4 Roots of Self-Government

Reading Focus
- Why did England want to regulate colonial trade?
- What were colonial governments like?
- How were the liberties of the colonists limited?

Key Terms
mercantilism
export
import
Navigation Acts
Yankee
triangular trade
legislature
Glorious Revolution
bill of rights
English Bill of Rights

Taking Notes
As you read, prepare an outline of this section. Use roman numerals to indicate the major headings, capital letters for subheadings, and numbers for the supporting details. The sample below will help you get started.

I. England Regulates Trade
   A.
   1.
   2.
II. Trade in Rum and Slaves
   A.
   B.
   C.
III. Colonial Government

Main Idea During the late 1600s and 1700s, England regulated colonial trade, while in each colony a governor carried out laws passed by the colony's legislature.

Setting the Scene Young Stephen Lamb hardly had time to look up before it was too late. A horse-drawn cart raced by, and the next instant Stephen was pulled beneath the wheels. One of Boston's newspapers reported the sad news: "A Child of about Five Years old, at the South End of the Town, was run over by a Cart, and died immediately after."

The streets in colonial cities like Boston had become busy—and sometimes dangerous—by the early 1700s. Farmers drove cattle, pigs, and sheep to market along narrow cobblestone streets. New York merchants complained that "Mischievous Mastiffs, Bull Dogs and Other Useless Dogs" chased their cattle and horses. Philadelphia spaced wooden posts along both sides of its main streets. The posts protected pedestrians from the "excessive Galloping, Trotting & Pacing of Horses."

Colonial city streets were becoming hazardous because there was so much activity. By the 1700s, trade flourished all along the Atlantic coast. As trade increased, England began to take a new interest in its colonies.

England Regulates Trade
Like other European nations at the time, England believed that its colonies should benefit the home country. This belief was part of an economic theory known as mercantilism (MEHR kuhnl thuhl uhnm).

According to this theory, a nation became strong by keeping strict control over its trade. As one English gentleman put it, "Whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world."

Mercantilists thought that a country should export more than it imported. Exports are goods sent to markets outside a country. Imports are goods brought into a country. If England sold more
goods abroad, gold would flow into the home country as payment for those exports.

Beginning in the 1650s, the English Parliament passed a series of Navigation Acts that regulated trade between England and its colonies. The purpose of these laws was to ensure that only England benefited from colonial trade.

Under the new laws, only colonial or English ships could carry goods to and from the colonies. The Navigation Acts also listed certain products, such as tobacco and cotton, that colonial merchants could ship only to England. In this way, Parliament created jobs for English workers who cut and rolled tobacco or spun cotton into cloth.

The Navigation Acts helped the colonies as well as England. For example, the law encouraged colonists to build their own ships. As a result, New England became a prosperous shipbuilding center. Also, because of the acts, colonial merchants did not have to compete with foreign merchants because they were sure of having a market for their goods in England.

Still, many colonists resented the Navigation Acts. In their view, the laws favored English merchants. Colonial merchants often ignored the Navigation Acts or found ways to get around them.

**Trade in Rum and Slaves**

The colonies produced a wide variety of goods, and merchant ships sailed up and down the Atlantic coast. Merchants from New England dominated colonial trade. They were known as Yankees, a nickname that implied they were clever and hardworking. Yankee traders earned a reputation for profiting from any deal.

Colonial merchants developed many trade routes. One route was known as the triangular trade because the three legs of the route formed a triangle. On the first leg, ships from New England carried fish, lumber, and other goods to the West Indies. There, Yankee traders bought molasses—a dark-brown syrup made from sugar cane—and sugar. The ships then sailed back to New England, where colonists used the molasses and sugar to make rum.

On the second leg of the journey, ships carried rum, guns, gunpowder, cloth, and tools from New England to West Africa. In Africa, Yankee merchants traded these goods for slaves. On the final leg, ships carried enslaved Africans to the West Indies. With the profits from selling the enslaved Africans, traders bought more molasses.
Colonists traded with the West Indies, Africa, and Europe in a route known as the triangular trade.

1. **Comprehension**
   - (a) What did American ships bring to Africa?
   - (b) Where were enslaved African Americans traded for molasses?

2. **Critical Thinking**
   - **Making Decisions**
   - How did New England benefit from the slave trade?

**Colonial Government**

Although each colony developed its own government, the governments had much in common. A governor directed the colony’s affairs and enforced the laws. Most governors were appointed, either by the king or by the colony’s proprietor. In Rhode Island and Connecticut, however, colonists elected their own governors.

**Elected Assemblies** Each colony also had a **legislature**. A legislature is a group of people who have the power to make laws. In most colonies, the legislature had an upper house and a lower house. The upper house was made up of advisers appointed by the governor.

The lower house was an elected assembly. It approved laws and protected the rights of citizens. Just as important, it had the right to approve any taxes the governor asked for. This “power of the purse,” or right to raise or spend money, was an important check on the governor’s power. Any governor who ignored the assembly risked losing his salary.

**The Right to Vote** Each colony had its own rules about who could vote. By the 1720s, however, all the colonies had laws that restricted the right to vote to white Christian men over the age of 21. In some colonies, only Protestants or members of a particular church could vote. All voters had to own property. Colonial leaders believed that only property owners knew what was best for a colony.
A Bill of Rights Colonists took great pride in their elected assemblies. They also valued the rights that the Magna Carta gave them as English subjects.

Colonists won still more rights as a result of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Parliament removed King James II from the throne and asked William and Mary of the Netherlands to rule. In return for Parliament’s support, William and Mary signed the English Bill of Rights in 1689. A bill of rights is a written list of freedoms the government promises to protect.

The English Bill of Rights protected the rights of individuals and gave anyone accused of a crime the right to a trial by jury. Just as important, the English Bill of Rights said that a ruler could not raise taxes or an army without the approval of Parliament.

Limits on Liberties

English colonists in the Americas enjoyed more freedoms than did the English themselves. However, the rights of English citizens did not extend to all colonists. Women had more rights in the colonies but far fewer rights than did free, white males. A woman’s father or husband was supposed to protect her. A married woman could not start her own business or sign a contract unless her husband approved it.

In most colonies, unmarried women and widows had more rights than married women. They could make contracts and sue in court. In Maryland and the Carolinas, women settlers who headed families could buy land on the same terms as men.

Africans and Native Americans in the colonies had almost no rights. While so many colonists enjoyed English liberties, most Africans were bound in slavery. The conflict between liberty and slavery would not be resolved until the 1860s.
5 Life in the Colonies

Reading Focus
- What class differences existed in colonial society?
- How did the Great Awakening affect the colonies?
- How did the colonists educate their children?
- How were the colonies affected by the spread of new ideas?

Key Terms
- gentry
- middle class
- indentured servant
- Gullah
- Great Awakening
- public school
- tutor
- apprentice
dame school
- Enlightenment
- libel

Taking Notes
Copy the cause-and-effect chart at right. As you read, complete the chart to show the effect of different factors in shaping life in the colonies. Add as many entries as you need.

Main Idea During the 1700s, England’s 13 colonies became societies with their own ideas and traditions.

Setting the Scene On a warm May day in the 1750s, a parade made its way down a main street in Newport, Rhode Island. Most of the city’s Africans had turned out for a holiday known as Negro Election Day. Dressed in their finest clothes, enslaved and free Africans alike sang and marched. One resident recalled:

"All the various languages of Africa, mixed with broken . . . English, filled the air, accompanied with the music of the fiddle, tambourine, the banjo [and African] drum."

—Henry Bull, Memoir of Rhode Island, 1837

Similar parades took place throughout New England. Each year, at about the time white New Englanders voted for their colonial government, Africans elected a leader of their community. The winner’s job was to settle disputes that arose among black townspeople during the year.

Negro Election Day was a truly American custom, blending traditions from Africa and England. As the American colonies grew in the 1700s, they became more than rough settlements. Gradually, old customs and ideas were being shaped into a new culture that was distinctly American.

Colonial Society
For the most part, colonists enjoyed more social equality than people in England, where a person’s opportunities in life were largely determined by birth. Still, class differences existed. Like Europeans, colonial Americans thought it was only natural that some people rank more highly than others. A person’s birth and wealth still determined his or her social status.
The Gentry and the Middle Class  At the top of society stood the gentry. The gentry included wealthy planters, merchants, ministers, successful lawyers, and royal officials. They could afford to dress in the latest fashions from London.

Below the gentry were the middle class. The middle class included farmers who worked their own land, skilled craftworkers, and some tradespeople. Nearly three quarters of all white colonists belonged to the middle class. They prospered because land in the colonies was plentiful and easy to buy.

Indentured Servants  The lowest social class included hired farmhands, indentured servants, and slaves. Indentured servants signed contracts to work without wages for a period of four to seven years for anyone who would pay their ocean passage to the Americas. When their term of service was completed, indentured servants received “freedom dues”: a set of clothes, tools, and 50 acres of land. Because there were so few European women in the colonies, female indentured servants often shortened their terms of service by marrying.

Thousands of men, women, and children came to North America as indentured servants. After completing their terms, some became successful and rose into the middle class.

Women’s Work in the Colonies  From New Hampshire to Georgia, colonial women performed many of the same tasks. A wife took care of her household, husband, and family. By the kitchen fire, she cooked the family’s meals. She milked cows, watched the children, and made clothing.

In the backcountry, wives and husbands often worked side by side in the fields at harvest time. With so much to be done, no one worried whether harvesting was proper “woman’s work.” One surprised visitor described a backcountry woman’s activities: “She will carry a gun in the woods and kill deer, turkeys &c., shoot down wild cattle, catch and tye hoggs, knock down [cattle] with an ax, and perform the most manfull Exercises as well as most men.”

In cities, women sometimes worked outside the home. A young single woman from a poorer family might work for one of the gentry as a maid, a cook, or a nurse. Other women were midwives, who delivered babies. Still others sewed fine hats or dresses to be sold to women who could afford them. Learning such skills often required years of training.

Some women learned trades from their fathers, brothers, or husbands. They worked as butchers, shoemakers, or silversmiths. Quite a few women became printers. A woman might take over her husband’s business when he died.

African Cultural Influences  By the mid-1700s, the culture of Africans in the colonies varied greatly. On rice plantations in South Carolina, slaves saw few white colonists. As a result, African customs remained strong. For example, parents often chose African names for their children, such as Quosh or Juba or Cuff. In some coastal areas, African Americans spoke a distinctive combination of English and West African languages known as Gullah.
In Charleston and other South Carolina port towns, many African Americans worked along the docks, making rope or barrels or helping to build ships. Skilled craftworkers made fine wooden cabinets or silver plates and utensils. Many of their designs reflected African artistic styles. Although most Africans in these towns were enslaved, many opened their own shops or stalls in the market. Some used their earnings to buy their own and their family's freedom.

In Virginia and Maryland, Africans were less isolated from white farmers and planters. Even so, many African customs survived. For instance, mourners took part in a ceremony to speed a dead man's spirit to his home, which they believed was in Africa.

In the Middle Colonies and New England, the African population increased during the 1700s. As you have read, customs like Negro Election Day became a part of colonial life, especially in cities.

**The Great Awakening**

In the 1730s and 1740s, a religious movement known as the Great Awakening swept through the colonies. Its drama and emotion touched women and men of all backgrounds and classes.

**Powerful Preachers** A New England preacher, Jonathan Edwards, helped set off the Great Awakening. In powerful sermons, Edwards called on colonists, especially young people, to examine their lives. He preached of the sweetness and beauty of God. At the same time, he warned listeners to heed the Bible's teachings. Otherwise, they would be "sinners in the hands of an angry God," headed for the fiery torments of hell.

In 1739, when an English minister named George Whitefield arrived in the colonies, the movement spread like wildfire. Whitefield drew huge crowds to outdoor meetings. An enthusiastic and energetic preacher, his voice would ring with feeling as he called on sinners to repent. After hearing Whitefield speak, Jonathan Edwards's wife reported, "I have seen upwards of a thousand people hang on his words with breathless silence, broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob."

**Impact of the Great Awakening** The Great Awakening aroused bitter debate. People who supported the movement often split away from their old churches to form new ones. Opponents warned that the movement was too emotional. Still, the growth of so many new churches forced colonists to become more tolerant of people with different beliefs.

The Great Awakening contributed in another way to the spread of democratic feelings in the colonies. Many of the new preachers were not as well educated as most ministers. They argued that formal training was less important than a heart filled with the holy spirit. Such teachings encouraged a spirit of independence. Many believers felt more free to challenge authority when their liberties were at stake. People began to think differently about their political rights and their governments. They felt if they could figure out how to worship on their own, then they could govern themselves. Eventually, many of these colonists would challenge British authority.
Education in the Colonies

Among the colonists, New Englanders were the most concerned about education. Puritans taught that all people had a duty to study the Bible. If colonists did not learn to read, how would they fulfill this duty?

New England  In 1642, the Massachusetts assembly passed a law ordering all parents to teach their children “to read and understand the principles of religion.” They also required all towns with 50 or more families to hire a schoolteacher. Towns with 100 or more families also had to set up a grammar school to prepare boys for college.

In this way, Massachusetts set up the first public schools, or schools supported by taxes. Public schools allowed both rich and poor children to receive an education.

The first New England schools had only one room for students of all ages. Parents paid the schoolteacher with corn, peas, or other foods. Each child was expected to bring a share of wood to burn in the stove. Students who forgot would find themselves seated in the coldest corner of the room!

Middle and Southern Colonies  In the Middle Colonies, churches and individual families set up private schools. Because pupils paid to attend, only wealthy families could afford to educate their children.

In the Southern Colonies, people lived too far from one another to bring children together in one school building. Some planters engaged tutors, or private teachers. The wealthiest planters sent their sons to school in England. As a rule, slaves were denied education of any kind.

Apprenticeships and Dame Schools  Boys whose parents wished them to learn a trade or craft served as apprentices (uh PRÉN tihs ehz). An apprentice worked for a master to learn a trade or a craft. For example, when a boy reached the age of 12 or 13, his parents might apprentice him to a master glassmaker. The young apprentice lived in the glassmaker’s home for six or seven years while learning the craft. The glassmaker gave the boy food and clothing. He was also supposed to teach his apprentice how to read and write and provide him with religious training.

In return, the apprentice worked without pay in the glassmaker’s shop and learned the skills he needed to set up his own shop. Boys were apprenticed in many trades, including papermaking and printing, and tanning (making leather).

In New England, most schools accepted only boys. However, some girls attended dame schools, or private schools run by women in their own homes. Other girls, though, usually learned skills from their mothers, who taught them to spin wool, weave, and embroider. A few learned to read and write.

Spread of Ideas

During the 1600s, European scientists began to use reason and logic instead of superstition to understand the world. They developed theories, and then performed experiments to test them. In doing so,
they discovered many of the laws of nature. The English scientist Isaac Newton, for example, explained the law of gravity.

**The Enlightenment Spreads** European thinkers of the late 1600s and 1700s believed that reason and scientific methods could be applied to the study of society. They tried to discover the natural laws that governed human behavior. Because these thinkers believed in the light of human reason, the movement that they started is known as the Enlightenment. John Locke, an English philosopher, wrote works that were widely read in the colonies. He said people could gain knowledge of the world by observing and by experimenting.

In the 13 colonies, the Enlightenment spread among better educated colonists. They included wealthy merchants, lawyers, ministers, and others who had the leisure to read the latest books from Europe. Urban craftsmen also heard and discussed these ideas.

**Benjamin Franklin** The best example of the Enlightenment spirit in the 13 colonies was Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was born in 1706, the son of a poor Boston soap and candle maker. Although he had only two years of formal schooling, he used his spare time to study literature, mathematics, and foreign languages.

At age 17, Franklin made his way to Philadelphia. There, he built up a successful printing business. His most popular publication was *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Published yearly, it contained useful information and clever quotes, such as “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

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**Viewing History**

School Days
Students in colonial times attended one-room schools. Usually, they studied subjects that would help them in their daily lives. Today, students attend schools that offer many subjects and the latest technology. Sometimes, students study in special classrooms, such as computer rooms like the one shown here.

**Applying Information**

(a) How has public education changed since colonial times?
(b) How is it the same?

**Primary Sources**

Like other Enlightenment thinkers, Franklin wanted to use reason to improve the world around him. He invented practical devices such as a lightning rod, a smokeless fireplace, and bifocal glasses. As a community leader, Franklin persuaded Philadelphia officials to pave streets, organize a fire company, and set up the first lending library in the Americas. Franklin’s inventions and his public service earned him worldwide fame.

**Colonial Cities** While most colonists lived on farms, towns and cities strongly influenced colonial life. Through the great ports of Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Charleston, merchants shipped products overseas. Towns and cities also served as the center of a busy trade between the coast and the growing backcountry.

Culture flourished in the cities. By the mid-1700s, many colonial cities had their own theaters. City dwellers found entertainment at singing societies, traveling circuses, carnivals, and horse races.

In 1704, John Campbell founded the *Boston News-Letter*, the first regular weekly newspaper in the English colonies. Within 50 years, each of the colonies, except New Jersey and Delaware, had at least one weekly paper.

**The Trial of John Peter Zenger** The growth of colonial newspapers led to a dispute over freedom of the press. John Peter Zenger published the *Weekly Journal* in New York City. In 1734, he was arrested for publishing stories that criticized the governor. Zenger was put on trial for libel—the act of publishing a statement that may unjustly damage a person’s reputation. Zenger’s lawyer argued that, since the stories were true, his client had not committed libel. The jury agreed and freed Zenger. At the time, the case did not attract a great deal of attention. However, freedom of the press would become recognized as a basic American right.

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**Recall**

1. **Identify** Explain the significance of (a) Gullah, (b) Great Awakening, (c) Jonathan Edwards, (d) George Whitefield, (e) Enlightenment, (f) Benjamin Franklin, (g) John Peter Zenger.

2. **Define** (a) gentry, (b) middle class, (c) indentured servant, (d) public school, (e) tutor, (f) apprentice, (g) dame school, (h) libel.

**Comprehension**

3. What social classes existed in the colonies?

4. How did the Great Awakening affect religion in the colonies?

5. Why did the Puritans support public education?

6. In what ways did Benjamin Franklin’s ideas reflect the ideas of the Enlightenment?

**Critical Thinking and Writing**

7. **Exploring the Main Idea** Review the Main Idea statement at the beginning of this section. Then, make a list of five statements that support the main idea.

8. **Drawing Inferences** Why do you think there was greater social equality in the colonies than in England?