CHAPTER 4

American Life in the Seventeenth Century, 1607–1692

# Part I: Reviewing the Chapter

## A. Checklist of Learning Objectives

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the basic economy, demographics, and social structure and life of the seventeenth-century colonies.

2. Compare and contrast the different forms of society and ways of life of the southern colonies and New England.

3. Explain how the practice of indentured servitude failed to solve the colonial labor problem and why colonists then turned to African slavery.

4. Describe the character of slavery in the early English colonies and explain how a distinctive African American identity and culture emerged from the mingling of numerous African ethnic groups.

5. Summarize the unique New England way of life centered on family, town, and church, and describe the problems that afflicted this comfortable social order in the late seventeenth century.

6. Describe family life and the roles of women in both the southern and New England colonies, and indicate how these changed over the course of the seventeenth century.

## B. Glossary

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms.

1. **headright** The right to acquire a certain amount of land granted to the person who finances the passage of a laborer. “Masters—not servants themselves—thus reaped the benefits of landownership from the headright system.”

2. **disfranchise** To take away the right to vote. “The Virginia Assembly in 1670 disfranchised most of the landless knockabouts. . . .”

3. **civil war** Any conflict between the citizens or inhabitants of the same country. “As this civil war in Virginia ground on. . . .”

4. **indentured servant** A laborer bound to unpaid service to a master for a fixed term, in exchange for benefits such as transportation, tools, and clothes. “There they boarded ship for America as indentured servants. . . .”

5. **tidewater** The territory adjoining water affected by tides—that is, near the seacoast or coastal rivers. “Bacon . . . had pitted the hard scrabble backcountry frontiersmen against the haughty gentry of the tidewater plantations.”

6. **middle passage** That portion of a slave ship’s journey in which slaves were carried from Africa to the Americas. “. . . the captives were herded aboard sweltering ships for the gruesome ‘middle passage.’. . .”

7. **fertility** The ability to reproduce and bear abundant young. “The captive black population of the Chesapeake area soon began to grow not only through new imports but also through its own fertility. . . .”

8. **menial** Fit for servants; humble or low. “But chiefly they performed the sweaty toil of clearing swamps, grubbing out trees, and other menial tasks.”

9. **militia** A voluntary, nonprofessional armed force of citizens, usually called to military service only in emergencies. “[They] tried to march to Spanish Florida, only to be stopped by the local militia.”

10. **hierarchy** A social group arranged in ranks or classes. “The rough equality . . . was giving way to a hierarchy of wealth and status. . . .”

11. **corporation** A private group or institution to which the government grants legal rights to carry on certain specified activities. “. . . the Massachusetts Puritans established Harvard College, today the oldest corporation in America. . . .”

12. **jeremiad** A sermon or prophecy recounting wrongdoing, warning of doom, and calling for repentance. “Jeremiads continued to thunder from the pulpits. . . .”

13. **lynching** The illegal execution of an accused person by mob action, without due process of law. “A hysterical ‘witch-hunt’ ensued, leading to the legal lynching in 1692 of twenty individuals. . . .”

14. **hinterland** An inland region set back from a port, river, or seacoast. “. . . their accusers came largely from subsistence farming families in Salem’s hinterland.”

15. **social structure** The basic pattern of the distribution of status and wealth in a society. “. . . many settlers . . . tried to re-create on a modified scale the social structure they had known in the Old World.”

16. **blue blood** Of noble or upper-class descent. “. . . would-be American blue bloods resented the pretensions of the ‘meaner sort.’. . .”

# Part II: Checking Your Progress

## A. True-False

Where the statement is true, circle **T**; where it is false, circle **F**.

1. T F Life expectancy among the seventeenth-century settlers of Maryland and Virginia was about sixty years.

2. T F Because men greatly outnumbered women in the Chesapeake region, a fierce competition arose among men for scarce females to marry.

3. T F Pregnancies among unmarried young women were common in the seventeenth-century colonial South.

4. T F Chesapeake Bay tobacco planters responded to falling prices by cutting back production.

5. T F The headright system of land grants to those who brought laborers to America primarily benefited wealthy planters rather than the poor indentured servants.

6. T F Most of the European immigrants who came to Virginia and Maryland in the seventeenth century were poor indentured servants.

7. T F Bacon’s Rebellion involved an alliance of white indentured servants with Virginia’s Indians in an attack on the elite planter class.

8. T F African slaves began to outnumber white indentured servants as the primary labor supply in the plantation colonies by the 1680s.

9. T F Slaves brought to North America developed a culture that mixed African and American speech, religion, and patterns of life.

10. T F Directly beneath the wealthy slaveowning planters, in the southern social structure, were the white indentured servants.

11. T F New Englanders’ long lives contributed to the general stability and order of their childrearing and family life.

12. T F New England expansion was carried out primarily by independent pioneers and land speculators who bought up large plots and then sold them to individual farmers.

13. T F The development of the Half-Way Covenant, in the 1660s, reflected both a decline in Puritan religious fervor and a broadening of religious participation.

14. T F The Salem Witch Trials reflected the persecution of poor women by upper-class males and clergy.

15. T F New Englanders’ Calvinist heritage and stern, self-reliant character created a legacy of high idealism and reform that greatly affected later American society.

## B. Multiple Choice

Select the best answer and circle the corresponding letter.

1. For most of their early history, the colonies of Maryland and Virginia

a. provided a healthy environment for child rearing.

b. contained far more men than women.

c. had harsh laws punishing premarital sexual relations.

d. encouraged the formation of stable and long-lasting marriages.

e. tolerated interracial sexual relations.

2. The primary beneficiaries of the headright system were

a. well-off planters who acquired land by paying the transatlantic passage for indentured servants.

b. widows who acquired new husbands from England.

c. indentured servants who were able to acquire their own land.

d. English ship owners who transported new laborers across the Atlantic.

e. backcountry settlers who gained reinforcements for their fights with the Indians.

3. The primary cause of Bacon’s Rebellion was

a. Governor Berkeley’s harsh treatment of the Indians.

b. the refusal of landlords to grant indentured servants their freedom.

c. white settlers’ resentment against the growing use of African slave labor.

d. the persecution of the colonists by King Charles II.

e. the poverty and discontent of many single young men unable to acquire land.

4. African slavery became the prevalent form of labor in the 1680s when

a. Bacon’s rebellion and rising wages in England made white indentured servants no longer a reliable labor force.

b. the first captives were brought from Africa to the New World.

c. blacks could be brought to the New World in safer and healthier condition.

d. the once-clear legal difference between a servant and a slave began to be blurred.

e. plantation owners discovered it was cheaper to buy slaves for life than replace white indentured servants every five years or so.

5. Most of the slaves who eventually reached North America were originally

a. from southern and eastern Africa.

b. free servants who worked as household labor in African royal families.

c. captured by West African coastal tribes and sold to European slave merchants.

d. sold as slaves in the West Indies and then reshipped to North America.

e. brought to the New World in family groups.

6. Political and economic power in the southern colonies was dominated by

a. urban professional classes such as lawyers and bankers.

b. small landowners.

c. the Anglican clergy

d. the English royal governors.

e. extended families of wealthy planters.

7. Because there were few urban centers in the colonial South

a. good roads between the isolated plantations had to be constructed early on.

b. most southerners traveled regularly to England or the West Indies to enjoy more sophisticated forms of culture.

c. the rural church became the central focus of southern social and economic life.

d. there were almost no people of wealth and culture in the region.

e. a professional class of lawyers and financiers was slow to develop.

8. The average colonial New England woman who did not die in childbirth could expect to

a. lose the majority of her children to death before adulthood.

b. outlive her husband by an average of fifteen years.

c. experience about ten pregnancies, occurring on average every two years from her twenties through menopause.

d. work regularly for pay outside the home besides care for her children.

e. be physically or mentally abused by her husband at some point in her life.

9. In New England, elementary education

a. was mandatory for any town with more than fifty families.

b. failed to provide even basic literacy to the large majority of citizens.

c. was less widespread than in the South.

d. was oriented to preparing students for entering college.

e. was completely in the hands of the Puritan clergy.

10. The Congregational Church of the Puritans contributed to

a. the development of basic ideas of democracy as expressed in the New England town meeting.

b. the extremely hierarchical character of New England life.

c. the increasing social harmony and unity displayed throughout the seventeenth century in New England towns.

d. the growing movement toward women’s rights in New England.

e. a growing number of personal conversions among young New Englanders.

11. In contrast to the Chesapeake Bay colonists in the South, those in New England

a. had fewer women and more men in their population.

b. had shorter life expectancies.

c. practiced birth control as a means of preventing overpopulation.

d. provided no protections for women within the institution of marriage.

e. enjoyed longer lives and more stable families.

12. The focus of much of New England’s politics, religion, and education was the institution of the

a. colonial legislature.

b. town.

c. militia company.

d. college.

e. commercial trading company.

13. The Half-Way Covenant provided

a. baptism, but not full communion, to people who had not had a conversion experience.

b. partial participation in politics to people who were not church members.

c. admission to communion, but not to voting membership in the church, for children aged twelve to seventeen.

d. partial participation in church affairs for women.

e. limited involvement in Massachusetts church councils to new frontier congregations.

14. Those people accused of being witches in Salem were generally

a. from the poorer and more uneducated segments of the town.

b. notorious for their deviation from the moral norms of the community.

c. outspoken opponents of the Puritan clergy.

d. from families associated with Salem’s burgeoning market economy.

e. suspected of having Indian or African ancestry.

15. English settlers greatly altered the character of the New England environment by

a. raising wheat and oats rather than the corn grown by Indians.

b. burning the forests that the Indians had rigorously protected against fires.

c. beating trails through the woods as they pursued seasonal hunting and fishing.

d. building an extensive system of roads and canals.

e. their extensive introduction of livestock.

## C. Identification

Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Early Maryland and Virginia settlers had difficulty creating them and even more difficulty making them last

2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ The principal economic product of early Maryland and Virginia

3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Immigrants who received passage to America in exchange for a fixed term of labor

4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Maryland and Virginia’s system of granting land to anyone who would pay trans-Atlantic passage for laborers

5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Laws first passed in 1662 that made blacks and their children the lifelong property of their white masters

6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ New England colony that was home to most North American slave traders

7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ English company that lost its monopoly on the slave trade in 1698

8. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ African American language that blended English with Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa

9. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Site of northern slave revolt of 1712 that led to the deaths of nine whites and the execution of more than twenty blacks

10. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Shorthand term for the wealthy extended clans like the Fitzhughs, Lees, and Washingtons that dominated politics in the most populous colony

11. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Occupation of assisting in childbirth that was a virtual female monopoly in colonial New England

12. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ The basic local political institution of New England, in which all freemen gathered to elect officials and debate local affairs

13. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Formula devised by Puritan ministers in 1662 to offer partial church membership to people who had not experienced conversion

14. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Late seventeenth-century judicial event that inflamed popular feelings, led to the deaths of twenty people, and weakened the Puritan clergy’s prestige

15. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ A form of Puritan sermon that scolded parishioners for declining piety and urged repentance and reform

## D. Matching People, Places, and Events

Match the person, place, or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. \_\_\_ Chesapeake  2. \_\_\_ Indentured servants  3. \_\_\_ Nathaniel Bacon  4. \_\_\_ William Berkeley  5. \_\_\_ Royal African Company  6. \_\_\_ Middle passage  7. \_\_\_ Ringshout  8. \_\_\_ Stono River  9. \_\_\_ Gullah  10. \_\_\_ New England conscience  11. \_\_\_ Harvard  12. \_\_\_ William and Mary  13. \_\_\_ Half-Way Covenant  14. \_\_\_ Salem witch trials  15. \_\_\_ Leisler’s Rebellion | a. Site of a 1739 South Carolina slave revolt  b. Helped erase the earlier Puritan distinction between the converted elect and other members of society  c. A bloody New York revolt of 1689–1691 that reflected class antagonism between rich landlords and aspiring merchants  d. Primary form of labor in early southern colonies until the 1680s  e. Term for the brutal slave journey from Africa to the Americas  f. Coastal African American language that blended elements of English with the African languages Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa  g. West African religious rite, retained by African Americans, in which participants responded to the shouts of a preacher  h. Phenomena started by adolescent girls’ accusations that ended with the deaths of twenty people  i. Virginia-Maryland bay area, site of the earliest colonial settlements  j. The legacy of Puritan religion that inspired idealism and reform among later generations of Americans  k. Colonial Virginia official who crushed rebels and wreaked cruel revenge  l. The oldest college in the South, founded in 1693  m. Organization whose loss of the slave trade monopoly in 1698 led to free-enterprise expansion of the business  n. Agitator who led poor former indentured servants and frontiersmen on a rampage against Indians and colonial government  o. The oldest college in America, originally based on the Puritan commitment to an educated ministry |

## E. Putting Things in Order

Put the following events in correct order by numbering them from 1 to 10.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Legal lynching of twenty accused witches occurs.

2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Royal slave trade monopoly ends.

3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ First colonial college is founded.

4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Landless whites in Virginia lose the right to vote.

5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Major rebellion by African Americans occurs in one of the middle colonies.

6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Southern slaves in revolt try, but fail, to march to Spanish Florida.

7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Partial church membership is opened to the unconverted.

8. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ African slaves begin to replace white indentured labor on southern plantations.

9. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Poor Virginia whites revolt against governor and rich planters.

10. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ First Africans arrive in Virginia.

## F. Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with the proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cause | Effect |
| 1. \_\_\_ The severe shortage of females in southern colonies  2. \_\_\_ Poor white males’ anger at their inability to acquire land or start families  3. \_\_\_ Planters’ fears of indentured servants’ rebellion, coupled with rising wages in England  4. \_\_\_ The dramatic increase in colonial slave population after 1680s  5. \_\_\_ The growing proportion of female slaves in the Chesapeake region after 1720  6. \_\_\_ New Englanders’ introduction of livestock and intensive agriculture  7. \_\_\_ The healthier climate and more equal male-female ratio in New England  8. \_\_\_ The decline of religious devotion and in number of conversions in New England  9. \_\_\_ Unsettled New England social conditions and anxieties about the decline of the Puritan religious heritage  10. \_\_\_ The rocky soil and harsh climate of New England | a. Inspired passage of strict slave codes  b. Sparked Bacon’s Rebellion  c. Produced large number of unattached males and weak family structure  d. Thwarted success in agriculture but helped create the tough New England character  e. Inspired the Half-Way Covenant and jeremiad preaching  f. Reduced forests and damaged the soil  g. Produced high birthrates and a very stable family structure  h. Fostered stronger slave families and growth of slave population through natural reproduction of children  i. Underlay the Salem witchcraft persecutions  j. Caused southern planters to switch from indentured-servant labor to African slavery |

## G. Developing Historical Skills

### Learning from Historical Documents

The illustrations on pp. 71 and 82 reproduce parts of two colonial documents: excerpts from an indentured servant’s contract and some pages from a children’s schoolbook, *The New England Primer.* By carefully examining these documents, you can learn much about early colonial culture and ideas. Answering the following questions will illustrate the kind of information that historical documents can provide.

1. What principal goals are the master and the indentured servant each seeking in the contract?

2. What do the potential problems that each side anticipates reveal about the nature of the relationship between masters and indentured servants?

3. How does the *New England Primer* directly link religious obligation with obedience to political authority and to parents?

4. Besides reading and writing, what other skill does the *Primer* instruct the teacher to develop in the child through sentences like this?

# Part III: Applying What You Have Learned

1. Why was the tobacco culture of early Maryland and Virginia so harsh and unstable. How did the environmental and demographic conditions of the Chesapeake region—especially rampant disease and the scarcity of women—affect the social and political life of the colonies?

2. What was the underlying cause of the expansion of African slavery in English North America?

3. Could the colonies’ labor problem have been solved without slavery?

4. How did African Americans develop a culture that combined African and American elements? What were some of the features of that culture?

5. Compare and contrast the typical family conditions and ways of life of southern whites, African American slaves, and New Englanders in the seventeenth century.

6. How did the harsh climate and soil, stern religion, and tightly knit New England town shape the Yankee character?

7. In what ways were married colonial New England women second-class citizens, subjected to discrimination and control, and in what ways was their status and well-being protected by law and society. Is it fair to critically judge colonial gender relations by later standards of equality and rights?

8. How did the Salem witch episode reflect the tensions and changes in seventeenth-century New England life and thought?

9. In what ways was seventeenth-century colonial society already recognizably American in relation to issues of family life, social class, ethnicity, and religion, and in what ways did it still reflect Old World features—whether European or African?