Chapter Five

The Cultures of Colonial North America, 1700–1780
Chapter Focus Questions

- Who similarities and differences existed among eighteenth-century Spanish, English, and French colonies?
- How did increasing European immigration affect British colonial culture?
- How did contact with European customs and lifestyles change the cultures of Indian America?
- What were the patterns of work and class in eighteenth-century America?
- What tensions existed between Enlightenment thought and the Great Awakening's call for renewed religious devotion?
Crossing Cultural Boundaries

In 1704, Indians attacked the town of Deerfield, Massachusetts.

Dozens of captives were delivered to the French allies of the Indians, including Eunice Williams, the daughter of John and Eunice Williams.

Eunice refused to return to her family and stayed at Kahnawake, a Catholic Indian community near Montreal, becoming part of that community.

Only 36 years later did Eunice, under her Iroquois name A'ongonte, return to visit Deerfield with her Iroquois family.
Indian America

- Indians showed capacity to adapt and change by participating in the commercial economy, using metal tools, and building homes of logs as frontier settlers did.
- But, Indians also became dependent on European trade goods.
- Diplomatically, Indians played colonial powers off against each other.
- The major concern of Indians was the phenomenal growth of the colonial population in the British coastal communities.
- Simultaneously, Indian populations continued to decline.
A portrait of the Delaware chief Tishcohan by Gustavus Hesselius, painted in 1732. In his purse of chipmunk hide is a clay pipe, a common item of the Indian trade. Tishcohan was one of the Delaware leaders forced by Pennsylvania authorities into signing a fraudulent land deal that reversed that colony’s history of fair dealing with Indians over land. He moved west to the Ohio River as settlers poured into his former homeland.

The Introduction of the Horse

Map: Growing Use of the Horse by Plains Indians

The introduction of the horse stimulated the rise of nomadic Plains culture.
In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Spanish settlers introduced horses into their New Mexican colony. Through trading and raiding, horses spread northward in streams both west and east of the Rocky Mountains. The horse, whose genetic ancestor had been native to the American continent in pre-Archaic times, offered the Indian peoples of the Great Plains the opportunity to create a distinctive hunting and warrior culture.
The Spanish Borderlands

- The viceroyalty of New Spain was the largest and most prosperous European colony in North America.
- The northern borderlands of New Spain were considered a buffer zone of protection from other European colonies.
- In Florida, the colonial presence was weak causing the Spanish to form alliances with Indians and runaway slaves to create a multiracial society.
- In New Mexico, the population expanded by developing ranches and farms along the Rio Grande River.
By the middle of the eighteenth century, European colonists had established a number of distinctive colonial regions in North America. The northern periphery of New Spain, the oldest and most prosperous European colony, stretched from Baja California to eastern Texas, then jumped to the settlements on the northern end of the Florida peninsula; cattle ranching was the dominant way of life in this thinly populated region. New France was like a great crescent, extending from the plantation communities along the Mississippi near New Orleans to the French colonial communities along the St. Lawrence; in between were isolated settlements and forts, connected only by the extensive French trading network.
The Mission System

- In California, the mission system guided development in the 1770s.
- As shown by the mission system, the Catholic Church played a dominant role in community life.
- Indians were needed to raise the necessary subsistence.
  - Indians were not forced to join but once they joined they were not allowed to leave.
  - They were attracted by the food, clothing, and tools that promised a higher standard of living.
A mounted Soldado de Cuera (Leather-Coated Soldier), a watercolor by Ramón de Murillo, c. 1803. Thick leather coats offered protection from Indian arrows for the cavalry posted to the northern frontiers of eighteenth-century New Spain.
The Church of San Xavier del Bac, constructed in the late eighteenth century, is located a few miles south of the city of Tucson, where Jesuit Father Eusebio Kino founded a mission among the Pima Indians in 1700. Known as the White Dove of the Desert, it is acclaimed as the most striking example of Spanish colonial architecture in the United States.

SOURCE: Photograph by Jack W. Dykinga.
The French Crescent

Map: The French Crescent

The French empire was founded on a series of alliances and trade relations with Indian nations linking a large crescent of colonies and settlements from the St. Lawrence River to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Catholic Church played a strong role in the French colonies.

For defensive reasons, the French allied with Indian trading partners to set up a line of military posts and settlements.

Throughout Quebec, the French established farming communities that shipped wheat to Louisiana plantations.

French communities combined French and Indian elements in architecture, dress, and family patterns.
The persistence of French colonial long lots in the pattern of modern landholding is clear in this enhanced satellite photograph of the Mississippi River near New Orleans. Long lots, the characteristic form of property holding in New France, were designed to offer as many settlers as possible a share of good bottomland as well as a frontage on the waterways, which served as the basic transportation network.

MAP 5.3 The French Crescent  The French empire in North America was based on a series of alliances and trade relations with Indian nations linking a great crescent of colonies, settlements, and outposts that extended from the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, through the Great Lakes, and down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. In 1713, Acadia was ceded to the British, but the French established the fortress of Louisbourg to anchor the eastern end of the crescent.
New England

- Puritan congregations governed local communities.
  - Mix of freedom and repression
- Attempts to introduce religious toleration failed as other denominations practiced their faith openly by 1700.
- New England towns grew rapidly and the expanding population pressed against available land.
- By the mid-eighteenth century New England was reaching the limit of its land supply.
The Turner House (immortalized by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables*) in Salem, Massachusetts, was constructed in the seventeenth century. In this style of architecture, function prevailed over form as structures grew to accommodate their residents; rooms were added where and when they were needed. In England, wood for building was scarce, but the abundance of forests in North America created the conditions for a golden age of wood construction. 

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy Peabody Essex Museum.
The Middle Colonies

- New York had one of the most ethnically diverse populations in North America.
- New York City grew tremendously but immigration to rural areas was lower than surrounding areas.
- Pennsylvania Quakers accepted a more diverse population.
- Government institutions were pillars of community organization.
- Middle Colony communities were more individualistic than the tightly controlled New England communities.
This view of the Philadelphia waterfront, painted about 1720, conveys the impression of a city firmly anchored to maritime commerce. The long narrow canvas was probably intended for display over the mantel of a public room. SOURCE: Peter Cooper, *The South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia*, ca. 1720. The Library Company of Philadelphia.
The Backcountry

Map: Spread of Settlement: Movement into the Backcountry, 1720–1760

Backcountry was a distinctive region where rank was often of little concern.
- Most pioneers owned little or no land.
- “Big men” held large tracts and dominated local communities.
- Men were warriors; women domestic workers

Conflicts between settlers and Indians made the backcountry a violent region.
MAP 5.4 Spread of Settlement: Movement into the Backcountry, 1720–60 The spread of settlement from 1720 to 1760 shows the movement of population into the backcountry during the midcentury.
The South

- The South was a triracial society of Europeans, Africans, and Indians.
- Large plantation homes dominated the Upper and Lower South.
- Small tobacco farms were widely found in the Upper South.
- White males dominated southern society.
- The Anglican Church was present in the South but had little power.
- In the Upper South, well-developed neighborhoods created a sense of community and white solidarity.
Traditional Culture in the New World

- **Table: Monthly Frequency of Successful Conceptions**
- In the colonies, everyday life revolved around the family and kinship, the church, and the local community.
- Americans were attached to their regional cultures which were based on oral transmission.
- Community needs outweighed those of the individual.
- The majority of rural Americans were self-sufficient farmers who practiced diverse agriculture and engaged in crafts on the side.
- In cities, artisans were organized according to the European craft system.
- Women had few career opportunities.
This two-story log house, built in Pennsylvania in the early eighteenth century, is one of the oldest surviving examples of the method and style of log construction introduced in America by the Scandinavian colonists on the lower Delaware River. Learning New World farming and woodland hunting techniques from the Indians, these settlers forged a tradition of settlement that proved enormously successful for pioneers. SOURCE: Courtesy Henry Glassie.
Human reproduction in colonial America corresponded to cycles. But European colonists and African American slaves had different patterns.

The Frontier Heritage

- Land in America was abundant and cheap but did not lead to a democratic society.
- Forced labor was common and few indentured servants won freedom and prosperity.
- The demand for land caused wars with Indians.
  - Puritans argued that Indians were failing to use the land to the utmost capacity.
  - Violence and brutality were considered an essential part to colonial life.
A spinner and carpenter from *The Book of Trades*, an eighteenth-century British survey of the crafts practiced in colonial America. In colonial cities, artisans organized themselves into the traditional European craft system, with apprentices, journeymen, and masters. There were few opportunities for the employment of women outside the household, but women sometimes earned income by establishing sidelines as midwives or spinners. SOURCE: The Granger Collection.
Population Growth and Immigration

Table: Estimated Total Population of New Spain, New France, and the British North American Colonies, 1700–1780

In 1700, 290,000 colonists lived north of Mexico.

In 1750, the colonial population had grown to almost 1.3 million.

High fertility and low mortality played important roles.

- An abundance of food contributed to good health.
The Ancestry of the British Colonial Population

Map: Ethnic Groups in Eighteenth-Century British North America

Table: The Ancestry of the British Colonial Population

Only the British colonies encouraged immigration.
- The British also encouraged immigration from foreign nations.
- Less than fifty percent of the population was English in 1790

The Spanish feared depleting their population at home.

The French blocked Protestant Huguenot immigration.
The first federal census, taken in 1790, revealed remarkable ethnic diversity. New England was filled with people from the British Isles, but the rest of the colonies were a patchwork. Most states had at least three different ethnic groups within their borders, and although the English and Scots-Irish were heavily represented in all colonies, in some they had strong competition from Germans (eastern and southern Pennsylvania) and from African peoples (Virginia and South Carolina).
Social Class

- Colonial America was more egalitarian than Europe.
- In New Spain status was based on racial purity.
- In New France and New Spain hereditary ranks and styles from the Old World prevailed.
- In the British colonies, the elite was open and based on wealth.
  - Social mobility was present and common.
  - The large middle class was a new social phenomena.
  - There was also a large lower class.
FIGURE 5.3 The Ancestry of the British Colonial Population The legacy of eighteenth-century immigration to the British colonies was a population of unprecedented ethnic diversity.

Economic Growth and Increasing Inequality

- Table: Wealth held by richest 10 percent
- French and Spanish colonies were economically stagnant compared to the booming British colonies.
- Over time in the British colonies, the gap between rich and poor increased, especially in cities and commercial farming regions.
- In older regions, land shortage created a population of "strolling poor."
An eighteenth-century genre painting from New Spain showing various racial *castas*, the result of ethnic mixing.

Contrasts in Colonial Politics

Unlike the French and Spanish, the British used a decentralized form of government.

Royal governors and locally elected assemblies governed.

Most adult white males could vote.

Colonial politics were characterized by deference rather than democracy.

Leadership was entrusted to men of high rank and wealth.

Most colonial assemblies had considerable power over local affairs because they controlled finances.
FIGURE 5.4 Distribution of Assessed Taxable Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Chester County

This graph charts the concentration of assets in the hands of wealthy families. From 1693 to 1802, the percentage of total wealth held by the richest 10 percent of taxpayers rose from 24 to 38 percent, while the percentage held by the poorest 60 percent of taxpayers fell from 39 to 18 percent. This pattern was typical for regions dominated by commerce.

The Enlightenment Challenge

- The British colonies were more open to intellectual and religious challenges than the French and Spanish.
- Enlightenment ideas emphasized rationality, harmony, and order.
  - The state existed to provide for happiness and security of individuals who were endowed with rights of life, liberty, and property.
- Widespread literacy helped spread Enlightenment ideas.
  - Traditional views also had strong popular appeal.
  - Colleges held to a mixture of traditional and enlightened views.
The first page of the *New England Primer* (1689), published in Boston, which in its various editions sold more than five million copies. In addition to the letters of the alphabet, illustrated by crude but charming woodcuts and couplets, the book contained simple moral texts based on Biblical history and wisdom.

SOURCE: Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.
A Decline in Religious Devotion

The spread of new ideas occurred during a period of religious decline.

The Puritan Church experienced falling membership and attendance at services.

The change from a congregational to an established church contributed to the Puritan decline.

The belief in predestination was weakening as Arminianism became more popular.
George Whitefield, an evangelical preacher from England who toured the colonies in the late 1730s and 1740s, had a powerful impact and helped spark the Great Awakening.

SOURCE: John Wollaston, George Whitefield, ca. 1742.
The Great Awakening

- In the 1630s, the Great Awakening began with Jonathan Edwards calling for a return to Puritan traditions that appealed to dissatisfied young people.
- The movement spread as thousands of people experienced emotional conversions.
- In 1738, George Whitefield toured America, further fueling the movement.
- Conflicts developed between Old and New Lights.
- In the South, the Great Awakening introduced Christianity to slaves.
- The Great Awakening greatly increased church membership, led to the growth of the Methodist and Baptist churches, and paved the way for future political change.
Baptism by Full Immersion in the Schuylkill River of Pennsylvania, an engraving by Henry Dawkins illustrating events in the history of American Baptists, was published in Philadelphia in 1770. With calls for renewed piety and purity, the Great Awakening reinvigorated American Protestantism. The Baptists preached an egalitarian message, and their congregations in the South often included both white and black Protestants. SOURCE: John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.