Life in the American Colonies

Lesson 3 Culture and Society

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How do new ideas change the way people live?

Terms to Know
immigration the permanent movement of people into one country from other nations
epidemic an illness that affects large numbers of people
apprentice a young person who learns a trade from a skilled craftsperson
civic virtue the democratic ideas, practices, and values that are at the heart of citizenship in a free society

Where in the world?

When did it happen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1607</td>
<td>First English colony in America</td>
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<td>1647</td>
<td>Massachusetts public education law</td>
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<td>1730s to 1740s</td>
<td>The Great Awakening</td>
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<td>1775</td>
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Life in the American Colonies

Lesson 3  Culture and Society,  Continued

Life in the Colonies

Guiding Question  What was life like for people living in the thirteen colonies?

In 1700, there were about 250,000 people living in the colonies. By the mid-1770s, there were about 2.5 million colonists. The number of African Americans grew from 28,000 to more than 500,000. Immigration was important to this growth. Immigration occurs when people move permanently to one country from another.

![Colonial population growth chart]

There was another reason for the growing number of people in the colonies: large families. Colonial women often married young and had many children. Also, the colonies were a healthy place to live.

Still, there were more threats to life than today. Many women died in childbirth. There were outbreaks of smallpox and other serious diseases. Some outbreaks killed large numbers of people. This is called an epidemic.

The American spirit of independence began in these early years. Settlers left their home countries far behind. In America, they faced new challenges. The old ways of doing things no longer worked, so people began doing things in a different way—their own way.
The family was the basis of colonial society. Men were the official heads of the family. They ran the farm or business. They represented the family in the community. Sons might work on the family farm or in the family business. A young man might also become an apprentice—a person trained by a skilled craftsman.

Women ran their homes and cared for the children. On farms, many worked in the fields with their husbands. A young, unmarried woman might work as a maid or cook for a wealthy family. A widow (a woman whose husband has died) might sew, teach, or nurse for a living. Widows and unmarried women also could run businesses and own property.

Even children worked. By the time they were four or five years old, they often had jobs. Even so, they did have time to play. Their games and toys were simple.

**American Beliefs**

**Guiding Question** What values and beliefs were important to the American colonists?

Life in the colonies was built upon a strong, two-part foundation: the spirit of independence and the family.

Most colonists valued education. Parents often taught their children to read and write at home.

In New England and Pennsylvania, people set up schools. They wanted to make sure everyone could read and study the Bible. In 1647, Massachusetts passed a public education law. It said that communities with 50 or more families must have a public school. The result of this was a high level of literacy (the ability to read and write) in New England.

In the Middle Colonies, most schools were private. Widows and unmarried women ran many of them. Religious groups, such as Quakers, ran others.

Another kind of school was run by craftspeople. In these schools, apprentices learned a skill. Colleges in the colonies had a special purpose: to train ministers.

Religion shaped much of colonial life. In the 1730s and 1740s, ministers were asking people to renew their faith—to return to the strong faith of earlier days. This renewal of religious faith was called the First Great Awakening.
The First Great Awakening inspired many new types of churches. These churches stressed personal faith rather than church ceremonies. The most important effect of the First Great Awakening was greater religious freedom. More colonists began to choose their own faith. People began to believe that colonists had the right to make their own decisions about government too.

The First Great Awakening also broke down walls between the colonies. From north to south, the colonists were united by this revival of faith. This helped to spread other ideas about revolution and independence.

By the mid-1700s, another movement spread from Europe to the colonies—the Enlightenment. With it came the idea that knowledge, reason, and science could improve society. In the colonies, interest in science grew. People, like Benjamin Franklin, began to study nature, do experiments, and write about their findings. The Enlightenment also brought ideas about freedom of thought and expression, equality, and popular government.

Freedom of the press became important. Newspapers in some cities carried news about politics. Often the government did not like what the newspapers wrote and told them not to publish the information. The publishers fought this censorship. Their battle helped a free press to grow in the United States.

Colonists began to consider how citizens should think, feel, and act in a free society. They began to wonder what civic virtues would be important to a free and democratic society. Civic virtues are public or community ideals.

9. What was the renewal of religious faith called?

Contrasting

10. How was the Enlightenment different from the First Great Awakening?

Reading Progress Check

11. In what ways did the First Great Awakening influence American society?