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The American Revolution and the Birth of the USA 1740–1801

ALAN FARMER

SECOND EDITION



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Dedication

Keith Randell (1943–2002)

The *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

The American colonies by 1763

The establishment of the British colonies in North America seemed, by the mid-eighteenth century, to have been a huge success. In 1763 British North America ran from Hudson Bay in the north to Florida in the south. Few Americans or Britons expected that within twelve years they would be at war – a war that the Americans would win. This chapter will examine the relationship between Britain and its American colonies pre-1763 by focusing on the following themes:

- ★ The development of the thirteen colonies
- ★ Colonial government
- ★ Colonial economy, society and culture
- ★ The struggle with France
- ★ Britain by 1763

The key debate on *page 23* of this chapter asks the question: To what extent were there signs in 1763 that the colonies were likely to break their ties with Britain?

Key dates

1607	Virginia established	1759	Britain captured Quebec
1754	Albany conference	1760	Accession of George III
1756–63	The French–Indian (or Seven Years') War	1763	Peace of Paris

1 The development of the thirteen colonies

- *Why did the American population grow so quickly in the eighteenth century?*

The first successful English **colony** was established in Virginia in 1607. The second major colony followed the sailing of the *Mayflower* to Massachusetts in 1620. By 1650, four further colonies – Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Maryland – had been added. New York was captured from the Dutch in 1664, New Jersey and North and South Carolina were founded during the

KEY TERMS

Colony Territory, usually overseas, occupied by settlers from a 'mother country' that continues to have political power over the settlers.

Mayflower The name of the ship on which the Pilgrim Fathers, a small group of English Puritans, sailed to America in 1620.

1660s and Pennsylvania and Delaware during the 1680s. The establishment of Georgia in 1732 completed the thirteen British colonies on the American mainland. They stretched about 2400 km (1500 miles) along the Atlantic seaboard from Canada to Florida. Pre-1763, most colonists lived to the east of the Appalachian mountains (see Figure 1.1).

Colonial division

There were three colonial groups:

- the New England colonies – New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut
- the middle colonies – New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware
- the southern colonies – Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

Population growth

Between 1700 and 1763 the population of the thirteen colonies increased eightfold from 250,000 to reach 2 million. Between 1750 and 1770 England and Wales's population rose from 6.5 million to 7.5 million – a fifteen per cent increase. In the same period, the thirteen colonies' population expanded from

Abbreviations for US states used in this book:	
CT	Connecticut
DE	Delaware
GA	Georgia
IL	Illinois
IN	Indiana
KY	Kentucky
MA	Massachusetts
MD	Maryland
ME	Maine
MI	Michigan
NC	North Carolina
NH	New Hampshire
NJ	New Jersey
NY	New York
OH	Ohio
PA	Pennsylvania
RI	Rhode Island
SC	South Carolina
TN	Tennessee
VA	Virginia
VT	Vermont
WI	Wisconsin

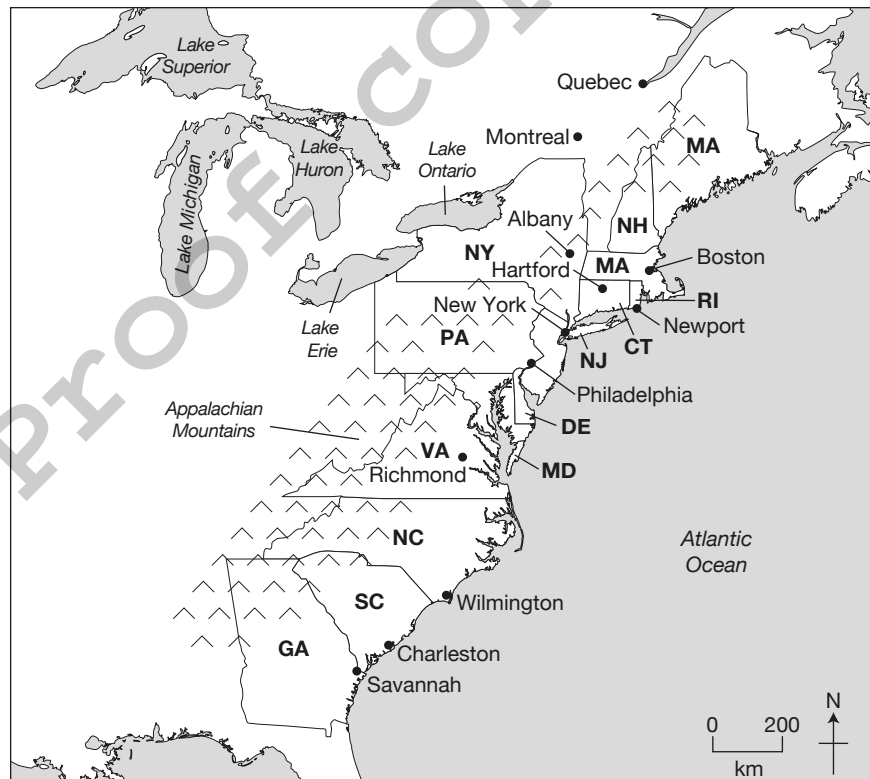


Figure 1.1 The thirteen colonies in 1763.

1.25 million to over 2.3 million – an almost 100 per cent increase. There were three reasons for the population growth:

- a high birth rate: the average American woman had a family of seven children
- a low death rate: Americans, well fed and generally prosperous, lived longer than most Europeans
- immigration (see below).

Nevertheless, America was far from densely populated. The vast majority of colonists lived on farms. Almost half lived in the South, a quarter in the middle colonies and a quarter in New England. By 1770:

- Virginia was the largest colony in population and land area, with some 500,000 inhabitants.
- Pennsylvania and Massachusetts each had about 275,000 inhabitants.
- Maryland and North Carolina each had 200,000.
- New York, South Carolina and New Jersey each had more than 100,000.
- New Hampshire and Rhode Island each had just over 50,000.
- Delaware had 40,000.
- Georgia had only 30,000.

American towns

There were only five towns of any size, all of which were seaports: Philadelphia (with 23,750 inhabitants), New York (18,000), Boston (15,600), Newport (10,000) and Charleston (10,000). By 1760 their combined population was 73,000 – only 3.5 per cent of the total population.

The colonial melting pot

Some 400,000 people from Europe and Africa migrated to the thirteen colonies between 1700 and 1763. While most of the seventeenth-century settlers were of English stock, less than a fifth of the eighteenth-century migrants were English.

European settlement

The largest group of immigrants (some 150,000) were Scots-Irish Protestants from Ulster. Discontented with the land system, recurrent bad harvests and the decline of the linen trade, most Scots-Irish left their homeland for economic reasons.

About 65,000 Germans, mainly peasants from the Rhineland, hoping to improve their economic lot and attracted by the religious tolerance in the colonies, crossed the Atlantic. Many settled in Pennsylvania, making up almost a third of the colony's population by the 1760s. Smaller immigrant groups included Dutch and Swedes.

Indentured servitude

European immigrants crossing the Atlantic tended to travel in groups, either as part of colonisation schemes or, more frequently, under a system of temporary

servitude designed to meet the colonies' severe labour shortage. The system enabled people to obtain free passage by entering into a contract (or indenture) pledging their labour for a specified number of years – usually four. Between a half and two-thirds of all white immigrants during the colonial period were indentured servants.

African settlement

The first black slaves landed in Virginia in 1619. Their numbers at first grew slowly. In the eighteenth century, however, the importation of slaves soared. By 1763 there were 350,000 slaves – one in six of the overall population. Most came from west Africa. The demand for slaves was so high that the black population in America grew more rapidly than the white population. While there were African-Americans in all the colonies, 90 per cent lived in the South (see page 12). They made up less than five per cent of the total population in New England but 40 per cent in Virginia, Maryland and Georgia, and 67 per cent in South Carolina.

KEY TERMS

Native Americans The people, often known as Indians, who first lived in North America.

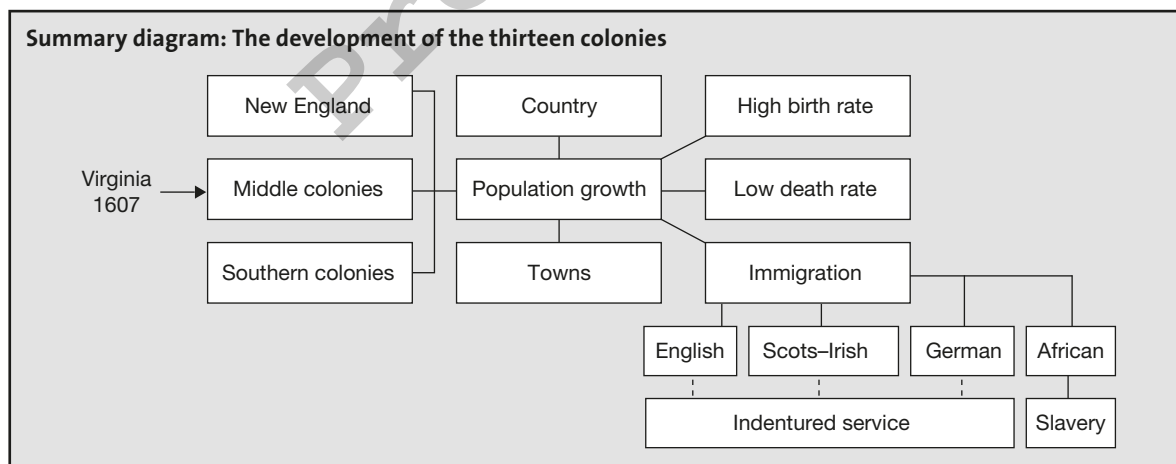
Autonomy Independence or self-government.

Native Americans

The British and European settlers did not assimilate with the **Native Americans**. Divided, less advanced technologically and hit hard by European diseases, the Indians had been unable to resist the newcomers establishing themselves down the Atlantic seaboard. Nevertheless, Native American tribes remained a powerful force to the west of the Appalachians (see Figure 1.1).

The results of immigration

By 1760 only about half the American population was of English stock. Another fifteen per cent was Welsh, Scottish or Scots-Irish. Africans comprised over twenty per cent and Germans eight per cent of the population. While most European newcomers quickly blended into colonial culture and society, Germans retained an important degree of religious and cultural **autonomy**.



2 Colonial government

► *To what extent did the colonists govern themselves?*

All the colonies had, by 1760, a similar governmental structure, consisting of a governor and a legislative assembly.

Governors

In most colonies, the governor was appointed and could be removed only by the British king, to whom he was responsible. The exceptions were the following:

- the **proprietary colonies** of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware, where the proprietor who ran the colony appointed the governor
- the **corporate colonies** of Connecticut and Rhode Island, where governors were popularly elected and responsible to the legislatures.

Responsible for internal administration, the governors (in theory) had enormous powers. In reality, however, their authority was limited:

- They could be dismissed at will by the British government.
- They were dependent for revenue (including their own salaries) on the colonial assemblies.

Colonial assemblies

Most colonial legislatures (usually called assemblies) consisted of two houses:

- Upper houses (or councils) were normally appointed by the governor. Chosen from the colonial elite, their members served as an advisory board to the governor.
- Lower houses were elected. Although they could be summoned and dismissed and their legislation vetoed by the governor, the power of the assemblies was considerable.
- They were responsible for initiating money bills and controlling expenditures.
- They represented their communities in a way that neither the governors nor the councils did.

Assemblies usually met in the spring or autumn for four to six weeks. As well as dealing with money matters, they made local laws. At least 50 (and in some colonies as much as 80) per cent of American white adult males could vote, compared with only fifteen per cent in Britain.

Nevertheless, the colonies were far from democratic:

- Not all white men owned sufficient property to entitle them to vote.
- Women and slaves could not vote.
- Higher property qualifications for office as well as custom and deference towards men of high social standing ensured that great landowners, rich merchants or lawyers were usually elected.

KEY TERMS

Proprietary colonies

Colonies in which the Crown had vested political authority in the hands of certain families: the Calverts (in Maryland) and the Penns (in Pennsylvania and Delaware).

Corporate colonies

Connecticut and Rhode Island possessed charters granted by the king, which gave them extensive autonomy.

SOURCE A

? The Massachusetts assembly met in the State House in Boston. What does the nature of the building shown in Source A suggest about the power of the colony's legislature?



The State House in Boston.

Local government

In New England, where settlements were relatively compact, authority over local affairs was vested in town meetings in which all **freeholders** had voting rights. Elected annually, the town meetings fixed local taxes and chose men to administer the town's business. In the middle and southern colonies, a wider variety of practices prevailed. Some communities had New England-style town governments; in others local government was organised by county or parish.

KEY TERM

Freeholders People who own, rather than rent, their land.

British rule in the colonies

Charters were the umbilical cords attaching the colonies to Britain – the mother country. Granted in the seventeenth century, the charters tied the colonies to the Crown rather than to Parliament. The governors continued to be appointed by – and represented – the Crown. The Crown’s authority was somewhat ambiguous in the proprietary colonies and even more tenuous in the corporate colonies.

After 1696 the British sovereign and the **Privy Council** had joint authority, conferred by Parliament, to review colonial laws. (Only five per cent of the 8500 colonial measures submitted between 1691 and 1775 were disallowed by Britain.)

For most of the eighteenth century, responsibility for colonial supervision rested with the Board of Trade, which advised on colonial appointments, drew up government instructions and reviewed colonial legislation.

The secretary of state for the Southern Department also had responsibility for colonial affairs. Both the Board of Trade and the secretary communicated with governors on policy and routine administration. Governors submitted regular reports to the secretary on colonial affairs generally and to the Board of Trade on commercial matters.

Other agencies – the Treasury, the War Office and the Admiralty – also had some role in imperial administration. Given that British administration affecting the colonies lacked central control, confusion and duplication often characterised the bureaucracy.

In order to follow developments concerning colonial matters, as well as to lobby Parliament and the Board of Trade on behalf of their interests, most colonies employed agents in Britain. These agents warned the colonies of pending measures by the Crown or Parliament and informed British officials of colonial thinking.

Salutary neglect

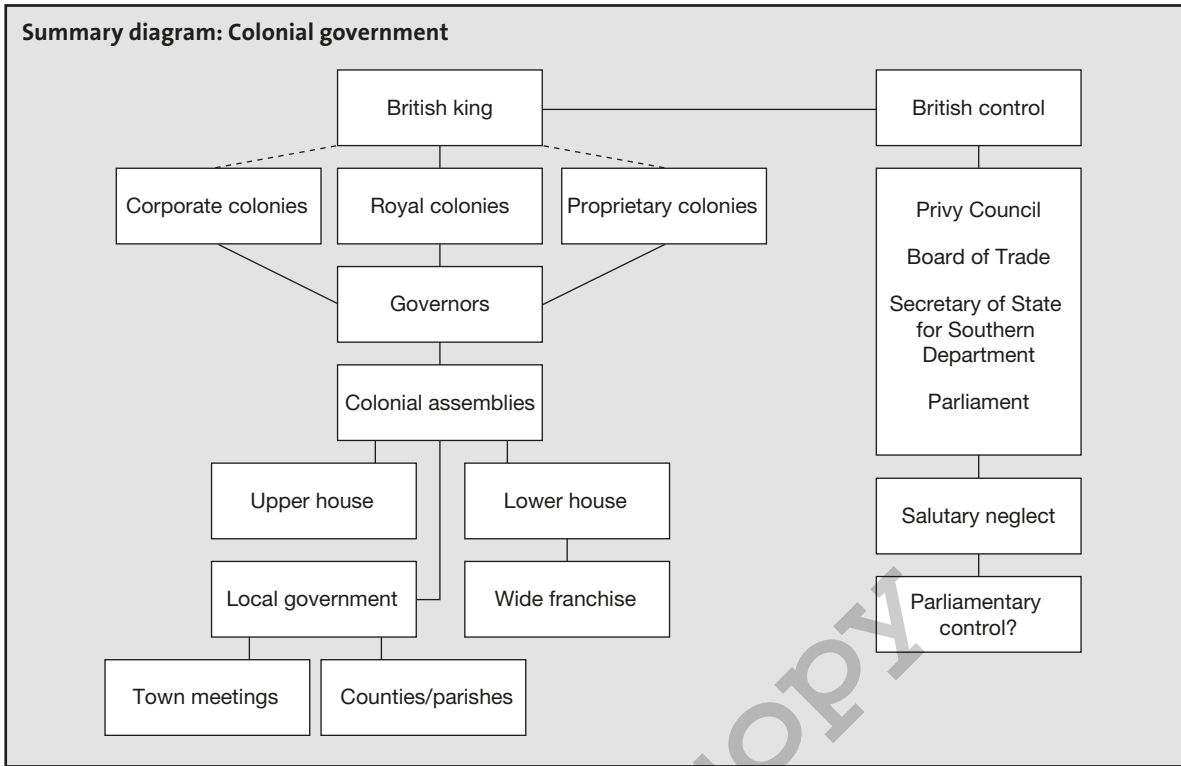
In the early eighteenth century, British governments realised it was best not to stir up trouble in the colonies. Given that they were 4800 km (3000 miles) away from Britain, the colonies were left largely to their own devices. This detached policy is often referred to as ‘salutary neglect’.

Despite salutary neglect, the common presumption in Britain was that the colonies were subject to parliamentary legislation. The colonists did not necessarily accept this view. However, this was not a major issue pre-1763 because Parliament gave so little attention to colonial affairs. Trade regulation apart, there was hardly a single parliamentary act that touched on the internal affairs of the colonies. Few colonists, therefore, gave much thought to their relationship with Britain.

KEY TERMS

Charters Formal documents, granting or confirming titles, rights or privileges.

Privy Council The private council of the British king, advising on the administration of government.



3

Colonial economy, society and culture

► *To what extent were the colonies linked to Britain – economically, socially and culturally?*

Between 1650 and 1770 the colonial economy grew by an annual average of 3.2 per cent. This was the result of several factors:

- expanding inter-colonial trade
- increased trade with Britain and its Empire
- availability of credit and capital from Britain
- the rapid increase in population
- availability of new land
- increasing diversification; for example, the development of iron production, textiles and shipbuilding.

The importance of agriculture and fishing

Farming remained the dominant economic activity, employing nine-tenths of the working population. There was great diversity from region to region:

- Lacking extensive rich soils, New England remained a land of small subsistence farms. The sea, however, provided it with a profitable alternative. From the Newfoundland Banks and the shores of Nova Scotia, New England fishermen brought back great quantities of cod, to be dried and exported. More than half of New England's thriving export trade was with the West Indies, which supplied the colonies in return with sugar, molasses and other tropical products. New England distillers turned molasses into rum.
- The middle colonies were a major source of wheat and flour products for export to other colonies, the West Indies and Europe.
- Tobacco was the mainstay of the southern economy, tobacco exports rising from £14 million in the 1670s to £100 million by the 1770s. Rice, indigo and grain were also produced for export. Development was most advanced in the **Tidewater**, where the population was densest. Population pressure and the search for higher profits ensured that the **backcountry** was filling rapidly.

KEY TERMS

Tidewater The eastern areas nearest the coast.

Backcountry The western areas furthest from the coast.

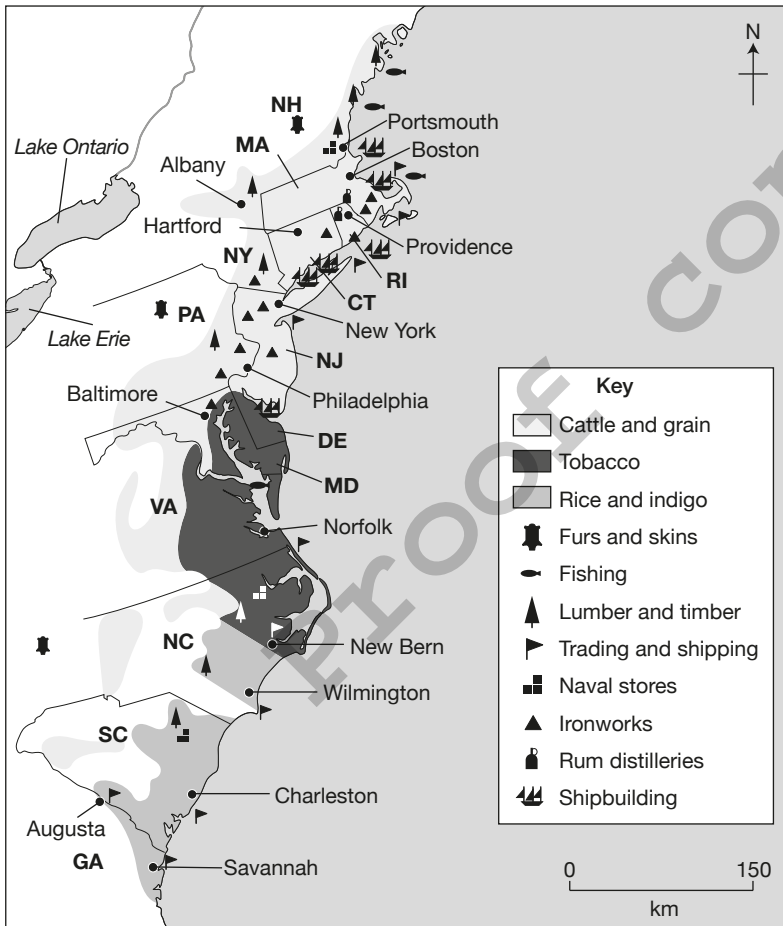


Figure 1.2 The colonial economy.

 **KEY TERMS**

Mercantilism The belief that colonies existed essentially to serve the economic interests of the mother country.

Economic self-sufficiency The situation when a country or a community produces all it needs and is not dependent on others.

Enumerated commodities Listed items which were affected by the Trade and Navigation Acts.

English/British England and Scotland signed the Act of Union in 1707. Thus, it is correct to term the policy British (rather than English) after 1707.

Sinecure An office without much, if any, work; in other words, a cushy job.

Mercantilism

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most European governments believed in **mercantilism** and **economic self-sufficiency**. Mercantilists assumed that colonies existed to supply the mother country with raw materials, buy its manufactures and provide employment for its shipping.

Between 1651 and 1673 the Trade and Navigation Acts were designed to establish an English monopoly of the colonial carrying trade, the colonial market and certain colonial products:

- All cargoes to or from the colonies were to be carried in ships built and owned in England or the colonies and manned by predominantly English crews.
- Certain **enumerated commodities** – sugar, cotton, indigo, dyewoods, ginger and tobacco – could be exported only from the colonies to England even if their ultimate destination lay elsewhere.
- European goods bound for America had, with few exceptions, to be landed first in England and then reshipped.

English/British colonial policy remained strictly mercantilist through the early eighteenth century. The list of enumerated commodities was steadily extended until by 1763 it included practically everything the colonies produced except fish, grain and lumber. Laws were also passed to restrict colonial manufacturing:

- The Woollen Act (1699) forbade the export of woollen yarn and cloth outside the colony in which it was produced.
- The Hat Act (1732) prohibited the export of colonial beaver hats.
- The Iron Act (1750) banned the export of colonial iron outside the Empire.

The effects of the mercantilist system

Few Americans complained about mercantilist regulations. This was partly because the system was not well enforced. While the Navigation Acts levied high duties, they were rarely collected. The chief posts in the colonial customs service were **sinecures**, filled by men who remained in Britain. The ill-paid deputies who were sent to perform their duties could easily be bribed by the colonists, ensuring that they often turned a blind eye to infractions of the trade laws. The laxity of control particularly prevailed during Prime Minister Robert Walpole's long rule (1721–42). Although Lord Halifax, president of the Board of Trade from 1748 to 1761, tried to tighten imperial control, the colonies were able to avoid most of the trade laws and smuggling was a fact of colonial economic life.

The few laws restricting colonial production had little effect. The Woollen Act had a limited impact because sheep and wool rarely exceeded local demand. The Hat Act affected an industry of minor importance. The prohibitions of the Iron Act were disregarded. Moreover, the act was not wholly restrictive.

Designed to check the expansion of the iron-finishing industry, it aimed to encourage crude-iron production and allowed colonial bar and pig iron to enter Britain free of duty. By the 1770s the colonies had outstripped Britain as producers of crude iron.

On balance, mercantilism probably benefited the colonies:

- American products enjoyed a protected market in Britain and its Empire.
- American shipping profited by the exclusion of foreign ships from colonial trade.

As the eighteenth century progressed, colonial trade played an increasingly important role in the British economy. By the 1760s a third of British imports and exports crossed the Atlantic. The colonies imported British manufactured goods, exporting tobacco, flour, fish, rice and wheat in return. Both Britain and the colonies benefited from increasing trade.

SOURCE B

Peter Kalm, a Swedish biologist travelling in North America 1748–51,
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/economies/text1/europeanperspectives.pdf>

For the English colonies ... have increased so much in their number of inhabitants and in their riches that they almost vie with Old England. Now in order to keep up the authority and trade of their mother country and to answer several other purposes, they are forbidden to establish new manufactures, which would turn to the disadvantage of the British commerce ... They have not the liberty of trading with any parts that do not belong to the British dominion, except a few places; nor are foreigners allowed to trade with the English colonies of North America. These and some other restrictions occasion the inhabitants of the English colonies to grow less tender for their mother country. This coldness is kept up by the many foreigners such as Germans, Dutch and French, who live among the English and have no particular attachment to Old England.

Colonial society

In every colony a wealthy elite – great landowners, **planters** and wealthy merchants – had emerged whose pre-eminence was evident in its possessions, lifestyles and in their control of politics. Several landowners received returns from their lands rivaling the incomes of the great British landed families. Yet the colonial elites lacked the titles, privileges and often the possessions that gave automatic social prestige and political authority to the British aristocracy. The American elite were hard-working capitalists, intensely and of necessity absorbed in land speculation and in the business of marketing commercial crops. Since their capital was largely tied up in land (and slaves in the South), their **liquid assets** were not impressive by European standards.

Why, according to Source B, were the ties between Britain and the colonies starting to strain?



KEY TERMS

Planters Southern landowners who owned more than twenty slaves.

Liquid assets Wealth that may be easily converted into cash.

Below the elite were the professionals – ministers, lawyers, doctors, schoolmasters. Respected in their communities, they often held positions of public responsibility. Eighty per cent of free males were farmers. Most owned and (with the help of their families) worked their own land – usually between 50 and 500 acres (20 and 200 hectares). In the towns, two-thirds of the population were shopkeepers and self-employed craftsmen.

Below the property holders were those who laboured for others. This was a diverse group, ranging from tenant farmers to slaves. Approximately a third of land was farmed by tenants who rented rather than owned the land. Only about a fifth of adult white males, many of whom were recent immigrants, were landless labourers. The availability of cheap frontier lands limited the numbers of tenants and landless agricultural workers. In the towns, the property-less included apprentices, sailors, servants and labourers.

Black slaves were at the bottom of the social structure. Slaves were subject to the will of their owners and could be bought and sold. While some slaves were used as domestic servants, most worked on plantations producing tobacco and rice.

A middle-class world?

According to historian Richard Hofstadter (1948), colonial America was ‘a middle-class world’. The groups at the top and bottom of the British social pyramid – the nobility and the poor – were under-represented in America. Availability of land meant that, unlike in Britain, where farm tenancy was the norm, most colonial farmers tilled their own soil. In the cities, **artisans** capitalised on their scarcity value by demanding and getting higher wages.

Nevertheless, American society was hierarchical and there were huge differences between rich and poor. While society may have been more mobile than that in Britain, the notion of widespread social mobility should not be exaggerated. Only a few individuals rose from humble beginnings to wealth and power.

Families

The basic unit of American life was the family. At its head was a white male. Households were hierarchical. Children were subordinate to elders, females to males, servants to family, blacks to whites. While it has been claimed that the preponderance of males among early American settlers helped to raise the status of women, this seems doubtful. Irrespective of wealth or condition they were assigned a subordinate role and were denied the political and civil rights enjoyed by men. Wives, for example, had no legal right to property.

American culture

By the 1760s Americans could boast their own cultural and intellectual achievements.



KEY TERM

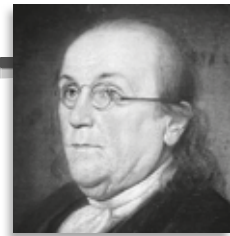
Artisans Skilled manual workers.

Benjamin Franklin

1706	Born in Boston
1729	Purchased the <i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i>
1751–64	Sat in the Pennsylvania Assembly
1757–75	Pennsylvania's colonial agent in London
1775	Sat as a delegate in the Second Continental Congress
1776	Helped to draw up the Declaration of Independence
1776–85	Head of a diplomatic mission in France, he helped to bring France into the War of Independence
1787	Helped to draft the Constitution
1790	Died

A self-made man, Franklin was a many-sided genius who succeeded in everything he tried: journalism, business, invention, politics and diplomacy. Largely self-educated, he prospered as owner of a printing business in Philadelphia and as editor of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He was a prolific pamphleteer on politics, economics, religion and other topics. His passion for learning and civic improvement led him to play a leading role in founding, among other things, a subscription library, a city hospital and the American Philosophical Society.

Franklin became famous in America and Europe as a result of his inventions, including the lightning rod and bifocal spectacles, and still more for his research into the nature of electricity. In all his endeavours Franklin displayed a faith in reason and a humanitarianism that were characteristic of the Enlightenment.



Education

Education was strongly encouraged. By 1763, 75 per cent of white male American adults were literate, compared with 60 per cent in England, and there were nine colleges and universities. Printing presses and booksellers were common. More than thirty newspapers were in circulation by 1763.

The colonial intellectual elite were influenced by the **Enlightenment**, the ideas of which permeated every branch of thought from science to politics. By the mid-eighteenth century Americans could boast their own intellectual achievements. Learned organisations were founded, most notably the American Philosophical Society (1743). Some Americans, for example Benjamin Franklin, gained international notice for their work.

Religion

Church membership was high, especially in New England. Most Americans were Protestants, a fact that shaped their cultural, social and political attitudes as well as defining their theological principles. However, in contrast to most European states, there was no dominant religious denomination in the colonies as a whole or even within most individual colonies. The tendency towards religious division, together with the immigration of sectarians from different countries, produced a multiplicity of denominations – Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, German and Dutch Reformed and Methodists. There was an established church in nine colonies; Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey were the exceptions. The Congregational Church

KEY TERM

Enlightenment The name given to a school of European thought of the eighteenth century. Those influenced by the Enlightenment believed in reason and human progress.

was the established church in the New England colonies. The Anglican Church was established in Virginia and other southern colonies. Established churches enjoyed certain privileges, including support from taxation.

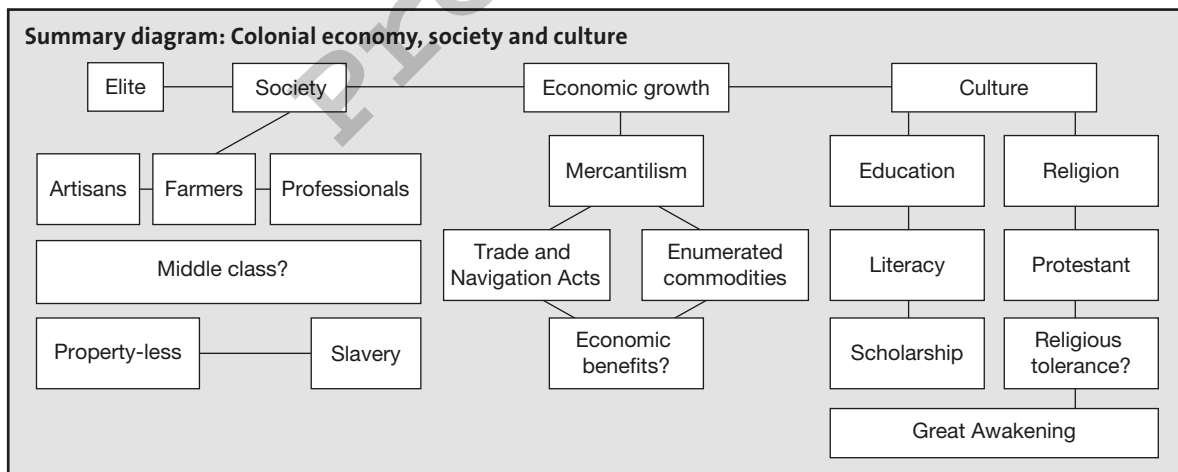
Table 1.1 Estimated religious census for 1775

	Number	Chief locale
Congregationalists	575,000	New England
Anglicans	500,000	NY, South
Presbyterians	410,000	Frontier
German churches (incl. Lutherans)	200,000	PA
Dutch reformed	75,000	NY, NJ
Quakers	40,000	PA, NJ, DE
Baptists	25,000	RI, PA, NJ, DE
Roman Catholics	25,000	MD, PA
Methodists	5,000	Scattered
Jews	2,000	NY, RI
Total membership	1,857,000	
Total population	2,493,000	
Percentage church members	74%	

The plethora of diverse religious groups forced Americans to acknowledge a degree of religious tolerance. Tolerance, however, was largely confined to other Protestant groups. Most Americans were strongly anti-Catholic.

The Great Awakening

A wave of religious revivals known as the Great Awakening swept through the colonies in the early eighteenth century. Popular preachers, emphasising the individual’s personal relationship with God, drew enormous crowds. Although some scholars have claimed that the Great Awakening aroused an egalitarian and democratic spirit as all souls were now considered eligible for salvation, its levelling tendencies may have been overstated. While it tended to undermine the position of the established clergy, it did not develop into a general challenge to traditional forms of authority.



4 The struggle with France

► What were the main results of the British–French struggle for control of North America?

Warfare was a fact of colonial life in the seventeenth century. To secure their foothold on the American continent early colonists had to overcome Native American resistance. Towards the end of the seventeenth century warfare between colonists and Native Americans merged with a larger struggle between Britain and France (which ruled Canada and Louisiana) for control of North America.



Figure 1.3 European control of North America in 1740.

Spain, which ruled most of Central and South America, had some interest in developments in North America. It controlled Florida and its Mexican boundaries extended north into territory that is now part of the USA. However, there were very few Spaniards in North America, and Spain was declining as a great power. It tended to ally with France against Britain but usually offered little assistance to its partner.

The wars

Between 1689 and 1763 Britain and France fought four wars:

- the War of the League of Augsburg (1689–97)
- the War of Spanish Succession (1702–13)
- the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48)
- the Seven Years' War (1756–63).

The first three wars began in Europe, and were essentially about the balance of power within that continent. Conflict then spread across the Atlantic. That the colonists viewed them essentially as foreign wars in which they became embroiled only as subjects of the British Crown was evident from the labels they attached to the first three of them: King William's War, Queen Anne's War and King George's War. Nonetheless, they were eager to defeat French and Spanish neighbours whose Catholicism they loathed and whom they regarded with fear and suspicion.

The War of Austrian Succession

In the War of Austrian Succession, Britain was too absorbed in Europe to send much help to the colonists. But France and Spain had similar problems. The fact that the Royal Navy was stronger than the French and Spanish navies also made it difficult for Britain's enemies to send assistance to their colonists. Britain left most of the fighting to the colonial **militia**. The English-speaking colonists outnumbered the French fifteen to one but inter-colonial disputes and French alliances with Native American tribes largely offset the British advantage. The colonists' greatest military achievement was the capture of Louisbourg in 1745. Proud of their victory, the colonists were appalled when the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) handed Louisbourg back to France.

The Albany Congress

As far as America was concerned, the 1748 peace was simply a truce. No sooner had it been signed than British and French colonists redoubled their efforts to control the Ohio Valley. In the spirit of salutary neglect, there were only about 500 British troops in America. The Board of Trade recognised that Native American support could be vital in the coming struggle against the French. It thus called on the colonies from Virginia northward to send delegates to a meeting at Albany to discuss joint Native American policy. The Albany Congress (June 1754) failed to secure an alliance with the Iroquois, the tribe best disposed towards the British. However, the Congress did adopt a scheme, drawn up by Benjamin Franklin, for a permanent inter-colonial confederation. Franklin's Plan of Union envisaged an elected colonial Parliament with authority over Native American affairs and defence and with power to levy taxes to support an army. The British government might well have vetoed the proposal since it went much further than it had intended. But the colonial assemblies saved it the trouble by either rejecting or ignoring the Plan of Union.

KEY TERM

Militia A force, made up of all military-aged civilians, called out in times of emergency.

Fort Duquesne

In 1753–54 a group of Virginia planters organised the Ohio Company and secured from the British government a grant of some 200,000 acres (about 80,000 hectares) in the trans-Allegheny region. When the French began to build a chain of forts between Lake Erie and the Allegheny River, a Virginian force, led by George Washington (see page 87), was sent to forestall them. But Washington found that the French were already in possession of the key site, the forks of the Ohio River (present-day Pittsburgh), where they were busy constructing Fort Duquesne. In the fighting that followed, Washington was forced to surrender (July 1754). Although war was as yet undeclared, Britain sent General Braddock and 2000 troops to America. On his way to Fort Duquesne, Braddock blundered into a French–Indian ambush. He was killed and his army routed (July 1755). Over the next two years Native American war parties devastated scores of frontier settlements.

The Seven Years' War

In 1756 Britain declared war on France. The Seven Years' War – or the French–Indian War as it was known in America – developed into a worldwide conflict. There was fighting in Europe, the West Indies, Africa and India as well as in North America. At first things went badly for Britain. French General Montcalm captured Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario in 1756 and Fort William Henry at the southern end of Lake George in 1757. These reverses reflected the inability of the Earl of Loudon, the British commander, to induce the colonists to unite in their own defence. Miserly assemblies, dominated by men from the secure seaboard, were unperturbed by the threat to remote frontiers.

Once **William Pitt** was recalled to power in Britain in 1757, the tide began to turn. Determined to expand Britain's imperial power, Pitt judged that defeat of the French in North America was the key to ultimate victory. He thus sent 25,000 troops to America under the command of Jeffrey Amherst and James Wolfe, and paid for raising a further 25,000 colonists. As never before, the British government was preoccupied with America. The war proved an economic bonanza for the colonies. They were paid good money to support the British forces.

Meanwhile Pitt provided subsidies to Frederick the Great of Prussia to preoccupy the French in Europe. The strategy worked brilliantly. In 1758 British forces captured Louisbourg and then cut the link between Canada and the Mississippi Valley by taking Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario. This led to the fall of Fort Duquesne, renamed Fort Pitt. Meanwhile Robert Clive won a series of victories in India while Frederick the Great defeated the armies of France, Russia and Austria in Europe.

KEY FIGURE

William Pitt (1708–78)

Pitt (the Elder), who entered Parliament in 1735, quickly established his reputation as a great orator. In 1757 he formed a ministry with the Duke of Newcastle and was largely responsible for British victory in the Seven Years' War.

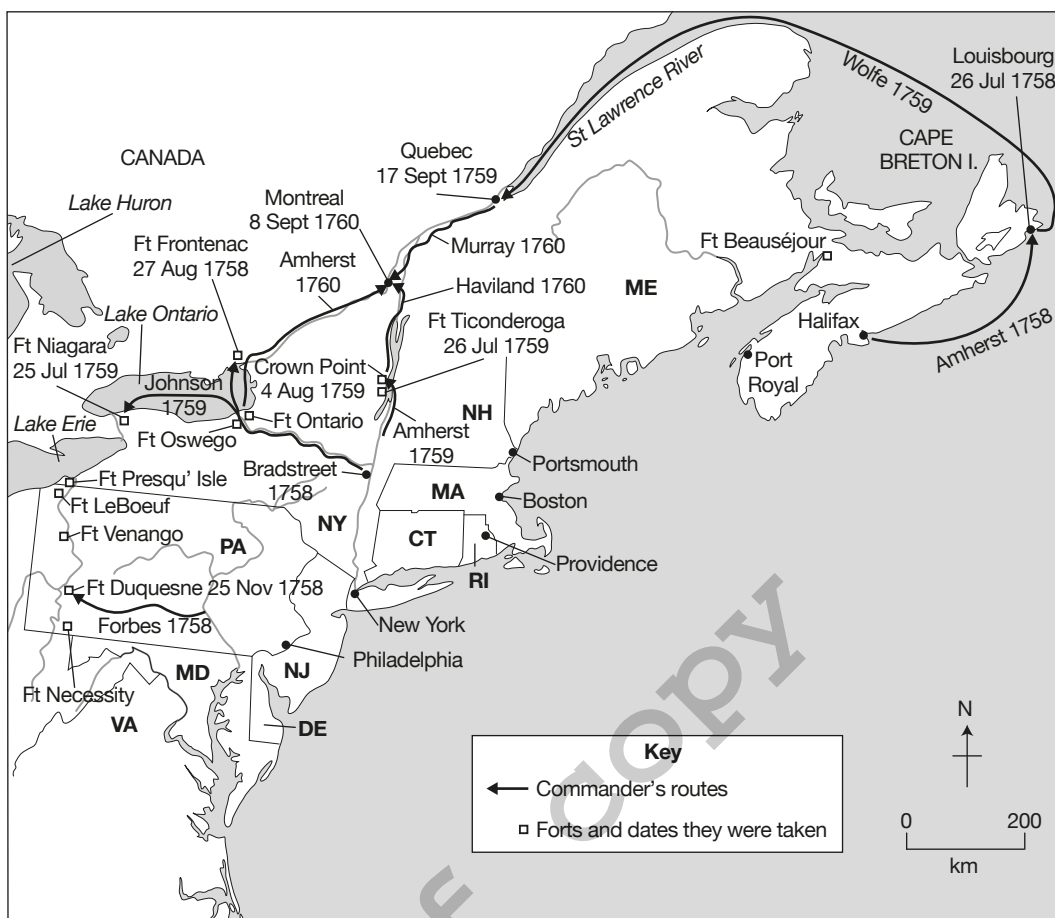


Figure 1.4 The main events in the Seven Years' War in America.

The greatest triumphs came in 1759 – the year of victories:

- Admiral Hawke smashed a French fleet at Quiberon Bay, southeast of Brest, thereby preventing France sending reinforcements to Canada.
- Britain captured Guadaloupe in the Caribbean.
- Britain launched a three-pronged attack on Canada. General Wolfe's defeat of Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham (12 September 1759) ensured the capture of Quebec, effectively destroying French power in Canada.

In 1760 Amherst took Montreal and the capture of Canada was complete. By the terms of the Peace of Paris (1763):

- Britain received Canada and all French possessions east of the Mississippi.
- Britain acquired most of France's Caribbean islands.
- Britain acquired Florida from Spain.
- France ceded Louisiana to Spain.

Other results of the Seven Years' War

- Britain was now the world's greatest imperial power, controlling North America, the Caribbean and much of India.
- The war gave training to men who later became senior officers in the American army.
- There was mutual contempt between some American and British soldiers. British officers tended to regard the Americans as a rabble. Americans, in turn, considered British officers haughty and incompetent.
- Americans, particularly those who lived near the frontier (in colonies like Virginia), expected to benefit from the expulsion of the French. A huge area of western land beyond the Appalachian mountains now seemed open for settlement.
- Ironically, the British triumph prepared the ground for the American Revolution. French elimination from North America weakened the colonists' sense of military dependence on Britain.

SOURCE C

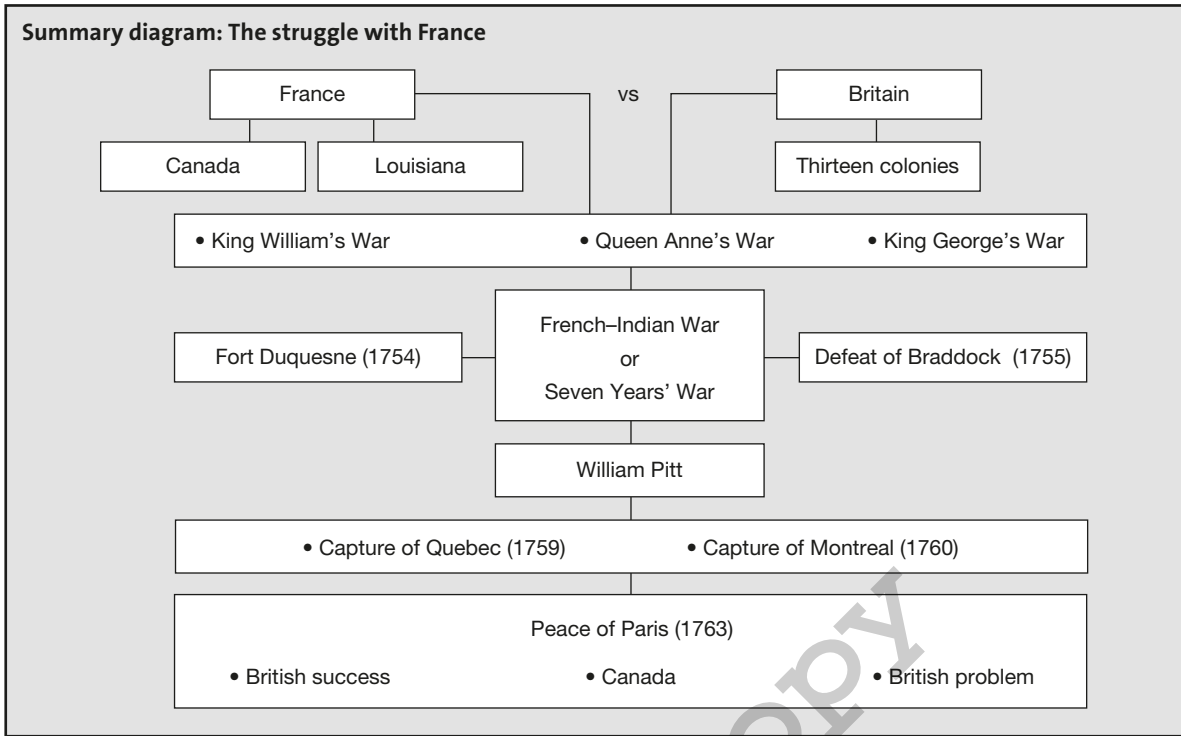
Thomas Barnard, an American preacher in 1763, quoted in R.D. Brown, editor, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution 1760–1791*, D.C. Heath, 1992, pp. 50–1.

America, mayest well rejoice, the children of New England may be glad and triumph in reflection on events past, and prospect of the future. Encompassed with native savages, our Fathers having escaped from oppression, deepest felt by pious minds, carried their lives in their hands, subjected to captivities, to inhuman cruelties and massacres; encompassed with crafty, faithless Europeans, who sought their ruin, what prospect could they have before them? ... And if we their offspring, call to mind the idea which possessed us in the year 1756, with what exultation must we sing, 'The snare is broken and we are escaped.'

Now commences the era of our quiet enjoyment of those liberties which our fathers purchased with the toil of their whole lives, their treasure, their blood. Safe from the enemy of the wilderness, safe from the gripping hand of arbitrary sway and cruel superstitions: here shall be the late founded seat of peace and freedom. Here shall our indulgent mother, who has most generously rescued and protected us, be served and honoured by growing numbers, with all duty, love and gratitude, till time shall be no more.

Why, according to Source C, were Americans much better off in 1763 than they had been earlier?





5 Britain by 1763

In 1763 Britain seemed a state of modernity, combining economic growth, political maturity and imperial strength.

The economic situation

Britain had a rising population, with 7.5 million people in 1760. Although more than half the British people were connected with farming, the **Industrial Revolution** was beginning to take effect, principally in the production of textiles, iron and steel. Cities like Birmingham and Manchester were rapidly growing. London, with 700,000 people, was the largest city in the world. Britain was the world's greatest trading nation.

The social situation

British society was hierarchical. Great landowners dominated society and politics. The nobility and their relations filled most of the high offices, whether in the ministerial departments, church or army.

KEY TERM

Industrial Revolution The economic and social changes arising out of the change from industries carried on in the home to industries in factories with power-driven machinery.

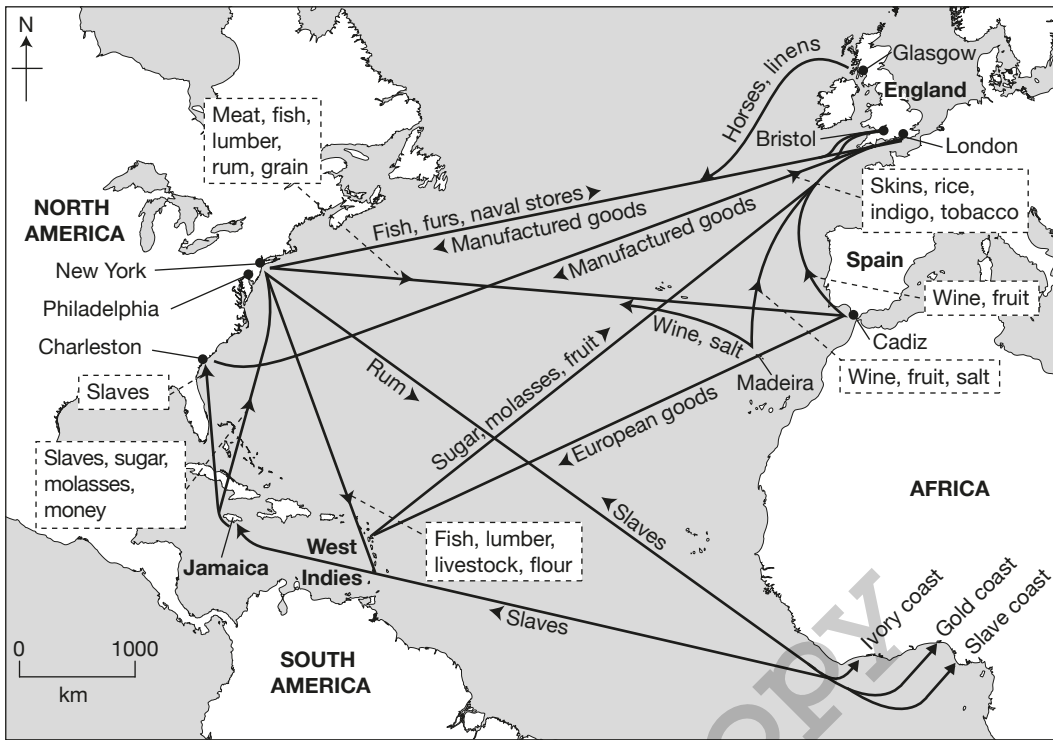


Figure 1.5 Colonial overseas trade.

Britain’s rising middle class was essential to the growth of the economy and to Britain’s social flexibility and stability. The middle class, diverse in both wealth and economic activity, was not a coherent group. There was a large gap, for example, between the great merchants, who often married into the aristocracy, and the small tradesmen and craftsmen who represented the backbone of commercial England.

At the bottom of society there were large numbers of agricultural and industrial labourers.

The political situation

Britain was a parliamentary monarchy. While **the Glorious Revolution** had reduced the monarchy’s power, all government was – in theory – the king’s. From the lowest official in the parish to the greatest minister of state, service undertaken was in the name of the monarch. George III (1760–1820) took an active part in government. Within limits, he chose the ministers who served him – the limits being essentially their ability to command parliamentary support.


KEY TERM

The Glorious Revolution
 In 1688 King James II fled from Britain. William III and Mary became joint monarchs. Parliament assumed greater control.

King George III

1738	Born, grandson of George II: he was the first Hanoverian king to be born and brought up in England
1760	Crowned king
1761	Married Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg Strelitz
1783	Shared with Lord North the blame for the loss of the American colonies
Mid-1780s	Suffered periods of madness
1811	Became permanently insane; his son George became regent
1820	Died

In 1760, influenced by his former tutor, the Earl of Bute, George hoped to inaugurate a new era in politics by breaking the dominance of the Whigs and by ending the exclusion of the Tories from government, court and other office. Some Whig leaders, in consequence, accused George of plotting to enhance the power



of the Crown and reduce Parliament to subservience. There is no evidence that Bute infected the future king with authoritarian intentions. Far from planning to reduce Parliament's powers, George III wanted to protect the constitution from the Whigs and the corruption which he imagined they employed to reinforce their power. While George had no wish to be a despot, he was determined to rule as well as reign. He thus did what he could to influence government policy.

George has generally had a bad press. Early twentieth-century historian Sir George Otto Trevelyan wrote that 'he invariably declared himself upon the wrong side in every conflict'. Historians today are somewhat kinder but most agree he was headstrong and obstinate. His political prejudices helped to cause the ministerial instability in the 1760s. If he had had greater perception or intelligence he might have steered Britain away from the disastrous policies of confrontation with the American colonies.

Parliament

Parliament consisted of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The Commons' control of financial matters meant that it had ultimate power. But Britain was not democratic:

- In the 1761 election only 215,000 reasonably wealthy males were entitled to vote.
- Most of the growing cities were not represented in the Commons.
- Rich landowners usually determined who would stand as candidates and who would be elected.
- Few MPs were independent. A half owed their seats to patrons. Nearly a third held offices or honours under the government, usually voting as the government directed.

The political parties

In the early eighteenth century there were two major political parties: the **Whigs** and the **Tories**. After the **Hanoverian succession** in 1714, George I (1714–27) and George II (1727–60) were strongly committed to the Whigs. Between 1722 and 1762 there were only seven years in total in which the Whig **oligarchy** failed to provide Britain with stable and generally successful government. Politics after 1720 was dominated first by Sir Robert Walpole and then by the Pelhams: Henry Pelham and his brother the Duke of Newcastle.

KEY TERMS

Whigs Members of the Whig Party – a party which had once upheld popular rights and opposed royal power.

Tories Members of the Tory Party – a party which usually opposed radical change.

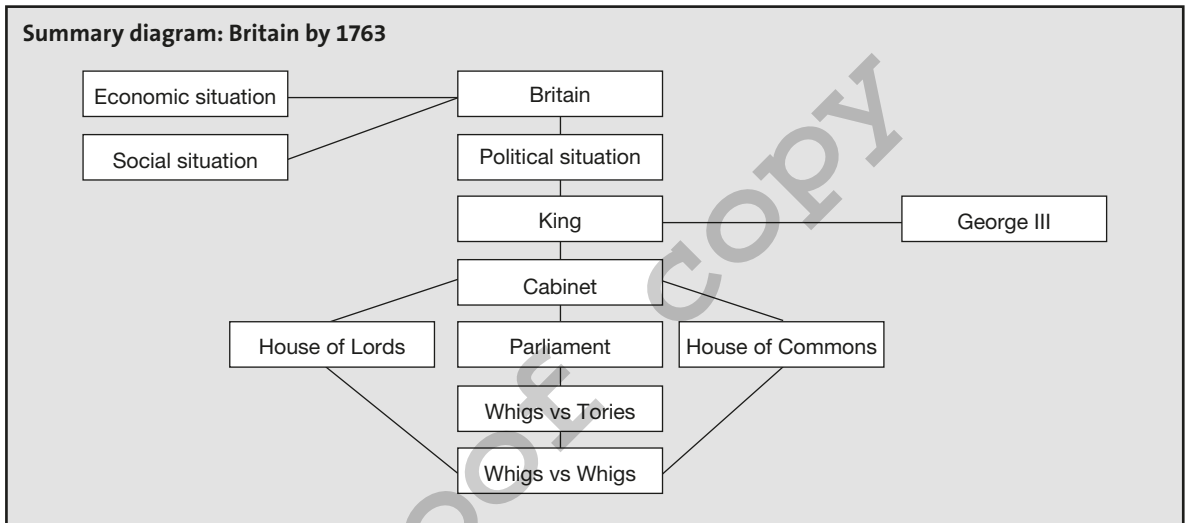
Hanoverian succession

In 1714 Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch, died childless. George, Elector of Hanover, a small state in Germany, became King George I of Britain.

Oligarchy Government by a small (usually wealthy) exclusive class.

Walpole and the Pelhams were adroit managers of the Commons, using government patronage to skilful effect.

In the late seventeenth century, the Whig Party had stressed government by consent of the people, resistance against arbitrary rule and the inviolability of the individual's fundamental rights. However, by 1760 Whiggism – indeed the Whig Party – had little real meaning. Everyone who mattered politically was a Whig. The Whigs were less a party than a broad-based political establishment with a few great Whig families at its core. The Tory Party had little influence, with many of its ambitious members joining Whig factions. In the absence of the Whig–Tory framework, politics became factionalised. Several powerful political leaders battled for control. Given the Whig feuding, ministries found it hard to command majorities. There was a constant shifting of support from one faction to another. The result was political instability in the 1760s.



6 Key debate

► *To what extent were there signs in 1763 that the colonies were likely to break their ties with Britain?*

Historians continue to debate the extent to which the American colonies were tied to Britain in 1763. It is possible to argue that the relationship between the two was weakening and would inevitably end. It is also possible to claim that the ties between Britain and its colonies were still very strong.

Signs of a weakening relationship

EXTRACT I

From Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763–1789*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 26.

The colonies owed allegiance, and paid it, to the same king of England itself, but because their experience was different from the parent country's, this connection and those to imperial agencies of government did not restrict them. Distance from England and the slowness of communications helped keep the ties ... slack. So also did the robust political institutions found in the mainland colonies – the provincial assemblies or legislatures and the county, town, and parish governments which gave order to their lives. Before 1776, the Americans had become almost completely self-governing.

Arguably, by 1763 the thirteen colonies were developing so rapidly that it was only a matter of time before they broke their ties with Britain. In all parts of America, there were tendencies at work that pointed to autonomy rather than to colonial dependency. The colonies' populations were rapidly growing and by 1763 colonists were aware of being something other than Britons. The mixing of diverse peoples in the colonies helped to forge a new identity. 'The standard culture retained its English cast but the presence of large bodies of non-English populations eroded its English texture', claims Robert Middlekauff.

By 1763 the colonies pretty well ran their own affairs. British governors complained throughout the early eighteenth century that they were dealing with an incipient or even fully matured spirit of independence. Unless Britain asserted its rights, the colonies were likely simply to drift away from British control. But if Britain tried to assert its rights, this was likely to cause ructions. According to historian Bernard Bailyn, the colonists' ideological outlook predisposed them to be acutely sensitive to all threats, perceived or real, to their liberty.

The colonists were also aware of their economic strength, and economic ties were beginning to pull the colonies together. British mercantilism, although not strictly enforced, rubbed the colonies up the wrong way.

The peace settlement of 1763 boded ill for future American–British relations. Once Canada was under British control, the colonies had nothing to fear from France and were thus less dependent on Britain.

Signs of a strong relationship

EXTRACT 2

From Maldwyn A. Jones, *The Limits of Liberty: American History 1607–1992*, Oxford University, 1995, p. 37.

At the close of the Seven Years War in 1763 hardly any of the American colonists are likely to have harbored thoughts of independence. For all their varied origins they were closely bound to Great Britain by ties of interest and affection. They were proud to be members of the British Empire and rejoiced in its great triumph over France. They cherished the British tradition of political liberty and, though chafing at certain aspects of the imperial economic system, were reasonably content with it.

Which of the two extracts provides the more convincing interpretation?



It is possible to argue that the colonial–British relationship was strong in 1763. For all the apparatus of regulation and control, the British imperial system was in practice easy-going. No other colonising nation conceded to its colonial subjects the degree of autonomy that the inhabitants of the thirteen colonies enjoyed. There were strong bonds of affection between Britain and the colonies, much of which stemmed from the colonists' pride in their British heritage and rights. Most Americans were loyal to Britain: during the Seven Years' War some 25,000 Americans had joined militias to fight against the French.

The strong relationship with Britain united the colonies rather than any inner sense of American unity. The only common institutions were those derived from Britain – notably the monarchy, common law, the English language and British culture. Moreover, Britain and the colonies were held together by a real community of economic interests within the mercantile system.

Pre-1763 the colonies showed no desire to attain unity. The word 'American' was mainly a geographical expression. People's loyalties were confined primarily to their own colony and then to Britain. Many customary features of nationhood were missing. The army, customs service and post office were British, and there was no single legal or monetary system. The thirteen colonies had different governments, different laws and different interests. There was a good deal of inter-colonial jealousy and squabbles over boundaries and land claims.

In 1763 virtually no American colonist sought or predicted the likelihood of separation from Britain. There was thus nothing inevitable about American independence. The argument that distance, population growth and nationalism would sooner or later have made separation inevitable is conjecture: the same factors did not make Canada in 1775 or later fight a war for independence.

Chapter summary

By 1763, it seemed that the development of Britain's colonies in North America had been hugely successful. The thirteen colonies had growing populations, thriving economies, and cultural and intellectual achievements. The colonies also had

considerable political freedom and were far more democratic than Britain. Success against France in the Seven Years' War ensured that Britain was the dominant power in North America. But the conquest of Canada meant that the thirteen colonies were no longer militarily dependent on Britain. Historians continue to debate the strength of the colonies' ties to Britain.

Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- 1 Why did the American population grow so quickly in the eighteenth century?
- 2 What impact did immigration have on the thirteen colonies?
- 3 To what extent did the colonists govern themselves?
- 4 How democratic were the colonial governments?
- 5 How did British rule in the colonies operate?
- 6 Why were the American colonies so prosperous?
- 7 What were the effects of mercantilism?
- 8 How different were colonial and British societies?
- 9 How important was the Great Awakening?
- 10 Why did Britain win the struggle with France for control of North America?
- 11 What were the results of British success?
- 12 How strong were British–American ties in 1763?

Question practice

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 Which of the following was more responsible for British and American success in the Seven Years' War: i) American militia forces or ii) regular British troops? Explain your answer with reference to both i) and ii).
- 2 To what extent did the mercantilist system hinder the economic growth of the American colonies?
- 3 'Britain's success against France in the Seven Years' War weakened the American colonies' relationship with Britain.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.
- 4 'In 1763, the relationship between Britain and its North American colonies was strong.' Assess the validity of this view.

INTERPRETATION QUESTION

- 1 Read the interpretation and then answer the question that follows: 'The British mercantilist system may on balance have been economically advantageous to the colonies.' (Maldwyn A. Jones, *The Limits of Liberty, American History 1607–1992*, Oxford University Press, 1995.) Evaluate the strengths and limitations of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations that you have studied.

SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

- 1 With reference to Sources 1 and 2, and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two sources is more valuable in explaining the relationship between Britain and the American colonies in 1763?
- 2 With reference to Sources 1, 2 and 3, and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of the sources to a historian studying the relationship between Britain and the American colonies in the early 1760s.

SOURCE 1

Thomas Hutchinson, a Bostonian and the last royal governor of Massachusetts, writing of the situation in Massachusetts in 1763.

Advantages in any respect enjoyed by the subjects in England, which were not enjoyed by the subjects in the colonies began to be considered in an invidious light and men were led to inquire, with greater attention than formerly, into the relation in which the colonies stood to the state from which they sprang ... It is well known in America that the people of England, as well as administration, were divided upon the expediency of retaining Canada rather than the islands [Guadeloupe and other French Caribbean islands] and it was also known the objection to Canada proceeded from an opinion that the cession of it by France would cause in time a separation of the British colonies from the mother country. This jealousy [suspicion] in England being known, it was of itself sufficient to set enterprising men upon considering how far such a separation was expedient and practicable.

SOURCE 2

James Otis (who later became a major opponent of Britain) speaking in the town meeting of Boston in 1763.

We in America have certainly abundant reasons to rejoice. The heathen are not only driven out, but the Canadians, much more formidable enemies are conquered and become fellow subjects. The British dominions and power may now be said, literally to extend from sea to sea ... And we may safely conclude from his majesty's wise administration hitherto that liberty and knowledge, civil and religious, will be co-extended, improved and preserved to the latest posterity. No other constitution of civil government has yet appeared in the world so admirably adapted to these great purposes as that of Great Britain.

SOURCE 3

Reverend Andrew Burnaby, an Anglican minister, writing about his visit to America in 1760.

My first attachment, as it is natural, is to my native country [England]. My next is to America and such is my affection for both that I hope nothing will ever happen to dissolve that union, which is necessary to their common happiness ...

The province of Massachusetts Bay has been for some years past, I believe, rather on the decline, its inhabitants have lost several branches of trade which they are not likely to recover again ... Their ship trade is considerably decreased, owing to their not having been so careful in the construction of vessels as formerly. Their fisheries too have not been equally successful ... However, notwithstanding what has been said, Massachusetts Bay is a rich, populous and well-cultivated province.