

Major Problems in American History Chapter 2 & 3 Documents

Chapter 2

Document 1: Account of Indian Attack (Edward Waterhouse, 1622)

In this account, Waterhouse details an attack of the Native Americans on a Virginian settlement. He begins by noting that the Native Americans were typically well-inclined to the colonists previously; as a result of the recent actions, however, Waterhouse interprets this as a “treacherous dissimulation,” a false facade simply meant to deceive the Europeans that they sought to destroy. He describes the attack as an event that was unexpected, cruel, and worthy of revenge — a view common to the English, who often dismissed the Native Americans as “Savages” as Waterhouse had done. In his report, the Europeans were saved by God’s mercy, and the Native Americans seemed to have their actions propelled by some unknown and inexplicable means that Waterhouse cannot grasp. Waterhouse concludes by asserting that the Europeans have now a right to avenge this action and take everything the Native Americans have for themselves, without exception.

Document 4: List of the Governor’s Misdeeds (Nathaniel Bacon, 1676)

Here Nathaniel Bacon lists eight misdeeds of Governor Berkeley of Virginia, as well as the consequences that should follow if compensation is not met. Among these wrongs include corruption by holding and spending large sums of money for selfish reasons, causing corruption in the judicial system, monopolizing the beaver trade, supported acts harmful to the colonists by the Native Americans, protecting the Native Americans when conflict seemed inevitable, for weakening the colonists’ frontier defenses, and limiting the colonists’ rights when they believed that the Native Americans were of true concern. Bacon argues that these claims mean that the governor is deliberately attempting to ruin the colony of Virginia by allowing it to fall into such disarray. He says, on behalf of the people, and chosen by the consent of the people, that failure to act to fix such measures would make all of the governing figures traitors and open to be “confiscated” by the regular citizens. Bacon also says that these men should be deemed traitors and should be moved to the middle colonies. The stance is very harsh and unforgiving, representative of the general view of average American resentment towards the aristocracy.

Document 8: Account of Horrors of Slavery (Olaudah Equiano, 1757)

Equiano retells the impressions that he first gained as he was sold into slavery in the West Indies. His account begins in his homeland, where slave traders — also Africans — stole them and brought them aboard a slave ship. The entire experience was completely new and foreign to Equiano — the white men, the ship, and brutality on this scale were things that he

had never encountered. On the ship he recalled a level of unprecedented cruelty, with men cut for trying to abandon ship and whipped for denying to eat. When the ship approached Barbadoes, the strangeness of the situation expanded to the wonders of the New World: people on horseback, a desperate slave trade, masters owning slaves on a huge scale with the same level of suppression as on the slave ship. Equiano recounts various inequalities between the white men and the Africans; for example, Europeans receive no punishment for sexually taking advantage of a black slave girl, but the other way around could warrant terrible punishment or death. Separating families, hanging, burning, whipping, cutting, and countless other abuses were mentioned in Equiano's passage, and told in a hopeless tone. The tone was matched by Equiano's memory of wishing death (without success) over a slave life for such horrors; this is the widespread sentiment of African slaves, sold only for the benefit of white men.

Synthesis

Were the roles of Europeans as servants and Africans as slaves based mostly on racial connotations or on economic availability? Which makes the most sense?

Although it is reasonable to infer that the role of indentured European servants as "servants" and African laborers as lower "slaves" is due to racism, it is actually the economic availability of the Africans that allowed for their exploitation and the subsequent racism. As a result, it is not that one of these schools of thought are wrong; instead, the idea of cheap labor led to a role of racial subordination.

Equiano, for example, notes that the white men were sometimes as cruel to one another as they were to the slaves: he recounted a "white man ... flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute." This reduces the possibility that the cruelty of slaves was only due to race. As Waterhouse and Bacon mention, the Native Americans were the more aggressive race (through their attack of the Virginian settlement and through their competitive trading with the aristocracy) probably elicited more racism and hatred between the two groups. To say that the African race, who had never done much harm to the Europeans (none more than Cato of the Stono Rebellion, which did not nearly match the scale of the rebellions by the Native Americans or the indentured servants), is not a well-founded argument.

Instead of an inherent hatred of the Native Americans, the more major cause of their enslavement and suppression was a new perceived inferiority because of their economic availability. As was shown in Bacon's strong support, the indentured servants as a whole had a great level of power over society; Bacon's Rebellion led servant masters to realize that their workforce of indentured servants were a potentially dangerous and lossy source of labor; instead, they turned to the increasingly cheap African labor. As the slave trade increased, people were herded into slave ships and maintained with the bare necessities for survival, punished incessantly by the cruelties and despair that Equiano noted, providing a cheap and available

source of labor — it built up an impressive system of economic exchange. Because they could not and did not have any significant revolt against the Europeans, this was probably perceived as a sign of weakness that the Europeans interpreted as their own superiority. This led to a vicious cycle of increasing racism and suppression that led to greater and greater social gaps, a play on politics and power based on their changing beliefs.

How did the increasing complexity of the colonial South change the relationships between rich and poor; black, red, and white; free and unfree?

A more complex society settled into a system of classes centered around the wealthy and powerful free Englishmen. What began as a give-take relationship between the new colonists and the Native American population became more of a one-sided aggression; what was once a job of hope as an indentured servant became a life of suppression by the aristocracy; what was once a modest source of labor from the African slaves became a culture of extreme oppression and brutality. In every situation, the white majority won over the unfree and un-white, which in turn invoked hatred directed back at them.

The Native Americans had the largest cultural switch in their society. Waterhouse mentioned that they had previously been “friendly entertained at the tables of the English, and commonly lodged in the bed-chambers,” meaning that there existed an amity between the two groups prior. What they did not realize was that when they pushed for Native American land and won the skirmishes along the border, there built up a hatred for them. This exploded in the attack of the Powhatans in 1622, which was followed by a swift retaliation and change of mind: the Native Americans were not allies but “Savages,” and then the Europeans believed that in return for the attack they deserved absolute jurisdiction and control over the Native Americans. Overall, this fostered a new hatred between the two groups and an increased English prevalence when they defeated the Native Americans.

The increasing awareness and population of the indentured servants gave a build-up of the sentiment of hate amongst the poorer white citizens — namely, the indentured servants — and the aristocratic minority — mostly royal governors. Bacon wrote a list of wrongs the average colonists of the Virginian colony felt that the governor had placed against them, and he created extensive terms for which the governor was to follow, exemplifying the extent of hatred that existed even within the white population. In this way, society was stratified one level further, with a level of rich white men on top, followed by the less wealthy and powerful commoners underneath them.

The slaves had little cultural change in the Americas except for an increasingly worsening situation. Equiano notes in his account that men were herded over in slave ships of terrible conditions, and that there was inexplicable inequality between the African Americans and their white counterparts. In the eye of the white slave owners, the greater volume of the slave trade made the slaves more commonplace and replaceable; the value of the life of a slave greatly decreased, almost like the inflation of money.

Overall, the culture and society of the colonies became more complex as it became more stratified. Very often would an American be poor and suppressed, whether a slave or an indentured servant. As a result, a new American identity of suppression and freedom-seeking would arise, which formed the basis for the great number of rebellions such as Bacon's and Leisler's rebellion, as well as the American Revolutionary War.

Chapter 3

Document 1: Model of Christian Charity (John Winthrop, 1630)

In this document, Winthrop (Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony) urges his people to create a society with religion blended in, to have a "due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical." He urges that the colonists should be "professing [them]selves fellow members of Christ" and consider their work to be for God as well as for society, so that God's grace will be upon them. This, he explains, will have to be carried out in regular life rather than in theory only at church; he also says that it is necessary to do this with honesty. Winthrop concludes with his belief that his city should be a religious model for all other cities, and that following his guidelines to become a city of faith would maintain God's gift of help to the colonists. Throughout the document, Winthrop maintains the "evil" world is born with "Curses upon us," in which Christianity is "maintain[ed] as a truth in profession only"; however, he asserts optimistically that his plan will save the city.

Document 3: Captivity during King Philip's War (Mary Rowlandson, 1675)

Rowlandson describes her account of her capture by the Native Americans and the mindset by which she survived. The account begins with the fight that resulted in her capture, a battle of King Philip's War: there was a panic as the Native Americans invaded, leaving many from both sides injured or dead, eventually leading to the colonists' defeat. When she and her children were captured, she expressed her fleeting thought to take her own life rather than to be taken by the "ravenous beasts" of the Native Americans, but she decided against it. It turned out to be a fortuitous move for her: she goes on to explain that despite the great longing she felt to return to the normal colonial life, she was not abused by the Native Americans despite being held prisoner, and she felt the strong pull of God's grace. By saying this, Rowlandson portrays an interesting and unique account of the Native Americans only possible by being taken captive and experiencing living with the Native Americans: at first, she described the Wampanoags as "barbarous creatures," yet ones that "offer[ed] [her] the least bit of unchastity" — she ascribed this to God, saying that she "ha[s] learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles, and to be quieted under them." Thus, her view of the Native Americans grew greatly sympathetic and gentle, knowing the true nature of the indigenous people.

Essay: "Worlds of Goods" by T. H. Breen

The historical discussions of the rise of consumerism in the Americas, especially through trade with England, are brought up in Breen's essay. He brings up the claim of the importance of consumer commercialism in the Americas that allowed the colonies and all of its citizens to prosper. To strengthen his claim, an alternate theory about the "self-sufficient yeoman" as the major advancement in American economy — the idea of the patriotic, inventive self-made man — is brought up and refuted for its lack of evidence. On the contrary, historians Appleby and Lemon find strong evidence for Breen's claim of capitalism, "witness[ing] a steady commercialization of economic life" and people "far from being opposed to the market ... act[ing] as agents of capitalism." This is further supported by statistics regarding the rise of trade between the colonies and their mother nation, as well as regarding the resultant benefit to the colonies and dependency on Great Britain. Then Breen describes the implementation of this new system: which items were desirable, to what ends the colonists looked for tradeable items, the spread of influence from the rich to the poor. This he capitalizes in the discussion of tea, one of the many commodities sold with increasing desirability for all classes and dependence on England, even if it is not a very practical application — it is the drive for consumerism that allows this. Other indirect effects are described: for example, the increase in choice (and therefore economic power), the proliferation of the peddler profession, the increased demand for cost efficiency and style, the entertainment of shopping, a unity of goods between the colonies, the paradox of "Americanization ... through Anglicanization," a stronger connection between the trading partners; all these stemmed from an increased flow of goods.

Synthesis

What psychological anxieties might have resulted from the transition of religious colonies into secular societies? In what ways might these anxieties have been manifested in society?

For the religious, the change to a secular society would surely cause extreme anxiety because of the lack of faith. Not only are people leaving the religion and the membership physically shrinks, but it may also matter that the belief systems instilled in that religion may be forgotten due to a lack of support. In society, this may be represented by the decline in registered members of a faith, as well as attempts to restore faith to prior levels.

For instance, John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, created a model for the future of Christianity in his colony. Originally, the colony had been formed on Puritan ideals, but the importance of religiosity was waning; as a result, efforts such as Winthrop's became more evident. In his model, he describes the outside, secular-becoming world as one of "evil" where their "prayers [will be] turned into Curses" — he diagnoses the problem as one without sufficient religiosity, saying that the colony must be "both civil and ecclesiastical." In this way, Winthrop asks not to completely overhaul the new systems of government that were popular in the liberal society of the 1700s, but asks to re-introduce

Christianity back into a major role in society — it is more of a compromise than a demand in order to coax more people into keeping a strong religious belief. Ultimately, the Great Awakening was the largest movement that encouraged people to join Christianity, and it greatly affected culture and society by reviving Protestantism to some extent, a great push similar to Winthrop's that relieved some of this anxiety.

How did the population of the northern colonies differ from that of the South in terms of occupation and ethnic background? How did this contribute to a colonial world different from that of the plantation south?

The population of the North was generally more religious and less likely to farm. As shown in Winthrop's description of the world as-is as evil, it becomes clear that society has a strong foothold in religion, especially those in the Puritan denomination. This strong religious background affected everything from the community-based governments and the so-called "Protestant work ethic." Ethnically, there was little diversity; most of the New Englanders came from England to escape religious persecution.

The South, on the other hand, is well-suited for farming in its more tropical climate. From the get-go, the colonists realized the importance of using the land for cash crops through plantations and slave systems. This land was generally more ethnically diverse, not forced here for religious reasons as some colonies in New England were. A greater part of their population was made up of slaves than in the northern and middle colonies; this was very important for the plantation life that fueled much of the economy in the South. This led to the horrors associated with slavery, such as in Equiano's account, to become a part of the identity of the South. In contrast, in the large cities of the North such as Boston, there arose a large economy grown around trade, as described by Breen, because there were large trading hubs and less slavery. In this way, the presence of slaves in the South was a major factor in determining the economics of a region.