

Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution, 1700–1775

Driven from every other corner of the earth, freedom of thought and the right of private judgment in matters of conscience direct their course to this happy country as their last asylum.

Samuel Adams, 1776

Prologue: The population of the British colonies increased amazingly, owing largely to the fertility of a pioneer people. Slaves arrived from Africa in growing numbers in the eighteenth century, and they too—like the whites—were soon increasing their ranks through their own natural fertility. Immigrants were pouring in from the British Isles and Europe, and although the English language remained predominant, the now-famed melting pot was beginning to bubble. As the population spread, the austerity of the old-time worship weakened, although it was given a temporary revival by the Great Awakening of the 1730s. The rational thought inspired by the European Enlightenment found a ready disciple in Benjamin Franklin, whose sly pokes at religion no doubt helped undermine the dominance of the clergy. Americans began dealing in international trade, straining against the commercial limitations imposed by British imperial rule. A ruling class of sorts existed in all the colonies, although the governing clique in New York received a sharp jolt in the famed Zenger libel case. The ease with which the individual colonist could rise from one social rung to another, quite in contrast with Old World rigidity, foreshadowed the emergence of a mobile, pluralistic society.

A. The Colonial Melting Pot

I. Benjamin Franklin Analyzes the Population (1751)

The baby boom in the British colonies was an object of wonderment. The itinerant Swedish scientist Peter Kalm recorded that Mrs. Maria Hazard, who died in her

¹Jared Sparks, ed., *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* (1840), vol. 2, pp. 313–315.

hundredth year, left a total of five hundred children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. Benjamin Franklin, the incredibly versatile printer, businessman, philosopher, scientist, and diplomat, made the following observations in 1751. In his opinion, why were families so large, white labor so expensive, and slave labor so uneconomical?

Land being thus plenty in America, and so cheap as that a laboring man that understands husbandry can, in a short time, save money enough to purchase a piece of new land sufficient for a plantation, whereon he may subsist a family, such are not afraid to marry. For, if they even look far enough forward to consider how their children, when grown up, are to be provided for, they see that more land is to be had at rates equally easy, all circumstances considered.

Hence marriages in America are more general, and more generally early, than in Europe. And if it is reckoned there that there is but one marriage per annum among one hundred persons, perhaps we may here reckon two; and if in Europe they have but four births to a marriage (many of their marriages being late), we may here reckon eight, of which, if one half grow up, and our marriages are made, reckoning one with another, at twenty years of age, our people must at least be doubled every twenty years.

But notwithstanding this increase, so vast is the territory of North America that it will require many ages to settle it fully. And till it is fully settled, labor will never be cheap here, where no man continues long a laborer for others, but gets a plantation of his own; no man continues long a journeyman to a trade, but goes among those new settlers, and sets up for himself, etc. Hence labor is no cheaper now in Pennsylvania than it was thirty years ago, though so many thousand laboring people have been imported.

The danger therefore of these colonies interfering with their mother country in trades that depend on labor, manufactures, etc., is too remote to require the attention of Great Britain. . . .

It is an ill-grounded opinion that, by the labor of slaves, America may possibly vie in cheapness of manufactures with Britain. The labor of slaves can never be so cheap here as the labor of workingmen is in Britain. Any one may compute it. Interest of money is in the colonies from 6 to 10 percent. Slaves, one with another, cost thirty pounds sterling per head. Reckon then the interest of the first purchase of a slave, the insurance or risk on his life, his clothing and diet, expenses in his sickness and loss of time, loss by his neglect of business (neglect is natural to the man who is not to be benefited by his own care or diligence), expense of a driver to keep him at work, and his pilfering from time to time, almost every slave being by nature a thief, and compare the whole amount with the wages of a manufacturer of iron or wool in England, you will see that labor is much cheaper there than it ever can be by Negroes here.

Why then will Americans purchase slaves? Because slaves may be kept as long as a man pleases, or has occasion for their labor; while hired men are continually leaving their masters (often in the midst of his business) and setting up for themselves.

2. Gottlieb Mittelberger Voyages to Pennsylvania (c. 1750)

In the eighteenth century, tens of thousands of Germans, largely from the war-ravaged Rhineland, came to Pennsylvania for economic and social betterment. Often they were lured to the dock by the glib misrepresentations of "soul-traffickers," who received a commission for each victim enticed. Floating down the Rhine past thirty-six customshouses, the immigrants were fleeced at every turn by greedy officials and delayed by as much as six weeks. Then came delays of up to six weeks more in Holland and another six weeks in Britain, while scanty savings melted away. Many immigrants were exhausted before the beginning of the real ordeal—the seven- to twelve-week voyage. It is here described by a German pastor, Gottlieb Mittelberger, who crossed the Atlantic about 1750 to investigate conditions and to alert the people back home to their peril. His description of "the sale of human beings" at the end of the voyage, though overdrawn (like his description of the voyage itself), is basically sound. Yet he failed to observe that this system, which forced many immigrants into indentured servitude to pay for their passage, also enabled tens of thousands of hard-working immigrants to get a start in America. Why were sickness and death on the voyage so common? In what respects was white indentured servitude similar to black slavery, and in what important respect was it dissimilar?

During the voyage there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably.

Add to this, want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety, want, afflictions, and lamentations, together with other trouble, as for example, the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages for two or three nights and days, so that every one believes that the ship will go to the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a visitation the people cry and pray most piteously. . . .

Among the healthy, impatience sometimes grows so great and cruel that one curses the other, or himself and the day of his birth, and sometimes come near killing each other. Misery and malice join each other, so that they cheat and rob one another. One always reproaches the other with having persuaded him to undertake the journey. Frequently children cry out against their parents, husbands against their wives and wives against their husbands, brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances against each other. But most against the soul-traffickers.

Many sigh and cry: "Oh, that I were at home again, and if I had to lie in my pigsty!" Or they say: "O God, if I only had a piece of good bread, or a good fresh drop of water!" Many people whimper, sigh, and cry piteously for their homes; most of them get homesick. Many hundred people necessarily die and perish in such misery, and must be cast into the sea, which drives their relatives, or those who

²Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 . . .* (1898), pp. 20–29.

persuaded them to undertake the journey, to such despair that it is almost impossible to pacify and console them. . . .

No one can have an idea of the sufferings which women in confinement have to bear with their innocent children on board these ships. Few of this class escape with their lives; many a mother is cast into the water with her child as soon as she is dead. One day, just as we had a heavy gale, a woman in our ship, who was to give birth and could not give birth under the circumstances, was pushed through a loop-hole [porthole] in the ship and dropped into the sea, because she was far in the rear of the ship and could not be brought forward.

Children from 1 to 7 years rarely survive the voyage; and many a time parents are compelled to see their children miserably suffer and die from hunger, thirst, and sickness, and then to see them cast into the water. I witnessed such misery in no less than thirty-two children in our ship, all of whom were thrown into the sea. The parents grieve all the more since their children find no resting-place in the earth, but are devoured by the monsters of the sea. It is a notable fact that children who have not yet had the measles or smallpox generally get them on board the ship, and mostly die of them.

Often a father is separated by death from his wife and children, or mothers from their little children, or even both parents from their children; and sometimes whole families die in quick succession; so that often many dead persons lie in the berths beside the living ones, especially when contagious diseases have broken out on board the ship. . . .

[Pastor Mittelberger, after describing accidental falls that resulted in cripples or people lost overboard, turns to less serious inconveniences.]

That most of the people get sick is not surprising, because, in addition to all other trials and hardships, warm food is served only three times a week, the rations being very poor and very little. Such meals can hardly be eaten, on account of being so unclean. The water which is served out on the ship is often very black, thick, and full of worms, so that one cannot drink it without loathing, even with the greatest thirst. O surely, one would often give much money at sea for a piece of good bread, or a drink of good water, not to say a drink of good wine, if it were only to be had. I myself experienced that difficulty, I am sorry to say. Towards the end we were compelled to eat the ship's biscuit which had been spoiled long ago, though in a whole biscuit there was scarcely a piece the size of a dollar that had not been full of red worms and spiders' nests. Great hunger and thirst force us to eat and drink everything; but many a one does so at the risk of his life. . . .

At length, when, after a long and tedious voyage, the ships come in sight of land, so that the promontories can be seen, which the people were so eager and anxious to see, all creep from below on deck to see the land from afar, and they weep for joy, and pray and sing, thanking and praising God. The sight of the land makes the people on board the ship, especially the sick and the half dead, alive again, so that their hearts leap within them. They shout and rejoice, and are content to bear their misery in patience, in the hope that they may soon reach the land in safety.

But alas! When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them, except those who pay for their passage or can give good security. The others, who cannot pay, must remain on board the ships till they

are purchased, and are released from the ships by their purchasers. The sick always fare the worst, for the healthy are naturally preferred and purchased first. And so the sick and wretched must often remain on board in front of the city for two or three weeks, and frequently die; whereas many a one, if he could pay his debt and were permitted to leave the ship immediately, might recover and remain alive. . . .

The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried on thus: every day Englishmen, Dutchmen, and High-German people come from the city of Philadelphia and other places, in part from a great distance, say 20, 30, or 40 hours away, and go on board the newly arrived ship that has brought and offers for sale passengers from Europe, and select among the healthy persons such as they deem suitable for their business, and bargain with them how long they will serve for their passage-money, which most of them are still in debt for. When they have come to an agreement, it happens that adult persons bind themselves in writing to serve 3, 4, 5, or 6 years for the amount due by them, according to their age and strength. But very young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.

Many parents must sell and trade away their children like so many head of cattle; for if their children take the debt upon themselves, the parents can leave the ship free and unrestrained. But as the parents often do not know where and to what people their children are going, it often happens that such parents and children, after leaving the ship, do not see each other again for many years, perhaps no more in all their lives.

When people arrive who cannot make themselves free, but have children under 5 years, the parents cannot free themselves by them; for such children must be given to somebody without compensation to be brought up, and they must serve for their bringing up till they are 21 years old. Children from 5 to 10 years, who pay half price for their passage, viz. 30 florins, must likewise serve for it till they are 21 years of age. They cannot, therefore, redeem their parents by taking the debt of the latter upon themselves. But children above 10 years can take part of their parents' debt upon themselves.

A woman must stand for her husband if he arrives sick, and in like manner a man for his sick wife, and take the debt upon herself or himself, and thus serve 5 to 6 years, not alone for his or her own debt, but also for that of the sick husband or wife. But if both are sick, such persons are sent from the ship to the sick-house, but not until it appears probable that they will find no purchasers. As soon as they are well again they must serve for their passage, or pay if they have means.

It often happens that whole families—husband, wife, and children—are separated by being sold to different purchasers, especially when they have not paid any part of their passage-money.

When a husband or wife has died at sea when the ship has made more than half of her trip, the survivor must pay or serve not only for himself or herself, but also for the deceased. . . .

If some one in this country runs away from his master, who has treated him harshly, he cannot get far. Good provision has been made for such cases, so that a runaway is soon recovered. He who detains or returns a deserter receives a good reward.

If such a runaway has been away from his master one day, he must serve for it as a punishment a week, for a week a month, and for a month half a year. But if the

master will not keep the runaway after he has got him back, he may sell him for so many years as he would have to serve him yet.

3. Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur Discovers a New Man (c. 1770)

Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, a young Frenchman of noble family, served with the French army in Canada from 1758 to 1759. Upon reaching the English colonies in 1759, he traveled widely, married an American woman, and settled down to an idyllic existence on his New York estate, "Pine Hill." A born farmer, he introduced into America a number of plants, including alfalfa. Probably during the decade before 1775, he wrote in English the classic series of essays known as Letters from an American Farmer (published in 1782). This glowing account was blamed for luring some five hundred French families to the wilds of the Ohio Country, where they perished. What does Crèvecoeur reveal regarding the racial composition of the colonies? What did he regard as the most important factors creating the new American man?

. . . Whence came all these people?

They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans have arisen. The Eastern [New England] provinces must indeed be excepted, as being the unmixed descendants of Englishmen. I have heard many wish that they had been more intermixed also. For my part, I am no wisher, and think it much better as it has happened. They exhibit a most conspicuous figure in this great and variegated picture; they too enter for a great share in the pleasing perspective displayed in these thirteen provinces. I know it is fashionable to reflect on them, but I respect them for what they have done; for the accuracy and wisdom with which they have settled their territory; for the decency of their manners; for their early love of letters; their ancient college, the first in this hemisphere;* for their industry, which to me, who am but a farmer, is the criterion of everything. There never was a people, situated as they are, who with so ungrateful a soil have done more in so short a time. . . .

In this great American asylum, the poor of Europe have by some means met together, and in consequence of various causes; to what purpose should they ask one another what countrymen they are? Alas, two-thirds of them had no country. Can a wretch who wanders about, who works and starves, whose life is a continual scene of sore affliction or pinching penury—can that man call England or any other kingdom his country? A country that had no bread for him, whose fields procured him no harvest, who met with nothing but the frowns of the rich, the severity of the laws, with jails and punishments; who owned not a single foot of the extensive surface of this planet? No! urged by a variety of motives, here they came. Everything has tended to regenerate them: new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system. Here they are become men. In Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative

³M. G. J. de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904; reprint), pp. 51–56.

*In fact, the Spanish universities in Mexico City and Lima, Peru, antedated Harvard by eighty-five years.

mould, and refreshing showers; they withered, and were mowed down by want, hunger, and war. But now by the power of transplantation, like all other plants, they have taken root and flourished! Formerly they were not numbered in any civil lists of their country, except in those of the poor. Here they rank as citizens.

By what invisible power has this surprising metamorphosis been performed? By that of the laws and that of their industry. The laws, the indulgent laws, protect them as they arrive, stamping on them the symbol of adoption. They receive ample rewards for their labors; these accumulated rewards procure them lands; those lands confer on them the title of freemen, and to that title every benefit is affixed which men can possibly require. . . .

What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations.

He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *alma mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them the great mass of arts, sciences, vigor, and industry which began long since in the East. They will finish the great circle.

The American ought therefore to love this country much better than that wherein either he or his forefathers were born. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labor; his labor is founded on the basis of nature, *self-interest*; can it want a stronger allurements? Wives and children, who before in vain demanded of him a morsel of bread, now, fat and frolicsome, gladly help their father to clear those fields whence exuberant crops are to arise to feed and to clothe them all; without any part being claimed, either by a despotic prince, a rich abbot, or a mighty lord. Here religion demands but little of him: a small voluntary salary to the minister, and gratitude to God. Can he refuse these?

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.

This is an American.

4. *The Growth of the Colonial Population (1740–1780)*

This table shows the growth and shifting composition of the colonial population in the several decades before independence. What are the principal trends in the

⁴Reproduced from *The American Colonies: From Settlement to Independence* by R. C. Simmons (Copyright © R. C. Simmons 1976) by permission of PFD (www.pfd.co.uk) on behalf of Professor R. C. Simmons.

changing population? How might one account for regional differences in the numbers and makeup of the American people in the colonial era? Why did some areas grow faster than others? To what extent can the subsequent history of the United States be predicted from these figures?

The Thirteen Colonies
Estimated Percentages of Blacks and Whites, 1740–1780

A = Total Population B = % of Blacks C = % of Whites

	1740			1760			1780		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Maine*	—	—	—	—	—	—	49,133	0.93	99.07
New Hampshire	23,256	2.15	97.85	39,093	1.53	98.47	87,802	0.62	99.38
Massachusetts	151,613	2.00	98.00	222,600	2.18	97.82	268,627	1.79	98.21
Rhode Island	25,255	9.53	90.47	45,471	7.63	92.37	52,946	5.04	94.96
Connecticut	89,580	2.90	97.10	142,470	2.65	97.35	206,701	2.85	97.15
New York	63,665	14.13	85.87	117,138	13.94	86.06	210,541	10.00	90.00
New Jersey	51,373	8.50	91.50	93,813	7.00	93.00	139,627	7.49	92.51
Pennsylvania	85,637	2.40	97.60	183,703	2.40	97.60	327,305	2.40	97.60
Delaware	19,870	5.21	94.79	33,250	5.21	94.79	45,385	6.60	93.40
Maryland	116,093	20.70	79.30	162,267	30.20	69.80	245,474	32.80	67.20
Virginia	180,440	33.25	66.75	339,726	41.38	58.62	538,004	41.00	59.00
North Carolina	51,760	21.25	78.75	110,422	30.38	69.62	270,133	33.69	66.31
South Carolina	45,000	66.67	33.33	94,074	60.94	39.06	180,000	53.89	46.11
Georgia	2,021		100.00	9,578	37.36	62.64	56,071	37.15	62.85

*Massachusetts, of which Maine was a part until admitted to the Union as a state in 1820, did not establish a separate administrative district for Maine until the 1770s.

B. The Great Awakening

I. George Whitefield Fascinates Franklin (1739)

The frenzied religious revival that swept the colonies in the 1730s, known as the Great Awakening, featured George Whitefield as one of the Awakeners. Although he was only twenty-five years old when Benjamin Franklin heard him in Philadelphia during the second of Whitefield's seven trips to America, he had already preached with such emotional power in England that crowds would assemble at his church door before daybreak. When orthodox clergymen denied him their pulpits, he

¹John Bigelow, ed., *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), pp. 251–255.

would speak in the open air, at times to crowds of twenty thousand persons. Franklin, then thirty-six years old and a hardheaded Philadelphia businessman, was skeptical. What does this passage from his famed autobiography, written many years later, reveal about Franklin's character and about the atmosphere of toleration in Philadelphia?

In 1739 arrived among us from Ireland the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, who had made himself remarkable there as an itinerant preacher. He was at first permitted to preach in some of our churches; but the clergy, taking a dislike to him, soon refused him their pulpits, and he was obliged to preach in the fields. The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous, and it was a matter of speculation to me, who was one of the number, to observe the extraordinary influence of his oratory on his hearers, and how much they admired and respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them, by assuring them they were naturally *half beasts and half devils*. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.

And it being found inconvenient to assemble in the open air, subject to its inclemencies, the building of a house to meet in was no sooner proposed, and persons appointed to receive contributions, but sufficient sums were soon received to procure the ground and erect the building, which was one hundred feet long and seventy broad, about the size of Westminster Hall; and the work was carried on with such spirit as to be finished in a much shorter time than could have been expected. Both house and ground were vested in trustees, expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people at Philadelphia; the design in building not being to accommodate any particular sect, but the inhabitants in general; so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service.

Mr. Whitefield, in leaving us, went preaching all the way through the colonies to Georgia. The settlement of that province had lately been begun, but, instead of being made with hardy, industrious husbandmen, accustomed to labor, the only people fit for such an enterprise, it was with families of broken shopkeepers and other insolvent debtors, many of indolent and idle habits, taken out of the jails, who, being set down in the woods, unqualified for clearing land, and unable to endure the hardships of a new settlement, perished in numbers, leaving many helpless children unprovided for. The sight of their miserable situation inspired the benevolent heart of Mr. Whitefield with the idea of building an Orphan House there, in which they might be supported and educated. Returning northward, he preached up this charity, and made large collections, for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers, of which I myself was an instance.

I did not disapprove of the design, but, as Georgia was then destitute of materials and workmen, and it was proposed to send them from Philadelphia at a great

expense, I thought it would have been better to have built the house there, and brought the children to it. This I advised, but he was resolute in his first project, rejected my counsel, and I therefore refused to contribute.

I happened soon after to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.

At this sermon there was also one of our club who, being of my sentiments respecting the building in Georgia, and suspecting a collection might be intended, had, by precaution, emptied his pockets before he came from home. Towards the conclusion of the discourse, however, he felt a strong desire to give, and applied to a [Quaker] neighbor, who stood near him, to borrow some money for the purpose. The application was unfortunately to perhaps the only man in the company who had the firmness not to be affected by the preacher. His answer was, "At any other time, Friend Hopkinson, I would lend to thee freely; but not now, for thee seems to be out of thy right senses."

2. Jonathan Edwards Paints the Horrors of Hell (1741)

Jonathan Edwards, a New England Congregational minister, was, like George Whitefield, a Great Awakener. Tall, slender, and delicate, Edwards had a weak voice but a powerful mind. He still ranks as the greatest Protestant theologian ever produced in America. His command of the English language was exceptional, and his vision of hell, peopled with pre-damned infants and others, was horrifying. As he preached hellfire to his Enfield, Connecticut, congregation, there was a great moaning and crying: "What shall I do to be saved? Oh, I am going to hell!" Men and women groveled on the floor or lay inert on the benches. Would Edwards's famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," be equally effective today?

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire. He is of purer eyes than to bear you in his sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in his eyes as the most hateful, venomous serpent is in ours.

You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince, and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else that you did not go to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your

²Jonathan Edwards, *Works* (Andover, Mass.: Allen, Morrill & Wardwell, 1842), vol. 2, pp. 10–11.

eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell since you have sat here in the house of God provoking his pure eye by your sinful, wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.

O sinner! consider the fearful danger you are in! It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of Divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder. . . .

It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see along forever a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul. And you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages in wrestling and conflicting with this Almighty, merciless vengeance. And then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point [dot] to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite.

Oh! who can express what the state of a soul in such circumstances is! All that we can possibly say about it gives but a very feeble, faint representation of it. It is inexpressible and inconceivable: for "who knows the power of God's anger"!

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be. Oh! that you would consider it, whether you be young or old!

There is reason to think that there are many in this congregation, now hearing this discourse, that will actually be the subjects of this very misery to all eternity. We know not who they are, or in what seats they sit, or what thoughts they now have. It may be they are now at ease, and hear all these things without much disturbance, and are now flattering themselves that they are not the persons, promising themselves that they shall escape.

If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation, that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing it would be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation lift up a lamentable and bitter cry over him!

But, alas! instead of one, how many is it likely will remember this discourse in hell! And it would be a wonder, if some that are now present should not be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some persons that now sit here in some seats of this meeting-house, in health, and quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning!

C. The Colonial Economy

1. The West Indian Connection (1766)

Serving as a colonial agent in Britain in 1766, many-sided Benjamin Franklin was summoned to testify about American commerce before a parliamentary committee. What does the following excerpt from his testimony reveal about the economic relationship between the colonies and the mother country, and about the importance of the West Indian trade?

Q. What may be the amount of one year's imports into Pennsylvania from Britain?

A. I have been informed that our merchants compute the imports from Britain to be above 500,000 Pounds.

Q. What may be the amount of the produce of your province exported to Britain?

A. It must be small, as we produce little that is wanted in Britain. I suppose it cannot exceed 40,000 Pounds.

Q. How then do you pay the ballance?

A. The Ballance is paid by our produce carried to the West-Indies, and sold in our own islands, or to the French, Spaniards, Danes and Dutch; by the same carried to other colonies in North-America, as to New-England, Nova-Scotia, Newfoundland, Carolina and Georgia; by the same carried to different parts of Europe, as Spain, Portugal and Italy. In all which places we receive either money, bills of exchange, or commodities that suit for remittance to Britain; which, together with all the profits on the industry of our merchants and mariners, arising in those circuitous voyages, and the freights made by their ships, center finally in Britain, to discharge the ballance, and pay for British manufactures continually used in the province, or sold to foreigners by our traders.

Q. Have you heard of any difficulties lately laid on the Spanish trade?

A. Yes, I have heard that it has been greatly obstructed by some new regulations, and by the English men of war and cutters stationed all along the coast in America.

2. The Pattern of Colonial Commerce (1766)

Gottfried Achenwall was a distinguished German scholar whom Benjamin Franklin visited at Göttingen, Germany, in July 1766. At that time few Germans had any reliable knowledge about America, so Achenwall seized the opportunity to interview the immensely knowledgeable Franklin. What does Achenwall's analysis, as inspired by Franklin, suggest about the colonists' situation in the British imperial system?

¹From *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 13, p. 133.

²From *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 13, pp. 368–371.

Certainly it will in time be necessary to establish some manufacturers in the colonies. For with the growth of the North American colonies lasting for centuries, Great Britain and Ireland, as islands of limited resources (e.g., their wool production cannot be increased proportionately or without limit) will in the future find it beyond their power to supply from their output, the quantity of goods required by the colonies.

The three largest cities, centers of trade and seaports, in British America, are Boston in New England, New York in the province of that name, and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. About 1720, Boston was as large as the other two cities together, but since that time New York and Pennsylvania have grown far more than Boston. For in New England there are many seaports, but the other two are the only ports in their respective provinces, as these have only a small coastal area. So both these cities are the common markets for their whole province and grow more in proportion to the province and have the hope in consequence of becoming the largest cities in America. Philadelphia has more than 3,000 houses and more than 20,000 inhabitants. The city is regularly laid out, the streets are all at right angles; they are extended every year and new houses are always being built beyond the first boundary. The houses are almost all of brick, like most of those in London.

All the American colonies have their cities and villages; but Virginia has the fewest villages and only one small city, Williamsburg, where the governor resides and the provincial Assembly and the courts meet. In this province the colonists are scattered and distant from each other, each on its own tobacco plantation. This is because of the nature of the country. Chesapeake Bay runs deep into the land, and many navigable streams flow into it. By these streams the colonists send down their tobacco in barges to the Bay, where the seagoing vessels load it. This transport is the easiest and cheapest, especially for a product taking up as much room as tobacco. Virginia is cut up by as many naturally navigable streams, as Holland by artificial canals.

New York has excellent advantage for the trade with the savages. It ships its goods up the Hudson River, to the city of Albany. Hence they are sent by other streams, and because of waterfalls, here and there partly by land several English miles, on to Oswego on Lake Ontario. Here the fairs for Indian trade are held. Lake Ontario is connected by water through the greater lakes lying inland with the *Obersee* (Lake Superior). The savages easily bring their skins and hides from the interior in their boats to Oswego. In this trade Pennsylvania has no share, as New York would not allow it. On the other hand, the trade of Pennsylvania profits by the commerce of New Jersey, as this by the convenience of the Delaware River is mostly directed to Philadelphia.

The English colonies lack salt and rarely make it for themselves. They import it from Spanish South America. There it is produced naturally, as in the Cape Verde Islands and Senegal. When the tide is high, it flows over the sand banks in certain valleys, and the heat of the sun makes salt. The colonies import it in 50 or 60 ships a year.

The colonies are generally restricted in all their foreign trade, and even more in their shipping in all sorts of ways. Nevertheless the continental colonies particularly maintain a considerable shipping trade of their own. Many products, particularly

those for ship building and raw materials suitable for manufactures: mast trees, ship timber, iron, copper ore, hemp, flax, cotton, indigo, tobacco, ginger, tar, pitch, rosin, potash, skins and furs, they may not export. These are reserved for the British realm, must be bought by British merchants, and carried by British ships and sailors. In areas where an English company has the exclusive trade, they may not trade, for example, the East Indies. In 1765, trade also was prohibited with the West Indies colonies of the French and Spanish. But this prohibition had bad results, and has been lifted. To the Portuguese Sugar Islands they may carry all sorts of food stuffs, such as grain, flour, butter, meat, and cattle for butchering, wood and timber for house building and farm use, and in return bring back chiefly molasses, from which rum is made. Trade with the Spanish in America is a mere contraband trade; the Spanish government requires the confiscation of the goods and enforces the law by its coastguard ships. But the colonist risks it because he can bring back specie, which is so rare in the colonies.

Great Britain has now, 1766, established two free ports in the West Indies, one in Jamaica and one in Dominica. Other nations had formerly done so, the French a port in St. Domingo, the Dutch in St. Eustatius, an unproductive island, the Danes in the island of St. Thomas. Great Britain has done so to enjoy the same advantages, and particularly to reduce the contraband trade with the Spanish. Yet there are restrictions on this new arrangement: all foreigners can buy all goods there duty free, but for cash, not in exchange for goods.

That the shipping trade of their own which the colonies carry on, is so important rises partly from the trade referred to with the Spanish and French West Indies, partly from the intercolonial trade by exchange of their marketable over-production, especially between the continental colonies and the English Sugar Islands, partly from their great off-shore fisheries.

After the West Indies, the chief trade of the colonies goes to the regions lying south of Cape Finisterre. They traffic directly (in their own products and in their own ships) to Africa, the Canaries, and other islands in the ocean; as also in their own wares but in British ships to Portugal, Cadiz, Malaga, Marseilles, Leghorn, and Naples. They can in this way even trade to Turkey, but up to now have not. Hither they export their surplus, especially fish, grain, and flour, timber, also sugar and rice, and bring back their price partly in hard cash. The trade with Portugal has special restrictions. They can export their products there, but cannot bring back Portuguese wine for that must be carried by way of England. So they usually in return bring back salt as ballast. Sugar is the only product which the colonist can export as his own property, though in British ships, to all Europe and sell directly.

The greatest part of American goods are taken by the English, as they ship their manufactures to America. In general, no foreign nation is permitted to go to the colonies to buy their products and carry them away, much less to send their own goods over; both export and import remain a privilege for British subjects or especially for inhabitants of England. The import of English goods into the colonies increases as they grow. England sells annually to the colonies in North America and the West Indies more than three million pounds sterling of its own products, chiefly manufactures, and including Scotland and Ireland over five million pounds sterling. . . .

3. A Traveler Views the Mistakes of New England Farmers (1775)

European immigrants tried from the outset to reshape the New World in the image of the Old World they had left behind. They imported European crops and livestock and set out to change the very face of the American landscape. In the process, they often inflicted unintended damage on their new environment. As the spread of commercial agriculture put increasing pressure on farmers to bring cash crops to market, they were tempted to treat the land ever more harshly. What does this British traveler, writing on the eve of the American Revolution, identify as the most harmful agricultural practices? To what does he ascribe their embrace by New England farmers?

Concerning the country management of America, . . . it is . . . of consequence to understand the defects of their agriculture as well as the advantages of it. . . .

The cultivated parts of New England are . . . in such condition that in Great Britain they would be thought in a state of devastation; yet here it all arises from carelessness. Live hedges are common, yet the plenty of timber in many parts of the province is such that they neglect planting these durable, useful, and excellent fences, for the more easy way of posts and rails, or boards, which last but a few years and are always out of repair. . . . In many plantations, there are only a few inclosures about the houses, and the rest lie like common fields in England, the consequence of which is much useless labour in guarding crops from cattle.

Respecting their system, a distinction is to be made between the parts which have been many years in culture, and which, from the neighbouring population, are grown valuable; in these, lands are much better managed than in the frontier parts of the province, where land is of little value and where all the new settlers fix. In the former, the farmers lay down a system which they seem tolerably to adhere to, though with variations. They sow large quantities of maize, some wheat, barley, oats, buckwheat, pease, and beans, turneps, and clover: hemp and flax in small parcels. And these they throw after one another with variations, so as to keep the land, as well as their ideas permit, from being quite exhausted; which they effect by the intervention of a ploughed summer fallow sometimes. When the land has borne corn for several years, till it threatens to yield no more, then they so[w] clover among the last crop and leave it as a meadow for some years to recover itself. . . .

Instead of such management, I shall venture to recommend the following system:

1. Summer fallow.
2. Maize.
3. Pease or beans.
4. Barley or oats.
5. Turneps.
6. Wheat.
7. Clover for three, four, or five years.
8. Wheat.

³*American Husbandry*; 2 vols. (London: J. Bew, 1775), vol. 1, pp. 74–85.

I think such a system is well adapted to their climate and soil. . . . In this system I consider maize, barley, oats, and wheat, as crops that exhaust the land; but pease, beans, turneps, and clover, as such as rather improve . . . it. . . .

Maize is reckoned a great exhauster in New England. . . . The culture is something similar to that of hops; being planted in squares of about five feet, and when up, the plant is earthed into little hillocks. . . . The misfortune is [that] they do not always keep the plantations of maize clean, or the earth so loose in the intervals as it ought to be, in which case one may easily conceive that the land may be left totally exhausted; but this effect would be vastly lessened by being more assiduous in the culture, while the crop was growing, [and] absolutely to destroy all weeds, and keep the vacant spaces in garden order. . . .

Turneps, and other articles of winter food for cattle, they are extremely inattentive to; the great want of the country . . . is the want of dung, and yet they will not take the only method of gaining it, which is the keeping great stocks of cattle, not ranging through the woods, but confined to houses or warm yards. This can only be done by providing plenty of winter food: at present, they keep no more than their hay will feed, and some they let into the woods to provide for themselves, not a few of which perish by the severity of the cold. Great stores of turneps, or other roots, and perhaps cabbages better still, would make their hay and straw go much further, and by means of plenty of litter, for which this country is in many respects very well provided, they might raise such quantities of manure as would double the fertility of all their lands. . . . A more general culture of the various sorts of clovers would also increase the means of keeping cattle, and consequently raising more dung, which is in all parts of the world, whatever may be the climate, the only means of getting good arable crops. Besides, turneps or other roots, cabbages, clover, &c. in their growth and the culture which such receive as stand single, much improve the land, as all good farmers in England have well known these hundred years. Nor have the New Englanders any reason to fear the having too much cattle for the constant export of beef, pork, and live stock of all kinds, to the West Indies, which is a market that will never fail them, let their quantity be almost what it may. And this mention of cattle leads me to observe that most of the farmers in this country are, in whatever concerns cattle, the most negligent ignorant set of men in the world. Nor do I know any country in which animals are worse treated. Horses are in general, even valuable ones, worked hard and starved: they plough, cart, and ride them to death, at the same time that they give very little heed to their food; after the hardest day's works, all the nourishment they are like to have is to be turned into a wood, where the shoots and weeds form the chief of the pasture; unless it be after the hay is in, when they get a share of the after-grass. . . . This bad treatment extends to draft oxen; to their cows, sheep, and swine; only in a different manner, as may be supposed. There is scarce any branch of rural economy which more demands attention and judgment than the management of cattle; or one which, under a judicious treatment, is attended with more profit to the farmer in all countries; but the New England farmers have in all this matter the worst notions imaginable.

I must, in the next place, take notice of their tillage, as being weakly and insufficiently given: worse ploughing is no where to be seen, yet the farmers get tolera-

ble crops; this is owing, particularly in the new settlements, to the looseness and fertility of old woodlands, which, with very bad tillage, will yield excellent crops: a circumstance the rest of the province is too apt to be guided by, for seeing the effects, they are apt to suppose the same treatment will do on land long since broken up, which is far enough from being the case. Thus, in most parts of the province, is found shallow and unlevel furrows, which rather scratch than turn the land; and of this bad tillage the farmers are very sparing, rarely giving two ploughings if they think the crop will do with one; the consequence of which is their products being seldom near so great as they would be under a different management. Nor are their implements well made, or even well calculated for the work they are designed to perform; of this among other instances I may take the plough. The beam is too long; the supporters ought to be moveable, as they are in ploughs in England and in Scotland; the plough share is too narrow, which is a common fault; and the wheels are much too low. . . .

The harrows are also of a weak and poor construction; for I have more than once seen them with only wooden teeth, which however it may do for mere sand in tilth, must be very inefficacious on other soils. . . . The carts and waggons are also in some parts of the province very awkward ill made things, in which the principles of mechanics are not at all considered. There are however some gentlemen near Boston, who, having caught the taste of agriculture, which has for some years been remarkable in England, have introduced from thence better tools of most sorts and at the same time a much better practice of husbandry. . . .

Another article, which I shall here mention, is that of timber, which already grows so scarce upon the south coasts, that even fire-wood in some parts is not cheap. . . . They not only cut down timber to raise their buildings and fences, but in clearing the grounds for cultivation they destroy all that comes in their way, as if they had nothing to do but to get rid of it at all events, as fast as possible. Instead of acting in so absurd a manner, which utterly destroys woods of trees which require an hundred years to come to perfection, they ought, in the first settling and cultivating their tracts of land, to inclose and reserve portions of the best woods for the future use of themselves, and the general good of the country. . . . If the legislature does not interfere in this point, the whole country will be deprived of timber, as fast as it is settled. For nothing is of more importance to this country, though a colony, than timber: the plenty which has hitherto abounded makes the planters so regardless of their essential interests as to think it a commodity of little or no value. . . .

Let me . . . observe further that the New Englanders are also deficient in introducing . . . carrots, parsnips, potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes, beets, lucerne, sainfoine, and particularly cabbages. . . . In these colonies . . . land costs nothing; they have enough of various soils to try every thing. . . . But this circumstance, which is such an undoubted advantage, in fact turns out the contrary; and for this reason, they depend on this plenty of land as a substitute for all industry and good management; neglecting the efforts of good husbandry, which in England does more than the cheapness of the soil does in America. . . .

D. The Shoots of Democracy

I. The Epochal Zenger Trial (1735)

William Cosby, a hottheadedly incompetent New York governor, peremptorily removed the chief justice of the colony and substituted a stooge, young James Delancey. New Yorkers of the “popular party” decided to strike back by supporting the New-York Weekly Journal, edited by John Peter Zenger, a struggling printer who had earlier come from Germany as an indentured servant. Zenger’s attacks on Governor Cosby brought on a famous trial for seditious libel. The outlook seemed dark after Zenger’s two attorneys were summarily disbarred. But at the crucial moment, Andrew Hamilton, an aging but eminent Philadelphia lawyer, put in a surprise appearance as defense counsel. At the outset, he seemingly gave away his case when he admitted that Zenger had published the alleged libels, but he contended that since they were true, they were not libelous. The accepted law was that a libel was a libel, regardless of its truth. In the account excerpted here, Zenger describes his defense by Hamilton and the outcome of the trial. How did Hamilton’s defense contribute to the development of American democracy?

Mr. Attorney. . . . The case before the court is whether Mr. Zenger is guilty of libeling His Excellency the Governor of New York, and indeed the whole administration of the government. Mr. Hamilton has confessed the printing and publishing, and I think nothing is plainer than that the words in the information [indictment] are scandalous, and tend to sedition, and to disquiet the minds of the people of this province. And if such papers are not libels, I think it may be said there can be no such thing as a libel.

Mr. Hamilton. May it please Your Honor, I cannot agree with Mr. Attorney. For though I freely acknowledge that there are such things as libels, yet I must insist, at the same time, that what my client is charged with is not a libel. And I observed just now that Mr. Attorney, in defining a libel, made use of the words “scandalous, seditious, and tend to disquiet the people.” But (whether with design or not I will not say) he omitted the word “false.”

Mr. Attorney. I think I did not omit the word “false.” But it has been said already that it may be a libel, notwithstanding it may be true.

Mr. Hamilton. In this I must still differ with Mr. Attorney; for I depend upon it, we are to be tried upon this information now before the court and jury, and to which we have pleaded not guilty, and by it we are charged with printing and publishing a certain false, malicious, seditious, and scandalous libel. This word “false” must have some meaning, or else how came it there? . . .

Mr. Chief Justice [Delancey]. You cannot be admitted, Mr. Hamilton, to give the truth of a libel in evidence. A libel is not to be justified; for it is nevertheless a libel that it is true [i.e., the fact that it is true makes it nonetheless a libel].

Mr. Hamilton. I am sorry the court has so soon resolved upon that piece of law; I expected first to have been heard to the point. I have not in all my reading met

¹J. P. Zenger, *Zenger’s Own Story* (1736; reprint Columbia, Mo.: Press of the Crippled Turtle, 1954), pp. 20–41, passim.

with an authority that says we cannot be admitted to give the truth in evidence, upon an information for a libel.

Mr. Chief Justice. The law is clear, that you cannot justify a libel. . . .

Mr. Hamilton. I thank Your Honor. Then, gentlemen of the jury, it is to you we must now appeal, for witnesses, to the truth of the facts we have offered, and are denied the liberty to prove. And let it not seem strange that I apply myself to you in this manner. I am warranted so to do both by law and reason.

The law supposes you to be summoned out of the neighborhood where the fact [crime] is alleged to be committed; and the reason of your being taken out of the neighborhood is because you are supposed to have the best knowledge of the fact that is to be tried. And were you to find a verdict against my client, you must take upon you to say the papers referred to in the information, and which we acknowledge we printed and published, are false, scandalous, and seditious. But of this I can have no apprehension. You are citizens of New York; you are really what the law supposes you to be, honest and lawful men. And, according to my brief, the facts which we offer to prove were not committed in a corner; they are notoriously known to be true; and therefore in your justice lies our safety. And as we are denied the liberty of giving evidence to prove the truth of what we have published, I will beg leave to lay it down, as a standing rule in such cases, that the suppressing of evidence ought always to be taken for the strongest evidence; and I hope it will have that weight with you. . . .

I hope to be pardoned, sir, for my zeal upon this occasion. It is an old and wise caution that when our neighbor's house is on fire, we ought to take care of our own. For though, blessed be God, I live in a government [Pennsylvania] where liberty is well understood, and freely enjoyed, yet experience has shown us all (I'm sure it has to me) that a bad precedent in one government is soon set up for an authority in another. And therefore I cannot but think it mine, and every honest man's duty, that (while we pay all due obedience to men in authority) we ought at the same time to be upon our guard against power, wherever we apprehend that it may affect ourselves or our fellow subjects.

I am truly very unequal to such an undertaking on many accounts. And you see I labor under the weight of many years, and am borne down with great infirmities of body. Yet old and weak as I am, I should think it my duty, if required, to go to the utmost part of the land, where my service could be of any use, in assisting to quench the flame of prosecutions upon informations, set on foot by the government, to deprive a people of the right of remonstrating (and complaining too) of the arbitrary attempts of men in power. Men who injure and oppress the people under their administration provoke them to cry out and complain; and then make that very complaint the foundation for new oppressions and prosecutions. I wish I could say there were no instances of this kind.

But to conclude. The question before the court and you, gentlemen of the jury, is not of small nor private concern. It is not the cause of a poor printer, nor of New York alone, which you are now trying. No! It may, in its consequence, affect every freeman that lives under a British government on the main[land] of America. It is the best cause. It is the cause of liberty. And I make no doubt but your upright conduct, this day, will not only entitle you to the love and esteem

of your fellow citizens; but every man who prefers freedom to a life of slavery will bless and honor you, as men who have baffled the attempt of tyranny, and, by an impartial and uncorrupt verdict, have laid a noble foundation for securing to ourselves, our posterity, and our neighbors, that to which nature and the laws of our country have given us a right—the liberty both of exposing and opposing arbitrary power (in these parts of the world, at least) by speaking and writing truth. . . .

The jury withdrew, and in a small time returned, and being asked by the clerk whether they were agreed of their verdict, and whether John Peter Zenger was guilty of printing and publishing the libels in the information mentioned, they answered by Thomas Hunt, their foreman, “Not guilty.” Upon which there were three huzzas in the hall, which was crowded with people, and the next day I was discharged from my imprisonment.

[The jurors, who might have suffered fines and imprisonment, were guilty of “bad law,” for at that time they had no legal alternative to finding Zenger guilty. But the trial, which was widely publicized at home and abroad, provided a setback for judicial tyranny, a partial triumph for freedom of the press, a gain for the privilege of criticizing public officials, and a boost to the ideal of liberty generally. Andrew Hamilton, in truth, was contending for the law as it should be—and as it ultimately became. Not for many years, however, did the two principles for which he argued become accepted practice in England and America: (1) the admissibility of evidence as to the truth of an alleged libel and (2) the right of the jury to judge the libelous nature of the alleged libel.]

2. Crèvecoeur Finds a Perfect Society (c. 1770)

Crèvecoeur, the happy Frenchman dwelling on a New York farm before the Revolution (see earlier, p. 88), wrote in glowing terms of the almost classless society developing in the colonies. Can you reconcile his statements with the existence of slavery and indentured servitude, a planter aristocracy, and a tax-supported church?

He [the English traveler to America] is arrived on a new continent; a modern society offers itself to his contemplation, different from what he had hitherto seen. It is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess everything, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe.

Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory, communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws, without

²M. G. J. de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904; reprint), pp. 49–50.

dreading their power, because they are equitable. We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself.

If he [the English visitor] travels through our rural districts, he views not the hostile castle and the haughty mansion, contrasted with the clay-built hut and miserable cabin, where cattle and men help to keep each other warm, and dwell in meanness, smoke, and indigence. A pleasing uniformity of decent competence appears throughout our habitations. The meanest of our log-houses is a dry and comfortable habitation. Lawyer or merchant are the fairest titles our towns afford; that of a farmer is the only appellation of the rural inhabitants of our country. It must take some time ere he can reconcile himself to our dictionary, which is but short in words of dignity and names of honor.

There, on a Sunday, he sees a congregation of respectable farmers and their wives, all clad in neat homespun, well mounted, or riding in their own humble wagons. There is not among them an esquire, saving the unlettered magistrate. There he sees a parson as simple as his flock, a farmer who does not riot on the labor of others. We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are.

Thought Provokers

1. Compare and contrast social conditions in the New World with those in the Old, and explain why the New World had certain advantages. In what ways did the composition of colonial society foreshadow the social structure of the modern United States?
2. Compare and contrast religion in colonial times with religion today. Did the threat of hellfire promote better morals? Reconcile the wrathful Old Testament God of Jonathan Edwards with the New Testament concept of "God is love."
3. In what ways did British imperial regulations work to the advantage of the American colonials? to their disadvantage?
4. What were the principal changes that European settlers wrought on the physical environment of North America?
5. How can one reconcile the case of Zenger with the classless society described by Crèvecoeur? Can the truth be libel today?