For Quakers, blind romantic love was to be guarded against by a rational and deliberate consideration

1. The weekly session in which Quakers assembled without clerical guidance and remained silent until individuals were prompted by the Inner Light to speak.

of divine will. Marriage, William Penn warned, should be a “union of souls,” not a “union of sense.” Love, to be sure, was an appropriate emotion, but only as the object of that love was also appropriate. “Never marry but for love,” Penn declared, “but see that thou lov’st what is lovely.” And while one should never marry for money, it was folly to marry someone profligate and wasteful. In marriages between well-to-do Quaker families, much attention was given to the size of dowries. Nothing should be done in unseemly haste, but only as, step by step, the meeting gave its approval, the parents theirs, and the couple managed to find a happy conjunc-

tion of spiritual and more worldly interests.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

For colonial Americans, the laws of nature directed that parents should provide food, clothing, and shelter for their children, just as the laws of the Bible commanded that children should “honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” But in each colony or region, variations in these broad understandings manifested themselves, as religious backgrounds, economic necessities, and ethnic heritages modified fundamental patterns.

In New England, authorities worried so much about idleness that laws required children to be trained “in some honest calling, labor, or employment,” beginning as early as seven years of age. At that age, daughters could readily assume household tasks, including those (such as sewing) that required some training and discipline. Sons might follow in their father’s steps around the same time, but if they were to learn a trade outside the home they would be apprenticed to a journeyman or master when ten to fourteen years of age. After seven years of apprenticeship (or until the age of twenty-one), the young man would then be ready to assume his vocation, with little likelihood that he would ever forsake the one skill that he knew well. Girls might also be placed in another home, to work as servants, learn domestic skills, and escape being overindulged by their parents.

Vocation literally means “calling,” and Puritans assumed that every honest employment should be a call-

ing by God to work faithfully in the world. Puritans denied that God called persons out of the world or out of the family. On the contrary, the divine call was to work in the world — to marry, to be fruitful, to perform services useful to both God and humankind. From the Puritan perspective, monasticism was not a “higher” form of Christian dedication, but irrelevant and unprofitable. Just as God called men and women to salvation, so he called them to “worldly employments” that would honor the Creator more than “if you should have spent all that time in meditation, prayer, or other spiritual employment, to which you had no call.” Given these presuppositions, parents took seriously their responsibility to guide their children into the proper life-work, urging them to listen for and heed their particular “call.” And when God called, Puritans believed, he provided the necessary gifts for success in the chosen field. One way in which a person could decide if he or she had been called, therefore, was to examine carefully the talents and abilities that God had bestowed — a process curiously like modern vocational counseling.

If parents neglected their children, they were summoned before the magistrates for formal rebuke or, if necessary, punishment. If, on the other hand, children cursed or neglected their parents, the courts could again become involved. In some cases, children might even be removed from their own homes and placed in another family that “will more strictly look unto, and force them to submit unto government.” When children resisted parental discipline or guidance, mothers and fathers might call upon the assistance of both the minister and the schoolmaster. All aspects of the child’s life — work, play, education, religious training — revolved around the Puritan determination to uproot all sin and corruption and replace them with grace and salvation.

In the Chesapeake, the official Anglican Church hovered over all of life’s major transitions: birth, marriage, and death. But given the scattered settlement in Virginia and Maryland, the ministrations of religion took place far more often in the home than in the parish church. By the middle of the eighteenth century, when the plantation system was in its full flower, great families dominated the political and social life of these colonies. In the seventeenth century, wives might give birth to five or six children — and be overjoyed if at least three reached adulthood and if they themselves survived the omnipresent dangers of childbirth. When these earlier bleak statistics of life expectancy turned more promising, families in the 1750s and beyond

might have seven or eight children, most of them living to maturity.

Since all activity centered in the plantation manor, the celebration of a new birth also took place there. A few weeks after birth, parents arranged for a home baptism and christening. The ceremonies themselves, including the choice of godparents, were followed by the main event: sumptuous dining and joyous dancing. The tutor at Robert Carter’s Nomini Hall in Virginia reported that a christening was “one of the chief times for Diversion here.” Indeed, he put that ritual in the same category — as entertainment — with cockfights, fish-feasts, horse races, and fancy dress balls. Even in quite large families (seventeen children were born at Nomini Hall to Anne Tasker Carter) the arrival of each healthy child brought more festivities.

The pleasure continued as the family grew, with parents taking pride in their children’s development and accomplishments. That same tutor for the large Carter family, Philip Fithian, reported that both parents had “a manner of instructing and dealing with children far superior, I may say with confidence, to any I have ever seen, in any place, or in any family.” Fithian, a native of New Jersey and graduate of Princeton, wrote not as a proud Virginian but as a young outsider impressed with the warm, even indulgent, relationships between parents and children. Though the family patriarch, Robert Carter III, had some seventy thousand acres to oversee, along with artisans, tenant farmers, a dancing master, a music master, a tutor, and some five hundred slaves, he nonetheless found time for his children. The mother, Anne Carter, nursed her own children except when, overwhelmed by sheer numbers, she found it necessary to use a wet nurse, often a slave.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Planters’ daughters shared in the family’s affection and training more often than in its wealth. The rule of primogeniture — under which the eldest son inherited the land and the home — prevailed in the Chesapeake until Thomas Jefferson urged its abolition in Virginia in the 1780s. Even if land was divided among the children, that division was generally limited to the sons. The division of labor was more nearly even, with boys working outside the “great house,” girls within. Imitating and directed by their mothers, girls worked at cooking, cleaning, knitting, spinning, and perhaps gardening. In larger and wealthier homes, both mother and daughters might confine themselves to supervising servants or slaves who performed the actual tasks. With girls’

occupational roles thus clearly defined, Virginia's William Byrd II could in the early eighteenth century boast of his own daughters that "they are every Day up to their Elbows in Housewifery, which will qualify them effectually for useful Wives and if they live long enough, for Notable Women." Fithian noted that young girls also recognized their future role as mothers; they stuffed cloths and rags "under their Gowns just below their Apron-Strings, [and] were prodigiously Charmed at their resemblance to Pregnant Women."

By the age of five or six, boys no longer wore the long gowns of babyhood and put on "breeches" as a kind of initiation into the male world. More deliberate initiation came through the father's increased companionship with his son, as he took him not only outside into the fields, but on trips to neighboring plantations and into nearby villages. When a boy was old enough to ride a horse, he might be dispatched as a messenger, carrying instructions or invitations across the countryside. Visitors from other areas were impressed with the independence of young plantation sons, one commenting that "a Virginia youth of 15 years is already such a man as he will be at twice that age. At 15, his father gives him a horse and a negro, with which he riots about the country, attends every fox-hunt, horserace, and cock-fight, and does nothing else whatever." Most fathers, however, took satisfaction in a son's growing independence, just as most sons sought parental approval above all else. Beyond the bonds of affection, the bonds of economic reality held the family together, the sons in particular dependent upon their father's generosity in bestowing on them land. For although primogeniture remained the custom through most of the eighteenth century, more and more fathers found that the abundance of land allowed them to provide all their sons with some property, although the eldest received by far the greatest share, as well as the plantation house itself.

SLAVE FAMILY LIFE

The wealthy Chesapeake family stood in sharp contrast to the small farmer on the frontier, where large fortunes simply did not exist, and the contrast was even starker, of course, with respect to the slave family, in terms not simply of material welfare but also of parental authority and family integrity. Laws gave virtually no protection to the slave family — indeed, did not even recognize slave marriages. The separation of husbands from wives, and children from parents, occurred with tragic regularity. Yet somehow many slave families survived more or less intact, especially if the

white master saw some merit in allowing a father to help feed his children, a mother to cook for and clothe her own. But that this did not everywhere prevail is evident in a 1774 petition of Boston slaves to the Massachusetts legislature: "Our children are taken from us by force," they noted, "and sent many miles from us where we seldom or ever see them again, there to be made slaves of for life which sometimes is very short by reason of being dragged from their mother's breast." Boston's small slave population at least had a voice; even that was denied to the enslaved almost everywhere else.

Some masters took care to see that pregnant slaves were not overworked and that mothers giving birth had sufficient "lying in" time. The rate of deaths in childbirth was about the same for white and black women, but infant mortality was far higher in the slave family. Above all else, slaves who could not control their own destinies confronted the awful reality that neither could they control the destinies of their own children. When the New Jersey Quaker John Woolman traveled through the colonies in the 1750s, he was distressed to see the wretched condition of the slaves — and even more distressed to see many Quakers justifying their ownership of slaves. One justification he often heard was that slaves were being rescued from horrible circumstances in Africa. If so, Woolman wrote in 1757, that "would incite us to use them kindly, that, as strangers brought out of affliction, their lives might be happy among us." But that is not what he saw all around him. Rather, he saw a deplorable failure to recognize that "they are human creatures, whose souls are as precious as ours, and who may receive the same help and comfort from Holy Scriptures as we do."

∞ *Servants and Slaves*

America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attracted few immigrants from Europe's elite or privileged ranks. What it attracted, and what it so urgently required, was labor. Many immigrants, of course, worked for themselves, clearing the land, erecting a crude shelter, tilling the soil, and hungrily awaiting the first harvest. But an enormous number worked for others, either as servants or as slaves. Within the white population alone, one recent estimate suggests that about half of all immigrants arrived as servants. Within the involuntary black immigrant population, the percentage of slaves by the eighteenth century was virtually total.



Slaves Dancing This eighteenth-century watercolor shows slaves enjoying a moment of recreation — and preserving some of the culture of their homelands. The instruments the men play are African in origin and the patterns on the scarves the women wear on their heads are reminiscent of African tribal ones.

Both servants and slaves might be regarded as part of the master's extended family, but that is not to sentimentalize their roles. If children were under stern parental discipline, required to share in the field labor or sent away to outsiders to learn a trade, then other household laborers could certainly expect an authority that was at best firm and at worst inhumanly cruel. Parents who knew what was “best” for their children did not hesitate to enforce what was “best” on their servants and slaves.

THE EARLY SLAVE TRADE

During the entire colonial period, about 1.5 million slaves were imported into the British colonies, the majority sent to the Caribbean and the Southern Colonies. Between 1741 and 1760, some 267,000 slaves arrived in the West Indies, 63,000 in the Chesapeake, Carolinas, and Georgia, but only 1,000 in the Middle Colonies and about the same number in New England. New England and the Middle Colonies were certainly not hotbeds of abolitionist sentiment, nor was opposition to slavery widespread. The question was not morality, but economy. Other forms of labor sufficed on the small farm, or in the production of wheat, or in the raising of horses and cattle. Outside of the South, New York had the larg-

est number of slaves, but most of these were employed as household servants, particularly among those wishing to flaunt their wealth by having slaves to serve their guests.

Patterns of bound labor varied widely from period to period and from area to area. In the British colonies, in massive numbers slave laborers came to be identified primarily with the Caribbean islands and the mainland South. Sugar in the former and tobacco and rice in the latter on the large plantations required enormous quantities of workers, a need that for a time was met with white indentured servants. By around 1680, however, three developments led to a sharp shift in the South away from white

servants and toward black slaves. First, employment opportunities and wages both increased in England, drying up the ready supply of potential indentured immigrants. Second, the number of blacks captured in Africa and sold to the slavers increased to the point where the purchase of slaves (and their progeny) for lifetime servitude became more economically attractive than buying a white servant for a period of only four to seven years. Third, black slaves came to be seen as more tractable, less threatening to the social order, and less likely than whites to succeed in escaping.

In Virginia, for example, Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 demonstrated to the Tidewater elite what happened when armed frontier whites, newly released from bondage and deeply aggrieved over their inferior status, took matters into their own hands. “How miserable that man is,” Governor William Berkeley noted, who had to govern a colony where six out of every seven inhabitants were “poor, indebted, discontented, and armed.” Importing black slaves would alleviate this situation because they would not be armed, nor ever be released from their “contract.” People of a distinctly different race and culture would become the workers, the laboring caste, allowing whites to achieve a greater degree of unity with each other. Whites might also come to a consensus on certain principles in which all — all of the non-slave caste, that is — could equally share. In colonial Virginia, as historian Edmund S. Morgan has pointed out, the paradox and cruel irony is that American freedom was born out of American slavery.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, slavery was flourishing in Maryland as in Virginia, and in 1750 blacks — overwhelmingly enslaved — accounted for more than one third of the population. In the tobacco-dominated Chesapeake region, the largest plantations developed labor forces of hundreds of slaves. By the second half of the eighteenth century, about 10 percent of plantations had more than one hundred slaves, another 10 percent more than fifty. Because tobacco used up land quickly, planters constantly needed more workers for clearing new land, planting corn in old land and restoring fertility by penning cattle in a given plot, meanwhile doing the time-consuming work of tending steadily to the newly planted tobacco seedlings. Tobacco planting could start as early as February, with all harvesting not complete until the first autumn frost. In the depths of winter, slaves kept busy pulling up stumps, making hogsheads for the tobacco, and mending fences that required constant repair.

REVOLTS AND RUNAWAYS

In South Carolina, where rice was the dominant crop, the black population exceeded that of whites by 1720 and for the remainder of the colonial period that black numerical dominance persisted. This demographic imbalance made South Carolinians especially fearful of slave revolts, though this anxiety was endemic to the South generally. In 1739 about twenty slaves broke into a warehouse near the Stono River in South Carolina, confiscated arms and ammunition, and the next day killed ten whites and burned several houses. The Stono rebels, now numbering about sixty blacks, then set out for St. Augustine, where the Spanish had promised them refuge. The South Carolina militia soon overtook them, however; the rebellion was brutally suppressed, and about forty blacks were killed. So extravagant was the punishment of blacks who had participated in the insurrection that the colonial Assembly in 1740 prescribed limits

for bodily mutilation or torture, scolding slave owners for conduct “highly unbecoming those who profess themselves Christians.”

More often, rebellion took the form of fleeing. The best evidence for the frequency of runaways was the number of advertisements in colonial newspapers for the return of fugitives who might be identified by distinguishing marks or scars. Such an advertisement in South Carolina in 1770 called for help in locating a seven-months pregnant runaway “named Kate, about 32 years old, of a yellowish complexion, hollow jaw’d, a pouting look, all her upper fore-teeth gone, and speaks good English.” Sometimes the newspaper notice indicated that the slave had recovered from smallpox, which left obvious scars. Distinctive clothing might also be noted, though often the description was of little help: he “has nothing on but an old rag about his middle.”

When a black was caught away from his or her proper abode (and without a pass), the advertisement could take the form of a “found” rather than of a “lost.” Thus the sheriff of Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1767 reported having several unclaimed blacks in his jail. Two had nothing with them “but an old Negro cloth jacket, and an old blue sailor’s jacket without sleeves.” Another, “named Sampson, about 5 feet, 10 inches high, about 25 years of age, well made, very black, . . . is much marked on his body and arms with his country marks” — that is, the tribal scars he had brought from Africa. The sheriff urged the owners of these men “to come and pay the fees and take them away.”

SLAVE “JUSTICE”

When runaways were caught, as they generally were, punishment was severe. Though it generally took the form of whipping, punishment could be more extreme, including imprisonment, exportation, or execution. Legal codes gave every protection to the master and his testimony, and little to the slaves, either individually

To be sold by the subscribers,

A Valuable tract of land near the river May, in St. Helena parish, belonging to the estate of James Macpherson, jun. deceased, containing 500 acres; 300 acres of which is very good rice-land, and may be kept under water by two short dams, 200 acres is pine-land, and the other 200 acres exceeding good for corn or indigo. — All persons having any demands against the above estate, are desired to make them properly known to us; and all those who stand any suit indebted to the said estate are desired to settle with

SARAH MACPHERSON, Executrix.
ISAAC MACPHERSON, Executor.

A Few Hogheads of exceeding good Jamaica muscovado and prize sugars, just imported, to be sold reasonably by

JOHN DAR I.

Henry Smith at William Glover’s cow-pen, informs me of a bright bay horse, about 14 hands high, has an obscure brand on the near buttock, and on the off shoulder and buttock L., with a flower de luce on the top, a star on the right cheek, a small blaze in his forehead, and has three white feet.

CHARLES LOWNDES.

WHEREAS my wife HANNAH hath absconded from me, without any just cause; This is to give public notice, that I will not pay any debts she may contract, and desire all persons not to harbour her, as this is the second time of her elopement.

THOMAS NEILSON.

RUN away about the end of July last, from my plantation on the Five and twenty-mile Creek, on the Water-river, a new negro girl about 12 years old, named ROSE, speaks pretty good English. Whoever takes up said negro, and delivers her to me at the aforesaid plantation, or the warden of the work-house in Charles-Town, shall receive a reward of *five pounds*. And any person giving information of her being harboured by a white person, shall, on conviction of the offender, be entitled to a reward of *twenty pounds*.

SAMUEL SCOTT.

JOHNSON TUCKER, of Williamsburg, informs me of two small grey’d creatures, one a roan mare with a white down her face, a bay mare, one hind foot white, and has the mark of an old fer on her withers, branded on the off shoulder & turned up’t down, with a flower de luce, jockey it, and on the off buttock MO. — A bay gelding, his hind feet white, and branded on the off buttock with a heart, and on the off shoulder the same brand turn’d down. The owners of said drays may apply to

BENJ. WARING.

Advertising a Runaway Slave Public notices such as this were so routine in South Carolina and other major slave colonies that newspapers kept an image of a fleeing slave as part of their font of type. Notice how this advertisement warns other whites against harboring the runaway twelve-year-old slave girl, who speaks “pretty good English” despite being “newly arrived.”

or collectively. Masters (whose records survive) explained at length their difficulties with slaves whom they described as lazy, drunken, disobedient, thieving, or malingering. Slaves (who left no records) were dependent upon neutral observers passing through the area to report the excessive mistreatment and pervasive distrust. One New Englander, traveling in South Carolina in 1778-79, wrote that “a man will shoot a Negro with as little emotion as he shoots a hare, several instances of which have come within my own knowledge.” South Carolinians “have a brief way of trying Negroes for capital crimes,” he continued. “The court consists of one Justice and two freeholders, who order the Negro placed before them at any place, try him, and hang him up immediately.” The advantage of having a slave formally hanged rather than casually shot, the visitor explained, was that the government reimbursed the owner for his loss when the execution was legally carried out.

There were some legal efforts to mitigate the plight of the slave, such as declaring Sunday a day of rest for all, slave or free, and limiting the number of hours per day (twelve or fourteen) that a slave could be required to work. Often slaves were also permitted to live with their spouses and children, though any could be transferred to another part of the plantation or to another owner entirely. Males first greatly outnumbered females, though by 1770 the sex ratio was reasonably balanced. After that, with sufficient corn, meat, and possibly a small garden plot of their own, mainland slaves fared much better than their Caribbean counterparts. The natural increase that slave families provided their masters made the importation of new slaves less necessary in such places as Virginia and South Carolina.

WHITE SERVANTS

White indentured servitude generally met the unfree labor needs for the Middle Colonies and New England. And in the seventeenth century, England, Ireland, and Scotland provided most such servants, with nearly two hundred thousand arriving in America during that period. In the eighteenth century, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany took over as the major suppliers of this labor force as employment conditions improved in England. Some of the servants sent from eighteenth-century England (for example, to Georgia and Maryland) were imprisoned debtors or convicts. Ships from northern Ireland landed their human cargo mainly in the Middle Colonies, while those sailing from Catholic southern Ireland added Maryland to their other ports of call. German emigration, especially heavy to Pennsylvania in the period from 1749-1754, included many “redemptioners,” or contract workers — persons who sold their own labor or that of their children to help pay for the Atlantic crossing. Boys in a German family might be bound over for their labor until they reached twenty-one years of age, girls until they were eighteen.

In the Middle Colonies white indentured labor resembled that of servants back in England. Men in the country tended to crops and farm animals, while those in the city engaged in some craft or trained themselves to become artisans. Women were more often engaged in domestic service, either on the farm or in the town. Up to the 1740s, the lot of such servants was fairly good, since labor was scarce and the contracts consequently generous. After that time, and up to the Revolution, labor was bountiful, resulting in lower wages and a smaller bonus of money or land at the end of the servant’s term. Even in the better days,

✱ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Virginia Code on Runaways, 1662

Servitude was so central to the Virginia economy that severe penalties were imposed for runaways.

Whereas there are divers loitering runaways in this country who very often absent themselves from their masters’ service and sometimes in a long time cannot be found, [and whereas] that loss of the time and the

charge in seeking them often exceeding the value of their labor, be it therefore enacted that all runaways that shall absent themselves from their said masters’ service shall be liable to make satisfaction by service after the times by custom or indenture is expired: namely, double their times of service so neglected. And if the time of their running away was in the crop or the charge of recovering them extraordinary, the court shall

limit a longer time of service proportionable to the damage the master shall make it appear he hath sustained. . . . And in case any English servant shall run away in company of any Negroes who are incapable of making satisfaction by an addition of a time, it is enacted that the English so running away in the company with them [shall serve additional time for the loss of the Negroes’ labor as well as their own].

however, servants complained of masters who failed to meet their obligations, as masters complained of lazy, drunken, or dishonest servants. And servants, like slaves, also ran away; unlike slaves, they found it easier to blend into the wider population and remain at liberty. If caught, the servant might, like the slave, be whipped; even more likely, he or she might have the number of years under contract extended beyond the original agreement.

Labor needs in New England were met largely by native-born whites, so that there were neither great importations of slaves nor major influxes of white servants. In large farm families, all who were old enough worked either in the house or in the field as soon as age permitted. Fathers might delay allowing grown children to marry in order to keep them working longer. If servants were hired, they generally lived with the family as long as both parties found it advantageous. The worker, male or female, might be an unemployed artisan, an unmarried or widowed woman, an older son or daughter of fellow townfolk, but in any case almost always another New Englander. In this manner, New England kept its ethnic homogeneity more successfully than the other mainland colonies. Serious labor dislocations tended to be a feature only of the coastal towns where shipping, privateering, and trading rose and fell in uneven waves.

By mid-eighteenth century, indentured servitude declined throughout the colonies as free labor became more accessible and even preferable. After all, masters had to provide indentured servants with food, clothing, shelter, and some freedom bonus. All this reduced the profit margin considerably, if not eliminating the profit altogether. Free labor, on the other hand, could be picked up as needed, and quickly dropped when no longer required. In contrast to white servitude, slavery did not decline before the Revolution, but continued to grow in both absolute numbers and geographic spread.

∞ Schools and Scholars

Reflecting their quite separate histories and distinctive cultures, the colonies offered a wide variety of educational options to their youth. New England — where building a town school had almost as high a priority as building a meetinghouse — achieved the greatest success. As early as 1647 the General Court of Massachusetts ordered that when any town grew to the number of fifty families, its citizens “shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all

such children as shall resort to him to write and read.” When the number of families reached one hundred, a building to house a grammar school must be provided. Puritans not only valued literacy; they required it, so that all men and women could read the Bible, thereby (it was assumed) shielding themselves from superstition, heresy, and that “old deluder, Satan.” In the grammar school, open to both boys and girls, subjects were divided into the “academical” (including Latin, Greek, logic, literature, and history) and the “useful” (including arithmetic, accounting, surveying, navigation, and bookkeeping).

After about seven years in a grammar school, attending from six to eleven in the morning and one to five in the afternoon year-round, young men could go on to the academy for education designed specifically to prepare them for admission to college. The student’s own abilities and interests, the parents’ circumstances and desires, and economic conditions or opportunities within the colony all helped determine whether a young man would attend an academy. Since young women were not admitted to college, no academy was created for them, though occasionally a private academy would allow girls to attend the school in the very early morning or late afternoon, when the “real scholars” were not present. Other private academies offered a full day of learning opportunities, though one Scotsman was disillusioned by his daughter’s experience in such a school in Boston. In the first place, the young ladies — about twelve years of age — “do not get up even in this fine Season till 8 or 9 o’clock. Breakfast is over at ten, a little reading or work until 12, dress for dinner till 2, after noon in making or receiving Visits or going about the shops.” He concluded: “Tea, Supper, and that closes the Day and their Eyes about 11.” This particular father, at least, believed his money could be better spent in other ways.

Academies took the form chiefly of young men attaching themselves to the household of a minister, which offered a library as well as at least one person certain to have had a college education. Ministers likewise found it advantageous to supplement their meager salary by charging for room, board, and tuition, or perhaps working some of that out in the home or garden. As in any society, some ministers soon gained a reputation for being better tutors or having larger libraries, or perhaps for having a wife who prepared finer meals. In such cases, students might travel to some distant town for their academy training.

✿ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Promises for New England's

"Dutiful Child"

Puritans required literacy so that all men and women could read the Bible — and, as this extract from the 1727 New-England Primer indicates, religion was the first subject about which children learned to read.

I will fear God, and honour the King.
 I will honour my Father & Mother.
 I will obey my Superiours.
 I will submit to my Elders.
 I will love my Friends.
 I will hate no Man.
 I will forgive my Enemies, and pray to God for them.
 I will as much as in me lies keep all God's Holy Commandments.
 I will learn my catechism.
 I will keep the Lord's Day Holy.
 I will reverence God's Sanctuary, for our God is a consuming Fire.

EDUCATION AND ASSIMILATION
 IN THE MIDDLE COLONIES

In the less homogeneous Middle Colonies, the orderly and regular New England pattern failed to develop. In New Netherland, the Dutch West India Company required the creation of a school in each Dutch village, although near the end of Dutch rule settlers in New Amsterdam complained that not enough was being done "in so wild a country" to see that youth were properly instructed not only in reading and writing "but also in the knowledge and fear of the Lord." Quakers, strongest in the Middle Colonies, overcame their suspicion of formal learning long enough to establish local schools for both sexes — sometimes taught together, but more often separately. Quakers recognized that creating their own schools was essential to maintaining their religious discipline and distinctiveness. Rules for Philadelphia boys adopted in 1748, for example, specified "That none shall at any time play or keep Company with the rude boys of the Town, but shall converse, as much as they can, with their own School-fellows." Since Quakers had no professional ministry, the teaching of Latin and Greek seemed less important than inculcating practical skills. For the same reason, Quakers saw no reason to establish a college anytime during the colonial period.

Scotch-Irish made up a major element of Pennsylvania's population by the middle of the eighteenth century. Presbyterian Scots who had settled in northern Ireland (Ulster) and who suffered from economic deprivation and Parliament's discriminations cast about for other lands. Pennsylvania offered low taxes and beckoning lands. Beginning in the 1720s, these Scotch-Irish migrated in large numbers to America, most of

them debarking in Philadelphia. Finding coastal land already occupied and very expensive, the newer arrivals moved on to the backcountry where they occupied empty lands without much concern for the niceties of legal title. Despite the primitive character of their frontier life, they steadily inculcated their children with the rudiments of education. Presbyterian ministers, like their Congregational counterparts in New England, also tutored college-bound young men or launched modest academies. As a result, literacy rates among the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians hovered around 90 percent, an astounding achievement considering the conditions of their life.

Germans constituted the other major non-English element in colonial Pennsylvania. Referred to as the "Pennsylvania Dutch" (a misunderstanding of the German word *Deutsch*, which means German), these immigrants also arrived in great numbers during the first half of the eighteenth century. Many of them preferred to maintain their own educational or vocational programs in isolation from the wider community, although in 1759 Mennonites in Germantown (near Philadelphia) opened a school "free to all denominations whatsoever without any regard to Name or Sect of People." This school, like most private schools, charged tuition, but every effort was made to reduce fees for children of the poor. In general, Germans operated their own schools with textbooks and instruction both in German. This so alarmed earlier settlers, especially after a sharp rise in German immigration in the 1730s, that some non-Germans lobbied Parliament to make it illegal to import German books or print anything in German in the colonies. Parliament refused, but many Pennsylvanians continued to worry.

Even the cosmopolitan Benjamin Franklin in the 1750s complained because the Germans failed to learn English or to assimilate to the surrounding culture. “Instead of their learning our language,” Franklin wrote, “we must learn theirs, or live as in a foreign country.” He supported a charity school movement, one of whose explicit purposes was to Anglicize the German population and make the learning of English mandatory. An early manifestation of the “melting pot” theory of Americanization, these charity schools, wrote one backer, would provide the same education to German and English boys and girls with the confident expectation that “acquaintances and connections will be formed, and deeply impressed upon them in their cheerful and open moments.” Intermarriage would inevitably follow, thereby gradually erasing the “German problem.” Though this particular movement was a failure, most Germans (except for the staunchest sectarians such as the Amish) did eventually adopt the English language and blend into the English-speaking Pennsylvania culture.

Ever mindful of education’s importance in building a culturally and social stable society, Franklin continued to wrestle with plans for schooling the young, including blacks. He devised a “Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks,” and commended George Whitefield’s purchase of five thousand acres on the Delaware River “in order to erect a Negro School there.” Likewise, he joined in Quaker efforts to see that young blacks received instruction in reading, writing, and the principles of religion. And in 1758 he contacted Dr. Bray’s Associates to solicit their assistance in creating a school for blacks in Philadelphia. In all education, white or black, Franklin’s interests tended toward the useful and away from the classical. The learning of Latin and Greek he regarded as little more than a showy ornament except for those going into the ministry.

In his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, Franklin in 1749 observed that “the good Education of Youth has been esteemed by Wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of Happiness both of private Families and of Commonwealths.” He therefore urged that public-spirited citizens seek a charter for an academy and then supervise its founding and development. If some persons could take so much pleasure in gardening and horticulture that they forsook all other amusements, “why may we not expect they should acquire a Relish for that more useful Culture of young Minds?”

With his usual thoroughness, Franklin laid down the preferred curriculum that included good penmanship (learning to draw might help), good number skills (“Arithmetic, Accounts, and some of the first Principles of Geometry and Astronomy”), and certainly the English language. Quoting John Locke, he deplored forcing pupils “to learn the Grammars of foreign and dead Languages, and are never told of the Grammar of their own Tongues.” Franklin also urged studying history as an excellent way to examine “Questions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice,” as well as to see the “wonderful Effects of Oratory.” Above all, Franklin thought, history “will also give Occasion to expatiate on the Advantage of Civil Orders and Constitutions . . . the Advantages of Liberty, Mischiefs of Licentiousness, Benefits arising from good Laws and a due Execution of Justice, etc. Thus,” he concluded, “may the first Principles of sound Politics be fixed in the Minds of Youth.”

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN THE SOUTH

In the Southern Colonies, the absence of major towns (except for Charleston) precluded the establishment of urban schools or major academies. No taxes were levied for the support of education; private schools had to be financed by philanthropy, either from England or from local donors. As late as 1671 Governor William Berkeley rejoiced that Virginia had no free public schools, since he saw learning as the source of disobedience and heresy. Literacy rates, quite low in the South in the seventeenth century, remained low in the eighteenth. Perhaps half of the women in 1750 were literate, and about two-thirds of the men. For what little education the South provided went more generously to the male children; fathers in their wills set aside larger amounts of money to educate their sons than their daughters. On great plantations a tutor would be provided; neighboring children, especially if ties of kinship existed, might be included in the instructional program. Wealthy landowners could also send promising sons to an academy abroad.

Throughout the South, the serious lag in public education continued up to the Revolution and even beyond, a defect that caused Thomas Jefferson great anxiety in Virginia. In the midst of the Revolution, Jefferson took time to draft a legislative “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” calling for all free youth to receive a grammar or general school education. Then academies should be created for those “whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue” to prepare pupils for higher education. Jefferson lob-

bied hard for the passage of this bill (“the most important bill in our whole code,” he wrote), but he failed to win its approval.

In all colonies, much education took place not in classrooms but in shops and on farms. Children serving their apprenticeships learned more than just a craft. They often also learned to read and write, either through the generosity of the master craftsman or because the contract required it. And if masters did not wish to assume that task themselves, they could send the youthful learner — as a typical contract stipulated — to “a good Evening School in Order to be well instructed in reading, writing, Accounting, and the like.” From the middle of the eighteenth century on, vocational schools developed to help those who all day learned their crafts, but could spend some evenings in schools designed specifically for them. If the family failed to teach reading and writing, if the church in its catechetical instruction did not succeed in that instruction, and if academies remained restricted and elitist, then evening vocational schools, especially in urban centers, could still reach many of the working young.

THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Americans demonstrated that they no longer merely survived on the fringes of civilization. At one level, the intellectual elites participated in the European Enlightenment, joining in its rebellion against tired tradition and reveling in its embrace of reason. At a more popular level, the colonists contributed to a sweeping wave of religious revivalism that united many fervent pietists² but at the same time divided some major denominations. The Enlightenment established one of the cultural boundaries of eighteenth-century America. The other boundary was defined by the intense religious excitement known as the Great Awakening.

Leading western European thinkers framed the discourse for Enlightenment thought. Those who considered themselves friends of the Enlightenment regarded all authority, both political and religious, with grave suspicion. For many intellectuals, experience and the scientific method became the only reliable avenues to truth. Many of those who embraced reason rejected

not only biblical revelation but also all abstract speculation and metaphysical system building. Plato was scorned and theology dismissed. The focus on reason tended to be of a special sort, favoring the axiomatic, the self-evident, the commonsensical — in short, the truths known to and demonstrable by experience. Intellectually, the world was being created anew.


The English thinkers who led the way to this new world were Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isaac Newton. Bacon discarded the hoary authority of Aristotle and his deductive method of reasoning; in its place, he substituted experimentation and induction, or what we have come to call the scientific method. Locke likewise saw truth as something to be earned and learned — not inherited and not given. Truths did not descend upon us from heaven, nor were our tender minds filled with innate ideas. Truths awaited our pursuit, our discovery. Finally, Newton taught his contemporaries that God’s world was orderly, regular, and predictable. By patient observation and careful mathematical calculation, one could uncover the secrets of the universe. Not in antiquity, but in modernity did one face — and create — the future.

In America, the Enlightenment expressed itself politically in such familiar figures as Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and John Adams (1735-1826). It expressed itself religiously in the non-institutional movement called deism, which accepted the central truths of “God, freedom, and immortality” because they supposedly could be found in nature and in reason. But no special revelation was required to perceive these great truths. This new excitement for learning and new willingness to consult nature directly infused literature, art, science, medicine, and law. By 1760, Enlightenment culture had come to the colonies.

☞ *Literature: New Secular and Enduring Spiritual Concerns*

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), a native of Massachusetts, moved to Philadelphia in 1723 as a young man. There he found the stage upon which he so successfully played his many roles. His enterprise as colonial printer gave him not only high visibility but sufficient fortune to follow many other pursuits: politics, science, social organization, diplomacy, and literary production. He was both product and promoter of the Enlightenment’s penchant for new ideas, new observations, new approaches to every avenue of human endeavor. Of all his writings, none gained greater fame than his *Autobiog-*

2. Pietism places its emphasis upon the personal and experiential in religion; for fuller discussion, see below, pp. 121-23.

 IN THEIR OWN WORDS
The Enlightenment and Slavery, 1773

Benjamin Rush saw slavery as anathema to Enlightenment ideals; tragically, almost another century would pass before the institution was abolished in the United States.

And now, my countrymen, what shall I add more to rouse up your indignation against slave-keeping? Consider the many

complicated crimes it involves in it. Think of the bloody wars which are fomented by it, among the African nations. Or if these are too common to affect you, think of the pangs which attend the dissolution of the ties of nature in those who are stolen from their relations. Think of the many thousands who perish by sickness, melancholy, and suicide in their voyages to America. Pursue the poor

devoted victims to one of the West India islands, and see them exposed there to public sale. Hear their cries, and see their looks of tenderness at each other being separated. Mothers are torn from their daughters, and brothers from brothers, without the liberty of a parting embrace. Their master's name is now marked upon their breast with a red-hot iron.

raphy, which he began writing in 1771 at sixty-five years of age. For so many in his own time and later, Franklin typified what it was to be an average American: no formal education, no “first family” nobility, no inherited fortune, but nevertheless succeeding at any chosen task by his own wits and energies and ultimately becoming the confidant of philosophers and kings. “Poor Richard,” the pseudonym under which Franklin for years published almanacs filled with witty sayings and wise proverbs, ended up as “Rich Benjamin” — rich in honors, dignity, and enduring reputation.

In his *Autobiography* Franklin recounts how he helped bring learning and culture to his adopted city. In 1727 he formed “a club for mutual improvement which we called the Junto.” Meeting on Friday evenings, members took turns reading original essays on “any point of morals, politics, or natural philosophy” that they might choose. The club, which lasted nearly forty years, Franklin pronounced to be “the best school of philosophy, morality, and politics that then existed in the province.” Four years later, Franklin encouraged Junto members to pool their books to make a common library, which eventually became the Library Company of Philadelphia, still flourishing today. Of this achievement, Franklin later wrote that it “was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous.” These libraries, he added, “have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defense of their privileges.”

The move from discussing “morals, politics, or natural philosophy” to creating a library for “the common tradesmen and farmers” is typical Franklin. Theory

must have its practical application; else it remains too far removed from everyday life and the ordinary concerns of women and men. Whether studying the gulf currents, observing the first hot air balloon crossing of the English Channel, considering the relationship between color and heat, or inventing bifocal glasses, Franklin was forever concerned with demonstrating that knowledge had consequences — not just for the scholar, but for all humankind. Moreover, scholarly pursuit could never justify the failure to be “a good Husband or Wife, a good Neighbour or Friend, a good Subject or Citizen.” In 1760, Franklin wrote to a friend of his impatience with one Nicholas Gimcrack “who neglected the Care of his Family to pursue Butterflies.” Such a man becomes a legitimate “Object of Ridicule” and fair game for satire.

In 1744 Franklin took the lead in creating the American Philosophical Society, the first learned society in the young country. While the Junto was limited to Philadelphia alone, the Philosophical Society was intended to be far wider in scope, even extending to interested parties abroad. Since “the first drudgery of settling new colonies . . . is now pretty well over,” Franklin noted, men of curiosity and genius could begin “to cultivate the finer arts and improve the common stock of knowledge.” Franklin, far more than a mere organization man, proceeded himself to take the lead in improving humankind’s “common stock of knowledge.”

KEEPING A RECORD

If autobiography as a literary form was unusual in Franklin’s time (the very word belongs to the nineteenth century), the keeping of a diary was commonplace throughout the colonial period. Puritans were the most dedicated diarists, but southern gentlemen followed the practice as well. Of these, William Byrd II

✱ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**A Virginia Gentleman,
Early Eighteenth Century**

Many colonists kept diaries, and William Byrd's offers a glimpse into the life of a learned, cultured Virginia planter.

July 7, 1709. I rose at 5 o'clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek in Josephus. I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast. I danced my dance [did exercises], and settled my accounts. I read some Latin. It was extremely hot. I ate stewed mutton for dinner. In the afternoon it began to rain and blow

very violently so that it blew down my fence. It likewise thundered. In all the time I have been in Virginia I never heard it blow harder. I read Latin again and Greek in Homer. In the evening we took a walk in the garden. I said my prayers and had good health, good humor, and good thoughts, thanks be to God Almighty.

of Westover, Virginia, is best known for his wit as well as for his freewheeling observations of and experiments in plantation manners and morals. Born on the family estate, Byrd was sent to London for his education in the classics (he read Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, in addition to modern languages) but also in the ways of high society that he so clearly relished.

Although he could not spend all his years in the company of London's finest, he did his best to bring that flavor into Virginia generally and onto the Westover plantation specifically. His diary records this effort, along with the routine running of his huge estate and his not-so-routine dalliances with the opposite sex.

In his diary, William Byrd described such matters as choosing a gardener, disciplining his children, playing billiards, finding a good French wine, doing his accounts, reading Italian or Dutch literature, traveling to the colonial capital in Williamsburg, attending church, and saying (or forgetting) his prayers. For example, after a riotous night in London in 1718, he got home about five o'clock in the morning "and neglected to say my prayers." But after several hours of sleep, he rose about ten and sought to make amends as he "read a chapter [in the Bible] in Hebrew and some Greek in Homer. I said my prayers, and had boiled milk for breakfast."

For Byrd, the ritual of religion alternated regularly with the ritual of indulgence, as he felt compelled to catalogue every conquest of women, from servants and slaves to ladies and other gentlemen's wives. A male chauvinist without doubt, Byrd nonetheless seriously objected to his North Carolina neighbors because, said Byrd, they made their women do all the work. The women were sent out into the fields at sunup, while the men "lie and snore till the sun has risen one-third of his course and dispersed all the unwholesome damp." Even then, most men were content to smoke their pipes and stay close to "the chimney corner." In his extensive

diaries as well as in his carefully revised *History of the Dividing Line* (between Virginia and North Carolina), William Byrd produced lively prose, often laced with rich sarcasm and sharp observation.

THE POWER OF THE SERMON

The most prevalent form of literature in colonial America and the most widely printed, especially in the seventeenth century, remained the sermon. Sermons were heard not only in the meetinghouses and churches on Sundays, but at funerals, at midweek meetings, at the ordination of new ministers, and on occasions of public fasts or thanksgivings. Sermons, based on a biblical text, began by expounding the scriptural context, then asserting the doctrine that the text suggested. After considering all the possible objections against the doctrine being set forth, the minister concluded with a reassertion of its truth along with its immediate application to the lives of his parishioners. Sermons in New England labored to be "plain," that is, clear and convincing, free of fancy rhetoric or irrelevant musing. In the South, on the other hand, Anglican sermons featured rhetorical flourishes and "entertaining" conceits. Also in the South, the itinerant preaching of Baptists and Presbyterians elevated the extemporaneous sermon to a new art form; Patrick Henry was among those greatly influenced by this oratorical style. North and south, however, the effective preacher was one who drove doctrinal truths "into the hearts and consciences of men like an arrow." Sermons served to advertise the promises of the New World, to warn of impending doom when men and women failed to obey God's clear commands, to interpret the meaning of wars or earthquakes or plagues, but above all else to hold out the promise of God's ever powerful grace and saving love. If colonial Americans missed all other forms of literature, they rarely escaped the sermon.

∞ *The Waning of Artistic Provincialism*

Artistic representation, whether the Navajo sandpainting, the Hopi woven basket, the Seneca head-dress, or the decorative jewelry of many tribes, is as universal as it is irrepressible. So it should occasion no surprise that American colonists, even without great artistic centers or teachers, nonetheless produced paintings that would ultimately win much admiration abroad. So also in architecture, after the period of earliest settlement — Franklin’s “first drudgery” — had passed, colonists began consciously to improve the style of their homes, their churches, and their public buildings, resorting to copybooks from abroad and master craftsmen at home.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the colonies had produced an abundance of folk art: portraiture, tombstone carving, elaborate calligraphy, painted tavern signs and wrought-iron weathervanes, knitting, needlework, and quilting. But also by that time, such prominent artists as Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, and Charles Willson Peale had been born in (respectively) Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maryland. Soon each of these men would come into his artistic maturity at about the same time that the colonies embarked upon an exercise of political maturity.

Born in 1738, Benjamin West by 1760 determined to study the great painters of the Renaissance. Journeying to Italy, he concentrated on Raphael and Titian, then by 1763 settled in London where he remained for the rest of his life. But his interest in things American and especially in budding American artists who chose to study with him never waned. In 1771 he decided to depict a battle he remembered from his youth: the successful assault of the British against Quebec in September, 1759, and the consequent fall of Canada to England. Though a major victory, it resulted in a bitter loss with the death of General James Wolfe. West would portray that poignant moment on the field of battle; however, he would clothe the men not in the classical togas of antiquity (for that was the fashion), but in the military uniforms of their own time and place, and the Indians



Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe* In a groundbreaking artistic move, West elected to render the soldiers in this painting in the uniforms of the day rather than in Greek and Roman battle dress. “The same truth that guides the pen of the historian,” West observed, “should govern the pencil of the painter.”

in their native dress. Strongly advised against so radical a departure from artistic convention, West replied that the Greeks and Romans knew nothing of the time or place that he chose to mark. The resulting masterpiece, *The Death of General Wolfe*, won widest acclaim not only in England, but throughout the Western world.

Born in the same year as West, John Singleton Copley grew up near the docks in Boston, helping his widowed mother to make a living in her tobacco shop. In his teens, he began painting extensively, teaching himself or learning from the occasional painter passing through the city. In his late twenties he submitted a painting to London’s Society of Artists for possible exhibit there. The painting, *Boy with a Squirrel*, was unsigned, and neither Benjamin West nor Sir Joshua Reynolds had the faintest idea who could have submitted such a fine, natural, unstylized portrait. West recognized the flying squirrel as an American animal such as he had seen in Pennsylvania, then noted that the wood on which the canvas was stretched was American pine. So an American had done it, but who? Finally, the captain who had brought the canvas across the ocean came forward to say that the painter’s name was Copley. The name meant nothing

in London, but that would soon change. For after *Boy with a Squirrel* (painted in 1766) was exhibited, correspondence between West and Copley sprang up. Meanwhile, Copley married well in 1769 (into a Loyalist family), and became a wealthy and much admired portrait painter in Boston. His *Paul Revere* is perhaps his best-known work, but he painted other patriotic heroes such as Sam Adams, John Hancock, and Mercy Otis Warren. Ironically, his reputation as a painter of revolutionary leaders obscures the fact that in 1774 he left for London, never to return to his native land.

Charles Willson Peale, on the other hand, went to London in 1767 to study with West but by 1769 was back in his native Maryland. There, and in the cultural capital of Philadelphia, Peale painted before, during, and after the Revolution, as conspicuous in his patriotism as in his art. In 1772, he painted the first of some sixty portraits of George Washington, and soon after began the portrait of his still growing family. Deeply impressed by the great masters of Europe, Peale gave to his four sons the names Titian, Rubens, Raphael, and Rembrandt. (The first two became naturalists, the last two painters.) Like Franklin, Peale was an organizer, for he managed to form the new nation's first natural history museum (depicted in his famous self-portrait, *The Artist in the Museum*) as well as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Friend of Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and other leaders, Peale never retreated from the political world, but plunged into it with vigor.

Colonial architecture, of necessity, had rude beginnings. Colonists used the materials at hand: chiefly wood, but also brick and stone. With an axe (sawmills were relatively rare in the earlier years), timbers could be split to erect the basic clapboard house with a large central fireplace on the first floor, a kitchen to one side, and a living room to the other. A ladder might lead to a second floor where two sleeping rooms accommodated the colonial family. By the eighteenth century, building plans grew more ambitious, as more people could afford homes that provided additional comforts and commodious space. Craftsmen faithfully copied or modified drawings found in such English books as James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* or William Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones*.

Peter Harrison, a native of England, settled in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1740, making his living as a merchant — not as an architect. In 1748 he designed the Redwood Library in Newport, introducing the neo-classical style associated with the sixteenth-century Italian, Andrea Palladio. Fourteen years later, he ex-



John Singleton Copley, *Boy with a Squirrel* The boy in Copley's famous painting is Henry Pelham, the painter's younger half-brother.

ecuted plans for what is now the nation's oldest Jewish house of worship, Touro Synagogue, also in Newport. Later in the eighteenth century, another American, more often thought of in a political context, took up architecture as a serious study. Thomas Jefferson, likewise influenced by Palladio, began work on his own home in Virginia in 1769, spending the next thirty or forty years — when other duties permitted — in modeling and remodeling his cherished Monticello. Architecture, whether in Richmond, Charlottesville, Washington, or France, continued to occupy and fascinate Jefferson who reported, simply but truthfully, that architecture “is my delight.”

☞ “*And All Was Light*”: Science and the American Enlightenment

The “scientific revolution” was predominantly a European event. Such names as Copernicus (1473-1543, Polish), Galileo (1564-1642, Italian), Kepler (1571-1630, German), and Newton (1642-1727, English) suggest the multinational character of a movement that so radically altered the way that people thought about the earth and the heavens of which it is a part. By the time of the Enlightenment, the results of fresh scientific in-

vestigations had been so widely absorbed into Western culture that even a few Americans readied themselves to join in that scientific revolution.

The early eighteenth-century English poet Alexander Pope wrote that “Nature and Nature’s law lay hid in night;/God said, ‘Let Newton be,’ and all was light.” This poetic compression honored Newton’s noted achievement in bringing natural laws out of their dark obscurity. For example, Newton had helped to “tame” the comets by proving that they, like the planets, followed the regular order of nature. If the universe was truly orderly, human beings needed to know more about its origin, its size, and its “rules.” A modest place to begin with those large — and still haunting questions — was with the earth’s own sun: how far away, how far from the other planets orbiting it? In 1761 and 1769 European astronomers had two rare opportunities to observe the passage of Venus across the face of the sun. By a careful measurement of the time it took for this “transit of Venus,” they could use Kepler’s law to calculate the distance of Venus from the earth, the distance of Venus from the sun, and the distance of the earth from the sun.

David Rittenhouse of Philadelphia, a clockmaker by trade, trained himself to be an astronomer, even constructing a mechanical model of the solar system (an orrery) that showed the earth’s motion in relation to that of the other planets. For the 1769 observation of the transit of Venus, Rittenhouse designed a special clock as well as a telescope that mechanically followed the planet’s path across the sun. Aided by Franklin’s American Philosophical Society, Rittenhouse — when all the mathematics were finally worked out — offered results that put the earth’s distance from the sun at a remarkably accurate 92,800,000 miles. A few years later, Rittenhouse gave the same careful attention to the study of a

total solar eclipse, with the consequence that eclipses would soon be seen more as objects of scientific investigation than as alarming signs of divine intervention.

Exploring the nature of electricity, however, gave colonial America the greatest opportunity for making a contribution to science and winning enormous respect abroad. Hearing a lecture on electricity in 1746, Benjamin Franklin decided that the subject needed more systematic study. Up to this point, such a familiar phenomenon as static electricity could be a subject for popular lectures, idle speculation, or mild amusement, but no one really understood what was going on. Franklin would change all that. He discovered that an electrical charge could be created by rubbing a glass sphere and then send the charge along a wire, storing it in a jar. For a new field, a new vocabulary was required: the glass sphere was the generator, the wire the conductor, and the Leyden jar the condenser. The amount of electricity that the jar could hold depended on the thickness of the glass, with the kind of charge (negative or positive) being different on the outside from the inside of the jar. Holding the jar and touching the wire gave a shock. “The knocking down of six men was performed with two of my large jars,” Franklin reported, “not being fully charged.”

Franklin’s most famous (and dangerous) experiment was to fly a kite into a lightning storm in order to demonstrate that lightning and laboratory-made electricity were of the same stuff. In Franklin’s words, the “experiment of drawing down the lightning” was conducted “in order to demonstrate its sameness with the electric fluid.” He suspected a sameness because both in the laboratory and in the sky electricity produced light, swift motion, crooked direction, a tearing of whatever it passed through. There was also a “crack or noise in

✿ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Benjamin Franklin as Enlightenment Optimist

In this letter, written from France in 1780, Franklin views scientific progress with an almost religious awe.

Dear Sir [Joseph Priestly],

... I always rejoice to hear of your being still employ’d in experimental researches into

nature, and of the success you meet with.

The rapid progress *true* science now makes occasions my regretting sometimes that I was born too soon. It is impossible to imagine the heights to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the power of man over matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large masses of their gravity, and give them absolute levity, for the sake of easy transport. Agriculture may diminish its labour and double its

produce; all diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting that even of old age, and our lives lengthened at pleasure beyond the antediluvian standard. O that more science were in as fair a way of improvement, that men would cease to be wolves to one another, and that human beings would at length learn what they now improperly call humanity! . . .



A Page from *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1750 *Poor Richard's Almanack* is most widely remembered as a repository for Benjamin Franklin's countless aphorisms. But it also contained all the other information featured in almanacs of its day: calendar, weather, astronomical, and — as shown here — astrological data.

exploding” and a “sulphureous smell.” Once he had shown that lightning was indeed a form of electricity, Franklin proceeded to invent the lightning rod to conduct lightning safely from a building's highest point into the ground, protecting both life and property. But some thought this impious, seizing from God's hands one of his weapons for chastising a disobedient people. After an earthquake struck the Boston area in 1755, one minister announced that this was divine retribution for those “iron points invented by the sagacious Mr. Franklin.”

When a friend and fellow investigator in London, Peter Collinson, published Franklin's letters to him under the title of *Experiments and Observations on Electricity* (1751), the sagacious Franklin found himself the idol of Europe, admitted to England's Royal Society, to France's Academy of the Sciences, awarded medals, honors, and degrees. His own countrymen responded with honorary degrees to the man who had never at-

tended college: Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, and Europe's universities all helped transform Ben Franklin into Dr. Franklin. Just as the world had been ready to understand the orderly motion of planets and the regular appearances of comets, so now the world was eager to learn more about this strange “fluid” and someday to harness its potential power. Though his work with electricity was enough by itself to make him a great celebrity, Franklin rested hardly at all, as he went on to introduce daylight saving time, to invent the “Franklin stove,” and to anticipate the military use of aerial balloons. Beyond all that, of course, Franklin still had decades ahead to devote to his country's cause.

3 Practical Sciences: Medicine and Law

If the motion of the heavens and the electrical fluid were becoming better understood in the eighteenth century, the fluids and fevers of the human body continued to mystify and confound. Contagions such as smallpox ravaged victims who turned in desperation to their physicians, who were — with equal desperation — seeking somewhere a cause and a cure. Along with greater understanding of the Newtonian sort, doctors sought greater professionalism and better medical education. Lawyers, gradually edging aside the clergy as the principal colonial profession, grew in significance and number during the eighteenth century as questions of English constitutionalism and American rights steadily gathered momentum. Just as Bacon had thrown off the mantle of Aristotle, so now a new class of lawyers might find it necessary to explore fresh understandings of the working of the body politic.

In the colonial period, many Americans treated their ills and defects just as they treated those of their farm animals or crops: that is, by reading some general handbook of practical remedies, or consulting their neighbors on the most expedient procedure. Learned doctors were rare, and even where they could be found, their advice was not at all clearly superior to folk wisdom. For most diseases, doctors prescribed harsh laxatives and extensive “letting” of blood — a treatment that more often dangerously weakened than benefited the patient. On the plantation, along the frontier, in much of rural America, the sick looked only to themselves or their families (or sometimes their ministers) for whatever medical assistance might be given.

In the treatment of disease, many theorists held that all diseases were related: that is, smallpox could become malaria, dysentery could become yellow fever.

And if diseases were of similar origin, then cures should be similar, if not identical. Such ignorance of specific causes and cures meant that the line between folk medicine and “professional” medicine in the eighteenth century was thin indeed. This helps to account for the low reputation that physicians (“Doctors of Physick”) endured. Surgeons stood even lower in esteem, pursuing a craft that had traditionally belonged to barbers. Most colonials preferred to learn from the non-professional: their own slaves, or neighboring Indians, or trial and error at home. Jefferson bemoaned the “adventurous physician who goes beyond the ‘scanty field of what is known’” into “the boundless region of what is unknown.” Medical fashions come and go, Jefferson noted, “like the dresses of the annual doll-babies from Paris, becoming, from their novelty, the vogue of the day.” It was a matter of sheerest luck when a patient was treated according to a vogue that actually worked; more often, Jefferson concluded, the patient “gets well in spite of the medicine.”

In the cities, where most doctors could be found, most epidemics also erupted. Smallpox struck Boston with deadly force in 1721, as it had so often hit the crowded community before. While such a disaster might be seen by some as a just punishment from a wrathful God, such a view did not mitigate the suffering of the afflicted or the sorrow of bereaved parents. Was there no escape? Previously there had been none, but now a novel technique was being advocated in Europe that might mitigate the severity of the attack. The newly discovered and largely untried method, inoculation, seemed on its face irrational, if not mad: deliberately to transplant infected material from an ill person to the skin of a healthy person.

“SECURITY FROM A DISTEMPER BY
RUSHING INTO THE EMBRACES OF IT”

“Madness” was precisely what a great many in Boston concluded when they heard about inoculation, among them the only physician with a real medical degree (from Edinburgh), Dr. William Douglass. Arrayed against him and the populace at large was the Congregationalist minister Cotton Mather, who as a member of the Royal Society of London had read in its *Transactions* of a Turkish doctor who had tried inoculation and discovered that, while the patient did get sick, the fever was much less severe than among those who caught the pox naturally. Mather, who read all this in 1714, immediately wrote to a doctor in London seeking more information about what England had done and what he, Mather, might do should an epidemic afflict Boston again. En-

gland, it turned out, had done nothing: the experiment remained unproven. On the other hand, the mortality rates with smallpox continued unacceptably high.

When the epidemic arrived aboard a ship from the West Indies in April 1721, Mather was determined to push hard for inoculation. He persuaded another doctor (who had been educated only as an apprentice), Zabdiel Boylston, to employ the paradoxical and highly controversial method. Boylston inoculated his six-year-old son and two black slaves. As evidence mounted that the resulting infections were mild and immunity from further infection long lasting, many other Bostonians got Boylston to inoculate them. Public outrage was enormous: the town’s governing body even passed a law against further inoculations. Dr. Douglass thought



Benjamin Franklin In this dramatic painting by Benjamin West, Benjamin Franklin captures the lightning from the storm and proves it to be electricity. Franklin gained fame all over the Western world for his scientific achievement. As the emissary of Revolutionary America in France, he would be called “the Electrical Ambassador.”



Cotton Mather One of the most formidable intellectuals of early eighteenth-century New England, Mather was a transitional figure between the stern Calvinist orthodoxy of the seventeenth century and the emerging rationalism of the Enlightenment. He took a deep interest in the natural sciences of his day, experienced a crisis of conscience in the Salem witchcraft controversy, and struggled with the Puritan faith of which he was one of the foremost guardians.

the experiment scientifically absurd and theologically intolerable since it came from people faithful to “the prophet Mahomet.” And people unquestionably did get sick from inoculation. How wild and absurd, to quote a South Carolina physician, to seek “Security from a Dis-temper by rushing into the Embraces of it.”

Despite laws and outcries, Boylston continued to inoculate. By November public resentment reached a peak sufficient for a bomb (which did not explode) to be thrown through the window of Cotton Mather’s home carrying the message: “Cotton Mather, You Dog,

Damn you: I’ll inoculate you with this, with a Pox to you.” When, however, both the fever of public opinion and that of the pox subsided, statistics demonstrated the validity of what Mather and Boylston had done. Of the approximately three hundred persons inoculated, only five or six had died; of the five thousand who caught the disease naturally (almost half the population of Boston), nearly nine hundred perished. In other words, the chances for survival with inoculation were roughly ten times greater than for those stricken without it. Before the eighteenth century was over, the battle for inoculation had been won. The world of disease had its “rules” just as the heavenly bodies had theirs. Francis Bacon would have applauded another application of the scientific method.

A GROWING NEED FOR LAWYERS

Lawyers also came in for their share of sharp rebuke, often being grouped with doctors and clergymen as among the chief “scourges of mankind.” One New Englander compared law to the lottery: “great charge, little benefit.” Making a living off the misery of others struck colonists as inappropriate, if not vile. It was widely believed that law as a profession should only be followed by those who also pursued the “honest” labor of a farmer or merchant — for, said the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, it was “a base and vile thing to plead for money or reward.” Such sentiments reflected a society suspicious of any elite and jealous of its own abilities to rectify wrongs and administer rough justice.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, estates had grown large, land titles had become contentious, and commercial transactions and maritime disputes had acquired considerable complexity. As the need for lawyers grew, so attention to their education and training increased. Most aspiring lawyers (Thomas Jefferson, for example) simply “read law” with a practicing lawyer or with someone well acquainted with the history of English Common Law as well as English local

law. In Jefferson's case, William and Mary College professor George Wythe served as his tutor and guide. John Adams studied with a practicing lawyer, Jeremiah Gridley, who (before the advent of more formal legal education at Harvard) trained many of Massachusetts's best legal minds. Other parents, if sufficiently affluent, sent their sons to London to be trained in law at the Inns of Court; William Byrd II was one such. By the 1760s, both Philadelphia and Charleston had around thirty young men studying law in London.

By that time — as we shall see in Chapter 5 — other tensions in the air suggested the need for sharp students of law. Local assemblies quarreled with their royal governors; colonists questioned their status as citizens in the British Empire; Parliament pushed its legal powers to the limit, or perhaps beyond, so far as the restless foreign plantations were concerned. Reason should be called upon here, as in other realms, to determine what new circumstances and new understandings should dictate. Just in time, the growing power, prestige, and number of lawyers spoke in behalf of not only a colonial culture but a colonial cause as well.

THE GREAT AWAKENING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Seventeenth-century colonists took religion seriously; so did their eighteenth-century heirs, as popular preaching and traveling ministers brought evangelical piety to a broad swath of the American people, white and black, rich and poor, urban and rural, educated and simple. Revivalism and concern for the soul's condition swept from Georgia to Maine, meeting only a few pockets of resistance or indifference. Before the high waters of zeal

and fervor subsided, churches had been enlivened or divided and the religious shape of British North America changed radically. African Americans joined in the Awakening, though they hardly needed that movement to convince them of the reality of personal and passionate experience of the divine. In higher education, the Awakening also had its impact, both on colleges already founded and in the creation of new ones. The Enlightenment largely moved among a limited elite; the Awakening, in contrast, found its audience in marketplaces and fields, in crowded churches and open assemblies. The first great popular movement spanning all the thirteen colonies, the Awakening helped create a sense of community that could begin to be called "American."

George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards

When the Awakening erupted, the colonies already showed considerable religious diversity. Congregationalism (or Puritanism) dominated most of New England, while Anglicanism (or the Episcopal Church) held sway throughout much of the South. Both these official, "established" churches did their utmost to keep other religions far removed from their soil, but by the middle of the eighteenth century both had failed to maintain a religious monopoly. Baptists, Dutch and German Reformed, Jews, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Quakers, and Roman Catholics added their color to the religious painting. The diversity that prevailed when the revivals broke out would soon sharply increase both in number and direction.

NEW METHODS OF PREACHING

The catalyst in this all-colonial excitement was a young English minister named George Whitefield. An early

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

George Whitefield and the Great Awakening, 1739

Here is a typical day in the career of George Whitefield.

Friday, November 9 [in Philadelphia]. Read prayers and preached as usual in the morning, and perceived the congregation still increased. Visited a sick person, for whom I was sent for, and felt the power of the Lord

was present, both with him and those who attended him. Most wept at the preaching of faith. I was visited in a kind manner by the minister of the parish, and preached again in the evening from the Court House steps. I believe there were nearly two thousand more present tonight than last night. Even in London, I never observed so profound a silence. Before I came, all was hushed exceeding quiet. The night was clear, but not

cold. Lights were in most of the windows all around us for a considerable distance. The people did not seem weary of standing, nor was I weary of preaching. The Lord endowed me with power from on high. My heart was enlarged and warmed with Divine love. My soul was so carried out in prayer, that I thought I could have continued my discourse all night. . . . Surely, God is favourable unto this people.

associate of John and Charles Wesley — soon to lead a Methodist movement out of the Church of England — Whitefield while still in England turned to open-air evangelism. He would take the gospel message to the people rather than wait for the people to find their way into the churches. When he arrived in Philadelphia in November 1739, he moved quickly to “the Court-house Gallery in this City, about six at Night.” There he preached “to near 6000 people before him in the Street, who stood in awful silence to hear him.” So the local newspaper reported eagerly as virtually half the town’s total population crowded around the much-heralded twenty-six-year-old evangelist.

And it was the same everywhere that Whitefield went, as he moved south from Philadelphia to Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. The following fall, he strode into New England, preaching on Boston Common to five thousand people straining to hear every word. The next day, Sunday — September 21, 1740 — no Congregational church in Boston was large enough to accommodate the crowds that pressed to hear him, so “he went and preached in the Field to at least 8000 Persons.” The next day repeated the dizzying excitement, and so did the day after that, as Whitefield, breathless with enthusiasm and inexhaustible in zeal, proclaimed his message (he reported) with “much Flame, Clearness, and Power.” Even Benjamin Franklin, mildly skeptical of all that enthusiasm, testified to the power of Whitefield’s oratory: “He had a loud and clear voice, and articulated his words so perfectly that he might be heard and understood at a great distance, especially as his auditories observed the most perfect silence.” Even if one were not interested in the subject, Franklin added, “one could not help being pleased with the discourse.”

Colonial America had neither seen nor heard anything quite like this before: extemporaneous preaching (not learned sermons read from a manuscript), powerful emotion (not dull doctrinal explication), and a concern about spiritual matters so intense as to fill the churches every week and require more services during the week. In New England the Awakening was as intense as it was brief: all over in a couple of years, the days of religious zeal were followed by months of recrimination and separation. But in the Middle and Southern Colonies, the movement continued well into the 1750s and even beyond. Penetrating every colony, the Great Awakening left few unmoved by its mighty surge.

To be sure, Whitefield did not do it all alone, though it is worth noting that the first individual to bring some degree of unity to the colonies was not a politician but

a preacher. Whitefield had many admirers — and many critics. Several pastors took his cue by becoming “itinerants” who moved beyond their own parishes to travel widely through other parishes, preaching wherever invited to do so, and sometimes where not. Thus a New Jersey Presbyterian, Gilbert Tennent, attracted large crowds not just in the Middle Colonies but in New England as well. Like Whitefield, he often questioned the spiritual integrity of some of his fellow clergy, a questioning that — understandably — aroused great resentment. Carrying that crusade to even greater extremes, James Davenport, a Connecticut Congregationalist, called for books to be tossed into a bonfire and for parishioners to abandon their cold, formal, and “unconverted” pastors. Brought before the colony General Assembly for trial in 1742, Davenport was found guilty of disturbing the peace and order of the government, and expelled from Connecticut.

DEFENDING THE REVIVAL

Of Whitefield’s many allies and of the Awakening’s many defenders, none was more brilliant or influential than Jonathan Edwards. A graduate of Yale College and pastor of the Congregational church in Northampton, Massachusetts, Edwards had witnessed brief spurts of revivalism in his own parish years before George Whitefield arrived in America. Already inclined to support the movement, Edwards found himself having to defend it against its critics at the same time that he decried the excesses of fanatics like Davenport. One of the ablest critics of the Awakening, Charles Chauncy of Boston’s First Congregational Church, thought that the unrestrained zeal threatened to upset all society, if not actually destroy it. For Chauncy, what Whitefield had begun in misguided sincerity, Davenport finished in inevitable anarchy. What persons in their right minds would tolerate the “Shriekings and Screamings, convulsion-like Tremblings and Agitations, Strugglings and Tumbings, which in Some Instances have been attended with Indecencies I shan’t mention”? From Chauncy’s point of view, it was time for the colonists to sober up after an unfortunate emotional binge.

From Jonathan Edwards’s point of view, the fact that excesses had happened should not — must not — discredit the Awakening as manifestly a work of God. Clearly influenced by both Locke and Newton, Edwards strove to find order and “rules” even in the midst of all this excitement and emotion. We must learn to discriminate, Edwards argued, to separate the wheat

from the chaff, the counterfeit from the genuine. In 1746, long after the furor had subsided in New England, Jonathan Edwards wrote the most sophisticated and profound defense of the movement that the eighteenth century produced. In his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards dismissed all the “Shriekings and Screaming” as no sign, one way or another, of whether the Awakening was genuine. Some people, Edwards noted, are so afraid of emotion that they treat religion as though it were a matter of intellectual propositions only — a matter for the head alone and not for the heart. On the contrary, Edwards wrote, nothing ever changed a person’s life without powerful emotions being clearly involved. “He who has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection [emotion], never is engaged in the business of religion.”

So how to determine whether the revivalism was genuine or fake? Edwards expended hundreds of pages in his treatise in an earnest effort to answer that question, concluding that while many signs of true religious emotion could be noted, the most convincing and impressive sign was the quality of life that one lived after the temporary excitement had passed. Scripture, Edwards noted, teaches that a tree is known by its fruits. Common sense teaches the same thing. “Hypocrites may much more easily be brought to talk like saints, than to act like saints.” So the genuineness of the Awakening, like the genuineness of a profession of love, was to be found not in tears or words but in the conduct of life.

Edwards did not convince everyone — not Chauncy, not all the members of his own congregation, which dismissed him in 1750. He spent the last eight years of his life in the frontier community of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, preaching to the Housatonic Indians and composing the major philosophical treatises upon which his enduring reputation rests. In 1758 he was invited to become president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), but died within a few months of his taking up residence there. Colonial America could boast of no more learned theologian or philosopher than Jonathan Edwards.

∞ *Religious Realignments*

The Awakening revived religion, but also divided it. Two active denominations in the movements, the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, fell apart over the issues of an itinerant ministry and intense emotionalism. The Congregational “New Lights” and the Presbyterian “New Side” supported the revival, while the “Old Lights”

and “Old Side” opposed its sometimes disruptive zeal. In New England, the people had not been accustomed to seeing their own Congregational clergy so bitterly arrayed against each other. We are, Edwards regretfully noted, like “two armies, separated, and drawn up in battle array, ready to fight with one another; which greatly hinders the work of God.” Division among the ministers led to schisms in the churches, as in many New England towns the single parish church became two. The second church, often called the Separates because they withdrew from the official tax-supported and now Old Light parish church, rejected what these pro-revivalists regarded as cold, compromised, second-hand religion.

In the Middle Colonies, the division between Old Side and New Side Presbyterians greatly troubled a relatively young denomination just beginning to be a major force in that region. Especially in New York and New Jersey, revivalist excitement resembled that found in New England, only with Presbyterian ministers such as Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Blair taking the lead. From the New Side point of view, none could properly object to the aroused interest in religion, the greater concern for personal salvation. From the Old Side point of view, however, several quite legitimate objections could be raised. First, many of the itinerant revivalists — “the strolling preachers” — had not been properly ordained; worse, they had not even been properly educated. Second, the authority of the church’s own governing bodies, the synods, was not recognized, as parishes were invaded without permission and doctrine dismissed without warrant. Third, and most threatening of all, some Old Side ministers found their own spirituality and piety being questioned, to the discredit of all organized religion and sowing utter disorder in place of careful ecclesiastical control. The Old Side faction so completely dominated the Synod of Philadelphia that the New Side clergy withdrew to form in 1745 the competing Synod of New York. When these two “sides” came back together in 1758, the pro-revivalists prevailed.

Revivalism prevailed even more obviously and significantly in denominations that took their inspiration directly from the Great Awakening. Prior to the Awakening, the Baptists in America had experienced very little growth. A generation after the Awakening, however, the Baptists had multiplied four times over. This sharp increase rode the waves of a Calvinist theology that emphasized the sovereignty of God in contrast to the frailties of humankind. In New England, many of the New Light or Separate churches ended up becoming Baptist. In the Middle Colonies,

D.^R SQUINTUM'S EXALTATION OF THE REFORMATION.



Whole Methodist Villains infect the whole Nation,
 And assist to pull on the Vice Reformation:
 Preach to our Good Friends the whole Flood to Dissolve,
 While Horses (the days) serv'd for our good Friends,
 Take a whole BELL YARD all well the one Vice.
 Their Infirmities mean—These Reformation of Vice
 With these and some Cost and their Pious Conscience
 I wish that Old Nick had his Fork in their A's, they were to
 Turn such that Devil Fly'd about with upland Kites,
 And a Troop of Devils that constantly live,
 About the pleasures of Earth, how he seems to Complacit.
 For the pleasure of their immortality with PAIM, they were to
 With a whole and a Conscience's mountains Mountain

But He goes further / exempt from passion,
 To give the reverse of the Good Copulation, they were to
 All Nature is wicked, and so they are Lame
 (SWIFT'S a tremendous cry—a stomach given to the Court)
 Like leather they Heats to find a Whoring extend,
 And who can afford that they Soul will never mend, they to
 In a Cause just by set a Knife like a CLARE
 Who had of himself had got into the Dock
 Cost out to his Resolution, At all but in Pain
 To seek to reform the whole World, without Love they were to
 Shall answer our End—just with that we can profit
 Every Right to be Wrong, and prove wrong to be Right,
 Blind Justice will always protect Us in this

We may do what we please, quoth the Carpenter told
 It may take up the Young & surprise the Old
 The Sunday well did all the first about street
 And preach the Bishops for selling their Seats, they were to
 Will away to the Hummer, who value a Stone
 But wear that we will like a D— I would I House
 The Ministry will long by her hour out of Devils
 For keeping a store and encouraging Whores, they were to
 That did they first called did did as they thought
 The more they have found them did not as they thought
 For now Cost and, in a, they appear sometimes flat,
 And hang down their Heads at the mention of P—TV they were to

An Anti-Whitefield Cartoon George Whitefield was not universally admired during his lifetime. This savage English caricature accuses him and his followers of arrogance, hypocrisy, greed, and even (in the lower left corner) of consorting with prostitutes. The epithet “Dr. Squintum” refers to his eye disease.

Philadelphia continued to be a major Baptist center throughout the eighteenth century. But it was in the South, after the Awakening was over, that Baptist growth was phenomenal, notably in Virginia and the Carolinas. From around the 1770s on, the Baptists would be the dominant religious force in the South, emphasizing personal religious experience above creedal uniformity or institutional integrity. One Congregational Old Light explained the spectacular Baptist growth in altogether unflattering terms. “Many people,” he noted, “are so ignorant as to be charmed with sound than sense.” A preacher’s lack of formal education, he added, “may easily be made up, and overbalanced by great zeal, an affecting tone of voice, and a perpetual motion of the tongue.” There

was, of course, more to it than that, as growth both in the urban East and the frontier West would demonstrate in the nineteenth century.

The Methodists, not even a separate denomination at the time of the Awakening, also grew explosively in the late eighteenth century and beyond. Although not formally organized in America until 1784, well before that time Methodists operated within the Church of England as a pietist society bent on reviving religion and emphasizing personal spiritual development. Methodist “societies” and Methodist itinerant lay preachers gathered followers both in England and America, built chapels, and challenged established, formal (“cold and sapless”) religion everywhere. From England, John Wesley dispatched lay evangelists in the late 1760s and early 1770s. The most famous of these was Francis Asbury, who arrived in America in 1771. Establishing his headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland, Asbury relied exclusively on traveling preachers or “circuit riders” to guide the impressive growth of this new-

est religious group. Unlike the predominately Calvinist Baptists, the Arminian³ Methodists emphasized the free will of men and women who must accept a great deal of responsibility for seeking their own salvation. In less than a century, Methodists would outstrip all other Protestant denominations in gaining the allegiance of religious-minded Americans.

Among smaller religious bodies that joined in the Awakening were the Dutch Reformed, especially strong in New York and New Jersey. Under the leadership of Theodore Frelinghuysen, the Dutch heartily participated in the revivalism of the Middle Colonies and Frelinghuysen's son helped found Rutgers University. During the peak years of the Awakening in the 1740s, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf of Bohemia visited the colonies on behalf of the Moravians, or Society of Brethren. Zinzendorf hoped to bring German Reformed members closer to the Moravians, and bring both closer to the kind of spiritual renewal that he saw in the revivalism all around. But the German Reformed Church ultimately retained its own ecclesiastical identity. The common denominator in all these pro-revivalist groups was pietism: that is, an emphasis upon a personal, immediate, heart-felt religion. This stood in opposition to religion that was official and political, formal or merely intellectual, largely traditional and liturgical. For the pietist, neither denominational labels nor theological opinions counted as much as the spiritual health within. Thus the Awakening had the effect of creating a kind of unity of spirit that had important ramifications during the American Revolution.

This unity of spirit was, to be sure, far from complete. Not only did denominations divide, but many groups stood aloof from the Awakening. Anglicans generally resisted it, even though the most famous itinerant of all, George Whitefield, was himself an Anglican. Quakers, Lutherans, and Catholics could also be numbered among those not caught up in the revivalistic excitement. In the long view, however, those groups that did take their inspiration from the revivals dominated America's religious scene for generations after the original fires had cooled. Pietism even created alliances across the ocean, especially with fellow believers in Scotland and Germany. For a time, some dared even to hope that pietism could forge bonds strong enough to break through the toughest barriers of all: those of race.

3. The theological "school" of Arminianism represents a pulling away from Calvin's emphasis on God's sovereignty toward a greater stress on the freedom of the human will.

☞ *Slave Religion*

The black population in colonial America proved surprisingly susceptible to the message of Christianity — surprising because Christianity was, after all, the religion of their oppressive masters. These masters, moreover, made little systematic effort to convert the slaves and, in fact, often placed obstacles in the way of conversion. Missionaries in America generally found other tasks more pressing or other audiences more congenial. Masters worried about whether baptism somehow altered a slave's legal status, giving him or her some claim to freedom as a "brother or sister in Christ." In 1730 the secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel bemoaned how little the society's missionaries had done on behalf of those Africans forcibly removed to America. Masters, he explained, refused to give their slaves time off for religious instruction, except on Sunday when they had to plant and tend their own gardens. Some masters even argued that slaves became less obedient after baptism, and others opined that perhaps the slaves had no souls anyway. Apologetically, Secretary David Humphreys noted that he would not even mention such things "if they were not popular now," these arguments having absolutely "no foundation in reason or truth."

TRANSFORMING WORSHIP

The Great Awakening increased Christianity's attractiveness and accessibility to slaves. As preaching became more passionate, slaves — men, women, and children — found themselves readier to respond. And as itinerants gathered audiences whenever and wherever they could, blacks had many more opportunities to hear the gospel proclaimed. To those New Lights and New Side and new-born preachers, disdainful of formality and order, the slaves had as much right to join the church and participate in its ceremonies as anyone else. If uneducated, no matter; if conscious of their sinful and outcast state, so much the better; if desperate for a heaven offering release from earth's sorrow and suffering, then the preacher's words had an immediate relevance and healing power.

New Side Presbyterian Samuel Davies in Virginia took special satisfaction in the slaves' response to his preaching. In 1750 he personally baptized about forty slaves and, a few years later, administered the Lord's Supper to about sixty. In Maryland, the center of Methodism's early growth in America, circuit riders appealed equally to black and white; one itinerant joy-

fully reported his experience of “many hundreds of Negroes . . . convinced of sin, and many of them happy in the love of God.” Baptists in the South found slaves as eager as whites to hear of a gospel open to all on equal terms. Some itinerants, so impressed with the slaves’ keen interest in becoming Christians, questioned slavery itself, seeing it (according to Baptist John Leland) as “pregnant with enormous evils.” This itinerant confessed that he could never be reconciled to slavery, and declared to the African American converts his hope “to meet many of you in heaven, where your melodious voices that have often enchanted my ears and warmed my heart, will be incessantly employed in the praise of our common Lord.”

The Christianity to which the slaves were converted was, by that process, itself transformed. Though much of the African heritage was lost in the disruption of families and tribes in Africa and in the further separations and catastrophes of slavery itself, enough of the original culture survived to give black Christianity a distinctive character. Worship was an occasion not so much of solemnity as of joy. As one contemporary reported late in the eighteenth century, “the slaves praise Jesus with the lungs, hands, and feet.” Both music and movement became prominent elements in the religious services. The Baptist emphasis on baptism by immersion — in a river, stream, or pond — also had much appeal to those of West African background, where water cults were commonplace.

As long as blacks worshiped under white leaders, some of the exuberance was discouraged or even suppressed. But soon both slaves and free blacks chose their own clergy, gathered in their own crude structures or brush arbors, and improvised their own services of worship. For generations, the ministry remained the

only profession open to African Americans, and the black church the only institution where an oppressed people had a considerable degree of self-determination. Baptists attracted the greatest number of blacks as their form of church government permitted maximum congregational autonomy. Methodists were next in order of popularity, with separate black denominations formed even before the end of the eighteenth century. Presbyterians came in a distant third in attracting slaves and ex-slaves. Once enrolled in the ranks of the Christian religion, African Americans were never mere passive spectators or imitators. They contributed directly and powerfully to their adopted religion, nowhere more movingly than in such spirituals as “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” and “Steal Away to Jesus.” If the Christianity of the masters supported and sanctioned slavery, the Christianity of the slaves enabled them to endure it and ultimately to survive it.

☞ *Colleges: “Nurseries of Piety”*

In the seventeenth-century colonies, only two colleges were founded, appropriately in the two most populous colonies: Massachusetts and Virginia. Harvard, the first of the two, began in 1636, as has been noted in Chapter 2. The College of William and Mary, the other seventeenth-century institution, was chartered in 1693, although instruction did not begin until nearly twenty years later. William and Mary’s creation resulted from the steady labors of one man, Commissary James Blair, who had been appointed in 1689 as the Bishop of London’s representative in Virginia. The leading Anglican cleric in the South, Blair spent much of his time trying to get the Church of England better organized and more strongly supported. But his other great goal was the creation of

✻ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Raising Funds for the College of New Jersey (Princeton), 1754

Enlightenment and Great Awakening ideals are evident in this letter soliciting funds for the College of New Jersey.

Nothing has a more direct tendency to advance the happiness and glory of a community that the founding of public schools and seminaries of learning for the education

of youth, and adorning their minds with useful knowledge and virtue. Hereby the rude and ignorant are civiliz’d and render’d humane; persons who otherwise would be useless members of society are qualified to sustain and honour the offices they may be invested with for the public service. Reverence of the Deity, Filial Piety, and Obedience to the laws are inculcated and promoted. . . . At length, several gentlemen residing in and

near the Province of New-Jersey, who were well-wishers to the felicity of their country, and real friends of religion and learning, having observ’d the vast increase of those colonies, with the rudeness and ignorance of their inhabitants for want of the necessary means of improvement, first projected the scheme of a collegiate education in that Province.

an Anglican college. With the support of Virginia's governor and Assembly, and with some money collected locally to prove an earnest intent, Blair sailed for England to obtain royal permission, a charter, and more money. His best friend in court was King William's co-sovereign, Queen Mary, who backed his proposal and helped him secure funds, especially from the estate of Robert Boyle, the renowned British physicist and chemist.

When Blair died in 1743, the college had begun to attract many of the colony's best young men. In the 1750s and 1760s such future luminaries as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Peyton Randolph received some of their education there, as it was the South's only colonial college. But the American Revolution created great hardships for a school so closely identified with an England and its sovereigns with whom the colonies were now at war. When the capital moved to Richmond in 1780, Williamsburg was left to the fringes of cultural and political life; its secondary status was further aggravated by the creation of the University of Virginia in the early nineteenth century. It was not until the twentieth century that William and Mary reemerged as a major institution.

At the very beginning of the eighteenth century, New England gained its second institution of higher learning with the founding of Yale in 1701. Connecticut citizens sought a school nearer than Cambridge as well as one less suspect of certain liberal leanings. Clergy took the lead in the creation of the school; the first eleven-man Board of Trustees were all ministers and all Harvard graduates. By 1716 the trustees finally settled on New Haven as the permanent location, and soon would agree to give their "Collegiate School" the name of Yale after Elihu Yale, a wealthy and childless official of the East India Company. Though Yale was himself an Anglican, others convinced him that if the Church of England really were the true church, what "better way to make men sensible of it than by giving them good learning"? Thus a second Puritan or Congregational school, receiving great help from a faithful Anglican, proceeded steadily on its path toward conspicuous success.

These three colleges preceded the Great Awakening, though two of them, Harvard and Yale, were tossed and turned in the spiritual turbulence. Of the remaining colonial colleges to be founded, five of the six schools had some connection with the revivalistic wave. Presbyterians created the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) in 1746, while Anglicans founded their second school in New York City in 1754: King's College (in Revolutionary days, patriotically renamed Columbia). Under the orig-

inal stimulus of George Whitefield and the later prodding of Benjamin Franklin, the College of Philadelphia (ultimately the University of Pennsylvania) received its charter in 1755. In 1764, with Baptists taking the lead, the College of Rhode Island (Brown University) became New England's third institution of higher learning. The Dutch Reformed in New Jersey in 1766 laid the foundation for a school of their own in New Brunswick: Queen's College, later Rutgers University. Finally, Eleazar Wheelock in 1769 created in New Hampshire Dartmouth College — a school intended originally for Indians.

With the exception of King's College in New York, the other five schools all revealed their sympathetic ties with the Great Awakening. By the time of the Revolution, New England and the Middle Colonies had four colleges each, while the South possessed only the College of William and Mary.

CONCLUSION: GROWTH, REVIVAL, AND CULTURAL MATURITY

In the last half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries, the colonies grew steadily in population and in cultural maturity. That population remained predominantly rural, with agriculture being the principal occupation, the source of trade, and the avenue to modest wealth. The typical colonial family was a farm family, though exactly what this meant varied sharply from region to region. The slave family fought hardest for survival as a unit, but lost that battle repeatedly. Slavery itself, however tentatively adopted in the years of earliest settlement, had by the 1750s become deeply rooted, especially in the South. As slavery expanded, white indentured servitude slowly withered away.

The educational opportunities for children were most numerous in New England and least promising in the South; in the Middle Colonies, denominational and ethnic loyalties most often shaped the educational landscape. For the culture as a whole, sharp improvement could be seen in young America's contributions to literature, art, science, medicine, and law. These would be most evident in the urban centers of Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. The mid-eighteenth century proved to be a lively time in religion, with revivalism — and strong reactions to it — disrupting and refashioning much denominational life in America. Many of the colonial colleges bore marks placed there by the Great Awakening.

In the crises to come later in the eighteenth cen-

tury, the colonists would need all the learning that these colleges could offer, all the conviction and passion that the Awakening might provide, and all the power of reason ushered in during the Age of Enlightenment. In the world of politics, the challenges rose to unprecedented heights; the responses needed to match or scale those peaks.

SUGGESTED READING

Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven* (1986). The best broad survey of religion in colonial America, with keen attention to its interaction with politics and society.

James T. Flexner, *America's Old Masters* (rev. ed., 1980). The authoritative discussion of artists Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, and Gilbert Stuart.

J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America* (1973). An engaging and solid treatment of topics ranging from childhood discipline to marital "bargaining."

Brooke Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789* (1965). A fascinating account of the colonial contributions to and gleanings from the scientific revolution.

Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (1993). A broad survey that discusses the degree to which slaves managed to be culture creators on the one hand and cultural adaptors on the other.

Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (1999). Lambert provides a clear picture of the role of the print media in helping to promote revivalism in America, England, Scotland, and Wales. Revivalists, as a conscious act of will, helped to create what in fact became a transatlantic Great Awakening.

J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall, *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography* (1986). The most helpful edition of this classic, with maps, extensive notes, critical analyses, and a compendium of other Frankliniana.

George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (2003). Yale University Press has provided (and is providing) excellent critical editions of Edwards's impressive corpus; utilizing these new works, Marsden gives us the best biography of Edwards now available.

Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (1976). The most sophisticated account of the several phases in the appropriation and extension of the European Enlightenment on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (2003). A thorough treatment of interactions between colonists and Indians, with attention to war, trade, intermarriage, and the missionary enterprise — especially of the Moravians.

Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Low Country* (1998). This prize-winning study offers the most detailed and suggestive interpretation of African-American culture in Virginia and in South Carolina.

Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (1991). A superb biography of the most conspicuous figure in the Great Awakening, treated in terms of the "theatre" of his performance and appeal.

Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (1980). The emphasis here is more on Edwards as pastor and revivalist than as philosopher or theologian; engaging narrative.

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David Freeman Hawke, *Everyday Life in Early America* (1989).

Winthrop D. Jordan and Sheila L. Skemp, eds., *Race and Family in the Colonial South* (1987).

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Sharon V. Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": *Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (1987).

Leigh E. Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (1989).

Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth Century Chesapeake Society* (1980).

Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (1987).

Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (1986).

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Richard Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1701-1740* (1973).

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