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| **Colonial Period (1607 – 1775)** |
| **Puritans and Colonial Life**  * Persecuted by Church of England for Protestant beliefs * Left England by way of Holland for the New World * Established colonial settlements in New England for the purpose of religious freedom * By the 1700, as the settlements grew into larger communities, Puritanism fell out of fashion * The Great Awakening (led by Jonathan Edwards) in 1720 was a series of revivals meant to rekindle the Puritan religious intensity * The time for Puritanical beliefs had passed as interest in the colonial revolution was taking hold of the continent; however, many people still hold true to the work ethic and values of the America’s first settlers, the Puritans |
| **The Puritanical Belief System**  * Wanted to “purify” the church from within but gave up and on the C.O.E. and moved to the New World. * Wanted to found the “city on the hill” or a holy Mt. Zion. * Wanted a theocracy and a theocratic community (ruled by the church). * Wanted simple churches not elaborately decorated cathedrals. * Were Calvinistic and believed in predetermination, the elect, and original sin   + **Predetermination:** God’s plan has been laid out, one would go to either Heaven or Hell, there is very little one can do about it either way.   + **Elect:** Those who are going to Heaven are the elect, they are considered saints, and are the representatives of the God on earth.   + **Original Sin:** Humans are born evil and corrupted and the only way to improve is through constant sacrifice and hard work. |

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| **Revolutionary and Nationalist Periods (1775 – 1828)** |
| **The Revolutionary and Nationalist Experience**  * In 1750’s and 1760’s, American colonies were well established and generally happy with English rule and the English Victory over France in the French and Indian War of 1754 - 1763 * But by the mid 1760’s King George III and the English Parliament enacted laws that infringed upon the freedom of the English citizens living in the colonies   + Stamp Act of 1765: Tax that required placing stamps on 54 commonly purchased items like newspapers, playing cards, legal documents etc.   + Townsend Act of 1767: Tax on paper, paint, lead, glass, and tea * Largely bloodless protests took place until 1770 when British troops fired on a crowd and killed five civilians * Townsend Act was repealed except for the Tea Tax * This lead to the Boston Tea Party * English Parliament passed the Coercive Acts; Colonists labeled them the Intolerable Acts * April 18, 1775: First shots fired in the American Revolution * 1776: Declaration of Independence * 1777: Colonial victory in Battle of Saratoga – international recognition of American independence. France commits troops to aid in the revolution. * October 19, 1781: Yorktown and the surrender of Cornwallis * Articles of Confederation: Linked the states in a common goal of unity * 1800: Jefferson elected President |
| **The Age of Reason or the Age of Enlightenment**  * **Inspired by scientific discoveries** of Galileo and Sir Isaac Newton * Believed people were **good by nature** * Believed **social contract** should be the preferred form of government, not a theocracy * Rejected **superstitions and religious fanaticism** of the Puritans for the rational thought of science, valuing reason over faith |

**Detailed Colonial Period Notes (Developed from American Literature: A Brief History, 1964)**

1588 – 1765: “The English Colonies”

***General Patterns of Colonial Culture***

* Columbus seeking passage to Orient 1492 is generally attributed to contact, though there is new scholarship suggesting Chinese contact that occurred earlier
* England showed a late and somewhat reluctant interest in colonial pursuits
* Nearly a century after contact, Sir Walter Raleigh made first actual claims through occupation
* English were initially scornful of costly failures like Roanoke Island in 1585
* However, *their patriotism* – a blend of nationalism and Protestantism – *their desire for wealth*, *their renewed awareness of their role as a sea-faring people* led to permanent settlements at Jamestown in Virginia, 1607 and Plymouth in Massachusetts, 1620
* Puritan Migration of 1628 – 1640 led to a population in New England of approximately **25,000** persons, by 1700 there were more than **250,000** colonists, and by 1765 there were approximately **1,750,000** colonists
* Representative assemblies, similar to those of the lower house of Parliament, developed to confront problems in the colonies and to administer the pronouncements of the Crown.
* However, there was tremendous diversity in the groups occupying the colonies, as evidenced by the Dutch New Amsterdam, the Swedes in Delaware, Catholic Lord Baltimore of Maryland, and Quaker William Penn of Pennsylvania.
* Moreover, outside of New England, there was very little homogeneity of background. By 1765 one out of every three Pennsylvanians was German, every other North Carolinian was of Scotch-Irish ancestry, slaves made up almost half of the population in Virginia, and in South Carolina and Georgia, whites were actually outnumbered by their slaves
* Intercolonial travel by land was difficult and uncommon. In fact, personal and commercial connections between individual colonies and England were often closer than those between colonies
* All aspects of culture – language, folklore, learning, the arts, literary tastes and forms, legal, political, and educational institutions – were all brought from Europe. Colonists were, in fact, citizens of England and nations of Europe, but the application of these time-honored traditions posed significant problems and required constant modifications to meet the specific needs of the colonists. Simply put, transplantation of culture was not smooth, regular, or simple.
* Likewise, Europe and England were experiencing cultural upheaval as well. The Renaissance gave way to Neoclassicism, feudalism and the divine right of kings began to give way to constitutional and contractual concepts, the upheaval of the Protestant Reformation caused the sectarian rivalries, scientific discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Boyle, and Newton shifted the world-view of Western man, bringing humanity closer to what we might deem familiar
* Colonial literature sought to emulate traditions of England and Europe and was written as much for European readers as colonial readers. Most American colonial literature was written for necessary, utilitarian, practical purposes rather than a product of leisure. Most colonists wrote because they confronted some immediate pressing purpose, economic, religious, or political, that could be furthered by writing

***Economic Life: Promise of Wealth***

* Primary aspirations for most colonists lay in freedom from want
* Much of the optimistic literature written about the economics of the colonies offered a glowing evaluation of what the New World could offer colonists. These accounts were often written by promoters and misled many settlers who sought economic freedom
* Almost every piece of writing from the colonies offered evidence, often exaggerated, to prospective colonists, suggesting that simple toil would offer a surplus, regardless of industry, and a significant opportunity for wealth
* These exaggerations fell on the happy ears of prospective colonists and fit into many of the myths of the west, like the Elysian Fields and Atlantis, held by most Europeans. This is the beginning of the myth of America as a place where the streets are paved with gold
* There were some critics, like the **Count de Buffon**, who contended that the climate was actually averse to the growth and development of flora and fauna. **Thomas Jefferson** sought to refute such claims by writing a series of refutations that systematically debunked the claims made by these critics. He went so far in his comparison to assemble the skeleton of an American mastodon in his apartments in Paris
* Indigenous American Indians were largely thought to be inferior heathens that must be subjugated by the Divine right of European and English colonists. Some voices offered suggestions of treaty and legal acquisition of land and property from the Indians, but these suggestions were few and obviously ridiculous when one considers that property rights were as foreign to indigenous people as the Western monotheistic God pressed upon them by the Protestants
* The mysterious American Indian generated a tremendous amount of myth and legend back in Europe, largely leading the portrayal of aborigines as a "noble savages." The legend of Pocahontas is an example of such mythologizing that has extended well into modern times
* A tremendous amount of animosity lay between the Protestants of England and the Catholics of France and Spain. Many Protestant religious leaders felt it imperative to convert aborigines before the Catholics could lead them astray

***The Religious Life: Freedom for Faith***

* Next to getting a living, the chief concern of most colonists was religion, specifically, saving their souls and the souls of others.
* The **Protestant Reformation**, beginning with Henry the VIII's disconnection with Rome and the Pope up to Queen Elizabeth's reign, was a significant event for all colonists. This break from Catholicism *established the monarch as the head of the English Church*, *caused monastic orders to be abolished*, *nationalized Church property and lands*, *caused church services to be held in English rather than Latin,* *led to the printing of English Bibles and the Book of Common Prayer*, and *abolished the elaborate worship ceremonies of Catholicism.*
* **Puritans**, who believed that the Reformation was not complete, wished to focus all attention to the Bible and the saving of souls, but most importantly, they wanted to be rid of all vestiges of Catholic traditions, and **Separatists**, who simply wanted the freedom to allow their congregations to mandate specific forms of worship and church government, began their move to the colonies
* This move was hastened by James I (of the King James Bible, 1611) and by Charles I, who ascended in 1625; significant social and often violent means were used to normalize the Church of England and establish a *status quo*
* Two major colonies were established in New England by these religious sects: **The Separatist Pilgrims of Plymouth** (moved first to Holland and then to the Mass. Bay area) who were led by William *Bradford* and were relatively poor and **The Massachusetts Bay Puritans**, who were led by John *Winthrop* and were comparatively wealthy
* **Puritanism**, as evidenced by the word, has come to indicate a purity of lifestyle, a strait-laced life, and excessive personal and social repression of appetites and desire for material things. Puritans were often obsessed with the personal lives of their neighbors, but Puritans weren't just dull-minded, busy-bodies. Some Puritans were earnest, faithful, and intense believers in God and took great pains to live a pious life in strict accordance with Christ's teachings.
* **Calvinism**, a stern philosophy constructed by Genevan reformer, *John Calvin* (1509-1564), portrayed God as a strict sovereign that was betrayed by Adam, breaking God's covenant. Adam and all of his race were forced into retribution for that betrayal. Through Christ, certain select individuals, called **the Elect**, were extended a chance to be saved. This concept hinges on the concept of God's supreme power and subsequently the predetermination of this Elect group. To be of the Elect, whose numbers were entirely unknown to man, one must live a righteous lifestyle and remain constantly vigilant against temptation and signs from God
* There were numerous critics of the strict Calvinistic doctrine and questioned the portrayal of man as essentially depraved. Calvinism lost favor because of its harsh presentation of God in relation to man, but experienced an intense revival in the beginning of the eighteenth century (1720 – 1770) led by the voices of **George Whitefield** and **Jonathan Edwards**. This revival of Calvinistic faith, called the **Great Awakening**, extended to all Protestant sects and spread beyond New England, but faded almost entirely as the focus of the colonies shifted to war in the later part of the eighteenth century

***Political Life: Commonwealth Building***

* The idea of the **commonwealth** came from the observation that the English Empire was waning, not unlike the Roman Empire, and the inequity that resulted from the strict feudal hierarchy was largely responsible for the slow collapse; moreover, the ensuing attempt at capitalism failed to provide man with a sense of social responsibility. In the New World, many believed, John Smith in particular, that there was a unique opportunity to take advantage all that America had to offer and create a society where all men worked together for the benefit of everyone
* Both Puritans and Separatists alike focused their political leanings towards communistic, theocratic government where there was a society governed by the many rather than by a select few
* The idea of the commonwealth was not achieved, but the implications are clear when one considers the democratic sensibility described by these religious leaders, later evidenced in the writings of Revolutionary Period

***The Circumstances of Literary Production***

* Printing was limited in the colonies and most books of significance, even colonial ones, were printed in Europe
* Printing was established in Massachusetts in 1639 and in all of the other colonies before 1763
* Printing larger volumes was extremely expensive and very uncommon; however, books that were absolutely necessary, like almanacs, school texts, legal and business manuals, and newspapers, were readily available. Sermons, pamphlets, and small volumes of poems were also very common, most often these forms were subsidized privately or through a process of presale
* Surprisingly, there was very little censorship of printers during this period and most publishers found a quite reasonable amount of freedom of expression

***Literary Trends***

* There were seven major forms of writing during this period: a*ccounts of voyages, promotion tracts, sermons, polemical (disputes and arguments) tracts and treatises, histories and biographies, and poems*. There were virtually no plays or novels written during the Colonial Period
* Accounts of Voyages: a plain narrative form, written by someone that was not a trained writer; chronologically organized; however, these writings were hardly boring and provided readers with interesting travel narratives
* Promotion Tracts: tone had to appear impersonal and unbiased to be effective; narratives were generally not used; instead, writers found topical means, moving from the general to the specific, breaking their tracts into parts (i.e. Organization described the varied commodities to be found or raised in VA: *1 Marketable*: plants, minerals, furs; *2 Sustaining:* grains, fruit, vegetables, game, fowl; *3 Miscellaneous commodities and Aborigines*)
* Sermons: Most highly developed literary form in America at the time; Sermons weren't just in church – they permeated every aspect of colonial life; most sermons from that period did not survive, but **Jonathan Edwards** is an exception; purpose was to persuade listeners, both intellectually and emotionally, to honestly assess the state of their souls; for Calvinists, the sermon was essential because it buoyed up and reassured the listeners, keeping them from falling into the trap of fatalistic acceptance of their lot
* Polemicals: These pieces of writing argued everything from the best means for organizing a church to how best the youth of Pennsylvania might be educated to field husbandry in New England; these tracts argued a specific opinion and used European argumentative forms to organize and structure their arguments
* Histories and Biographies: Histories were logically chronological and (by today's standards) extremely biased; writers of histories felt it was their duty to add their opinion of the observed events as part of the historical record; For instance, **Bradford**, This History of Plymouth Plantation, felt is was his duty to record the hard fought achievement of his pious little group of heroes for all future generations (I guess it worked!); all events were viewed through a theological lens, often seeking out a moral message in the most trivial of events, and were perceived as part of God's Divine plan
* Poems: Poetry of the colonies paled in comparison with the European and English masters these poets sought to imitate; however, some poems of merit, written by poets like **Bradstreet** and **Taylor**, reflect an honest expression, often articulated with originality, of religious faith and sensitivity to their environment
* Plays and Novels: These forms were virtually nonexistent in the colonies for quite practical reasons, not entirely attributable to the Puritanical piety; **plays** in theaters required both capital and a consistent audience, these were both in short supply; actors were a generally mistrusted lot, as class, and there were colonial laws in place forbidding public dramatic performances; in England, theaters were thought to be dens of sin and were shut down, forced to move to less desirable sides of town, or burned down; in fact, Puritan influence closed down theaters in London for at least eighteen years; the **novel**, as a form, was in its infancy during this period and the publishing that was going on at the time left no room for such publications; moreover, the appetite for romances and works of fiction was minimal, students were encouraged to allow fiction and poetry to be a "*Sauce*" rather than a "Food" for their intellectual growth