



# Colonial AMERICAN HISTORY



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# INTRODUCTION

**T**HE CURRENTS IN AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP SERIES offers Americanists abroad updates on the status of theory and practice relevant to the study of the society, culture and institutions of the United States of America. Prominent scholars from across the U.S. graciously accepted the invitation of the Study of the U.S. Branch to author annotated bibliographies. We hope the series proves to be valuable in introducing or refreshing courses on the United States, or expanding library collections.

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# COLONIAL AMERICAN HISTORY

## Changing Historiography: An Introduction

The European penetration of the Americas that began in 1492 inaugurated one of the most profound cultural, political, and economic transformations in modern history. Over the next three centuries, thousands of mariners, explorers, soldiers, settlers, and missionaries from Spain, Portugal, England, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and other European countries managed, with the aid of millions of people enslaved in the Americas and Africa and despite the resistance of the indigenous inhabitants, to bring about half of two American continents and many adjacent islands under their hegemony. In the process, they and their allies and bondspeople transformed the physical, economic, and cultural landscapes of the Americas and created a vast new Atlantic world that drew Europe, Africa, and the Americas into an intricate complex of trade and politics, reached into the Indian and Pacific oceans, and provided a sturdy base for subsequent expansion into many parts of Asia and Oceania.



This phenomenal development has generated a vast historical literature. This essay will survey some of the more important contributions to that literature for the area of colonial British America. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, this cultural area consisted of thirty separate British colonies that reached from Tobago north to Newfoundland and from Bermuda west to the Mississippi River. Between 1776 and 1783, thirteen of those colonies revolted from Great Britain in an event they called the American Revolution. During this revolution, they managed to win their independence, with the help of France and Spain, and took the first steps toward organizing themselves, in 1787–88, into a new republican nation, the United States of America.



From the beginnings of professional history in the late nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century, historians of the regions that formed the United States devoted enormous attention to the study of the colonial era. Led by Herbert Levi Osgood, whose three-volume *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (1904) and four-volume *The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century* (1924–25) provided what is still the fullest narrative history of the British North American colonies down to 1763, and Charles M. Andrews, whose four volume *The Colonial Period of American History* (1934–38) offered a detailed study of early English settlement and institutional development in North America, the Atlantic, and the West Indies and a survey of metropolitan commercial and political policy throughout the colonial period, the first generation of professional historians, like their contemporaries in other areas of history, concentrated on political history. They mainly studied the seventeenth century and stressed the problems of colony founding, the transfer of English institutions to the New World, the development of provincial and local political and religious institutions, and relations between the colonies and the parent state. Few paid much attention to developments in economic, social, or cultural history. Although many of them agreed that the proper frame of reference for colonial British American history was all the British colonies in America, they largely focused on the thirteen that revolted in 1776.

The following quarter century witnessed considerable change in this approach. Mostly eschewing grand narratives, historians continued to concentrate on political history but in a new guise, turning away from institutional history and emphasizing the underlying socioeconomic forces that shaped political life. Taking their cue from the political preoccupations of contemporary politics and inspired by earlier works of scholars influenced by the language of Progressive political and social analysts [in particular by Carl L. Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (1909), who set forth the thesis that the American Revolution in that colony was as much a struggle for who should rule at home as a contest for home rule, and Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913), which saw the constitution as the product of economic forces], they stressed political and ideological divisions during the late colonial and Revolutionary era. The culmination of this tradition can be seen in works such as J. Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution as a Social Movement* (1926), which argued that the American Revolution, like the



French Revolution, had profound social consequences, and Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Socio-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774–1781* (1940), which examined the socioeconomic divisions within the states during the Revolution. Most of the early American history written in the Progressive vein during the years 1925–1950 dealt with the American Revolution, relatively few scholars choosing to do research in the colonial era, perhaps because of the prevailing view that colonial history had all been written by the generation of Osgood and Andrews.

Beginning in the early 1950s, however, the study of what the historian Carl Bridenbaugh correctly characterized as the neglected first half of American history underwent a remarkable renaissance. More than a half century later, this renaissance shows no signs of abating. Until the mid-1970s, much of this renewed interest in early America focused on the American Revolution, on such traditional questions as why the Revolution occurred, what kind of phenomenon it was, and how it related to the Constitution of 1787–88. Scholars of the earlier period similarly concentrated on conventional institutional and political subjects within their established interpretive frameworks.

With the proliferation of scholars working in early American history in the 1950s and 1960s, however, an increasing number turned to the one hundred and fifty years before the Revolution. The brilliant works of the literary scholar Perry Miller, including *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939) and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), closely studied New England Puritan thought as a moral and explanatory system that changed in relationship to altering social and economic conditions, and his work inspired intensive study in colonial intellectual history, as numerous historical analysts sought to elaborate and modify his portrait of Puritan religious and intellectual development, to analyze the history of political and social thought, and to show how inherited notions about themselves and other people conditioned the Europeans' attitudes towards the non-Europeans they encountered in America.

The new respect for ideas and values as important components of historical situations, a respect that was greatly enhanced by studies on the political ideology of the late colonial and Revolutionary years, was soon accompanied by a new interest in the largely uncharted economic, demographic, and social history of the colonies. The impetus for this development came from two principal sources: the example of the social sciences in the United States and the transatlantic models provided by historians



of the *Annales* school in France and the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in Great Britain. From the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s, the study of social and economic history dominated early American studies. Striving for an *histoire totale* that would subordinate the history of public life to a more expanded concern for the recovery of all aspects of a population's experience, from the environmental and material to the social and intellectual, from the macro- to the micro-level, and from the most prominent inhabitants to the most marginal, early American social historians created an elaborate portrait of the process of settlement throughout most parts of colonial British America.

An initial interest in differences among white settlers in wealth, material conditions of life, and opportunities soon yielded to a concern for recovering the experience of the large black populations imported in response to the settlers' demand for slaves. Beginning in the late 1960s, this concern led to considerable work on the size, origins, role, and cultures of the enslaved populations—a major share of the people living in the plantation colonies from Maryland south to Barbados and a significant part of those residing in the farm colonies from Pennsylvania north. By the late 1970s other scholars were producing similar investigations of the many American Indian groups who, although gradually outnumbered and displaced, constituted a powerful presence within and adjacent to settler societies throughout the colonial era. The appropriation and development of anthropological techniques of ethnology and ethnography, and a growing interest in the field of historical archaeology, aided the study of both African Americans and American Indians and produced a deeper appreciation of the multiracial, fundamentally exploitative character of colonial societies.

Investigations of the role of women, stimulated by the women's movement, have led to another major expansion of knowledge about the societies of colonial British America. Not only have those studies uncovered much new information about the domestic and public lives of both free and enslaved women, but, by analyzing the many ways in which those societies were gendered, they have also deepened our understanding of the dynamics and imperatives of the male culture that exerted mastery over women, children, and other dependents such as servants. Studies of patterns of land and resource use, the product of a growing contemporary concern with the environment, have, like studies of African Americans, American Indians, and women, further enhanced our appreciation of the drive for mastery in the construction of the socioeconomic worlds of colonial British America.



Studies of the use of resources, of non-dominant groups, of social development, and of intellectual and material life have inevitably implied a concern for cultural formation in colonial British America, and since the mid-1980s this concern has been manifest in much work in this area. Using a broad anthropological definition of culture, a growing number of scholars have begun to explore the kaleidoscope of cultures created by the inhabitants of colonial British America, to analyze the ways in which individuals, groups, and larger entities represented and identified themselves, and to examine the processes by which the identities they constructed shaped the broader imperatives and meanings of the societies in which they lived as well as patterns of interaction within those societies.

This brief survey of changing trends in colonial British American history is only a backdrop. We now proceed to describe the central questions that have concerned historians and the state of knowledge on those questions at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## The Colonial Era

### *The Encounter*

Certainly one of the most dramatic recent advances in knowledge about early Americans is in the field of Amerindian studies. Until comparatively recently, the dominant historiography viewed the events that transpired over the three centuries following Columbus's first voyage to the New World in 1492 from the perspectives of the European participants and their descendants. The story was one of discovery, conquest, settlement, and rise to independent statehood. Although a few earlier scholars had investigated the attitudes of Europeans toward Amerindians and acknowledged the impact of Amerindians upon European conceptions of the colonizing process, this conventional narrative had little room for the native peoples of America, whose resistance seemed to represent little more than an obstacle to the predestined Europeanization of the Americas. To the extent that they felt any need to justify this neglect, colonial historians explained it largely by the rapid retreat and marginalization of Indians as a result of English settlement and by the paucity of sources written by Indians, which seemed to make them more appropriate subjects for anthropologists and historical archaeologists than for historians who based their works on written records.

Over the last three decades, however, a dramatic shift in historical perspective on this subject has occurred. Initially, this shift took the form of trying to present the Amerindian view of the activities of the Euro-



peans, the principal interpretive thrust of which could be surmised by the title of a provocative book by Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonists, and the Cant of Conquest* (1975), an effort to look behind Puritan rationalizations for conquest and occupation of Indian lands and emphasize the settlers' unthinking imperialism and lack of respect for Indian lives or cultures, including native religious beliefs and patterns of land use and ownership.

The Jennings volume was only one of the earliest examples of a large new literature on the Indian peoples of eastern North America. Employing ethnographic methods, an expanding cadre of historians used archaeological reports and combed the written sources created by Europeans and a few Indians in an effort to understand the variety of Indian peoples who inhabited the eastern woodlands, the range of their responses to the settler invasion of their territories, and the nature of their interactions with those settlers. As the picture came into focus, the authors of these works began to reconceive of the early stages of contact, not as a *discovery* or an *invasion*, but as an *encounter*, a more even-handed term that encouraged scholars in their efforts to study the myriad effects and influences—detrimental and beneficial, economic and cultural—that flowed back and forth between Europeans and indigenous American peoples, a process that continued for at least three hundred years, as new groups came within the European orbit.

Three general works provide an excellent introduction to the broader dimensions of this reconception. Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (1986), is an unusually insightful analysis of the effects of the encounter in the “greater Caribbean,” which the author defines as stretching from Brazil north to the Chesapeake. Marvin Daunton and Rick Halperin, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (1999), is a fine collection of essays focusing on the wider early modern British imperial world. Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (2002) represents an admirable effort to view the history of British North America from an Indian perspective, albeit the volume focuses mostly on the mid-Atlantic area.

For colonial English America, this approach has yielded a large and impressive group of case studies of the first century of English-Amerindian contact, the works mentioned below constituting only the tip of the iceberg. For the early years of settlement, regional studies of New England by Neil Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Euro-*



*peans and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (1982), and Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early New England* (2000); of New York by Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois–European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (1993); and of the colonial southeast by Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (1989), all represent careful efforts to describe the effects of the encounter upon indigenous peoples. Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French–Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1976), Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (1985), and Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis* (1995) provided a comparative dimension with colonial French America, as did Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (1994) for Spanish Florida.

More general works treating more than one region are James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (1985), a comparative study of French and English interactions with Amerindians; Colin Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (1997); and Michael Leroy Oberg, *Dominion and Civility: English Imperialism and Native America, 1585–1685* (1999), an excellent comparative study of early settler efforts to manage Indians in the Chesapeake and New England.

Perhaps the most important of the new Indian studies have focused on the last half of the colonial era. James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (1989), is representative of the very best of this literature. A detailed and masterfully written account of the Catawba Indians and their relations with their Carolina neighbors, this volume made clear how extensively the presence of European settlers affected Indian life in the colonial southeast. By showing how Catawbas sought to coexist with the settlers and retain their lands, Merrell showed that retreat and assimilation were not the only possible modes of Indian reaction to settler advance. Equally impressive, Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The People of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (1992), provided a similar exploration of the Iroquois response to the approach of European traders and settlers. Perhaps even more influential, Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republic in the Great Lakes Region, 1615–1850* (1991), offered a powerful new concept,



*the middle ground*, as an alternative to the conflict model stressed by Jennings and many other students of Indian-European relations. In a sweeping study of the Ohio valley from the earliest days of French occupation into the middle of the nineteenth century, White stressed the process of cultural negotiation, exchange, and convergence in areas in which neither side dominated, a situation he found to have characterized the Ohio country until it came under the control of the United States and the preponderance of power shifted to white settlers. The strong tendency in all these volumes was to stress the ongoing agency of Indians in their relations with European officials, traders, settlers, and other cultural representatives.

Written in a similar vein and also useful in providing detailed and original case studies of Amerindian-European interactions for the later years of the colonial and early national eras are, for the southeast, J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic History of the American Indians in the Old South* (1981), and Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (1992); and for the Ohio valley, Michael McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724–1774* (1992).

Many other studies have focused more intensely on the areas in which cultural negotiation took place, specifically in the arenas of trade, cultural exchange, and diplomacy. Important examples are Kathryn Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indians Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815* (1993), on trade; Ann Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (2000), on the exchange of cultural ideas; and Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from the Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (1984), and Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empire: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (1997), on diplomacy. James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (2000), is a superb case study of the central actors in this exchange process.

How the encounter affected English ideas about Indians and about ideas of race more generally has also been a subject of interest to historians. The best book on this subject is also the most recent, Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (2001). Exploring the many manifestations of English scientific interest in the New World in the literatures of exploration and colonization, Chaplin showed how, following recognition of the sus-



ceptibility of Indians to European diseases, an initially favorable view of Indians gave way to an idea of English superiority that settlers used to justify their efforts to assert their mastery over the Indians and their lands.

## The Colonization Process

If this new concentration of scholarship on the encounter between indigenous and European peoples has produced a profoundly enhanced understanding of the important and continuing role of Indians in the history of colonial British America, it has not led to any diminution of interest in the colonizing process by which settler societies took shape and asserted their hegemony over land and whatever indigenous peoples remained on it. The key questions involving this process have long been why European governments, landed and commercial elites, and ordinary people undertook overseas colonizing ventures, to what extent they tried to re-establish in America the critical features of the societies from which they emanated, how far they succeeded in those efforts, what sorts of political and social entities they established in the New World, and how those societies changed over time.

Of course, by the time the English people became involved in colonizing ventures in America at the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish and Portuguese had already had a century of experience in this area. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (1983) is an excellent general survey of the colonizing process in Spanish and Portuguese America, although it is weak on the seventeenth century and devotes little space to the fringe areas of Spanish settlement in Florida and New Mexico in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and other parts of North America in the eighteenth century.

For the English colonies, there is no recent comprehensive, balanced, and authoritative single-volume history. An older work, Angus Calder, *The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (1981), which covers the British Isles as well as the British overseas empire, remains the best one-volume general history. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (1984), is a collection of fifteen essays surveying the state of knowledge about colonial British America as of the early 1980s and remains a useful starting point. Three more recent collections also aim at broad coverage and contain many fine essays. Two of these—Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire* (1998), and P. J. Marshall, ed.,



*The Eighteenth Century* (1998), the first two volumes of the *Oxford History of the British Empire*—are set within a broad imperial framework, while the third—David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (2002)—employs a wide Atlantic approach.

As early Americanists have become ever more engaged in trying to sort out how much of English culture the colonists brought with them and to be more deeply aware of the importance of the larger context of colonial history, they have become more concerned to understand the nature of England both before and during the colonial era. The literature is vast, but Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580 to 1680* (1982), provides a superb short survey of English society during the first century of colonization, while Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1982), performs a similar function for the eighteenth century. Before venturing to America, the English had extensive experience with overseas maritime adventures, which are covered in detail and with analytic clarity in Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480–1630* (1984). Nicholas Canny's succinct study, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560–800* (1988), provides a short survey of England's contemporaneous and extensive colonizing activities in Ireland and makes the case that they served as a model for American colonization, while David B. Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584–1606* (1985), uses the failed colony on Roanoke Island during the late 1580s as an example to explore the general problems encountered by the earliest English colonizers.

A commercial company established the first successful English American colony in Virginia in 1607, and over the next half century other groups established nodes of settlement in New England and Maryland on the continent, on the Atlantic island of Bermuda, and in several West India islands. At the same time, the French were establishing settlements in Acadia and Canada, the Dutch and Swedes in the Hudson and Delaware River valleys, and both the French and Dutch occupied West India islands. By the 1660s, the early English settlements had evolved into three substantial and markedly different concentrations of English population: the *Chesapeake*, consisting of Virginia and Maryland; *New England*, including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut; and the *West Indies*, with colonies on the small islands of Barbados, St. Christopher, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua in the eastern Caribbean



and, well to the west, the large island of Jamaica, which the English captured from the Spanish in the mid-1650s.

Over the next seventy-five years, the English conquered the Dutch and Swedish settlements on the mid-Atlantic coast, converting them into the colonies of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware; established new colonies on the lower southern coast in what became North Carolina and South Carolina; and seized control of much of Acadia from the French, renaming it Nova Scotia. By the second decade of the eighteenth century, two new cultural regions had emerged on the North American continent: the *middle colonies* stretching from the Chesapeake to New England, and the *lower south* reaching from Virginia down the coast to the borders of Spanish Florida. At the same time, the older regions in the Chesapeake and New England grew in population and settled territory.

Beginning in the 1960s, the turn to social history concentrated on recovering the experiences of the several English regional societies established in the Americas. The identification of these broad cultural regions that could be used as an organizing principle for understanding colonial British America was one of the principal achievements of the social historians. As a result of their work, the history of this area no longer appeared to be merely the history of individual colonies but of large, increasingly integrated regions that shared modes of economic, social, and political organization and commonalities of culture. Implicitly or explicitly, the principal question driving the impressive body of literature that emanated from this effort was to what extent the several colonial regions were able to reproduce English culture in a New World setting.

### *The Chesapeake*

This question has been central to the historiography of the Chesapeake, where economic motives predominated, settlers used bound imported English laborers, the vast majority of whom were male, to produce staples—in the early days, principally tobacco—for the English market, and the disease environment produced high mortality. The most important early work on this subject was Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (1975), an engaging social history of England's first permanent American colony which called attention to the symbiotic relationship between servitude and freedom and emphasized how long it took to achieve demographic and social stability and the "social distortion" produced by the extensive use of the unfree labor, first of English servants and then of African



slaves. By showing how quickly some Virginia counties actually achieved a stable and densely connected rural society, James R. Perry in *The Formation of a Society on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1615–1655* (1990), challenged the idea that the Chesapeake was a social distortion, while later studies, including Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman's *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650–1750* (1984), used the experience of a single county to explore the settled ways of rural Virginia during the critical century after 1650. These works raised the possibility that Morgan, by treating the New England experience as normative, had failed to appreciate the Englishness of Chesapeake society, and in 1994, James P. P. Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake*, more directly challenged the Morgan view. By emphasizing the high levels of immigration and the continuing presence of English immigrants in Virginia throughout the seventeenth century and by comparing Chesapeake settlements to the English regions from which the emigrants were drawn, Horn emphasized the large extent to which settlers succeeded in adapting English institutions to the Chesapeake world.

Much of the earlier historical literature on the colonial Chesapeake had focused upon the early origins and emergence of the plantation elite that would be so prominent in Revolutionary and early national America. Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (1940), a still valuable study of the first generation of the elite Virginia families, and Charles S. Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (1952), an analysis of the dynamics of eighteenth-century Virginia political culture, are examples of this tendency. In the 1980s, as social historians began to dig more deeply into the nature of settler society, they produced several excellent works that explored a broader range of social groups. Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena Walsh, *Robert Cole's World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (1991), is a penetrating and readable short study of the social and economic life of a middling planter in the seventeenth century.

Still other scholars have turned their attention to the enslaved population that began growing during the closing decades of the seventeenth century and increased dramatically in the eighteenth century. The most important of these are Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (1972), an early and still useful study of the functioning and nature of slavery which concluded with an analysis of Gabriel's Rebellion in 1800, and Mechal Sobel, *The World*



*They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (1987), which suggestively explored some of the principal contributions of African Americans to the culture of eighteenth-century Virginia.

More recently, a few scholars have sought to analyze the ways in which gender functioned in colonial Virginia. Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (1996), a book that is more remarkable for its use of modern gender theory than for the depth of its empirical research, imaginatively endeavors to show how inherited notions about gender, patriarchy, race, and class shaped the process of social and cultural development in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Virginia, while Linda L. Sturtz, *Within Her Power: Propertied Women in Colonial Virginia* (2003), is a heavily empirical study of the rather extensive influence of propertied women in colonial Virginia. Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers* (1996) is a comparative study of the ways gender functioned in the Chesapeake and New England in the seventeenth century. Although Norton's efforts to link each region to a particular strand of English political and cultural thought is unsuccessful, her volume presents much helpful data on the contrasting socio-economic history of the household and family in the two regions it treats.

Notwithstanding this broadening of scholarly attention to include women, African Americans, and less wealthy white settlers, the Chesapeake upper class of gentry plantation owners, merchants, and professionals has continued to attract major attention from historians. Among the many books covering this subject are Trevor Burnard, *Creole Gentlemen: The Maryland Elite 1691–1776* (2003), which employs solid empirical research to study the emergence and perpetuation of Maryland's economic elite, and Ronald Hoffman, *Princes of Ireland, Planters of Maryland: A Carroll Saga, 1500–1782* (2000), which provides a detailed multi-generational history of the Carrolls, the wealthiest family among the Maryland elite. In his highly readable volume, which pioneers in the application of ethnographic methods to a historical subject, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (1982), Rhys Isaac sought to re-create the cultures of colonial Virginia but exaggerated the coherence of gentry culture and inflated the importance of the Baptists who challenged it, while Charles Royster, *The Fabulous History of the Dismal Swamp Company: A Story of George Washington's Times* (1999), presented a rather different view of the tidewater gentry, emphasizing, not its cultural coherence and resistance to change, but the ingenious, if often unsuccessful, pursuit



of profits through land speculation and other schemes of economic development.

The nature of the Chesapeake economy and the western spread of settlement have also been the subjects of some fine books. Jacob M. Price, *Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700–1776* (1980), remains the best single volume on the overseas trade in tobacco, the Chesapeake's principal export product throughout the colonial era. Despite its economic significance, tobacco was not the region's only economic activity, and Paul G. E. Clemons, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (1980), studies the rise in the production and export of grain in portions of the Chesapeake during the eighteenth century. A solid study of the transplantation of Tidewater culture into the interior Piedmont region is Richard R. Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia 1746–1832* (1984), while Richard D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (1977), offers a useful analysis of the early economic and social development of the area west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The study of politics, religion, and material culture in the region has lagged considerably behind the analysis of society. Jon G. Kolp, *Gentleman Freeholders: Electoral Politics in Colonial Virginia* (1998), which shows how vociferous an extensive electorate could be in contested elections, is probably the best place to begin a study of Chesapeake politics, while John K. Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690–1776* (2001), is a comprehensive and recent study of the religious life in the most Anglican of the continental colonies, and Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (1986), analyzes the architecture of Virginia parish churches as an expression of the social and political aspirations of the people responsible for building them.

### *New England*

The historiography for New England is even richer than that for the Chesapeake. First settled by English people in the early 1620s more than a decade after the establishment of Jamestown in Virginia, the small colony at Plymouth soon had to share the coast of eastern Massachusetts with a massive migration of settlers to the new colony of Massachusetts Bay.

Unlike the Plymouth settlers, the new emigrants came seeking, not religious freedom but a space in which they could construct a true church to serve as a model for the rest of Christendom. From coastal Massa-



chusetts, immigrants spilled south and west to form the colonies of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Haven and north to establish towns in Maine and New Hampshire, the latter becoming a separate colony in 1679. With a relatively benign disease environment, the fecund and sexually balanced population of New Englanders spread west, north, and east and even took a principal role in the settlement of Nova Scotia during the mid-eighteenth century.

Until relatively recently, early American historians have tended to consider New England as both the seedbed of what would become American culture and normative in the English colonizing experience in America. In many ways, however, New England was anomalous among the early English American settlements. Alone, it experienced settlement in family groups most of whom came in a single period of concentrated immigration in the 1630s; it never suffered from an unbalanced sex ratio and enjoyed perhaps the lowest mortality in the English speaking world; it had a religious dimension that was infinitely more powerful than the more materially oriented colonies in the Chesapeake and the West Indies; it enjoyed a more sparse material existence; and it used considerably less bound labor. Among later colonies, only Pennsylvania came close to resembling New England in any of these regards.

The extent to which New England quickly managed to reproduce settled English life in the New World was a subject that interested the new social historians of the 1970s. Indeed, the first community studies for any portion of colonial British America involved New England. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636–1736* (1970), which applied social science models of peasant societies, and Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (1970), which explored the early and successful implementation of English ideas of patriarchy, were among the earliest and most influential of such studies. Scholars of New England religious life had long used a declension model as a framework for understanding early New England. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956), an influential collection of ten essays, provides a succinct and brilliantly written example of the employment of this model. Inspired by the work of German sociologists such as Max Weber who developed the theory that the early modern era involved a major social transformation from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, that is, from an emphasis on communal values to a stress on individualism, scholars like Miller fashioned out of some of the sermons of Puritan cler-



ics an interpretive design that emphasized the early establishment of strong Puritan religious and communal institutions and the subsequent decline of those institutions and the religious spirit that underlay them. The earliest social historians had all worked within this conventional paradigm, and, by stressing the initial power and the slow disintegration of social, religious, and political community and of parental authority over children, Lockridge and Greven tended to reinforce it.

Though the implicit assumption underlying their work was that the New Englanders had recreated English culture more successfully than the settlers of any other region, the extent to which Puritan social creations recreated English cultural practices and values was not a subject that these historians explicitly confronted. One of the first books to investigate this subject systematically was David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transferal of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century* (1981), which used evidence from five towns to show how far early Massachusetts settlers had succeeded in transferring local English cultures to their new homes. One of Allyn's principal contributions, however, was to make historians acutely aware of how varied English local cultures and their New England adaptations actually were. There was not one but many models of Englishness on which the Puritans could—and did—draw.

The picture that emerged from these and other studies of cultural transfer was that of a society deeply traditional and religious in its orientation and dominated by small and coercive communities devoted to subsistence farming, with families living on independent freeholds. The continuing attraction of New England religious history operated to strengthen this view. How far the dominant Puritan establishments were able to imprint their ideas upon settler New England has been the classic question regarding colonial New England. No region of early America yielded such a rich theological literature, and historians have produced a detailed and increasingly intricate portrait of the Puritan religious experiment in colonial New England. Just a few of the more important books on this subject can be mentioned here. Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570–1700* (1991), provides a sophisticated analysis of the English background to New England Puritanism and of the ongoing religious exchange between England and New England throughout the seventeenth century. David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (1972), is perhaps the



best study of the ministry as a calling or a profession for any part of colonial British America. If these works tended to emphasize the importance of orthodox Puritanism, other works explored aspects of the rather considerable diversity of religious belief and practice. Thus, in *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England* (1989), David D. Hall explicated the religious dimensions of popular culture, including the fascination with the supernatural and the persistence of paganism, while Philip R. Gura, *Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620–1669* (1984), examined the significant role of radical Puritan sects, including antinomians, millenarians, and Socinians, in early New England religious life.

Of course, New England settler life had many other dimensions beyond the religious. Like those who went to the Chesapeake colonies, New Englanders busied themselves with constructing an economic and material base for their societies, and the investigation of this subject over the last several decades has revealed societies and economies that were both complex and diverse. Most New England households were farming households, and William Cronon's sprightly written *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983) is an account of how farmers changed the landscape and ecology of colonial New England. But not all settlers were farmers. As Darrett B. Rutman has shown in *Winthrop's Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630–1649* (1965), a comprehensive study of Boston's first two decades that stresses the primacy of economic concerns among the town's inhabitants and their religious heterogeneity, Boston quickly grew into a major town that bore little resemblance to the country villages spreading out beyond it, the town's inhabitants exhibiting marked religious heterogeneity and powerful economic drives.

Some of these economic energies focused on trade and some on land speculation. In an outstanding pioneering study, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (1955), Bernard Bailyn examined the economic, social, and political role of the emerging mercantile group in colonial Massachusetts and emphasized their role in building a trade economy with Britain and other American colonies, while John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century* (1991), explored the early histories of around sixty New England towns, showing the importance of the profit motive among the entrepreneurs who dominated the process of town founding. In *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seven-*



*teenth-Century Springfield* (1983), Stephen Innes explicitly challenged the long-held view that New England settlers were mostly all independent freeholders with relatively small farms by showing how the Pyncheon family succeeded in creating a large landed estate on the rich farm lands of the Connecticut River valley and employed large numbers of tenants to develop it. Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630–1850* (1994), looks at the vigorous fishing economy in the seacoast towns north of Boston. If New England society was economically diverse, it was also highly conflicted, as David Thomas Konig shows in *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts, 1629–1692* (1979), a model examination of litigation establishing the importance of courts in dispute settlements in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Virginia D. Anderson, *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (1991), makes a powerful case for the importance of religion in the great migration to New England and the construction of early New England society, while Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of New England* (1995), insightfully explores the interpenetration of economic and religious ideas among the early generations of New England settlers.

The New England colonies experienced a variety of problems during the third quarter of the seventeenth century, resulting mainly from metropolitan challenges to provincial autonomy and a pervasive conviction among the more religious elements of the community that the area had suffered a widespread decline in religious zeal since the founding. Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England Colonies, 1675–1715* (1981), provides the best study of the struggles with the metropolis that resulted in Massachusetts's losing its charter and being converted into a royal colony. Internal troubles were epitomized by the witchcraft trials that erupted around Salem village, Massachusetts, in 1692; the most extensive manifestation in English America of a phenomenon that was already dying out in Europe. This subject has attracted much scholarly interest. Probably the most informative single book-length study is Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974), which uses a microexamination of Salem village to explore the social basis of New England witchcraft.

As the New England colonies became ever more tightly integrated into the British Empire during the first six decades of the eighteenth century, they experienced rapid demographic and territorial growth and



economic diversification. Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (1985), is the best general study of an economy and its social effects. This work is particularly important for finding that, in Connecticut, few free males failed to acquire enough property to provide themselves with economic competence. In *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690–1750* (1984), an imaginative study of two Massachusetts port towns, Marblehead and Gloucester, Christine Leigh Heyrman shows how economic development fostered increasing social coherence, while Bruce H. Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers: Law and Community in Early Connecticut* (1987), an excellent social history of law in colonial Connecticut, traces changing patterns of litigation to show how the rising pressures of economic change and commercialization fostered a growing rationalization and specialization of Connecticut's legal system.

Provincial politics was also affected by the growth and diversification that characterized eighteenth-century New England. Among a number of excellent books on this subject, Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (1967), a study of the politics of expansion and of the effects of expansion upon politics and values, is fundamental. At the level of the town, which was the basic unit of local government in New England, public life was broadly participatory, albeit patterns of leadership varied according to the complexity of the community. This subject is best treated in Edward M. Cook, Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (1976), although William E. Nelson, *Dispute and Conflict Resolution in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1725–1825* (1981), a careful examination of dispute resolution through town meetings, churches, and courts in one Massachusetts county, shows how courts gradually acquired prominence in matters of local contention. New England's growing and not always comfortable involvement in broad imperial affairs is deftly illustrated in Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (1984), a study which contrasts Massachusetts soldiers and British regulars during the Seven Years' War (1754–1763) and explains the impact of the war upon Massachusetts.

The broad expansion of New England settlement during the last century of the colonial era can be studied through a number of excellent books. These include David E. Van Deventer, *The Emergence of Provincial New Hampshire, 1623–1741* (1976), one of the best social and eco-



conomic histories of any colony, which covers the long period from the beginnings of New Hampshire to 1741; Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (1968), an excellent study of geographical change in the old French colony of Acadia and the English colony of Nova Scotia that throws much light on the involvement of New Englanders in the eastern spread of settlements beginning about 1748; and Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (1990), a careful and admirably concise study of the settlement process on the eastern frontier. Elizabeth Mancke, *The Fault Lines of Empire: Political Differentiation in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, ca. 1760–1830* (2005), penetratingly explores the ways Nova Scotia political cultures diverged from that of Massachusetts.

The domestic and religious lives of New England settlers in the eighteenth century have also been well studied. Gloria L. Main, *People of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Early New England* (2001), is an excellent analysis of the structures and changes in family life, while Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1750* (1982), is an insightful study of the domestic lives of married women and their essential contributions to the household economy of colonial New England.

Cornelia H. Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639–1789* (1995), examines the public and private lives of women through their participation in the legal system. The literature on eighteenth-century religious life is extensive. J. William T. Youngs, Jr., *God's Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700–1750* (1976), a comprehensive investigation of the calling of ministers, and Erik R. Seeman, *Pious Persuasions: Laity and Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New England* (1999), an analysis of the respective roles of laity and clergy in religious life, will provide the reader with an introduction to this subject.

### *The Island Colonies*

The third group of English American colonies begun in the early seventeenth century was in the West Indies and off the Atlantic coast of North America. As in the case of the Chesapeake, economic considerations—the pursuit of wealth through the use of unfree labor, and the production of export articles for English markets—were paramount in shaping the societies of these islands. The introduction of sugar cultivation during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, first in Barbados,



then in the Leeward Islands, and finally in the 1660s in Jamaica, transformed their economic lives and made them the most valuable English colonies in the Americas. Tiny Barbados quickly became the major sugar producer and the wealthiest and most visible colony in the English empire, being succeeded in that regard by Jamaica only during the 1720s and 1730s. To produce sugar, these colonies made the first extensive use of non-European bound labor in the English-speaking world. Because plantation owners worked slaves hard, mortality was high among this population, while a large proportion of the settler population fell prey to tropical diseases. As a result, despite fairly high immigration from England and other parts of Britain, the white population increased only slowly, while, because of imports, the population of African descent increased exponentially, reaching a ratio of five to one in Barbados, somewhat healthier than the other islands, and more than ten to one in some of the Leeward Islands and Jamaica. Those white families who survived and were able to reproduce themselves tended to become extremely wealthy, a small proportion of them even managing to resettle in Britain where they lived on the profits generated by their estates. In most of these regards, the West Indian colonies differed from all the colonies on the North American mainland.

These islands, all of which concentrated on the production of sugar and other tropical staples for export to Britain and, to a growing extent in the eighteenth century, to North America, need to be distinguished from the Atlantic island colonies of Bermuda, one of the earliest English American colonies, and the Bahamas, which became a British colony during the early eighteenth century. Neither Bermuda nor the Bahamas developed staple agriculture, neither had such proportionately large slave populations, and neither generated much wealth for its settler populations, albeit Bermuda developed a profitable shipbuilding economy based upon the seaworthiness of lumber made from its local cedar forests.

The modern historical literature on these island colonies is much less extensive than that for any region of English settlement in North America. Richard Pares, *Merchants and Planters* (1960), an excellent brief volume on the establishment of the English colonies in the West Indies and their early social and economic development, provides a good point of departure, but the most comprehensive book on the West Indies in the seventeenth century is Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies* (1972), a readable history of the formation of English West Indian society that fashions a narrative



around the emerging planter elite and the rapid transition from a labor system that employed bound English servants to one that relied very largely on African slaves. Despite its many strengths, this volume is flawed by the author's failure to appreciate the extent to which West Indian society represented a variant of English culture. For the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Dunn's work should be supplemented by two works. The first is Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1713* (1989), one of the best studies of coerced labor for any seventeenth-century English colony, which shows the close connections between white servitude and black slavery. The second is David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (1986), a systematic examination of the operation of the slave trade to the English West Indies before 1723 with some attention to the impact of slavery on English West Indian society.

For the eighteenth century, the standard work on the development of the West Indies is Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (1973), an excellent economic history of the British sugar colonies, with the best analyses of the social structure of the white population. The first half of Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects 1492–1900* (1987), provides a comprehensive discussion of the rich intellectual production of people living in the British West Indian colonies. For Jamaica, Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1832* (1971), is a comprehensive study of the cultural world of eighteenth-century Jamaica that creatively considers the roles of both whites and blacks in the creation of that world, George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica 1729–1783* (1965), contains a close study of Jamaican politics over a fifty-year period that shows the remarkable vigor of the colony's political institutions, and Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (2004), uses the extensive diaries of an overseer and planter to illuminate the social dynamics of Jamaica during the last half of the eighteenth century. There are few modern studies of the smaller island colonies, but David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua with Implications for Colonial British America* (1985), offers a close analysis of the slave society of Antigua during the early eighteenth century and of the aborted slave revolt of 1736, while Karl Watson, *The Civilised Island Barbados: A Social History, 1750–1816*



(1979), provides a rather general and selective study of the social history of Barbados. David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492* (1987), is a comprehensive study of social development and environmental change by a historical geographer with particular attention to Barbados, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands.

The historical literature on the Atlantic island colonies of Bermuda and the Bahamas is also rather sparse. An older study, Henry C. Wilkinson, *Bermuda in the Old Empire: A History of the Island from the Dissolution of the Somers Island Company until the end of the American Revolutionary War, 1684–1784* (1950), a thorough, if somewhat dated, narrative history, is still the best study of colonial Bermuda in the century before the American Revolution, although Virginia Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda, 1616–1782* (1999), provides much of the best social analysis. For the Bahamas, Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People* (1992), is a modern, comprehensive history of the Bahamas colony from its beginnings early in the eighteenth century to the 1830s.

### *The Middle Colonies*

The English capture from the Dutch of New Netherlands, an area including lands in both the Hudson and Delaware River valleys, in the early 1660s was the first step in the creation in the late seventeenth century of two further regions of English colonial settlement: the middle colonies and the lower south. The English colonies of New Jersey and Carolina (divided in the early eighteenth century into the two colonies of South Carolina and North Carolina) date from the mid-1660s, and the settlement of Pennsylvania under the proprietorship of William Penn began in the early 1680s.

The middle colonies certainly had the most socially diverse settler population in colonial English America. Part of this diversity derived from the presence of the Dutch and Swedish settlers who remained in the region after the English conquest and part from the efforts of William Penn and other proprietors to attract settlers from Scotland, Ireland, France, and Germany. A principal issue for colonial historians is how these non-English peoples related to the politically and usually numerically dominant English settler population. Did they try to settle in ethnic enclaves and recreate within those enclaves the cultures they had left behind in the Old World and, if so, how far were they successful in that attempt? Or, in terms of the classic melting pot theory, did they



try to assimilate to English norms and to meld into mainstream English-American culture through participating in existing colonial institutions and cultural patterns and through intermarriage? The answer to this question is mixed. The Dutch and Swedish settlers in the Hudson and Delaware River valleys represented an unusual case because they had well-established legal and social institutions at the time of the English conquest and remained politically and socially dominant in many communities for many decades. The social and economic development of New Netherlands up until the conquest is perhaps most concisely and clearly told in Oliver O. Rink, *Holland on the Hudson: An Economic and Social History of Dutch New York* (1986). Addressing the issue of Dutch assimilation to English norms, Donna Merwick, *Possessing Albany, 1630–1710: The Dutch and English Experiences* (1990), imaginatively uses the experience of the Albany settlement to explore the largely unsuccessful efforts of the Dutch to retain their culture in the decades immediately after the conquest, while Joyce Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664–1730* (1992), takes the subject of Dutch acculturation into the eighteenth century in a well-designed analysis of social dynamics in the town of New York, the most ethnically diverse urban center in colonial British America. In contrast to Merwick, however, she shows that the Dutch, using the Dutch Reformed Church as a vehicle for maintaining cultural cohesion and marrying within their own group, managed to hang on to their ethnic traditions through the early decades of the eighteenth century.

Several other studies show the middle colonies to have been places well-suited for the recreation of ethnic enclaves. Thus, Ned C. Landsman, *Scotland and Its First American Colony, 1683–1765* (1985), an important analysis of Scottish settlements in New Jersey beginning in the late seventeenth century, emphasizes the Scottish background of these settlements and their successful recreation of lowland Scottish culture. Coming in far larger numbers and mostly unfamiliar with the English language, Germans, who by the middle of the eighteenth century constituted more than a third of Pennsylvania's settler population, tended to settle in communities with other Germans. The best local study so far produced for the middle colonies, Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683–1800* (1976), analyzes the society created by the earliest German community in colonial British America. A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America*



(1993), provides a highly sophisticated analysis of the transfer of German culture to colonial British America, showing how Germans managed to use familiar legal practices to create estates and communities that retained their Germanness over several generations, while Wolfgang Splitter, *Politics, People, Politics: German Lutherans in Pennsylvania 1740–1790* (1998), explains how social conditions in Pennsylvania weakened clerical authority in Pennsylvania. By contrast, the French Huguenot settlers who, flying from religious persecution in Old Regime France, migrated to English America in significant numbers between 1680 and 1720, tended to settle in dispersed patterns amidst the English population and to assimilate quickly. Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in a New World Society* (1983), is the standard book on this group, but readers will also wish to consult Neil Kamil's analytically impressive recent study *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenot's New World, 1517–1751* (2004), which explores in great depth the formation of Huguenot cosmology in the Old World and imaginatively relates it to the material culture of immigrants to New York.

Most settlers in the middle colonies were farmers who lived in dispersed rural settlements, and James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (1972), remains the essential starting point for an understanding of changing patterns of land use and social dynamics in this rapidly developing portion of the British colonial world, where the spread of settlement, the prosperity of the free population, and demographic growth were by the 1720s among the most remarkable in colonial British America. Lemon stresses the commercial orientation of middle-colony agriculture, and Mary M. Schweitzer, *Custom and Contract: Household, Government, and the Economy in Colonial Pennsylvania* (1987), studies the participation of households in commercial markets and how those households used government at both the local and provincial levels to shape economic policy to their benefit.

But not all middle-colony residents were free, the regions having a few slaves, especially in New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, were importing substantial numbers of indentured servants. The institution of indentured servitude as it operated in colonial and early national Pennsylvania is the subject of Sharon V. Salinger, *"To Serve Well and Faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (1987). Nor did they all live on independent farmsteads. In both New York and



New Jersey, people well-connected to the provincial governments used their political clout to acquire vast tracts of land which they subsequently tried to fashion into large baronial estates peopled by tenants. Such estates were particularly evident in New York, some of them deriving from early Dutch grants to patroons, large investors willing to bear the expense of importing settlers to occupy their lands. Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1775* (1978), is a superb book on the landlord system that developed in colonial New York. Effectively challenging the view of tenants as members of a repressed class prone to agrarian revolt, it emphasizes the extent to which landlords had to make concessions to induce tenants to settle on their estates and shows how families used temporary tenantry as a means to get the resources to acquire their own estates.

With two large seaports, Philadelphia and New York, dominating the middle colonies, merchants soon became prominent in middle-colony culture. Beautifully written, Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: the Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia* (1948), is the classic account of the ethos of Quaker merchants in colonial Philadelphia, while Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (1998), an elegant and thoroughly researched study, is the most recent and best study of the mercantile world of a middle-colony urban center. Cynthia Kierner, *Traders and Gentlefolk: The Livingstons of New York, 1675-1790* (1992), provides an excellent case study of the manifold activities of a prominent New York mercantile family that also acquired large rural holdings through the era of the American Revolution.

How the diverse ethnic populations got along in the middle colonies has been a subject of considerable interest to historians of early America. The best study of the kinds of conflicts they had at the local level and how they resolved them is William Offutt, *Of "Good Laws" and "Good Men": Law and Society in the Delaware Valley, 1680-1710* (1995), while Sally Schwartz, *"A Mixed Multitude": The Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania* (1987), provides a coherent and more general recounting of how heterogeneous settlers of Pennsylvania achieved William Penn's ideal of a plural society with religious toleration. Perhaps the most original work on the lives of women in the middle colonies is Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Pennsylvania* (2000), which, unlike most previous books on colonial women, which tended to assume the ubiquity of marriage, concentrates on recovering the lives of the sig-



nificant and probably increasing population of single women, not just widows but people who never married, and the significant contributions they made to economic life, especially in Philadelphia.

The public life of the middle colonies has been the subject of a substantial literature. Gary B. Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania 1681-1726* (1968), is the best available study of the contentious political life of early Pennsylvania, but the best volume so far published on politics is Alan Tully, *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (1994), which covers both Pennsylvania and New York through the late colonial era. The spread of settlement during the colonial era has not received the attention it deserves, but Peter Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture Along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700-1800* (1991), an analysis of the cultural transformation of the upper Susquehanna Valley from an American Indian to European American space, is notable for its demonstration of the powerful influence of land developers in defining new settlements.

### *The Lower South*

Settled at the same time as the middle colonies, the lower southern colonies of North Carolina and South Carolina, along with Georgia, a new colony established in the 1730s, also developed into a distinctive region. Like the British island colonies, those of the lower south have received less attention from historians than their contemporary importance would seem to demand, perhaps because of the widespread assumption that, as embryos of the nineteenth-century South, they lay outside the mainstream of American development. After a slow start, however, South Carolina, producing staples such as rice and indigo which were in high demand in Europe, became by the 1740s and 1750s a wealthy and highly successful social and economic enterprise that was, next to Virginia, Britain's most valued American mainland colony. During the decades surrounding the Revolution, South Carolina was spreading west and south to contest the great southeastern Indian confederacies for space and preeminence in the region.

Initially settled mostly by immigrants moving south from Virginia, North Carolina was much like the Chesapeake, consisting mainly of rural settlements concentrating on the production of tobacco, lumber, and foodstuffs. Lacking good harbors of its own, North Carolina was among the poorest and most isolated of the colonies, mostly sending its exports, not directly to England, but north to Virginia or, by the early eighteenth century, south to the emerging port of Charleston in South Carolina.



North Carolina remained a marginal part of Britain's American empire until the 1750s, when its western territories began to attract vast numbers of settlers moving south from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia and north and west from South Carolina, making it the fastest growing area of colonial British America. Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (1964), a solid historical geography of colonial North Carolina that focuses on patterns of land use and economic activity, is the best modern account of this area of the lower south.

The hub of the colonial lower south was in South Carolina, where the early settlers succeeded by the early decades of the eighteenth century in establishing a culture that was well-designed for exploiting the rich lands of the Carolina lowcountry stretching from the Cape Fear River valley in southern North Carolina south to Georgia and Spanish Florida. South Carolina, many of whose earliest immigrants came from Barbados where they had had experience with the production of agricultural staples through the use of slave labor, was the only continental British colony that made extensive use of enslaved labor from the start. Once the successful cultivation of rice had begun in the late 1690s, the importation of slave labor was on such a scale that the black population quickly outnumbered the white. An excellent social history of the first seventy years of the colony that was the first work to give prominent attention to the colony's black population and to stress the African contribution to low country society is Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (1974), and several historians have followed his lead. Wood speculated that white settlers, none of whom had any experience with rice cultivation, gained their knowledge of how to cultivate that crop from those among the enslaved who came from the rice growing regions of west Africa, and Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (1981), provided support for that speculation by showing that planters strongly sought and preferred slaves from Senegambia precisely because they knew that people from that region were experienced in rice culture. More recently, the historical geographer Judith A. Carney, in her book, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (2001), has taken this argument even further by showing parallels between rice cultivation techniques in West Africa and the Carolina and Georgia low country.



If white settlers learned from their slaves, they were by no means passive recipients of that knowledge. Especially after the economic foundations were thoroughly in place, the most successful planters and their allies among the sophisticated mercantile and professional communities that were developing in Charleston were avid agricultural improvers, always on the lookout for new modes of profitable economic enterprise and new areas in which to apply old techniques. The nature of this spirit of innovation and its various manifestations is well told in Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1825* (1993), a basic work for any understanding of the expanding lower south during the late eighteenth century, while Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670–1920* (1989), a substantial portion of which covers the colonial era, is a superb economic history of the South Carolina lowcountry.

Richard Waterhouse, *A New World Gentry: The Making of a Merchant and Planter Class in South Carolina, 1670–1770* (1989), provides a systematic account of the early origins of the wealthy planter and mercantile elite that came to dominate lowcountry life, while Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700–1835* (1998), analyzes the role of women in the creation of lowcountry culture. However innovative and politically dominant white settlers were in the lower south, the ubiquity of people of African descent and slavery had a profound effect upon the shape of the regional culture. This subject is explored with penetration and imagination by Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1740–1790* (1998). Moreover, although the initial settlement of the upcountry in the interior of the Carolinas and Georgia initially proceeded with relatively few slaves, the slave culture of the east rapidly spread to the west, especially after the successful development of cotton as a cash crop during and immediately after the Revolution. The standard book on this subject is Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760–1808* (1990).

### *Adjacent Non-British Regions*

Simultaneous with the development of these colonial British American regions, other socio-economic entities took shape under the auspices of other European nations in both the West Indies and North America. Relationships between these entities and the British colonies were reciprocal exchanges—sometimes hostile, sometimes cooperative, and



occasionally intimate and intense. While some of these entities remained little more than military and missionary outposts among numerically superior indigenous populations, others developed into coherent regions similar to those in colonial British America. Over the past generation, historians of the America have come to appreciate that a full comprehension of the history of their own areas of study demands an understanding of the internal development of adjacent regions, as well as interactions with them.

Moreover, because, beginning in the late eighteenth century, some of these non-British entities were absorbed into the United States, as of that time their colonial histories became a part of the colonial histories of the United States. In the 1920s and 1930s, Herbert Eugene Bolton enthusiastically pushed for more attention to the histories of what he referred to as the Spanish Borderlands or those areas of the United States that were formerly under Spanish rule. One of Bolton's last books, *Wider Horizons of American History* (1939), laid out this position fully. Recent scholars have expanded the concept of a greater America to include areas that until the very late eighteenth century remained under the nominal control of the French and Russians, as well as the Spanish, French, and Dutch possessions in the West Indies, most of which never became part of the United States. Politically and culturally, these non-British areas were, throughout the period before the creation of the United States, attached to the larger areas of Spanish, French, Dutch, or Russian America, and their histories remain, first and foremost, part of the rich and complex histories of those empires.

Relationships between colonial British American regions and adjacent non-British regions were most intense in the West Indies, the earliest sites of Spanish colonial activity in the Americas during the last decade of the fifteenth century. Spain controlled all four of the Greater Antilles—Hispaniola, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica—from the time of their conquests from the native inhabitants until the English seized Jamaica in the mid-1650s, and the French took the western half of Hispaniola in the 1690s and turned it into the thriving sugar colony of St. Domingue, with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the eastern half of Hispaniola remaining in Spanish hands until the end of the nineteenth century. Before the last few decades of the eighteenth century, when sugar cultivation and African slavery became prominent features of the Cuban, and, to a lesser extent, Hispaniolan and Puerto Rican economies, the economic base of the Antilles consisted mainly of the production of



tobacco, provisions, livestock, and a few minor staples such as cacao. Some of these products went to supply the great silver fleets from Mexico and Panama that rendezvoused at Havana. The similarities in their economies and populations—few Indians, many Spaniards and mestizos, and modest numbers of slaves—meant that these islands constituted a coherent socio-economic region. Modern scholars writing in English have neglected this long preliminary phase in favor of studying the emergence of sugar culture, a subject that lies beyond the scope of this work. Studies in English of the French colonies in the West Indies—St. Domingue and the smaller islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, all of which formed a distinctive cultural region oriented toward the production of sugar using slave labor—are similarly sparse. Scholars have preferred to concentrate their attention upon the massive slave uprising on St. Domingue in the 1790s that led to establishment of the independent republic of Haiti in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Although James Pritchard comprehensive survey, *In Search of Empires: The French in the Americas, 1670–1730* (2004), which also covers activities in North America, treats the first half century of the colonial history of the French Antilles, there is at present no good study in English of the important years after 1730. After the Portuguese reconquest of Pernambuco in 1654 and the English conquest of New Netherlands in 1664, the only Dutch possessions in America were Surinam and several small islands in the Lesser Antilles and off the northern coast of South America that except for Surinam produced few staple producers and served as trading entrepôts. Their early development is treated in Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast 1580–1680* (1971).

Spanish, French, and even Russian activities in North America have attracted much more attention from historians writing in English. Indeed, practically all of the historical work on Spanish efforts in North America has been done by North Americans. Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia and A Way to the Orient: The American Southeast during the Sixteenth Century* (1990), provides an excellent survey of early Spanish activities in what is now the southeastern United States, including the establishment of Florida in the 1560s. Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana*, previously mentioned, offers a clear account of the mutual dependence of the republic of Spaniards and the republic of Indians in the maritime periphery of Florida during the seventeenth century and of the waning influence of the presidio of St. Augustine over the southeastern Indians during the early eighteenth century; Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's*



*Frontier* (2002), contains a succinct and authoritative overview of Florida's development as a Spanish colony and during the British interregnum of 1763–1784.

By the first decade of the seventeenth century, the spread of Spanish occupation north from New Spain had reached New Mexico, and during the latter half of the eighteenth century it would extend into Texas and California. During the period covered by this essay, these outposts had little directly to do with colonial British America, and the aridity of their climates and their overland connection to Mexico City rendered them a region quite distinct from Spanish Florida. Their development is recounted in David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (1992). James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (2002), is a recent work on the cultures of colonial New Mexico and adjacent areas.

The literature in English on French activities in North America is extensive. At the same time that the English and Dutch were establishing settlements on the eastern coast of North America in the first decades of the seventeenth century, the French were doing the same in what is now northeastern Canada: in Acadia around the Bay of Fundy and in New France in the St. Lawrence River valley. By the late seventeenth century, they had established a vast Indian trading empire stretching across the Great Lakes and into the Illinois country. During the first decades of the eighteenth century, they lost most of their Acadian settlements to the English and began the successful occupation of the lower Mississippi River valley with the colony of Louisiana. By the 1730s and 1740s, they had many small settlements and trading posts reaching up the Mississippi into the Illinois country. The French thus had three distinctive regions through much of the early eighteenth century. New France, an agricultural, fur trading, and fishing colony focused on the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes with a substantial French population in the east and a string of trading posts to the west; a staple producing colony with a significant slave population in Louisiana; and a farming and fur trading region with a few widely dispersed French farming communities in the Illinois country. In 1763 at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, all of these regions came under British control, except Louisiana and posts west of the Mississippi, which were transferred to the Spanish.

Only a few key books about these developments can be mentioned here. Allan Greer, *The People of New France* (1997), an excellent and



concise social history of the principal French colony, and James Pritchard, *In Search of Empires*, previously mentioned, should be supplemented by four specialized works. By showing how little authority Canadian landlords had over their tenants, Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Seignorial System in Canada: A Geographic Study* (1966), a pioneering study, forever put to rest the nineteenth-century depiction of New France as a tightly controlled feudal entity. The more recent study by Leslie Choquette, *Frenchmen and Peasant: Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada* (1997), emphasizes the limited migration from France and explores the development of a peasant mentality among rural landholders. J. F. Boshier, *The Canada Merchants, 1713–1763* (1987), studies the development of an overseas merchant class in the urban centers of Quebec and Montreal. Peter N. Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada: A Cultural History* (2000), is a general overview of the cultural history of New France. French Acadia, including the history of its Francophone inhabitants after the British conquest, is insightfully surveyed by N. E. S. Griffith, *The Contexts of Acadian History, 1686–1788* (1992), while Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (2000), is a recent study of French activities in the upper Mississippi. Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, previously mentioned, is the best book on colonial Louisiana under the French. Carl A. Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana* (1987), is a social history of the Acadians who settled in Louisiana after their expulsion from Nova Scotia in the mid-1750s, and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of the Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (1992), offers a perceptive analysis of the development of a creole culture among the slaves imported during the early stages of the development of a plantation economy in French Louisiana.

Dating from the early decades of the eighteenth century, Russian activities in North America largely consisted of fur trading and fishing posts that attracted few settlers, but by the late eighteenth century reached as far south as north central California. James R. Gibson, *Imperial Russia in America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784–1867* (1976), is the best monograph on this subject.

## The African and the African American Dimension

The reader may have noticed how important the institution of African slavery was in the creation of several of these regions, especially



the Chesapeake, the island colonies, and the lower south, but it was of more than minor importance even in the middle colonies and New England. New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Rhode Island also had significant slave populations, at least some of whom lived on large plantation-style production sites. Moreover, the proportion of Africans or African Americans in the population of some rural areas of those colonies approached that of some Chesapeake counties, while the settler populations of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and even Nova Scotia were, especially in the larger towns, sprinkled with people of African descent who worked as laborers in households, on farms, in fishing, and in various commercial and manufacturing activities. Everywhere in colonial British America, slavery was recognized and protected by law. The fact that slavery was not confined to a deviant south during the colonial era gives the lie to those historical interpretations that find the roots of American culture in a slave-free New England and powerfully calls attention to the centrality of slavery in the early modern British Atlantic world.

Historians had always been aware of the presence of colonial slavery, of course, but they had devoted little energy to investigating it. Most slavery studies had concentrated on the antebellum South in the decades immediately before the American Civil War. This situation changed abruptly beginning in the 1960s as the civil rights movement, combined with the professional interest in constructing a more complete history, turned attention to the role of Africans in the creation of the Americas. Indeed, it can be argued that the new interest in Amerindians and women was preceded and inspired by this concern for recovering the history of African Americans. Within the world of scholarship on English American colonies, the foundational book was Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (1968), a profound analysis of white attitudes toward blacks and the ways those attitudes shaped social, cultural, and mental structures of American slave worlds established under the aegis of Britain during the early modern era. Weighing in on an old historical question, whether slavery was the source of racial prejudice or vice versa, Jordan argued that deep-rooted prejudices toward blackness constituted an essential precondition for the enslavement of Africans and was the foundation for the prejudice that would underlie the racism and discrimination of later American life.

But the historical inquiry quickly moved beyond white racism to look closely at the extent and nature of the slave trade and the operation of slavery itself. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*



(1969), provided a firm starting point from which historians could develop an understanding of the extent and nature of the slave trade and the extraordinary ethnic diversity of the people caught up in it. Over the last thirty years, many scholars have refined and elaborated upon Curtin's work, and their findings are conveniently incorporated into a relatively recent and highly authoritative volume, David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (2000). The new work on the slave trade has revealed that African middlemen controlled the trade on the African coast, that the western coast of Africa stretching from Senegambia down to Angola was the source for the vast majority of slaves, many of whom came from far in the interior, that the volume of the slave trade was extraordinary, reaching into the tens of thousands in most years by the early decades of the eighteenth century, and that British slave traders enjoyed a large share of the trade throughout the eighteenth century, to the enormous profit of metropolitan Britain. Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy, 1660–1800* (2000), provides an excellent and concise analysis of the economic impact of the slave trade upon Britain.

As Curtin had already made clear, only a relatively small percentage of people shipped across the Atlantic to be slaves came to colonial British America, and most of those went to the West Indian colonies. Only a fraction went to the colonies on the North American continent, which, with the exception of Bermuda, was the only place in the colonial British American world where the black population became self-sustaining before the end of the colonial era. In the West Indies and in most of the other plantation slave regimes, mortality among slaves was so high that planters needed to replace about five percent of them every year just to maintain the existing numbers of laborers, whereas in North America, where the food supply was plentiful, the work regime somewhat less onerous, and the disease environment less lethal, the black population by the early decades of the eighteenth century was reproducing itself almost at the rate of the white population. Imports, usually limited only by the buying power of potential purchasers, went not for replenishment but for expansion. If North America imported far fewer slaves than the West Indies, however, the number of Africans entering the English colonies during the century from roughly 1680 to 1780 far exceeded the number of European immigrants over the same period, and these African immigrants brought with them a diversity of languages and cultures that made the differences among European immigrants seem almost trivial by comparison.



To what extent in the slave regimes of the New World these unwilling African immigrants were able either to retain elements of the cultures they brought with them or to fashion new and specifically African American cultures out of a process of cultural negotiation has been a subject of great interest to scholars of the early modern Atlantic. The best general book on this subject is John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (1992). An Africanist, Thornton succinctly surveys the specific ways in which African American cultures may have derived out of African cultural practices, while Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), suggestively argues for the creation of a generalized Black Atlantic culture that brought an underlying unity to the many modes of black life that could be found all around the Atlantic.

But most scholars of the black experience in the Americas have emphasized the wide variety in the nature of the cultures of the enslaved in the Americas, a function mainly of the balance of ethnic groups in the black population and the specific conditions of work in particular regions. As the aforementioned works by Gerald Mullin, Mechal Sobel, Barry Gaspar, and Peter Wood show, the history of enslavement varied considerably from one place to another, and the elegantly written synthesis by Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998), is particularly adept at portraying these regional differences among the slave regimes in the North American colonies, while Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736–1831* (1993), represents an effort to compare the differing modes and character of slave acculturation in North America and the West Indies, a theme investigated for the southern colonies in the early portions of Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (1998). Throughout the British colonial world, most of the slaves lived on agricultural settlements, in large groups on plantations and in smaller numbers on farmsteads, not all of whom were engaged in production for the export economy. Increasingly, however, slaves could be found in ever larger numbers in urban communities, where their opportunities for cultural expression and a degree of autonomy seem to have been considerably greater. James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (1997), a study of slave life in and around Richmond, Virginia, is the best book on urban slavery for any area of British America before 1800.



Far and away the most impressive volume yet published on the history of the African-American population of colonial British America before 1800 is Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (1998). As the title suggests, this comprehensive study, based on extensive research and characterized by rich analysis, compares the two principal slave regimes in colonial British North America, the Chesapeake and the Carolina low country. Morgan shows how very different the institution of slavery was in these two areas. In the Chesapeake, slaves engaged in tobacco production generally worked in gangs under white supervision, while in the low country they worked in rice cultivation often on the task system without close white supervision. Morgan persuasively shows that the task system provided the enslaved with considerably more autonomy, which they used to produce foodstuffs for local markets and to acquire property in domestic animals and modest material possessions. Their relative freedom from white supervision, moreover, gave them far more latitude for the retention and reproduction of African cultural traits, as well as greater freedom to fashion among themselves a common African American culture.

In common with Ira Berlin, James Sidbury, Robert Olwell, and others, Morgan emphasizes the extent to which slaves were not simply passive victims of a vicious system but active agents in the construction of their worlds. For nearly three decades beginning in the late 1960s, scholars such as Peter Wood and Barry Gaspar had emphasized the theme of slave resistance to oppressive labor regimes. Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (1982) was one of the best analyses in this vein. More recently, scholars have been interested in spelling out how much room slaves had to negotiate better conditions for themselves. These works do not deny the oppressiveness of slave regimes, where masters were subject to few controls and received the state's full support. Yet the need to get the work done with a minimum of coercion, which was costly, often created spaces for slaves to take some role in shaping their own lives within slavery. How limited or extensive those spaces were is at the moment one of the central questions about the nature of the slave systems to which the enslaved were attached.

## General Works

The mass of information produced between roughly 1965 and 1985 about the several regions of colonial British America created a bad case of intellectual indigestion among the early American historical



community, and in the late 1980s four scholars sought to provide a synthesis or a general interpretation of this information. Each of them used the concept of the cultural region as a central starting point in his analysis. In his massive *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (1989), David Hackett Fischer used the powerful metaphor implicit in his title to argue for the profound cultural continuity between the Old World and the New. Employing a cultural diffusion model and cultural trait analysis, Fischer endeavored to demonstrate the continuities between each of four regional cultures in colonial British America—the Chesapeake, New England, the middle colonies, and the western backcountry (he paid no attention to the lower south)—and a specific area in Britain. Even had Fischer more persuasively linked these colonial regional cultures to the English cultures from which they allegedly derived, however, his failure to consider the modifications immigrants had to make in their new homes as a result of the environmental, situational, and material differences severely undermined the utility of his study. Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of North America: An Introduction* (1986), represented a succinct and lucid effort to sketch an interpretive framework around the concept of “peopling.” A synoptic sketch of the principal regions in English North America at the end of the seventeenth century, Bailyn’s volume underlined the limits of cultural continuity arguments of the sort offered by Fischer by emphasizing the plasticity and disordered character of these regions and showing that the English colonies at that point were at best yet fairly primitive and rude recreations of the English culture they had left behind.

Historical geographer D.W. Meinig took a more dynamic approach to the problem of synthesis in his sweeping work, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Volume One: Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (1986). Although Meinig’s work begins with the first penetration of the Americas by Europeans and has sections on early Spanish and French attempts, it is chiefly an analysis of North America and the West Indies after other Europeans began to take an active interest in them during the late sixteenth century. Casting a broad net to include all those regions that would either become part of the United States or remain British, Meinig traces the emergence of eleven separate cultural regions in North America and the West Indies—French, Dutch, and Spanish, as well as English, and stretching to Louisiana, Texas, and the Lower Rio Grande River valley—using the social science concepts of spatial system, cultural landscape, and social geography as analytic



devices to describe the functional coherence and cultural similarity of each region. He depicts these regions as moving through a similar general process with two stages, a long period of *implantation* in which major production districts and cultural hearths were articulated, and a period of *reorganization* during which metropolitan authorities tried to bring these many implantations under tighter central control. In contrast to Fischer, Meinig does not portray any of the cultural regions he describes as pure and direct transplants from the Old World. Rather, he sees them as regions moving from highly simple geographical entities to far more complex ones through an elaborate process of cultural selection, adaptation to American conditions, and interactions with peoples of other races and ethnic groups who brought their own cultural inheritances into the equation. According to Meinig, this social process led in the direction of ever greater divergence among regions and between those regions and the metropolitan society.

Considering only those places effectively occupied by the British before 1770, Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (1988), represented an explicit effort both to provide a synthesis of the new social history literature about the entire early modern British Atlantic world, including Britain and Ireland, and to propose a framework for a comprehensive, developmental narrative of early American history. Employing a broad regional framework and using the concept of *social development* as its principal analytic device, it focuses on the creation and subsequent histories of colonial regions as defined by the socioeconomic structures and cultural constructs devised and amended by settlers and their descendants to enable them to exploit the economic potentials of their new environments and to express the larger purposes of the societies they were creating. It is especially concerned to delineate the nature, function, and changing character of defining social processes as they were manifest in population distribution, economic organization, land use, labor systems, social institutions, and social structures. These processes, *Pursuits of Happiness* posits, cannot be traced exclusively to either the transit of civilization from Britain to the Americas or the Americanization of New World conditions. Rather, they were the products of a complex, regionally differentiated interaction between metropolitan *inheritance* and colonial *experience*.

As a framework for understanding how these social processes worked, *Pursuits of Happiness* proposes a developmental model, the



underlying assumption of which is that the colonial experience in the early modern British Atlantic world can best be understood as a process of adaptation, institution building, and expansion of human, economic, social, and cultural resources in association with the transformations of the simple and inchoate societies of the earliest years of settlement into the ever more complex, differentiated, and articulated societies of the late colonial era. This transformation, according to Greene, proceeded through a series of three overlapping phases: *social simplification*, *social elaboration*, and *social replication*. This stadial developmental model is offered as a device to show the common social processes at work in the regions of colonial British America as well as to direct attention to regional and subregional variations in context, process, and development. In contrast to the works of Fischer and Meinig, *Pursuits of Happiness* argues that the powerful diversities among regions did not lead in the direction of cultural divergence from Britain. Rather, it posits a gradual social convergence during the middle decades of the eighteenth century throughout the anglicized parts of the British Atlantic world. The product, in the colonies, of the conjoint processes of *creolization*—adaptation to local conditions—and *metropolitanization*—successful cultivation of the principal forms and values of the parent culture—that convergence, *Pursuits of Happiness* suggests, served as a critical precondition for the rupture of the early modern British Empire by intensifying demands among colonists for metropolitan recognition of their growing metropolitanness and thus provided the foundation for the loose political confederation that, after 1775, evolved into the United States.

Two other works that attempt to bring some general coherence to the study of colonial British America merit mention. They are Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (1971), an older but still valuable and extremely readable portrait of the society of the continental colonies during the late colonial era, and Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., (1991), which contains nine excellent essays on the theme of marginal peoples within the early modern British Empire, a subject largely neglected by the works of synthesis discussed above.

## **Eighteenth-Century Developments**

The social dynamism stressed in these general works by Meinig, Greene, and Hofstadter all called attention to the extraordinary growth and expansion of colonial British America beginning in the early decades of the eighteenth century and becoming particularly strong after 1730.



The principal manifestations of this growth were the spread of settlement, which has been often touched on in earlier paragraphs, population increase, and the expansion and elaboration of the economy. The demographic growth of the colonies is well-treated in Robert V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America before 1776: A Survey of Census Data* (1975), a broad consideration of available population data for all Britain's New World colonies, including those in the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Wells correctly emphasizes the extent to which this surging population, which, as contemporaries such as Benjamin Franklin early appreciated, produced a doubling of people in each generation, was based on natural increase. But some of that growth continued to come from immigrants. As noted above, the spread of slavery brought thousands of people from Africa and constituted a major source of population growth, but new settlers continued to come to America, particularly from Ireland, Germany, and Scotland. Not all of these aspiring settlers came as free people. Many came as servants who in return for passage bound themselves to work for a limited number of years. David Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (1981), an econometric analysis of the institution of indentured servitude, is the most comprehensive study of the nature of the servant trade. As the eighteenth century went on, moreover, the British judicial system increasingly used the colonies as a dumping ground for petty criminals, transportation that required a period of servile labor being a common sentence. That colonists in need of labor snapped up these felons so quickly is a testimony to the profound shortage of labor in societies in which land and other sources of opportunity were so easily available. A. Roger Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718–1775* (1987), contains an excellent social analysis of the convict trade to America during the eighteenth century, showing who was transported and to where. Certainly the most detailed study of both bound and free immigration is Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (1986), a case study of British immigration to America in the early 1770s at the very end of the colonial era. Using emigrant registers in Britain to study patterns of emigration, Bailyn identifies two streams of emigration: English servants who fed the expanding labor market in settled areas, and Scottish families who settled on the frontier and became crucial participants in the spread of settlement.



The economic dimensions of this growth are fully covered in two superb general works on the economic history of the colonies. The first and probably still the best of these is John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (1985). The second is Stanley Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *The Colonial Era* (1996), a collection of essays by many experts and the first volume of the new *Cambridge Economic History of the United States*. Both of these volumes aim at comprehensiveness, and both cover the entire colonial era. But they are particularly valuable in providing portraits of the developing regional economies of colonial British America and in elaborating the sources, patterns, and problems associated with the economic growth in the late colonial period. They emphasize the expansion in agricultural and forest production, external trade and shipping, and technological know-how that made the economic expansion of the British colonies in America a subject of interest all over Europe. They also grapple with the knotty problems of currency supply, labor shortage, and wartime disruptions of the economy. Among many more specialized studies of aspects of the colonial economy, Carole Shammas, *The Preindustrial Consumer in England and America* (1990), a systematic, comprehensive, and persuasive study of the changing character of consumption and the distribution of consumer goods in early modern England and colonial America, especially merits the reader's attention.

Economic historians have given relatively little attention to the environmental impact of the spread of settlement and the development of the economy. Two early studies by environmental historians help to remedy this neglect. The first, on colonial New England, is the volume by William J. Cronon mentioned above. The second is Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in the South Atlantic Forests, 1500–1800* (1990), a broad consideration of transformation of the landscape wrought by Europeans and Africans in the pre-1800 southern colonies and states, omitting those of Spanish and French origins.

Rapid territorial, demographic, and economic expansion also signaled rising wealth and increasing social elaboration. Now relatively old, the two best and most comprehensive books on this subject are Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (1965), a general study that finds a considerably less rigid social structure among the free settler population in the colonies than in Europe and significantly more mobility for both middling and lower class free people, and Alice Hanson Jones, *The Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the*



*Eve of the American Revolution* (1980), a microscopic survey of social stratification through the measurement of wealth in 1774. Both Main and Jones find significant regional variations, with wealth declining from the most southern to the most northern colonies, and both find living standards among the free segments of the population to have been equal or even superior to those in Europe. Social elaboration also involved the spread of urbanization. On this subject, two books are essential reading. Now almost a half century old, Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743–1742* (1955), focusing on the five largest cities of Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Charleston, and Newport, Rhode Island, remains the fullest study of the character of colonial seaports and the nature of urban life during the last decades of the colonial era. It is particularly useful for its description of urban social and cultural life. But it should be supplemented by the sections in Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (1979), that provide a valuable systematic discussion of social stratification in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York.

As expanding trade figures suggest, this social development took place within a context of growing ties with metropolitan Britain. In an unusually important book, *The English Atlantic: An Exploration of Communication and Community, 1675–1740* (1986), Ian K. Steele showed how the speed and safety of transatlantic communication between England and its American colonies improved significantly in the six decades beginning about 1675 and brought the two continents ever closer together by making correspondence easier and faster and making English newspapers, books, and technology accessible even in the most peripheral areas of the the English Atlantic world. The same was true with material goods and models of cultural behavior. An outstanding and substantial collection of essays, Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1994), shows how through the middle decades of the eighteenth century British consumer goods became available to an ever wider and socially deeper group of colonials. Not just emerging elites but people of middling status enjoyed the comfort and status of wearing British clothing and having a variety of metropolitan material goods and publications in their households. The social meaning attached to these possessions and the increasingly comfortable housing in which colonials used and displayed them is the subject of Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (1992), a superb analysis of the spread and



changing character of the idea of gentility and its principal forms of expression in colonial and early national history. Jack Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (2001), shows how quickly a new sensibility about physical comfort involving such matters as heating and lighting moved to the American colonies after they had been introduced into Britain as a result of new technologies. Nor was this cultural borrowing limited to material goods. David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (1996), shows how the genteel social and literary set in colonial towns copied British cultural institutions, including literary clubs and tea tables, mimicked literary styles, and cultivated representatives of metropolitan literary cultures who happened to immigrate to the colonies.

Indeed, the massive importation of books, magazines, and other reading materials, which rose dramatically through the last decades of the colonial era, was indicative of the profound penetration of colonial cultures by British and other European ideas. Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607–1783* (1970), provides a rich and comprehensive history of how these ideas informed early American education and of the institutions colonials created to transmit them to the young. Complementary to Cremin's study, Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in America, 1700–1865* (1989), provides a full discussion of the sources, production, flows, and agencies of dissemination of information in early America. Also useful is Henry Farnham May, *The Enlightenment in America* (1976), which provides a sweeping examination of the movement of ideas from Europe to America and explores the tensions between those ideas and Protestant Christianity.

These tensions expressed themselves in family governance and child rearing. In *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Childrearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (1977), Philip J. Greven imaginatively explores the contrasting child-rearing practices between those families which had an evangelical orientation and those which cultivated the values of gentility associated most fully with the metropolis. A study in character formation, this study remains one of the most solid and persuasive studies of a subject that has attracted much interest from historians over the past decade, the nature of personal and collective identity in the colonial world. So far, no book-length volumes have tackled the question of collective identities, but the essays collected in Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel, and Frederika Teute, eds., *Through a Glass Darkly:*



*Reflections on Personal Identity in Early America* (1997), provide case studies of the many elements that combined to shape individual identity in a variety of social settings. Another volume of collected essays, Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America* (2000), which addresses the question of what being colonial meant for individuals and groups in the early modern American world, with a principal focus on mainland colonial British America, may also be read for information about the identity-shaping process.

For those who were churchd—and this appears to have been a minority of the settler population and only a fraction of Amerindians and enslaved Africans and African Americans—religion was an important element in shaping identity. Two excellent general volumes are available to guide the reader through the thicket of eighteenth-century religious history. They are Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (1986), which is a major reexamination of the role of religion in shaping early American life, and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (1990), which follows the history of the many Protestant sects from the first settlement of the colonies through the Civil War. Both agree that many people were not church members, but Bonomi argues for the growing vitality of religion in early American life, stressing the increase in congregational formation, church attendance, and church building during the century before the American Revolution. Both also agree that many colonial Americans in the generation before the Revolution participated in one of the many awakenings or revivals that occurred at disparate times and places in many regions of colonial British America, but Butler convincingly challenges the long-standing historical convention that these discrete events constituted a Great Awakening that occurred more or less simultaneously throughout the colonies and could be characterized as a single event.

Better communications between Britain and the colonies also affected the public world. What the English expected out of empire is the subject of a recent book by David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000), which traces the many strands of thought—commercial, Protestant, maritime, and jurisprudential—that beginning in the sixteenth century gradually came together to form a British ideology of empire that reached full flower in the eighteenth century. Stephen Saunders Webb, *The Governors-General: The English Army and the Definition of Empire, 1569–1681* (1979), emphasizes the militaristic and autocratic



tendencies within English colonizing activities before the 1680s, while David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (1971) shows the spirited resistance settlers gave to those tendencies during the closing decades of the seventeenth century, and Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assemblies in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1775* (1963), a detailed constitutional study of the growth of legislative authority in the colonies of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, stresses the resistance to those tendencies spearheaded by the elected legislatures that in every colony spoke for the interests of the dominant settler group and sought to keep as much control over local affairs as possible. Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (1988), calls attention to the elaboration of the ideal of consensual government in the early modern Anglophone world and argues that in the American colonies it supplied the intellectual justification for an ideal of popular sovereignty that informed resistance to metropolitan intrusions upon colonial self-government and led, after 1776, to the creation of republican government at both the state and national levels.

The constitutional results of the struggle over authority between metropolis and colonies is dealt with more fully by Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (1986), a general examination of the emergence of an informal imperial constitutional system within the early modern British Empire. This work emphasizes the local or colonial roots of constitutional development within the empire and the extent to which, already in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the colonials had developed an ideology justifying their claims to a status equal to those people who remained in Britain. Greene sees the early modern empire as evolving in the direction of a highly permissive polity in which, no matter what the official ideology of the metropolitan state in London, the various colonial governments exerted virtually complete control over local affairs and the raising of revenue, while the metropolitan government limited itself to matters of general oversight, trade regulation, and imperial defense. The British Empire, in other words, was a federal polity, with roughly the same division of authority between national and local governments that would become the central feature of the new American political system adopted in the late 1780s. The commitment of colonial leaders to this emerging system, Greene shows, shaped their responses to the revolutionary crises of the 1760s and 1770s and the creation of an American polity after 1776.



Why British officials were content to preside over such a loosely organized imperial entity can be explained by their preoccupation with internal British affairs, by their reluctance to spend money for imperial administration, and by the fact that the colonies brought such extraordinary economic benefits to the nation. By the 1730s and 1740s about half of British overseas trade was with the American colonies, and the colonial trades contributed strongly to the emergence of a vibrant British economy. James A. Henretta, *Salutary Neglect: Colonial Administration under the Duke of Newcastle* (1972), is a detailed study of the use of patronage in the colonial sphere and its effect on British colonial policy during this era of what the politician Edmund Burke called “salutary neglect.” How empire affected metropolitan political life has recently been analyzed by Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (2000), which imaginatively explores the debate within Britain over whether the empire ought to be brought under tighter metropolitan control.

Close ties with Britain also meant frequent and more intense involvement in a series of imperial wars. Britain was at war with France or Spain for forty of the seventy-five years from 1689 to 1763. A state of war was more common than peace. Because the colonies were prizes in these wars—and this was increasingly true after 1740—the colonies could not avoid involvement. Douglas Edward Leach, *Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607–1763* (1973), and Ian Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (1994) are the best general treatments of this subject. But they should be supplemented by Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America 1754–1766* (2000), which provides a massively detailed and global narrative of the last and largest of the intercolonial wars. The heavy involvement of British naval and military forces in the Americas in this war offers striking evidence of the growing importance Britain attached to the American empire.

The increasing military involvement of Britain with the colonies did not mean a diminution in the extensive self-government long enjoyed by the colonies. Rather, the need for supplementary funds for the war effort operated to enhance the vigor and authority of provincial legislatures, which used the need for funds to consolidate their own authority within the imperial constitutional system. Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (1968), is a broad and generally compelling interpretation of colonial politics at the provincial level during the last four or five decades



of the colonial era. Although its stress on the factional nature of politics exaggerates the instability of provincial public life, it is the most acute and succinct analysis of the general context in which colonial political life was played out.

Of course, most government in colonial British America was not government at the provincial level. Most people, free and slave, lived in households which assumed primary responsibility for controlling the behavior of household members. The head of the household, often an adult male, had theoretical authority over the property, labor, and behavior of his children, wife, servants, slaves, and other people living under his roof, albeit he often had to negotiate with those members to keep peace within the household and to keep it operating as an effective institution. Although the authority of the household declined in the nineteenth century, a recent book by Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (2002), which covers the period from the earliest colonial settlements until the American Civil War, argues that household power reached its zenith during the late eighteenth century. When problems occurred that could not be resolved within the household, settlers—those who had access to the judicial system—turned to the courts and other institutions of local government to adjudicate their disputes. An excellent collection of original essays, Christopher L. Tomlins and Bruce H. Mann, eds., *The Many Legalities of Early America* (2001), provides a convenient introduction to the many types of legalities that operated within colonial America and the ways in which the vast property-owning group used those legalities to protect their property and lives and define the kinds of entities they were creating.

The establishment and rapid development of colonial British America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, throughout the process, the subject of considerable contemporary interest, as various thinkers pondered what was happening in America and how the colonies were similar to or different from the Old World societies the colonists had left behind. Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World: American Culture, the Formative Years* (1962), is an early and still valuable discussion of the interplay between Old World culture and conditions in the New World from the beginnings of English settlement through the early decades of the nineteenth century, while Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800* (1993), examines the changing construction of America in the English-speaking world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Greene



emphasizes the continuing power of the concept of America as an unformed space replete with exceptional opportunities for European enterprise and the stress contemporary writers put upon the many ways in which the British societies established in the New World represented at once a successful effort to transplant British culture to the New World and a radical departure from British social norms. In analyzing the latter, they celebrated, not the wide use of chattel slavery in America, a subject which received surprisingly little attention before the eve of the American Revolution, but the greater availability of property, the incentives to early marriage and population production, the high wages produced by the chronic shortage of labor, the relatively porous social structure coupled with the high levels of household formation and civic participation, the extent of self-government, and the low cost of government and religious establishments. They depicted, in short, societies that, while they were heavily British in their form and aspirations, differed fundamentally from those then existing in the Old World. Though it is marred by its uncritical use of modernization theory, Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776* (2000) similarly and persuasively argues that continental colonial British America had in the generations before the American Revolution created a society that, by Old World standards, was already radical.

## The American Revolution

### *General Works*

Of all the events in American history, only the Civil War has attracted more interest from historians than the American Revolution, the formative event in the construction of the American nation. Historians have usually defined this event as covering the era from the beginnings of resistance to British governance in the early 1760s until the adoption of the United States Constitution in 1787–1788. So vast is the literature generated on this subject that only a small fraction of it can be discussed in this essay. The best introductory survey of the whole era remains Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763–1789* (1956), an older but unusually well-written, comprehensive, and succinct account that provides a clear narrative of the key events between 1763 and 1787. This work can be supplemented by a series of excellent essays by different scholars in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (1973), which also covers the whole of the Revolutionary era.



Always a popular subject, the heyday in Revolutionary studies occurred during the quarter century beginning around 1950. The literature produced on this subject during these years brought a new level of scholarly rigor and imagination to the analysis of the Revolution and remains the starting point for any serious understanding of that event. Although this literature treated virtually all aspects of the Revolution, it concentrated on the illumination of three classic questions.

### *Why Revolution?*

Why the Revolution occurred was the first of these questions. An older generation of Imperial historians such as Herbert Levi Osgood, Charles Andrews, and, especially, Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, (1937–90), had limned a picture of a British Empire so benign that one was hard put to understand why any colonists would have chosen to revolt in 1776. At the same time, a new interest in the economic and social roots of political behavior, drawing its inspiration from the insights that dominated sociopolitical thinking during the Progressive era of the early decades of the twentieth century, encouraged historians to explore internal divisions within the colonies and to suggest that the Revolution was to be explained largely in terms of conflicts over power within the colonies between the forces of aristocracy and democracy. The new literature effectively challenged both of these propositions.

One group of studies, the most important of which were Oliver M. Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (1951), and Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power*, previously mentioned, demonstrated that from time to time and from place to place membership within the British Empire produced considerable conflict over economic and political questions, but that before the 1760s the empire provided sufficient scope for colonial economic enterprise and sufficient local political control to prevent the emergence of any significant or sustained body of discontent among colonists with regard to their relationship to the empire, while Max Savelle, *Seeds of Liberty: The Genesis of the American Mind* (1953), a broad general survey of eighteenth-century colonial culture, showed that British patriotism among the colonists, stimulated by colonial participation in the Seven Years' War against France, remained intense throughout the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

If the colonists were thus happy with their condition in the late 1750s and early 1760s, what made them unhappy enough to revolt little more than a decade later? Both Dickerson and Greene pointed to



changes in metropolitan British policy that threatened the economic well-being of northern colonial traders, on the one hand, and the long-enjoyed quasi-control over local political matters, on the other. Still other scholars produced a series of volumes investigating specific episodes and issues during the years between 1763 and 1776. The most important of these were Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution: 1759–1766* (1960), which offered a detailed portrait of the specific policy changes that initially made colonials angry; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (1953), a superb study of the decision by the British Parliament to tax the colonies for revenue with the Stamp Act of 1765, the widespread colonial resistance to that act, and its subsequent repeal; and Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party* (1964), and David L. Ammerman, *In the Common Cause: American Response to the Coercive Acts* (1974), which together furnished a coherent analysis of the final crisis that led to war and independence. Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (1960), and John Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, 1965), offered model studies of how specific issues contributed to the formation of colonial discontent. These works concentrated on defining the issue at stake in the quarrel between Britain and the colonies and on showing the gradual evolution of colonial discontent with metropolitan governance between 1764 and 1776.

Still other books contributed importantly to this discussion. Most notably, Bernard Bailyn, in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967), a brilliant and path-breaking study of the intellectual dimensions of the rising opposition to Britain, tried to unravel the many intellectual influences upon the thought of the leaders of American resistance. Whereas most earlier scholars had stressed colonial reliance upon the liberal political philosopher John Locke or legal writers such as Sir Edward Coke, Bailyn called attention to the importance of the dark views of a long line of British thinkers associated with the opposition to the political establishment in Britain, writers who stressed the growth of state power and its threat to individual and corporate liberties. The widespread influence of these writers, according to Bailyn, principally accounted for the exaggerated fears and the vehement opposition of colonials to metropolitan measures. Examining the nature of colonial resistance as it changed over the decade before the Declaration of Independence, Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (1972),



provided a sustained narrative of the development of a revolutionary mentality among American political leaders and, in an important contribution, showed how, in the absence of extensive police powers in the colonial polities, colonial mobs functioned as an arm of the popular will against metropolitan authority.

Another group of books studied the political life within individual colonies during the era of the Revolution. David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760–1776* (1958), and Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (1978), are two of the best representatives of these works. These and similar works on other colonies showed that colonial politics was primarily elitist in nature and that, although there were occasional manifestations of social and economic discontent among the the lower classes, that discontent never resulted in widespread demands for basic changes in the customary patterns of upper-class leadership. They found that political divisions were not along class lines and not between rival ideological groups of radicals and conservatives but revolved around the ambitions of rival factions among the elite. The controversy with Britain often provided the occasion for one faction to gain political predominance over its rivals, but, significantly, the faction that stood for the strongest line of resistance to British policy usually emerged victorious.

At the same time, detailed studies of social and political structure of several colonies further undermined the Progressive conception of colonial America as riven by class conflict. Examinations of the extent of the franchise in many colonies, the most notable of which were Robert E. Brown, *Middle Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780* (1955), and Robert E. Brown and B. Katherine Brown, *Virginia, 1705–1786: Democracy or Aristocracy?* (1964), revealed that the franchise was everywhere very wide among free white males, virtually all of whom could expect to acquire enough property in their lifetimes to meet suffrage requirements. This finding made it clear that the predominance of the upper classes in colonial politics rested upon the support of men from all classes. In *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America*, previously mentioned, Jackson Turner Main considerably enriched this picture of late colonial society as a place of opportunity for free people by demonstrating that, although there were great extremes in wealth and in standards of living in American society during the late eighteenth century, the free segments of that society were everywhere relatively free from



poverty, enjoyed high rates of upward mobility and extensive social and economic opportunity, and had a remarkably supple class structure.

The effect of these works was to provide a new picture of the origins of the Revolution. Rooted in neither internal colonial socioeconomic and political divisions nor ancient colonial discontent with membership in the British Empire, it was, as post-World War II historians explained it, primarily a reaction to measures undertaken by British colonial ministers to tighten up metropolitan controls over the colonies in the wake of the Seven Years' War. The most important of these efforts was direct taxation of the colonies by Parliament, which, colonials widely believed, directly violated English principles of consensual and participatory government. But other measures, including stricter enforcement of customs regulations and trade laws, restrictions upon colonial legislative autonomy, use of the British navy and army in coercive ways, and prohibitions upon colonial monetary legislation and western expansion also exacerbated relations between metropolis and colonies. Colonial leaders opposed these measures almost entirely on political and constitutional grounds which they elaborated in a plethora of pamphlets and essays that asserted their entitlement to the traditional rights of British people to consensual government, individual and corporate liberties, and the rule of law. Although colonial spokesmen invariably associated these rights with self-interest, conceiving of them as the necessary safeguards of the colonists' fundamental social, economic, and political well-being, the opposition to Britain, these studies indicated, was much less directly social and economic in character than earlier historians had suggested. Ian R. Christie and Benjamin W. Labaree, *Empire or Independence, 1760–1776: A British-American Dialogue on the Coming of the American Revolution* (1976), is probably the best synthesis of the findings of these scholars.

Scholarly interest in the origins of the Revolution has waned over the last quarter century. Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (1997), has provided the most thorough modern reading of the construction of the document that formally declared American independence from Britain and the immediate context in which it was written and received. A number of scholars have tried to revive earlier conflict models of the Revolution. Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (1975), a local study of the ways social tensions in Concord, Massachusetts, functioned to shape the resistance movement, and Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (1999), an insightful account of the



memories of a shoemaker who participated in the Boston Tea Party, are two of the best of these. But, although they have succeeded in demonstrating that local social divisions, whatever form they took, affected the way that the Revolution unfolded and was experienced in particular places, they have not fundamentally altered the basic interpretation of it set down in the years between 1950 and 1975, as a settler revolt against British attempts to impose metropolitan authority on the colonies in new and unacceptable ways.

Indeed, the principal body of writings about the coming of the American Revolution has poured from the pen of the legal historian John Phillip Reid. Most earlier historians had assumed that in the debate that preceded the move for independence the British had the law on their side, that they were right about the constitutional issues. But in the 1970s and 1980s Reid produced a series of books which showed that the colonists had a legal case that, in terms of English law, was every bit as persuasive as that emanating from the metropolis. Exploring both the legal precedents and the legal theory that colonials used to underpin their case, Reid's work made a strong case for the proposition that the dispute was primarily a legal and constitutional one and, in a direct challenge to earlier writers who had emphasized the importance of natural law theory or British opposition political thought, that British jurisprudence was the most important metropolitan intellectual tradition upon which the Americans rested their case. Among Reid's many writings are *The Authority of Rights* (1986) and *The Authority to Tax* (1987), volumes 1 and 2 of his multi-volume *Constitutional History of the American Revolution*. In *Peripheries and Center*, previously mentioned, Jack P. Greene made a similar case for the legitimacy of the American constitutional position and for the importance of the legal and constitutional dimensions of American Revolutionary thought. In contrast to Reid, however, he emphasized the specifically colonial roots of that thought and thereby underlined the continuity between the colonial and Revolutionary eras.

## Transition to Independent Government

The second major question that has interested scholars of the American Revolution is how the colonists managed to make the transition to independent government and to win the War for Independence against Britain, the strongest military and naval power in the western world at that time. In trying to come to grips with these questions, it is important to understand that they were experienced at two levels of government.



Until the adoption of a loose formal national confederation in 1781, the national concerns of the United States were managed by the Continental Congress, a collection of delegates from the thirteen original states, the legitimacy of which depended on the states' recognition of the authority of its acts. The adoption of the Articles of Confederation, the first constitution of the United States, did not fundamentally alter this constitutional reality. Yet, effective governance went on in the states, all of which devised viable state constitutions, most of them during the early years of the war in 1776–1777. The subject of a combination of colonial precedents and republican theory, none of these constitutions departed radically from the colonial constitutions under which they had previously lived—except of course the elimination of the monarchy. Willi Paul Adams, *The First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era* (1980), which emphasizes the pragmatic character of this process, is probably the best single volume on the transition to independence in the states. At the national level, the indispensable book is Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (1979), a careful study of the process by which a rudimentary national government was formed and how it dealt with the myriad problems of raising a military and naval force, extracting money from the states to pay for the war effort, and seeking allies against Britain. Like Adams, Rakove also emphasizes the pragmatic approach of the Continental Congress to handling these problems.

The war itself consumed much time and energy, and the historical literature on the military dimensions of the Revolution is extensive. Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763–1789* (1971), provides an excellent discussion of the war effort as it unfolded, from the first battle at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, in 1775, through the entry of France into the war on the side of the Americans in 1778, absolutely critical to the eventual American triumph, to General George Washington's capture of the British army at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781. This volume should be supplemented by the imaginative treatment of John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (1976), a superb collection of essays exploring the political and social dimensions of the war.

Internal resistance to the war was significant. As much as a tenth to a fifth of the free white population remained loyal to Britain. The litera-



ture on this subject is diffuse, but the reader will find that William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (1961), which emphasizes the wide dispersal and lack of cohesion among loyalists, and Robert M. Calhoon, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760-1781* (1973), which analyzes the behavior and motivation of the most influential loyalists, serve as an excellent starting point for understanding why some groups of free people opposed the Revolution. The competition for Indian allies among the British and American forces was fierce, but Indian discontent with settler encroachments upon their lands often gave the advantage to the British. Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (1995), provides the best treatment of this subject. That the large enslaved populations in the southern colonies would welcome the conflict as a way to escape slavery is hardly surprising, and many slaves deserted the plantations of the Chesapeake and the lower south when military developments presented them with the opportunity. Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (1991), is an excellent treatment of this subject.

The interest in the ideological dimensions of the colonial resistance to Britain in the 1760s and 1770s has translated into a similar concern for the period of political reorganization and constitutional experimentation that began with the decision for independence. The fullest discussion of this subject is the pathbreaking volume by Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969). This brilliant, if unnecessarily detailed, examination of the development of American political thought from the Declaration of Independence to the adoption of the Federal Constitution of 1787 emphasized the importance of republican ideology in shaping the nature of the new American polity and thereby sparked a vigorous debate over the intellectual foundations of the American republic. Most earlier scholars had traced the roots of American political thought to the liberal ideas associated with the English political philosopher John Locke. Building on the work of Wood and his own exhaustive analysis of the origins and persistence of republican or civic humanist thought in the early modern British world, J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1976), suggestively argued for the significance of civic humanism in American political life and thereby set off a vigorous debate over whether liberalism or republicanism had dominated American thinking about politics. Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (1985), and Cathy D.



Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (1990), are two of the more important volumes that have tried to sort out the complex dimensions of this subject, while Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (1984), in a gracefully written and argued volume, reaffirmed the importance of liberalism in the construction of the new republic.

The Constitution of 1787 formed the capstone of the movement to create a coherent national state out of the several states that had achieved independence in 1787. But Americans were by no means entirely agreed on the merits of this document, and Wood explored their intellectual divisions. The manifold economic and political interests at work during the process of writing and adopting the Constitution have been thoroughly studied at both the state and national levels. Two older studies, Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (1958), and Jackson Turner Main, *The Antifederalists: Critics of the Constitution 1781–1788* (1961), remain the most thorough and full analyses of these interests and the political forms through which they were expressed.

The interest in the Founding Fathers who wrote and pushed through the Constitution have been the subject of excessive scrutiny, the number of books reaching almost indigestible proportions. Space limitations permit the mention of only one study here, Ralph Lerner, *The Thinking Revolutionary: Principle and Practice in the New Republic* (1987), a collection of seven essays exploring the thought and contributions of several key founders.

## The character of the Revolution

The third question that dominated scholarship during this period involves the character of the American Revolution. During the 1930s, many scholars had followed the lead of J. Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution as a Social Movement* (1926), mentioned above, in suggesting that the American Revolution not only represented a political revolution that threw off British government and established a new nation, but also generated radical social upheaval of the kind associated with the French Revolution that began in 1789. But the literature produced during the third quarter of the twentieth century tended to see the Revolution as much more concerned with the preservation of existing rights and property and reaffirmation of the existing social order than



Jameson had suggested. As noted above, Jon Butler, *Becoming America*, has gone so far as to argue that the American social, political, and cultural order was already modern before the Revolution and therefore in need of no radical transformation. Exploring many dimensions of how Americans faced the problems of their societies during and after the Revolution, a spate of original works illustrated the limits under which they operated, invariably set by their commitment to traditional values of property rights and patriarchal governance. These works are too numerous to be mentioned here, but many of the authors summarized their views in a short essay in Jack P. Greene, ed., *The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits* (1987), a collection of twenty-two pieces on the issues that confronted Americans during the Revolution and how state and national governments dealt with them.

Work in two areas, the history of women and the history of slavery, illustrates the extent to which the Revolution did little to change the fabric of American society as it had been inherited from the colonial era. Two pioneering works on the history of women, Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experiences of American Women, 1750–1800* (1980), and Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1980), showed that, whereas many wives assumed major new responsibilities while their husbands were off at war and a few women actually argued that a struggle undertaken in the name of liberty should not neglect the issue of women's limited civil rights, the Revolution produced few gains for women in that regard. Ideas of patriarchy were too deeply ingrained, and it would be another century and a half before significant changes occurred in the civil status of women.

The same can be said for the institution of slavery, another glaring inconsistency with the ideas of liberty associated with the Revolution. Enslavement existed throughout most of the early modern Atlantic world, was integral to the development of the slave plantation colonies of the Americas, and was widely accepted before various anti-slavery spokesmen, mostly in the Old World, began, in the late 1760s, to question the justice of keeping human being in chains. In Britain and, to a lesser extent, in Britain's American colonies, where the rights of men were being intensely debated, anti-slavery writers quickly pointed out the incongruity of Britons demanding liberty for themselves while subjecting some categories of people to abject slavery. Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of resistance and revolution in America led to a demand for the end of slavery, and wherever the institution was not central to the economy, as



was the case from Pennsylvania north, state legislatures put it on the road to gradual extinction, and the Confederation Congress excluded slavery from the territories north of the Ohio River in the west. But the economic importance of slavery to the states from Maryland to Georgia was so great, and the sanctity of property rights, including property in slaves, such an elemental concern throughout the states that, notwithstanding all the rhetoric about liberty, slavery remained a vigorous institution in many American states. Moreover, despite the personal distaste for slavery by many delegates to the Federal Convention of 1787, they attached far more importance to achieving a strong union than they did to the abolition of slavery, and the document they adopted made no provisions against slavery, albeit it did provide for the eventual abolition of the slave trade. The American republic was thus from the beginning a republic composed of free *and* enslaved peoples, and the dispute over this issue that developed after 1820 was ultimately the most important cause of the failure of the constitutional system of 1787 in 1861. Among many volumes treating this important subject, Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765–1820* (1971), is probably the best.

How any Revolution that did so little to interfere with the injustice of slavery could be considered socially radical is unclear. The protection of property rights in slaves provides the single most dramatic evidence of the extent to which the Revolution was at its core motivated by a desire to protect the existing system of property as it had taken shape over the decades since the founding of the first permanent settlement in Virginia in 1607. Yet, in an influential book, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992), Gordon S. Wood tries to make the case that the Revolution was an event that, in its own way, was every bit as radical as the French Revolution. Conflating the traditional society of Britain with the societies that developed in colonial British America, he argues that the Revolution represented a rejection of much of the colonial past. In doing so, however, he ignores the great extent to which British America had already deviated sharply and, in the opinion of contemporary observers, radically from British society in the widespread distribution of property, the relative fluid social structure, the opportunities the colonies presented for social advancement, and the consensual politics of the colonies. But he does succeed in laying out the ways that Americans after 1776 did begin to think about social and political organization in non-traditional ways and, in doing so, makes an impressive case for the proposition that the Revolution had intellectually radical results.



## Conclusion

This short essay has only touched upon a few of the most important works that have made the colonial and Revolutionary eras of American history such an exciting field of study, especially over the last half century. This efflorescence of scholarship, which during the last decade has begun to lead some historians back to classic questions in political and constitutional history, has made colonial British America a field of great excitement. As its practitioners seek to find still newer approaches to their investigations, they will no doubt continue to surprise themselves with the directions and implications of their work.



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*The new respect for ideas and values as important components of historical situations, a respect that was greatly enhanced by studies on the political ideology of the late colonial and revolutionary years, was soon accompanied by a new interest in the largely unchartered economic, demographic, and social history of the colonies.*”