

Period 2: 1607 to 1754

Overview: Europeans and American Indians maneuvered and fought for dominance, control, and security in North America, and distinctive colonial and native societies emerged.

Key Concept 2.1:

Differences in imperial goals, cultures, and the North American environments that different empires confronted led Europeans to develop diverse patterns of colonization.

I. Seventeenth-century Spanish, French, Dutch, and British colonizers embraced different social and economic goals, cultural assumptions, and folkways, resulting in varied models of colonization.

A. Spain sought to establish tight control over the process of colonization in the Western Hemisphere and to convert and/or exploit the native population.

B. French and Dutch colonial efforts involved relatively few Europeans and used trade alliances and intermarriage with American Indians to acquire furs and other products for export to Europe.

C. Unlike their European competitors, the English eventually sought to establish colonies based on agriculture, sending relatively large numbers of men and women to acquire land and populate their settlements, while having relatively hostile relationships with American Indians.

II. The British–American system of slavery developed out of the economic, demographic, and geographic characteristics of the British-controlled regions of the New World.

A. Unlike Spanish, French, and Dutch colonies, which accepted intermarriage and cross-racial sexual unions with native peoples (and, in Spain’s case, with enslaved Africans), English colonies attracted both males and females who rarely intermarried with either native peoples or Africans, leading to the development of a rigid racial hierarchy.

B. The abundance of land, a shortage of indentured servants, the lack of an effective means to enslave native peoples, and the growing European demand for colonial goods led to the emergence of the Atlantic slave trade.

C. Reinforced by a strong belief in British racial and cultural superiority, the British system enslaved black people in perpetuity, altered African gender and kinship relationships in the colonies, and was one factor that led the British colonists into violent confrontations with native peoples.

D. Africans developed both overt and covert means to resist the dehumanizing aspects of slavery.

III. Along with other factors, environmental and geographical variations, including climate and natural resources, contributed to regional differences in what would become the British colonies

A. The New England colonies, founded primarily by Puritans seeking to establish a community of like-minded religious believers, developed a close-knit, homogeneous society and — aided by favorable environmental conditions — a thriving mixed economy of agriculture and commerce.

B. The demographically, religiously, and ethnically diverse middle colonies supported a flourishing export economy based on cereal crops, while the Chesapeake colonies and North Carolina relied on the cultivation of tobacco, a labor-intensive product based on white indentured servants and African chattel.

C. The colonies along the southernmost Atlantic coast and the British islands in the West Indies took advantage of long growing seasons by using slave labor to develop economies based on staple crops; in some cases, enslaved Africans constituted the majority of the population.

Key Concept 2.2:

European colonization efforts in North America stimulated intercultural contact and intensified conflict between the various groups of colonizers and native peoples.

I. Competition over resources between European rivals led to conflict within and between North American colonial possessions and American Indians.

A. Conflicts in Europe spread to North America, as French, Dutch, British, and Spanish colonies allied, traded with, and armed American Indian groups, leading to continuing political instability.

B. As European nations competed in North America, their colonies focused on gaining new sources of labor and on producing and acquiring commodities that were valued in Europe.

C. The goals and interests of European leaders at times diverged from those of colonial citizens, leading to growing mistrust on both sides of the Atlantic, as settlers, especially in the English colonies, expressed dissatisfaction over territorial settlements, frontier defense, and other issues.

II. Clashes between European and American Indian social and economic values caused changes in both cultures.

A. Continuing contact with Europeans increased the flow of trade goods and diseases into and out of native communities, stimulating cultural and demographic changes.

B. Spanish colonizing efforts in North America, particularly after the Pueblo Revolt, saw an accommodation with some aspects of American Indian culture; by contrast, conflict with American Indians tended to reinforce English colonists' worldviews on land and gender roles.

C. By supplying American Indian allies with deadlier weapons and alcohol, and by rewarding Indian military actions, Europeans helped increase the intensity and destructiveness of American Indian warfare.

Key Concept 2.3:

The increasing political, economic, and cultural exchanges within the “Atlantic World” had a profound impact on the development of colonial societies in North America.

I. “Atlantic World” commercial, religious, philosophical, and political interactions among Europeans, Africans, and American native peoples stimulated economic growth, expanded social networks, and reshaped labor systems.

A. The growth of an Atlantic economy throughout the 18th century created a shared labor market and a wide exchange of New World and European goods, as seen in the African slave trade and the shipment of products from the Americas.

B. Several factors promoted Anglicization in the British colonies: the growth of autonomous political communities based on English models, the development of commercial ties and legal structures, the emergence of a trans-Atlantic print culture, Protestant evangelism, religious toleration, and the spread of European Enlightenment ideas.

C. The presence of slavery and the impact of colonial wars stimulated the growth of ideas on race in this Atlantic system, leading to the emergence of racial stereotyping and the development of strict racial categories among British colonists, which contrasted with Spanish and French acceptance of racial gradations.

II. Britain’s desire to maintain a viable North American empire in the face of growing internal challenges and external competition inspired efforts to strengthen its imperial control, stimulating increasing resistance from colonists who had grown accustomed to a large measure of autonomy.

A. As regional distinctiveness among the British colonies diminished over time, they developed largely similar patterns of culture, laws, institutions, and governance within the context of the British imperial system.

B. Late 17th-century efforts to integrate Britain’s colonies into a coherent, hierarchical imperial structure and pursue mercantilist economic aims met with scant success due largely to varied forms of colonial resistance and conflicts with American Indian groups, and were followed by nearly a half-century of the British government’s relative indifference to colonial governance.

C. Resistance to imperial control in the British colonies drew on colonial experiences of self-government, evolving local ideas of liberty, the political thought of the Enlightenment, greater religious independence and diversity, and an ideology critical of perceived corruption in the imperial system.