

## Colonial American Economic & Social Characteristics

- ❖ Immigrants to colonies adapted European habits, customs, & outlooks to conditions in the New World
  - Economically - varying regional factors led to diversity & innovation
  - Culturally – colonists tended to copy trends in London & elsewhere

### Colonial Economies

- Most colonists were farmers – 90% of economy agricultural
- Small-scale manufacturing flourished – Large-scale restricted by Eng.
- Economies shaped by English demand but limited by labor shortages
- ❖ New England
  - Severe winters & poor soil – little large-scale agriculture
    - Crops grown for consumption & local trade
  - Fishing (inc. whaling), ship building, & Trans-Atlantic trade dominant
  - Small-scale industry (household goods)
    - Primary large-scale industry – Rum (part of triangular trade)
- ❖ Middle Colonies
  - Good soil & moderate climate
    - Colonial “bread basket” – good crop production
  - Good navigable rivers (Delaware, Hudson) to interior
    - Strong export trade in grain, animal products, fruit, vegetables
  - Merchants & artisans flourished in coastal towns
    - Glass, textiles, paper, iron
- ❖ Southern Colonies
  - Favorable climate & abundant land lead to plantation economy
    - Export crops – tobacco, rice, indigo dye
    - 50-acre headrights for settlers
      - Reliant on indentured and slave labor
  - Plantations located along rivers – improved direct export of goods
  - Farms & plantations widely scattered – little urban development
  - Most manufacturing confined to plantations for their needs
  - Carolina had active lumber industry – for shipbuilding & naval stores

### Colonial Society

- ❖ Most immigrants to colonies were from commercial & labor classes
  - Population up dramatically in 18<sup>th</sup> century – natural increase surpassed immigration
    - Lowest avg. life expectancy (40) in southern colonies
- ❖ Family the basic unit of colonial society
  - Early marriages & large families
    - Children an economic asset, especially on farms

- Family bonds strongest in New England towns – weak in south & frontier due to high death rates, disease, & isolation
- **Women had few legal rights** but usually accepted as equals in social & business affairs of family
- ❖ **Class distinctions not as apparent as in England**
  - Small upper class w/ close connections w/ England
    - Governors, clergy, wealthy merchants & planters, professionals
  - **Middle class largest** – tradesmen, farmers, artisans, laborers
    - Gap between upper & middle smaller than in Europe
  - Lowest status – landless whites, indentured servants, slaves
- ❖ **European Ethnic Mix**
  - **Greatest in middle colonies**
  - See charts p. 102 of text for mix (also PPT slide)
- ❖ **Social Patterns**
  - **Most lived in rural settings** – only 10% lived in cities by 1775
  - **Towns the dominant social unit in New England**
  - Plantation community in south
- ❖ **Religion**
  - **Lives of most Americans shaped by churches or religious groups**
    - Only RI had complete separation of church & state
      - **Established churches supported by laws & taxation**
    - Anglican → middle & southern colonies – Puritan → New England
    - **Puritanism strict – changes later made to relax requirements**
      - **Halfway Covenant of 1662 & Mass. charter of 1691**
    - With immigration from other Euro countries – other religious sects
      - Presbyterians, Quakers, Lutherans, etc.
    - More religious tolerance in RI, PA, MD
  - **Great Awakening (1730's-40's) – series of evangelical revivals**
    - **To counter drop in religious piety & rise in Enlightenment thought**
    - Evangelists included Congregationalist **Jonathan Edwards** & Methodist **George Whitefield** – fiery orators – many converts
      - **Most effective in backcountry of south & west**
    - **Emphasized individual relationship with God – contributed to democratizing trend & questioning of traditional institutions**
      - Caused splits in churches between “**Old Lights**” & “**New Lights**” – rationalism vs. emotionalism
        - ◆ New Light preachers like Gilbert Tennent fostered doubt about Old Light ministers, hinting that they were not saved
  - **Enlightenment – European movement of learning & ideas**

- All things based on reason and natural law – scientific answers existed for everything – humans capable of great things
- **Deists** – Enlightenment thinkers who viewed God as the rational creator of the world – an uninvolved “**Clock-maker God**”
  - Many notable colonial figures were deists (Franklin, Jefferson)
- Enlightenment encouraged scientific experimentation
  - Looking for answers to life’s mysteries
- **Franklin personified the Enlightenment in America**
  - Printer, scientist (experiments w/ electricity), inventor, statesman, writer (Poor Richard’s Almanac)
    - ◆ Founded 1<sup>st</sup> Phila. public library and volunteer fire company
    - ◆ Organized **American Philosophical Society** (1743)
- ❖ Enlightenment ideas of natural rights & social contract (John Locke) central to push for American independence