Culture and Society

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: How do new ideas change the way people live?
Life in the Colonies

Guiding Question: What was life like for people living in the thirteen colonies?

- The number of people living in the thirteen colonies rose from about 250,000 in 1700 to approximately 2.5 million by the mid-1770s.
- The population of African Americans increased at an even faster rate—from about 28,000 to more than 500,000.
- Immigration - the permanent moving of people into one country from other countries = much growth
- Between 1607 and 1775, an estimated 690,000 Europeans came to the colonies.
- Also during this time, traders brought in 278,000 enslaved Africans to the colonies.
Growing Population and Checks on It.

- Other reasons for the growing population: colonial women tended to **marry early** and have large families and the colonies—especially New England—turned out to be a very **healthy place** to live compared to other parts of the world.
- Still, compared to today, life was fragile. For example, women often died in childbirth.
- Outbreaks of serious diseases such as smallpox were common.
- 1721 - a smallpox epidemic in the city of Boston killed about 850 people, or 15 percent of the city's population!!!!
A New American Spirit

- Many Americans were born in other countries - brought with them different languages and ways of thinking.
- Still, in the colonies, immigrants became something new and different—they became Americans.
- 1782, French writer J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur described this new type of person:

"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. . . . Here individuals of all races are melted into a new race of man, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."

— from Letters from an American Farmer
An American Culture Forms

- A spirit of independence developed early in the history of the American people.
- Far from the rules and limits of their home countries, settlers began to develop their own ways of doing things.
- Throughout the colonies, people adapted their traditions to the new conditions of life.
- Religion, education, and the arts contributed to a new American culture.
- The family, however, formed the basic foundation of colonial society—for those who were not enslaved, at least.
Family Roles

- Men were the formal heads of the households.
- They managed the farm or business and represented the family in the community.
- On the farm, men worked the fields, built barns, houses, fences.
- Sons might work as indentured servants for local farmers or become apprentices.
- Apprentice: works with a skilled craftsperson as a way of learning a trade.
- Women ran households and cared for children.
- Many worked in the fields with their husbands.
- Married women had few rights.
- Unmarried women might work as maids or cooks.
- Widows and older women who never married might work as teachers, nurses, seamstresses.
- They could run businesses and own property, but they could not vote.
- Even children as young as four or five often had jobs.
- When they played, they enjoyed simple games, such as hopscotch or leap frog.
- Their toys were usually made from common objects.

Finding the Main Idea: What was the role of the family in colonial life?
Connections to TODAY

Colleges and Universities

- Several colleges and universities founded in colonial times are still educating students today. For example, Harvard University in Massachusetts got its start in 1636 as a school for training ministers.
- Next came Virginia’s College of William and Mary, founded in 1693.
- Yale University in Connecticut started as a school in 1701.
- The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia began as a charity school in 1740.
American Beliefs & Education

Guiding Question: What values and beliefs were important to the American colonists?

- The American spirit and the family served as a foundation for life in the colonies.
- In addition, Americans shared a commitment to education, strong religious beliefs, and openness to new ideas.
- Most colonists valued education.
- Parents often taught their children to read and write at home.
- In New England and Pennsylvania, in particular, people set up schools to make sure everyone could read and study the Bible.
- In 1647 the Massachusetts Puritans passed a public education law requiring communities with 50 or more homes to have a public school.
Results of American Values

- The result was a high level of literacy in New England.
- By 1750, about 85 percent of the men and about half of the women were able to read.
- Many learned from The New England Primer.
- Most schools in the Middle Colonies were private.
- Widows or unmarried women ran many of those schools.
- Quakers and other religious groups ran others.
- In towns and cities, craftspeople often set up night schools for their apprentices.
- The earliest colleges in the colonies were founded to train ministers.
The Great Awakening

- Religion had a strong influence in colonial life.
- 1730s and 1740s, a religious revival = the Great Awakening.
- In New England and the Middle Colonies, ministers called for "a new birth," a return to the strong faith of earlier days.
- Jonathan Edwards of Massachusetts - gave powerful and convincing sermons.
- George Whitefield, an English preacher who arrived in the colonies in 1739, inspired worshipers in churches and open fields from New England to Georgia.
- Inspired greater religious freedom.
Consequences of the Great Awakening

- Led to the formation of many new types of churches.
- The new churches placed an emphasis on having personal faith rather than on church rituals.
- More colonists began choosing their own faiths, and the strength of established official churches declined.
- As a Baptist preacher noted soon after the Great Awakening, "the common people now claim as good a right to judge and act in matters of religion as civil rulers or the learned clergy."
- The Great Awakening also united colonists from north to south in a common experience.
- The colonists overcame regional barriers - this helped pave the way for the rapid spread of revolutionary ideas and excitement during the struggle for independence.
The Enlightenment

- Middle of the 1700s, many educated colonists were also influenced by the Enlightenment.
- This movement, which began in Europe, spread the idea that knowledge, reason, and science could improve society.
- In the colonies, the Enlightenment increased interest in science.
- People observed nature, staged experiments, and published their findings, much as Benjamin Franklin did.
- The Enlightenment also promoted freedom of thought and expression, a belief in equality, and the idea of popular government.
Ideas of Freedom

- Freedom of the press became an important issue in colonial America.
- Newspapers in colonial cities, such as Boston and Philadelphia, carried political news and often faced government censorship.
- Censorship is the banning of printed materials because they contain unpopular or offensive ideas.
- For criticizing the governor, officials charged Zenger with a crime and threw him in jail.
- Zenger argued that the statements written about the governor were true.
- Therefore, he claimed, he had the right to publish them. Zenger's lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, made a stirring defense:
  - "The loss of liberty in general would soon follow the suppression of the liberty of the press; for it is an essential branch of liberty, so perhaps it is the best preservative of the whole."

—from The Trial of John Peter Zenger and the Birth of Freedom of the Press, by Doug Linder
The jury found Zenger not guilty. The case is seen as a key step in the development of a free press in this country.
Civic Virtue

- Colonists - beginning to form new ideas of freedom.
- Began thinking in terms of civic virtue—democratic ideas, practices, and values that form a truly free society.
- De Crèvecoeur was writing about these ideals when he described the spirit of the new American.
- Benjamin Franklin was a shining example of civic virtue at its best.
- Colonists would soon put their belief in civic virtue into action.
- These ideas and actions would become the building blocks of a new nation.

Analyzing: In what ways did the Great Awakening influence culture in the colonies?