

Colonial Daily Life

MOST PEOPLE in the 13 Colonies lived on farms and guided their days by the seasons. Crops varied according to region: tobacco in Virginia, hardier crops in colder New England. Inhabitants in cities like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Williamsburg, Virginia, often used shops like tanneries and dry-goods stores, which offered products and services not available on the largely self-contained farm. Although housing size differed according to wealth, houses were often symmetrical in appearance, with an equal number of windows on each side of the entrance. Established farming families sometimes demonstrated success by building a larger dwelling onto original, smaller farmhouses. In these homes, big or small,

children were born, sometimes with the help of a midwife but often simply with the assistance of a female family member. Large families of several children were common, both to provide labor for the farm and because approximately half of all children died before reaching adulthood. Children learned basic reading and writing skills at home; later, if families had the means, boys were sent to grammar school and college. Some male children who needed to learn a trade were apprenticed to a master's family, with whom they lived and trained for years. Girls were not permitted to attend school outside the home and instead learned the art of housekeeping from their mothers.



A colonial frontier wedding, 1700s

Colonial Courtship

- Finding a mate in the colonies was a lengthy, regimented process, which began in youth and ended with the teenage or slightly older young woman marrying the man who had just reached the age of legal majority. The long journey included these steps:
- Once the girl learned stitchery, she began assembling her dowry, or "bride wealth," of linens, nightgowns, and other household items, which were stored in a hope, or dowry, chest.
- Young people met each other at dances and social events.
- A male suitor requested permission from the female's father to court her; if the father found the suitor unacceptable, he declined, making potential marriage impossible.
- Most courtship was done in public, often with little chance for privacy. An exception was the New England custom of tarrying, or "bundling," in which a man and woman were allowed to sleep the night in the same bed, but with many layers of clothing, and sometimes a bed-length "bundling board" to divide them.

Colonial Amusements

When farm families were able to break from daily routine, they often found pleasure in social activities that integrated enjoyment and work, such as corn-huskings and barn-raising. Young children's toys included dolls, balls, and marbles; city men found amusement at the grogshop or tavern.

A Big Colonial Dinner

For colonial families, dinner was the main meal of the day and was given appropriate time and variety. Beginning in the early afternoon, it often spanned several hours and multiple courses. A representative first course at a lavish dinner might include:

- soup
- boiled goose
- fish
- cooked red cabbage
- breast of veal
- chicken
- pudding
- venison
- mutton

At Christmas, mince pie would also be served, made according to a recipe similar to this one condensed from the 1683 edition of the 1630 book *The Housewife's Skill in Cookery*:

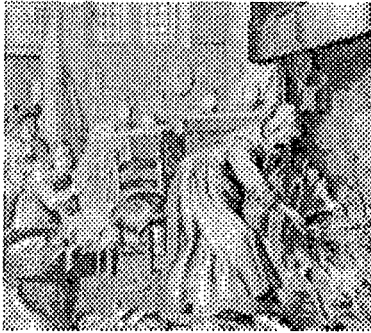
"Take a Legge of Mutton and cut the best of the flesh from the bone and parboyl it well. Then put to it three pound of the best Mutton suet . . . and season it with Salt, Cloves, and Mace. Then put in good store of Currants, great Raisins, and Prunes . . . [P]ut into a coffin . . . and so bake them. When they are served up . . . strow some of suger on the Top . . ."

Colonial Table Manners

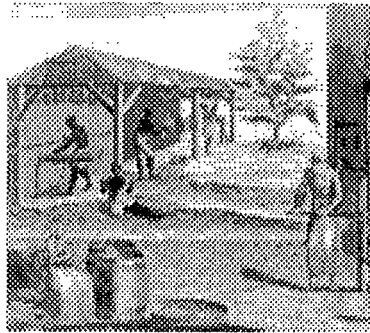
As they are today, proper table manners were important to the colonial family dinner table. Most were similar to today's rules, as excerpts from the 18th-century guide, "Children's Behaviour at the Table," indicate:

- "Come not to the Table without having your Hands and Face washed, and your Head combed"
- Find no fault with any Thing that is given thee
- If thou wantest any thing from the Servants, call to them softly
- Smell not of thy Meat, nor put it in thy Nose
- When thou risest from the Table, having made a Bow at the Side of the Table where thou sattest, withdraw."

Occupations in the Thirteen Colonies



Cooking over the fire, 1700s



Slaves and other workers picking leaves and operating machinery at a tobacco factory, 1750



Merchants meeting on New York City waterfront, 1760s

Farmer

Tasks: Most farmers in colonial times worked small, family-run farms. They cleared land, dug ditches, built fences and farm buildings, plowed, and did other heavy labor.

Equipment and Tools: Plow, hoe, axe, building tools.

Notable Features: Farmers grew crops to sell, but also for their own sustenance. They commonly enlisted only the help of family members. Their prestige was much lower than that of planters, who ran plantations that were worked by slaves.

Planter

Tasks: Planters were wealthy, educated men who oversaw the operations on their large farms, or plantations. Planters dealt more with logistics than with hard labor. They could be found supervising the slaves and staff and inspecting crops.

Equipment and Tools: Books to track expenses and sales.

Notable Features: Common crops included tobacco in Virginia and Maryland and rice and indigo in the Carolinas. Planters profited by selling their crops to merchants who exported items to Europe and distributed them in the colonies.

Artisan

Types: The many varieties of artisan or craftsman included blacksmith, cooper, tinsmith (whitesmith), and printer.

Equipment and Tools:

Blacksmith: Hammers, anvil, hardy, bellows.

Cooper: Drawknives, jointer, hand adze, howel, auger.

Tinsmith: Tin snips, pincers, punches, soldering iron.

Printer: Wooden press, ink ball, punch, counterpunch.

Products:

Blacksmith: The blacksmith supplied other craftsmen and townspeople with iron tools. Implements made by blacksmiths ranged from axes to horseshoes to blades to hoes.

Cooper: The cooper made barrels to store grain, cornmeal, beer, molasses, syrup, salt fish, and meat. He also made kegs (for gunpowder and rum), tubs, and pails.

Tinsmith: The tinsmith created a variety of tin items, including dippers, strainers, pans, lanterns, and sugar and spice boxes.

Printer: Many printers were publishers, producing newspapers and books along with legal forms and handbills.

Notable Features: Artisans were esteemed because of their special expertise. The stages of their career included apprentice, journeyman, and master. Indentured servants often served as apprentices, and slaves were sometimes trained as artisans.

Merchant

Types: Shop owners; merchant fleet owners.

Tasks: Merchants sold or traded goods within the colonies and between the colonies and Europe. They negotiated with colonial planters and craftsmen; ordered goods and materials for the colonies from England; and coordinated the sea voyage to export and import products.

Equipment and Tools: Ships, carts, ledgers to track orders.

Notable Features: Some merchants were considerably wealthy and held prestige in the colonies. Among the items exported were furs, fish, pelts, grain, indigo, lumber, rice, and livestock. Common imports included glassware, copperware, ironware, silk goods, iron nails, printed cotton, linen, and beaver hats. It was not uncommon to engage in smuggling to avoid trade barriers.

Unskilled Laborer

Types: Free laborers, indentured servants, and slaves.

Tasks: Unskilled laborers did many kinds of manual labor, including farm work, household service, and the myriad tasks an apprentice performed for a craftsman. Slaves were generally used for hard labor on plantations, including clearing and plowing land; and planting, picking, and processing crops.

Notable Features: Indentured servants were men and women who agreed to work for a master for a specified period of time in exchange for passage to the colonies. After the period of service passed, their masters provided them with clothes, tools and sometimes land to start them in their new, free lives. Slaves, however, were bought and sold as property.

Housewife

Tasks: A housewife's duties varied depending on her level of wealth and husband's occupation. Farmers' wives generally had the greatest number of daily household tasks, including gardening, cooking, cleaning, childcare, weaving, and sewing.

Equipment and Tools: Common equipment for a farmer's wife might include gardening implements, a spinning wheel, a butter churn, iron cookware, and a weaving loom.

Notable Features: The wives of shop owners often worked with their husbands and had a servant to assist in household tasks. Planters' wives, meanwhile, oversaw the household staff and often helped care for sick slaves and deliver babies. They also relied on servants for household needs such as cleaning, child care, cooking, laundry, and sewing.

Government in the English Colonies

ALL 13 ENGLISH COLONIES were virtually self-governing by 1776, but their governments had been shaped by very different histories. Many colonies were originally chartered colonies; of these, some were corporate colonies created by stock-company ventures, while others became proprietary colonies. Chartered at different times for different reasons, many saw transformations in their colonial governments over the years, often starting out as private ventures but ending up as Crown (or royal) colonies. Due largely to their isolation from England, almost all enjoyed

relative freedom from direct Parliamentary supervision. Differences among them were most apparent in the formation of local governments, which varied according to region. All colonies, however, shared two aspects: governors appointed by the Crown or colony proprietors (except for Connecticut and Rhode Island, where governors were elected); and legislative assemblies with elected representatives—the right to which became one of the cornerstones of the American Revolution.

Chartered Colonies

- Issued by the king, royal charters allowed the grantees (whether proprietors or corporations) the right to colonize specified tracts of land and to administer themselves as long as they did not pass legislation contrary to the laws of England.
- Chartered colonies fell into two subdivisions: proprietary and corporate.
- All colonies except New Jersey began with royal charters.

Proprietary Colonies

- A charter or grant was issued to an individual or group of people who essentially held the land as a private estate.
- Proprietors could earn income from the land by selling, leasing, or renting parts of it to settlers.
- Colonies that began as proprietary ventures included Maryland, Carolina (later North and South Carolina), New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Georgia.
- By 1776 only Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware remained as proprietary colonies.

Corporate Colonies

- A joint-stock company with investors obtained a charter to own and manage a specified territory for its investors (usually settlers). A corporate colony might also be formed when a proprietor sold or leased land to another organization.
- Those settling in the colony became its "freemen" who elected or chose the colony's officials, including the governor.
- Colonies that began as corporate colonies included Virginia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.
- By 1776 Connecticut and Rhode Island were the only two corporate colonies.

Crown (Royal) Colonies

- Crown or royal colonies were under the direct protection and supervision of the British monarch.
- Many became royal colonies after their corporate or proprietary ventures failed.
- Although royal colonies set up legislative assemblies that passed laws for self-governance, their acts were technically subject to the approval of Parliament.
- Royal colonies included: Virginia (as of 1624); New Hampshire (as of 1679, when it separated from Massachusetts); New York (as of 1685); Massachusetts (as of 1691); Maryland (1692-1715, when it reverted to proprietary status); New Jersey (as of 1702); North and South Carolina (as of 1729); and Georgia (as of 1752).



William Penn, founding proprietor of Pennsylvania

Government in the Colonies

- Colonial governments were generally based on the English system of a head of state (the governor) and a bicameral legislature. Exceptions: Pennsylvania and Georgia had a single legislative house.
- Excepting Rhode Island and Connecticut, a colony's governor was appointed by the Crown or by its proprietor(s). The governor had power to convene and dissolve the colony's legislature as well as veto its laws. He also had command of the militia and the authority both to appoint public officials and to administer justice.
- Also common to most colonies was a council appointed by the Crown. This usually consisted of 12 men (although numbers varied in different colonies) who served as the upper house of the legislature, as a board of advisors to the governor, and frequently as the highest court in the colony.
- The legislative assembly comprised representatives elected by the colonists. (Elected representative government was first introduced in Virginia in 1619 and Massachusetts in 1634, after which other colonies followed suit.) Although the assembly was the chief legislative arm of colonial government, its acts could be vetoed by the governor or overridden by the Crown. However, it retained the right to approve any taxation of the colony.
- In the North, local government took the form of small, compact communities called towns, run by selectmen who were elected in annual town meetings.
- In the South, settlers were more scattered, and thus the county was the basic administrative unit. South Carolina and Georgia had similar structures called parishes.
- The middle colonies generally adopted a mixture of township and county government, depending on population and necessity.

Interactions with Native Americans

THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH SETTLEMENTS in mainland North America—Jamestown in Virginia and Plymouth in Massachusetts—probably wouldn't have survived without help from local Native Americans, who provided food and, at Plymouth, taught the newcomers to survive in an unfamiliar environment. As settlement increased, the Native Americans often grew to resent the strangers in their midst, but they eagerly traded food, furs, and land for the tools and firearms brought by the colonists. Yet the settlers' hunger for land—and for valuable furs in the river valleys of New York and New England—led to conflicts ranging from small forest skirmishes to full-scale wars that left hundreds dead on both sides. In addition to fighting English colonists, Native Americans were sometimes recruited as allies in wars against England's colonial rivals, France and Spain. However,

the history of colonial–Native American interaction is not restricted to armed conflict. Some colonial leaders—most notably Roger Williams in Rhode Island, Sir William Penn in Pennsylvania, and Sir William Johnson in New York—worked for peaceful and fair relations between the two peoples. Some Native Americans intermarried with whites and were assimilated into colonial society. The reverse was also true, —some whites taken captive by Native Americans stayed with the families that had adopted them rather than return to their homes. Other Native Americans moved westward, trying to stay ahead of the tide of settlement. Still others, their lands gone, wound up living on the margins of colonial society, ravaged by the twin evils that followed the settlers—alcohol and disease.

Timeline

1607 English colonists—744 in all—found Jamestown on the Virginia coast, in territory ruled by the powerful Native American leader Powhatan. One of the colony's leaders, John Smith, is captured by warriors and (according to Smith's account) saved from execution by Powhatan's young daughter Pocahontas.

1614 Pocahontas weds John Rolfe of Jamestown. Pocahontas later visits England but dies just before the voyage back to Virginia.

1618 A massive smallpox epidemic devastates the Native American communities of the Atlantic coast. Hardest hit is New England, where up to 90 percent of the population dies.

1620 The Pilgrims, English colonists, establish Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts. The Pilgrims sign a treaty with Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag nation.

1622 In Virginia, Powhatan's successor Opechancanough attacks settlements along the James River; warriors kill more than 300 colonists.

1624 Virginia's House of Burgesses authorizes the kidnapping of Native American children to be raised as Christians and otherwise "civilized."

1625 Native Americans of the Canarsee nation "sell" the island of Manhattan to Peter Minuit of the Dutch West India Company.

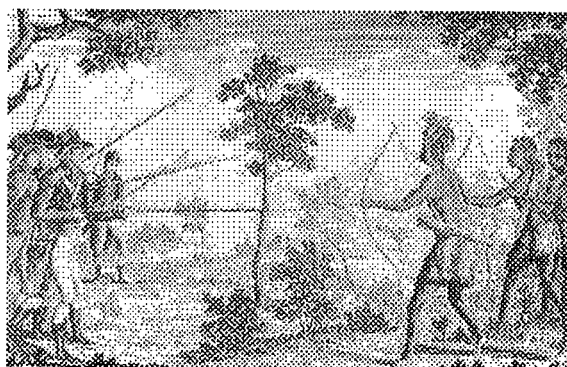
1634–1637 Pequot War: Attacks on British traders lead to war between the Pequots and Massachusetts and Connecticut settlers. The war ends with the death of some 500 Pequots and the burning of the Pequot's main village.

1638 Religious radical Roger Williams founds Providence Plantation (now Rhode Island). Williams seeks to preserve good relations with local Native Americans, who sheltered him after he was expelled by the Massachusetts Bay Colony's Puritan leaders.

1644 Native Americans attack English settlements in Virginia and Dutch outposts in the Hudson and Housatonic valleys. The attacks are brutally put down in both regions.

1661 Puritan missionary John Eliot establishes a church for Native Americans at Natick, Massachusetts, and translates the Bible into Algonquian language.

1675–1677 King Philip's War: The most devastating Native



A confrontation between Native Americans and colonists during King Philip's War, 1675

American conflict in New England pits the Wampanoag led by Metacomb ("King Philip") against colonists. The war leaves about 600 settlers and 3,000 Native Americans dead.

1680 Sir William Penn, Quaker leader and founder of Pennsylvania, signs a "treaty of friendship" with local Native Americans. It is sometimes called the only treaty "never sworn to" (Quakers refused to swear oaths for religious reasons) "and never broken."

1704 Fifty settlers are killed and 100 taken captive when Native Americans loyal to France raid the frontier settlement at Deerfield, Massachusetts.

1711–1715 Two brutal conflicts sweep the Carolinas: In North Carolina, settlers come into conflict with the Tuscarora, while the Yamasee attack settlers in South Carolina. Both wars end in Native American defeats but cause much death and suffering on both sides.

1724 New England colonists defeat French-backed Abnakis in a series of skirmishes along the Kennebec River in Maine.

1754–1763 The French and Indian War: Both British and French make use of Native American allies in the struggle for North America.

1763–1766 Pontiac's Rebellion: A confederacy of Native American nations led by Pontiac, an Ottawa leader, attacks British outposts along the Great Lakes. A 1766 treaty ends the conflict, but Pontiac is assassinated in 1769.

Slavery in the English Colonies

IT TOOK SEVERAL DECADES for slavery to become established in England's North American colonies. In the early 1600s a person's African origins did not automatically guarantee a lifetime of servitude or status as "property." Because plantation-style slavery was not suited to the tobacco-based economy of Virginia and Maryland, the first African laborers in these colonies were treated not much differently than white indentured servants (men and women who worked for a master for a fixed period of years to pay back the cost of their passage to America). These first African-American laborers mostly came from the Caribbean instead of being imported from Africa, and there is evidence that many eventually became free men and women. Some even owned property and intermarried

with white settlers. After about 1680, however, the situation changed. The flow of white laborers from the British Isles slowed, and Africans, now mostly brought directly from West Africa, picked up the slack. The growth of rice and indigo as cash crops in the Carolinas led to the establishment of plantations worked by large groups of slaves. At the same time, slavery began to be fixed in law. By the 18th century, slavery was for life, and the offspring of slaves were declared to be slaves themselves. Slaves were concentrated in the South but were found throughout the colonies. By 1775 the number of slaves in the 13 colonies was about 500,000—about one-fifth of the total colonial population.

Timeline

1619 A Dutch warship arrives at Jamestown, Virginia, carrying 20 Africans captured from a Spanish slave ship

1652 Virginia sets tax rates on slaves.

1667 Virginia law states that a slave remains a slave even if he or she becomes a Christian; however, another law frees African Christians taken to the colony as slaves.

1672 Parliament grants the Royal African Company a monopoly on the transportation of slaves from Africa to England's colonies in North America.

1682 Virginia repeals the law which freed African Christians.

1688 In Pennsylvania, Mennonites—members of a dissenting Protestant group—become the first American religious group to denounce slavery.

1691 Virginia's legislature declares that a slaveowner cannot free a slave unless the owner pays the ex-slave's passage out of the colony.

1700 Massachusetts judge Samuel Sewall publishes *The Selling of Joseph*—the first printed argument against slavery. The population of the New England colonies is about 275,000; about 25,000, or slightly less than 10 percent, are slaves.

1705 Virginia enacts several laws codifying slavery in the colony on a racial basis. Slaves are now considered "real estate," and whites and blacks are forbidden to marry.

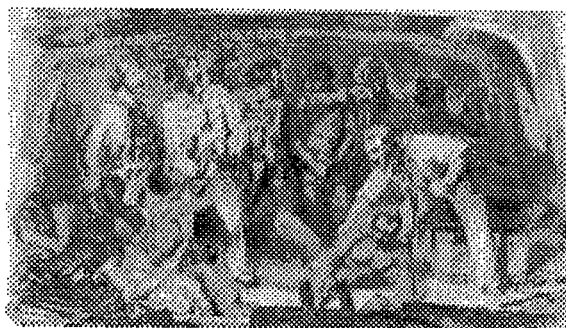
1712 A slave uprising in New York City leaves nine whites dead; 18 alleged "rebels" are killed in revenge, some by torture.

1739 "Cato's Conspiracy," a major slave revolt, grips South Carolina after a group of slaves in Charleston attempt to reach Florida. Twenty-one whites and 44 slaves die in the violence that follows.

1740 Slaves are blamed for setting a series of fires in New York City. Authorities execute 29 slaves: 18 by hanging, the rest burned at the stake.

1753 Benjamin Franklin argues that slavery is economically inefficient.

1774 Although a slaveowner himself, George Washington denounces the slave trade as "wicked, cruel, and unnatural."



Human cargo is stowed away on a slave ship-at-night, 1700s.

Facts About Colonial Slaves

Different kinds of slaves: Colonial slaves worked at a variety of occupations. Some were house servants; others, especially in towns, became skilled at particular trades like blacksmithing and carpentry. Sometimes slaves were permitted to ply a trade for their own profit, and a few managed to make enough money to buy their freedom.

Small-scale slavery: Even after the plantation system took hold, the number of slaves per plantation was relatively small. In the mid-1700s, the average plantation in the Carolinas had 10–12 slaves, all of whom might come from the same one or two families.

Slaves as a percentage of the population: Virginia and South Carolina were the colonies with the biggest slave populations. By 1775, African-Americans (all but a few of whom were slaves) made up nearly half of Virginia's population, and slaves outnumbered whites by almost two to one in South Carolina.

Slave codes: Fear of slave uprisings led to the passage of "slave codes" by southern colonial legislatures. These laws usually forbade slaves from leaving their owner's house or plantation without permission, forbade slaves from gathering in groups, and sometimes made it illegal for whites to teach slaves to read.

Flight to freedom: Escaped slaves risked cruel punishment if caught, but some took the risk. In Virginia a community of escaped slaves called "maroons" lived with Native Americans in the backcountry region known as the Great Dismal Swamp. Other escaping slaves, like those involved in Cato's Conspiracy, fled south to Spanish-controlled Florida.

The Colonial Social Pyramid

ON THE EVE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, the population of the 13 colonies was clearly divided into social classes colloquially known as "the better sort," "the middling sort," and "the meaner sort." In a land full of new or nearly new settlers, a man's social status was determined not so much by the antiquity of his family but by his wealth and land ownership, while a woman's class was dictated by her father or husband. Because opportunities were plentiful and land was abundant, it was possible for a person born of no means to rise to a higher station in adulthood.

Colonial people in the middle and working classes were, therefore, more optimistic than those in European countries because they believed that with hard work and perseverance, they could advance themselves. With a constant shortage of labor, the working classes in the colonies were also treated better and paid better than in Europe. The working people occasionally vented their frustrations in rebellion. Though these rebellions did not always redress their actual grievances, they served to make often neglected people more visible.

Class Structure

- Those at the highest level of society, the colonial "aristocrats," were wealthy planters and merchants, from whose ranks came many public officials and religious leaders.
- Also high in status were educated professionals such as doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and teachers.
- The middle class was made up of land-owning farmers and skilled craftsmen.
- The lower classes included hired laborers and indentured servants, people who received passage to the colonies in return for a commitment to work for a specified period of time.
- African-American slaves, in the very lowest class, had no rights of their own and were considered the property of the landowners for whom they worked.



Rebel leader Nathaniel Bacon confronts Governor William Berkeley in Jamestown, 1676.

Social Mobility

In sharp contrast to England's rigid class structure, it was possible for a man to improve his station in the colonies if he so desired. In a land with too short a history to have established norms that set the social strata, the upper class was open to virtually any man who accumulated some wealth, though this was more true in the North than in the South. Some men went to school to become lawyers and then moved into public office and leadership; others worked hard to increase their land holdings and became wealthy merchants. Some men married well. Three of the most famous colonial leaders—Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson—did not come from wealthy families but were self-made men.

Social Unrest

- In 1676 backcountry Virginians were frustrated that the state was not helping to protect them from Native Americans. A well-connected member of the governor's council, Nathaniel Bacon, after leading a wilderness mission that killed some 150 Native Americans, brought 100 armed backcountry men to Jamestown to confront Governor William Berkeley. Bacon drove Berkeley from Jamestown, but the rebellion ended with Bacon's untimely death from disease.

- In May 1689, amid rumors that New York was going to be turned over to the French, wealthy German native Jacob Leisler and about 500 men seized Fort James. With the backing of Hudson Valley farmers who were angry that city merchants controlled the price of their wheat, Leisler ruled New York for over a year, abolishing the trade monopolies on flour but levying new taxes as well. He was convicted of treason in 1691.

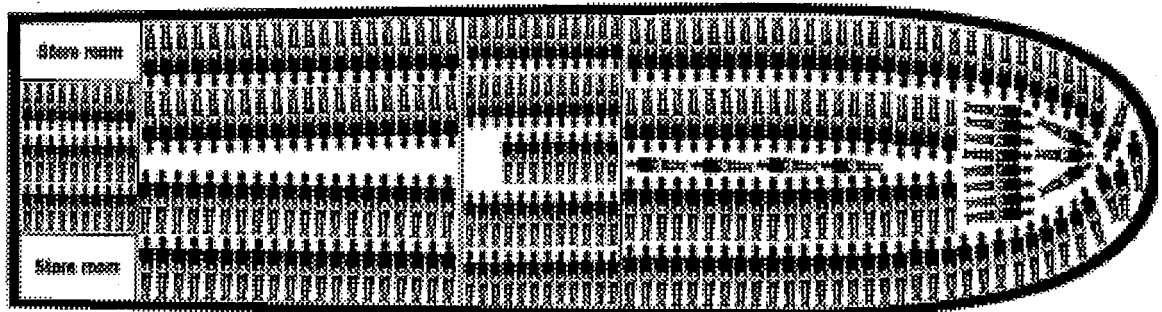
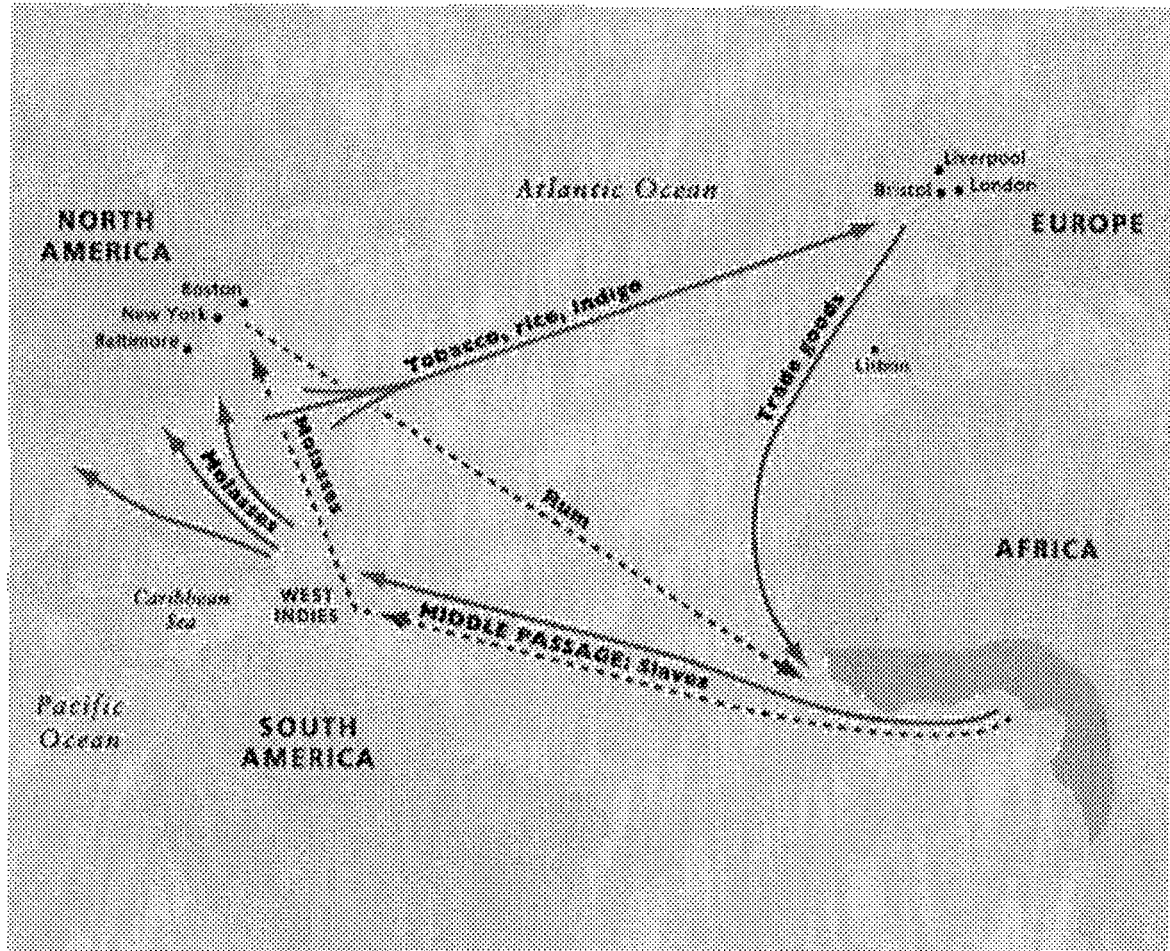
- After 20 Native Americans were murdered in a riot in December 1763 by the Paxton Boys (a group of about 50 men from Lancaster, Pennsylvania), a crusade of backcountry settlers emerged. About 600 armed settlers marched on Philadelphia to air their grievances: underrepresentation in the assembly, a lack of roads, and the need for help against the Native Americans. Benjamin Franklin negotiated a peaceful end to the potential rebellion.

- In 1767 angry settlers in the backcountry of North Carolina created an "association" for "regulating" their problems, which included high taxes, government corruption, and underrepresentation in the assembly. Known as the Regulators, they pursued their aims through means violent and peaceful until 1771, when the movement collapsed in the face of military action by the colonial militia.

The Triangle Trade and the Middle Passage

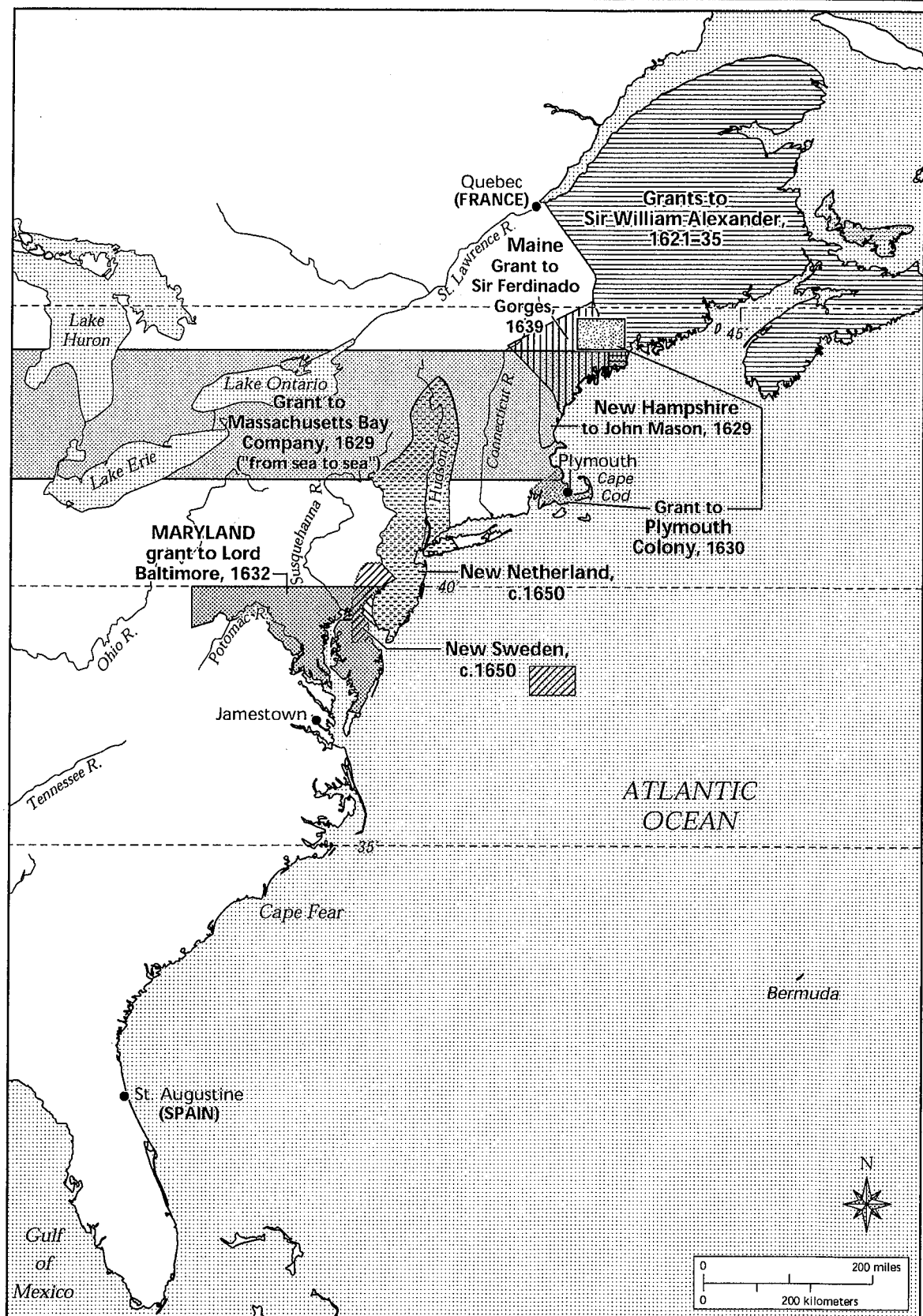
THE THREE-WAY SLAVE TRADE among Africa, the Americas, and Europe came to be known as the triangle trade because the patterns made by the cargo

ships formed huge triangles across the Atlantic Ocean. This map shows key trading routes used by European merchants.



The five-to-eight week voyage taken by slave ships to the Americas was called the Middle Passage. Though many died trying to escape, most deaths were caused by harsh shipboard conditions, particularly if the ship's captain was a "tight packer" who tried to maximize profits by cramming as many Africans as possible onto a ship (see diagram above). "Loose packers" felt that by giving slaves room to move, more could survive to be sold at journey's end.

Colonial Grants, 1621-1650



Different Types of Colonial Government



Religious Diversity, 1750

