

ECONOMICS, POLITICS, AND SLAVERY

VUS-3

Economic and political institutions in the colonies developed in ways that were either typically European or were distinctively American, as climate, soil conditions, and other natural resources shaped regional economic development.

The African slave trade and the development of a slave labor system in many of the colonies resulted from plantation economies and labor shortages.

How did the economic activity and political institutions of the three colonial regions reflect the resources or the European origins of their settlers?

Why was slavery introduced into the colonies?

How did the institution of slavery influence European and African life in the colonies?

Economic characteristics of the Colonial Period

-The **New England** colonies developed an economy based on shipbuilding, fishing, lumbering, small-scale subsistence farming, and eventually, manufacturing. The colonies prospered, reflecting the Puritans' strong belief in the values of hard work and thrift.

-The **middle colonies** of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware developed economies based on shipbuilding, small-scale farming, and trading. Cities such as New York and Philadelphia began to grow as seaports and commercial centers.

-**Virginia and the other Southern colonies** developed economies in the eastern coastal lowlands based on large plantations that grew "cash crops" such as tobacco, rice, and indigo for export to Europe. Farther inland, however, in the mountains and valleys of the

Appalachian foothills, the economy was based on small-scale subsistence farming, hunting, and trading.

-A strong belief in private ownership of property and free enterprise characterized colonial life.

Social characteristics of the colonies

-**New England's** colonial society was based on religious standing. The Puritans grew increasingly intolerant of dissenters who challenged the Puritans' belief in the connection between religion and government. Rhode Island was founded by dissenters fleeing persecution by Puritans in Massachusetts.

- **The middle colonies** were home to multiple religious groups, including Quakers in Pennsylvania, Huguenots and Jews in New York, and Presbyterians in New Jersey, who generally believed in religious tolerance. These colonies had more flexible social structures and began to develop a middle class of skilled artisans, entrepreneurs (business owners), and small farmers.

- **Virginia and the Southern colonies** had a social structure based on family status and the ownership of land. Large landowners in the eastern lowlands dominated colonial government and society and maintained an allegiance to the Church of England and closer social ties to England than in the other colonies. In the mountains and valleys further inland, however, society was characterized by small subsistence farmers, hunters and traders of Scots-Irish and English descent.

- The "**Great Awakening**" was a religious movement that swept both Europe and the colonies during the mid-1700s. It led to the rapid growth of evangelical religions such as the Methodists and Baptists and challenged the established religious and governmental order. It laid one of the social foundations for the American Revolution.

Political life in the colonies

- **New England Colonies** - the use of town meetings (an "Athenian" direct democracy model) in the operation of government.

- **Middle Colonies** - incorporated a number of democratic principles that reflected the basic rights of Englishmen.

- **Southern colonies** - maintained stronger ties with Britain, with planters playing leading roles in colonial legislatures.

The development of indentured servitude and slavery

-The growth of a plantation-based agricultural economy in the hot, humid coastal lowlands of the Southern colonies required cheap labor on a large scale. Some of the labor needs, especially in Virginia, were met by indentured servants, who were often poor persons from England, Scotland, or Ireland who agreed to work on plantations for a period of time in return for their passage from Europe or relief from debts.

-Most plantation labor needs eventually came to be filled by the forcible importation of Africans. While some Africans worked as indentured servants, earned their freedom, and lived as free citizens during the Colonial Era, over time larger and larger numbers of enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to the Southern colonies (the "Middle Passage").

-The development of a slavery based agricultural economy in the Southern colonies would lead to eventual conflict between the North and South and the American Civil War.

