

Chapter 4 (14th)

American Life in the Seventeenth Century

1. The Unhealthy Chesapeake
 1. Life in America was brutal, especially in the Chesapeake (Virginia/Maryland).
 1. The work there was hard and the climate was muggy.
 2. Diseases such as malaria, dysentery, and typhoid took their deadly toll.
 3. Thus, life spans in the Chesapeake were only to 40 or 50.
 2. Family-life suffered.
 1. Men outnumbered women and had to compete to win a woman's heart. The ratio was 6:1(men-to-women) in 1650.
 2. Grandparents were unknown since lives were often cut short.
 3. 1/3 of new brides in one Maryland county were pregnant on their wedding day.
 3. Still, Virginia persisted and grew to be the most populous colony with 59,000 people.
2. The Tobacco Economy
 1. Though hard on people, the Chesapeake was ideal for cultivation of tobacco.
 1. Exports rose from 1.5 million pounds of tobacco annually in the 1630s to 40 million pounds in 1700.
 2. Increased production/supply meant prices fell. The solution was to simply plant and grow, even more tobacco.
 2. The "**headright system**" encouraged growth of the Chesapeake. Under this system, if an aristocrat sponsored an indentured servant's passage to America, the aristocrat earned the right to purchase 50 acres land, undoubtedly at a cheap price. This meant land was being gobbled by the rich, and running out for the poor.
 3. Initially, indentured servitude provided the labor for the tobacco.
 1. Life for an indentured servant was tough, but they had had of freedom and their own land when their seven years of service were done.
 2. As time wore on and labor became a premium, masters became intent on extending contracts or less willing to award a servant a plot of land. This would be the beginnings of race-based slavery—as indentured servants decreased, slavery went on the rise.
3. Frustrated Freemen and Bacon's Rebellion
 1. By the late 17th century (1600s), the Chesapeake had grown a generation of angry young men.
 1. These men were young, white, landless, jobless, womanless and frustrated.
 2. Essentially, their goal was to get land and get married.
 2. **Nathaniel Bacon** typified these men in what came to be called **Bacon's Rebellion**.
 1. In 1676, Bacon led about 1,000 men in a revolt.
 2. Many of these men had settled on the frontier where Indian attacks were frequent.
 3. Their ambition was to get **Gov. William Berkeley** to crack down on the Indians rather than continue his Indian-friendly fur trading. The poor men wanted land from the Indians.
 4. After some riotous success, Bacon suddenly died of disease. With the leader gone, Berkeley struck back and crushed the rebellion.
 5. Bacon's legacy was to leave a lingering fear of revolt and lawlessness in the minds of the upper class.
4. Colonial Slavery
 1. In 3 centuries following Columbus' landing, 10,000 million African slaves were brought to America. Only 400,000 were brought to North America.
 2. Things were changing in the late 1600s however, as indentured servitude was being replaced by black slaves.
 1. In 1670, black slaves made up on 7% of the Southern population.
 2. By 1680, the circumstances reached the tipping point.
 1. Wages in England went up, so fewer young men came to America.
 2. Americans were fearful of another Bacon-like revolt.
 3. In the mid-1680s, black slaves coming to America outnumbered white immigrants for the first time.
 4. Simply put, in the 1680s, the African slave trade quickened considerably.
 3. By 1750, black slaves made up almost 1/2 the population of Virginia.
 4. Most slaves came from the coast of West Africa.

1. They were usually captured by African tribes, shipped over on crammed boats on the grisly "**Middle Passage**" from Africa to the West Indies. Death rates have been estimated at 20%. There they were "seasoned" there in the islands.
 2. Lastly, they were distributed to North, Central, and South America or the islands. In the modern day U.S., Charleston, SC and Newport, RI were large slave import cities.
 3. A few of the earliest slaves gained freedom, some even owned slaves themselves. Eventually, the chances of freedom dwindled.
 4. As time wore, questions of slave ownership arose. So, it was decided that slaves and their children would be made property (or "**chattels**") to their owners for life.
 5. Some colonies made it a crime to teach slaves to read (for fear of an organized revolt or of reading liberating ideas).
 6. Conversion to Christianity didn't qualify a slave for freedom either.
5. Africans in America
1. Life for a slave in the Deep South was harsh. Health conditions and labor drained life.
 1. Rice and indigo plantations, such as in South Carolina, were even more brutal than tobacco.
 2. Despite hardship, a unique African-American culture emerged as a mix of African-and-white cultures.
 1. Blacks evolved their languages, for example *Gullah* (a variation of Angola). Certain words joined English: goober (peanut), gumbo (okra), and voodoo (witchcraft).
 2. Music was unique too with rhythmic beats, the banjo, and bongo drums. These were the ancestors of jazz.
 3. Some slaves became exceptionally skilled in their trade such as carpentry, bricklaying, or tanning leather. Most slaves were simply hard laborers in the fields though.
 4. Desiring freedom, blacks rose in revolt on occasion.
 1. In New York City, 1712, a slave revolt killed a dozen whites. 21 blacks were executed.
 2. In 1739, along the **Stono River** in South Carolina, 50 blacks rose up and tried to escape slavery by walking to Spanish Florida. But, they were intercepted by the militia.
 3. Overall, these revolts were rather small, scattered, and controlled. They were certainly smaller than Bacon's Rebellion with 1,000 men.
6. Southern Society
1. As time wore on, a rich—poor gap emerged and was widening in the South.
 2. A social hierarchy had developed in the South.
 1. Virginia was being run by a "planter aristocracy" or families of the privileged, like the Fitzhughs, Lees, and Washingtons.
 1. Such families owned huge tracts of land and dominated politics in the House of Burgesses.
 2. They were known as the "FFVs" or "First Families of Virginia."
 3. They were aristocratic, but they were also hard-working businessmen. Running a plantation had endless problems and issues to deal with on a daily basis.
 2. Beneath the FFVs were the small farmers (AKA "yeomen" farmers).
 1. They were the largest social group in number.
 2. They held small plots of land and, maybe if they had a bit of money, 1 or 2 slaves.
 3. Next on the social scale were the landless whites.
 1. These hapless folks were often freed indentured servants. Their numbers were dwindling.
 4. At the bottom of the social scale were the slaves. They had no rights and no hope of gaining any.
 3. Cities were few and far between in the South. Schools and churches were also rare. This was mainly due to the plantations and farms being so spread out.
7. The New England Family
1. The climate and conditions in New England were much healthier than in the South. Water was clean and temperatures cooler.
 2. Life expectancies there reached to over 70 years old. It's said New Englanders "invented" grandparents.
 3. Families immigrated to New England (unlike single people in the Chesapeake). This made for stability.
 4. Women married in their early twenties, then gave birth about every 2 years until menopause.
 1. An average woman would give birth to 10 children and expect to raise 8 of them; the other 2 would die at birth or infancy.

5. Women wielded little power outside of the home.
 1. In the South, women often had it a bit better because (a) the male—female ratio favored the ladies, and (b) men often died young and the woman could inherit the money.
 2. New England women were dominated by the men.
 1. A widow did not inherit her husband's land or money (this might undercut the stability of family, so she was expected to remarry).
 2. Women could not participate in the church as leaders or voters in the congregation (the Bible instructs that men run the church, not both genders).
 3. Life in New England's "Bible Commonwealth" was stern.
 1. The top priority was to protect the institutions of marriage and the family.
 2. This was illustrated in **Nathaniel Hawthorne's** *The Scarlet Letter* where the heroine is forced to wear a bright red "A" on her bosom to announce her sin of adultery.
8. Life in the New England Towns
 1. In keeping with the Puritan ways toward order, town life was very structured.
 1. A new town was first formally chartered by authorities (rather than just plopping into existence).
 2. Towns were laid out in an orderly manner—a town square (or common or "village green") in the middle surrounded by homes, shops, and the church.
 2. Education was valued by New Englanders.
 1. Towns of at least 50 families built primary schools. Towns of 100 families built secondary schools.
 2. Harvard College was established in 1636, the nation's first. Its motivation was to train men for the ministry.
 1. Notably, Virginia's first college was William and Mary, est. 1693.
 3. Puritan churches were run by the local congregation (hence the later name of "Congregational Church").
 4. The self-ruling church found it easy to become a self-ruling democratic government.
9. The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials
 1. Puritan leaders grew worried that their religious passion was dying down. So, they stepped up the preaching and "**jeremiads**" boomed from the pulpit.
 1. A jeremiad was a stern, old-fashioned scolding, like the sermons that the prophet Jeremiah preached to the Israelites.
 2. The ambition was to corral straying souls and return them to the "straight-and-narrow."
 2. Paradoxically, church leaders also eased the qualifications for joining the church with what was called the "**Half-Way Covenant.**"
 1. In this covenant, some people could receive a sort of "half-status" in the church.
 2. This meant that the "elect" or the "visible saints" had to mix with the "half-wayers," which was not always smooth.
 3. In 17th century New England, all aspects of life were seen through religious eyes. The **Salem Witch Trials** is an example.
 1. In 1692, a few girls claimed to have been bewitched by a Caribbean woman practicing voodoo.
 2. Names were named, rumors spread, and innocent people were accused of being witches. Hysteria took hold and twenty people were executed.
 3. By 1693, the Salem residents saw the recklessness for what it was and called it off.
 4. Notably, this type of witch-hunting had been done on a *much larger* scale back in Europe.
10. The New England Way of Life
 1. The New England soil was thin and rocky, so they turned less to agriculture and more toward trade.
 1. The agriculture that *was* present was small-scale and diverse (it was *not* plantation agriculture like the South).
 2. Slavery was tried, but since it wasn't really needed, it fizzled out.
 3. As a result, New England was less ethnically diverse than the Southern or Middle Colonies.
 2. Rivers ran short and fast in New England. This would later prove useful to industry to power water mills.
 3. White New Englanders felt they were destined to use the land to their benefit. Whereas the Indians lived *off* the land, New Englanders wished to clear and farm the land.
 4. Fishing became a major industry. New England is said to have been founded on "God and cod."
11. The Early Settlers' Days and Ways
 1. Colonial farmers worked from sunup to sundown, from "dusk 'til dawn."

1. Having only fire as light, little was done beyond sundown unless it was "worth the candle."
 2. Most people who'd emigrated from Europe for America were from the middle or lower-middle class and came looking for a better life.
 1. They found life in America to be simple and practical.
 2. Despite having to work hard for a simple life, their lives were still likely better than in Europe.
12. Makers of America: From African to African-American
1. Africans brought much of their culture across the ocean—language, music, food.
 2. Africans worked in the rice fields of South Carolina due to (a) their knowledge of the crop and (b) their resistance to disease (as compared to Indians).
 3. Early African slaves to America were men and sometimes gained their freedom (similar to indentured servants).
 4. By the 1740s, slavery had been institutionalized and freedom was uncommon.
 1. Men worked in the fields.
 2. Women also worked in the fields, as well as domestic jobs like weaving, spinning, sewing, and cooking.
 5. Slaves usually became Christian, but mixed parts of their native African religion in.
 6. African-American culture influenced the arts.
 1. The 1920s popular dance has African-American roots.
 2. Christian songs with themes of liberation were especially popular. They could sometimes be a code to mark the arrival of a guide to freedom.
 3. The best example of African-American influence of music is seen in jazz.