American Life in the Seventeenth Century

1607 – 1692
The Unhealthy Chesapeake

Diseases ravaged the people in the Chesapeake

Malaria
- Fever, shivering, pain in the joints and headache spread by being bitten by an infected mosquito

Dysentery
- Inflammation of intestines leading to bloody diarrhea and dehydration caused by drinking infected water or contact with people already infected

Typhoid
- Infectious bacteria that causes fever and diarrhea caused by contact with infected food, water, or other people already infected
The Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century
The Unhealthy Chesapeake

- Low life expectancy
  - 1/2 the people born in Chesapeake did not survive to their 20th birthday
  - Few lived to their full life expectancy of 40 for women or 50 for men
The Unhealthy Chesapeake

- The Chesapeake grew slowly in the 1600s because of this; it grew mostly from new immigrants from Europe, not natural birth
  - Most immigrants were single men in late teens or early 20s
  - Most new immigrants died soon after arrival
  - Survivors in the Chesapeake competed for scarce women; women were outnumbered 6 to 1 (in 1650) and 3 to 2 (by 1700)
Families were few and fragile
- Most men could not find mates
- Most marriages ended with death of a spouse in 7 years
- Few children reached adulthood with both parents; almost none knew a grandparent
- Weak family ties reflected in high number of premarital pregnancies (1/3 of brides already pregnant when married)
The Unhealthy Chesapeake

Chesapeake settlers struggled on:

- Native-born whites eventually developed immunities to diseases that had ravaged the original immigrants.
- More women came, allowing for more families.
- By the end of the 1600s, the white population grew because of its birthrate (and not immigration as before).
The Tobacco Economy

- The Chesapeake was well-suited to tobacco growing; most people quickly planted it.
- Tobacco planting quickly depleted the soil.
  - This forced settlers to move inland for more land, further encroaching on Indian land and provoking further attacks.
The Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century
Overproduction of tobacco led to a price depression

- 1.5 million pounds were exported in the 1630s;
  40 million pounds exported by 1700
- Chesapeake farmers responded by growing even more tobacco
Tobacco Prices, 1618 – 1710

Price in pence per pound (sterling)

Break-even price for producers
The Tobacco Economy

- The problem of labor
  - Family procreation was too slow to fill the need for labor
  - The Indians died too quickly from contact with whites (because of diseases)
  - African slaves cost too much money
Indentured servants became the solution to the Chesapeake labor problem

- These were white English farmers who had been displaced by the enclosure movement
- They voluntarily mortgaged their work in the Chesapeake for several years to get a transatlantic passage and “freedom dues” after their time was up (a few barrels of corn, clothing, and possibly a small piece of land)
The Tobacco Economy

- The headright system encouraged indentured servants to come
  - Whoever paid the passage of the laborer got 50 acres of land
  - Masters – not servants – received benefits (in land); some masters got huge estates by importing many servants
- By 1700 – 100,000 indentured servants had come to the Chesapeake, 3/4 of all European immigrants
Indentured servants had difficult lives

- They were basically “white slaves” who had the hope of eventual freedom
- Received harsh punishment (including lengthened service) for misbehavior
- Land grants as part of freedom dues became less common as good land became more scarce
- Even after freedom was granted, poor workers had little choice but to rent themselves out to former masters for very low wages
Frustrated Freemen and Bacon’s Rebellion

- In the late 1600s large numbers of young, poor discontented men lived in the Chesapeake area.
  - These men had little access to land or women for marriage.
- In 1670 the Virginia assembly disenfranchised most landless men because they caused “tumults” and “disturbance.”
Frustrated Freemen and Bacon’s Rebellion

In 1676 1,000 Virginians, led by 29-year-old planter Nathaniel Bacon rebelled

- Most rebels were frontiersman forced into backcountry searching for farmable land
- They rebels resented Governor Berkeley’s relations with the Indians
  - The governor monopolized the fur trade with the Indians in the Chesapeake
  - He also refused to retaliate for Indian attacks on frontier settlements
Nathaniel Bacon
Frustrated Freemen and Bacon’s Rebellion

Bacon’s Rebellion

- Rebels attacked the Indians, whether they were friendly or not to whites, as revenge for their attacks.
- Governor Berkeley driven from Jamestown and they then burned the city.
- Rebels then went on a rampage of plundering.
- During the rebellion, Bacon suddenly died of disease.
- After they lost their leader, Berkeley was able to brutally crush the rebellion and hanged 20 rebels.
Bacon’s Rebellion

In Bacon’s Rebellion, Governor Berkeley fled to the Eastern Shore because it was the only part of Virginia strongly loyal to him. Berkeley raised a militia there by promising them tax exemption for 21 years.
Settlers Fighting Native Americans During Bacon's Rebellion
Governor Berkeley and the Rebels
Frustrated Freemen and Bacon’s Rebellion

- Bacon’s rebellion exposed resentment between inland frontiersman and landless former servants against gentry on coastal plantations
  - The rebellion was suppressed, but resentment remained
  - Upper class planters searched for laborers less likely to rebel
  - This led to large-scale African slavery
Colonial Slavery

From 1500 to 1800, 10 million Africans were carried as slaves to the New World.

- Of these, only 400,000 came to North America; most of these came after 1700.
- Most slaves were transported to South America or the West Indies.
The Atlantic Slave Trade
Colonial Slavery

During the 1600s, only a few African slaves came to North America.

In 1619 slaves were first introduced in Jamestown.

By 1670 slaves only numbered 2,000 (out of a total population of 35,500).

- Slaves were only 7% of the 50,000 total number of people in all the southern plantation colonies together.

The reason few slaves were imported is because struggling white colonists could not afford the high prices for slaves who might die soon after arrival.

- White indentured servants were fall less costly than Africans.
Landing of Negroes at Jamestown
Colonial Slavery

During the 1680s, changes in Europe and America led to African enslavement.

- Rising wages in England meant that less people were willing to sell themselves as indentured servants in America.
- Large planters were fearful of large numbers of mutinous former servants (as demonstrated by Bacon’s Rebellion).
- Established planters with a generation (or more) in America now had income to spend on slaves.
Colonial Slavery

The rise of slavery in America

- By the mid 1680s, black slaves outnumbered white servants.
- In 1698 the Royal African Company lost its charter (granted in 1672) for a monopoly on slave transport to Americas.
- Americans (especially Rhode Islanders) moved in to transport slaves to America.
- By the mid 1700s, slaves came to outnumber whites in some Southern colonies.
Colonial Slavery

- Most slaves came from the west coast of Africa (from Senegal to Angola)
- They were captured by African coastal tribes, transported to the coast, and sold to European and American buyers
- On the coast they were branded and bound and the put on ships
- The ship voyage from Africa to America was known as the Middle Passage
  - Africans packed onto ships where up to 20% died
- Slaves were then sold in America on auction blocks in port cities
Captures Slaves Being Transported to the Coast
Diagram of a Slave Ship
The Deck of a Slave Ship
A Slave Auction
Colonial Slavery

- As the number of slaves increased, white colonists acted to put down the perceived racial threat.
- Slavery was transformed from an economic to an economic and racial institution.
  - In the early 1600s, the differences between slaves and servants were still unclear.
  - Beginning in 1662, “slave codes” were adopted, decreeing strict conditions of slavery:
    - Made blacks (and their children) property (“chattels”) for the life of their white masters.
    - Some colonies made it a crime to teach a slave to read or write.
    - Even conversion to Christianity did not qualify a slave for freedom.
Africans in America

Black slavery in the deep South was the harshest
- Worked on rice and indigo plantations
- Climate was extremely unhealthy
- Labor was difficult and lonely (because plantations were so spread out)
- Mostly male laborers (meaning no family life for most)
- Slave population only increased with fresh imports, not natural procreation
Harvesting on a Rice Plantation
Africans in America

- Black slaves in the Chesapeake had an easier life than those in the Deep South
  - There the primarily grew tobacco, which was a less physically demanding crop to grow
  - Plantations were closer together (allowing for more social contact among Africans)
  - An increasing number of female slaves made families possible
    - Increasing children made Chesapeake slaves one of the few slave societies in history to perpetuate itself through natural reproduction
Slaves Working in a Tobacco Factory
Africans in America

- A black culture, distinctive from American and African culture developed, including black religion, speech, and customs
  - Gullah, a blend of English and several African languages, was a unique black language developed on the islands off South Carolina
  - The impact of this black culture
    - Words such as goober (peanut); gumbo (okra); voodoo (witchcraft) from Gullah
    - The ringshout contributed to jazz
    - The banjo and bongo drum
Islands on the Coast of South Carolina Where Gullah Developed
Africans in America

- Slave revolts did occur, but overall there were few of them
  - Slaves were much more easy to manage than white indentured servants
- In 1712 a rebellion in New York occurred in which 12 whites were killed and 21 blacks were executed (some by burning at stake with a slow fire)
- In 1739, the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina occurred
  - Blacks rebelled and tried to march to Spanish Florida, but were stopped by the white militia
A Slave Rebellion
Southern Society

- The spread of slavery led to a widening gap between the upper and lower class whites
  - By the 1700s, a defined hierarchy of wealth and status developed
Southern Society

- At the highest level was an elite group of white planters
  - On their plantations, large gangs of slaves worked huge tracts of land
  - These planters dominated the political and economic life of the South
  - During the 1600s, they were a generally hard-working and businesslike group, not the leisure-loving gentlemen that were caricatured later
A Southern Plantation House
Southern Society

- The small farmers were the largest social group
  - They were far below the planters in wealth and power
  - They owned some land and possibly even 1 or 2 slaves, but still lived a poor, bare existence
A Small Farmer at His Plow
Southern Society

- **Landless whites**
  - These were mostly unlucky former indentured servants
  - They worked for wages on others people’s farms or in trades
A Poor White Southerner
Southern Society

- Indentured servants
  - Those still working under contract
  - By the end of the 1600s their numbers decreased as they were replaced by black slaves
Southern Society

- **Black slaves**
  - They were at the lowest level of society
  - They had no hope of eventual freedom or a change in condition, unlike indentured servants
Slaves at Work on a Southern Plantation
Southern Society

- Southern society revolved around the plantation
  - Few cities developed; an urban professional class (like lawyers, bankers) was slow to emerge
  - Poor roads meant that most transportation was done over waterways
The New England Family

- New England enjoyed a much healthier climate than the South
  - Clean water and cool temperatures retarded the growth of disease
  - Settlers added 10 years to their lives after moving from England, for an average lifespan of 70 years
The New England Colonies
The New England Family

- New Englanders generally migrated as families
  - Population grew from natural reproduction
  - Early marriage (by their early 20s); women bore children every 2 years until menopause
  - The typical woman would have 10 children (with 8 surviving past infancy)
  - Many women died during childbirth and women came to fear pregnancy
A Puritan Family
The New England Family

- Lives of children in New England
  - They lived in a stable, nurturing environment but were expected to learn obedience
  - They received guidance not only from parents but also grandparents
  - Family stability was reflected in their low premarital pregnancy rate and generally strong, peaceful social structure in colonial New England
The New England Family

- Southern women’s rights were more advanced because men frequently died young and there were fewer of them there
  - Women in the South were allowed to keep separate rights to property (from their husbands) and to inherit their husband’s estate
- New England women gave up property rights upon marriage
  - Puritan lawmakers worried about dividing men and women in marriage based on property
  - Widows did have secure rights to property (in contrast with England)
The New England Family

- Early women’s rights in New England
  - Women were seen as morally weaker than men (based on the story of Eve in the Bible)
  - They believed that the wife should subject herself to her husband and did not allow women to vote
  - However, a husband’s power over his wife was not absolute; for example, punishment was handed out to abusive spouses
  - Midwives (who delivered babies) created a network of women who shared trials of pregnancy and motherhood separate from the control of men
The New England Family

- Puritan laws kept up integrity of marriages
  - Divorce was very rare; separated couples were frequently ordered to reunite by the authorities
  - Adultery and abandonment were some of the few reasons allowed for divorce
  - Adulterers were publicly whipped and forced to wear a capital letter “A” on their clothing for the rest of their lives
The Scarlet Letter
Life in the New England Towns

- Tight-knit societies were based around small villages and farms
  - New England settlements were blocked in by the Indians, French, Dutch
  - Puritans were encouraged to all watch out for the moral health of all others
Life in the New England Towns

The expansion of settlement was orderly in New England, as opposed to the haphazard growth of the Chesapeake.

- New towns had to be legally chartered by colonial authorities.
- The distribution of land and town planning was done by the town fathers (“proprietors”).
- Meetinghouse (the church and town hall) surrounded by houses, with a village green (where the militia could train).
- Each family had several pieces of land, including a woodlot (for fuel), land for crops, and pasture.
Land Use in Rowley, Massachusetts, ca. 1650
Life in the New England Towns

- Towns with over 50 families were required to provide an elementary education.
- 1/2 the adults were literate in New England.
- In 1636, Harvard College was established to train local boys for the ministry.
  - The first college (William and Mary) was not established in Virginia until 1693.
An Early 18th Century View of Harvard College
Life in the New England Towns

- All adult males met together, discussed issues, and voted at the town meeting in New England.
- Thomas Jefferson called these meetings “the best school of political liberty the world ever saw”
The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials

In the mid 1600s, religious zeal among the Puritans began to wane, because of the passage of time and the fact that Puritan settlements became more spread out.

- To combat this, Puritan preachers began using the “jeremiad”, or strong calls to repentance and stronger faithfulness.
  - Named for Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied God’s judgments on Israel unless they repented.
- Decline in public conversions (testimonials by people who had received God’s grace and deserved to become members of the church as God’s elect) were most alarming to church leaders.
The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials

- In 1662 the Half-Way Covenant was introduced
  - Modification of the “covenant” between the church and its believers
  - Church would admit to baptism, but not “full communion” unconverted children of existing members
  - Weakened the distinction between the “elect” and others, diluting the purity of the original settlement

- Eventually, the Puritan church was opened to all, converted or not
  - Fully erased the distinction between the elect and others
  - Religious purity was sacrificed for wider participation
The Salem Witch trials began in 1692 in Massachusetts

- Some young girls claimed to be possessed by some older women who they claimed were witches
- In the ensuing “witch hunt”, 20 people were killed, 19 by hanging; 1 by pressing; 2 dogs were also hanged
The Trial of a Suspected Witch in Salem
The Hanging of Bridget Bishop During the Salem Witch Trials
The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials

- Witch hunts were then common in Europe.
- Several outbreaks had occurred before in the colonies, and were often directed against property-owning women.
The Half-Way Covenant and the Salem Witch Trials

- The causes of the Salem trial were different
  - Not only from the superstitions of the time
  - Also reflected the widening social stratification of New England and the fear that Puritanism was being corrupted by commercialism
    - Most of the accused witches came from families associated with Salem’s growing market economy, closer to coast
    - The accusers came mostly from subsistence farming families in the interior of Salem
The Geography of Witchcraft: Salem Village, 1692
By 1693, the witchcraft hysteria had ended in Salem

- The Massachusetts governor acted (alarmed by accusation against his wife) with responsible members of the clergy
- He prohibited further trials and pardoned convicted witches

20 years later, the Massachusetts legislature annulled the convictions of accused witches and paid reparations to their heirs
The New England Way of Life

- The land left its mark on New Englanders
  - Difficult farming because of rocky soil
  - Back-breaking work shaped strong character
  - Less ethnically diverse (immigrants were not attracted to farms or harsh religious life)
  - Climate (hot in the summer, cold in the winter) led to diversified agriculture and industry, instead of relying on a few staple crops (like cotton, tobacco)
  - Mostly small farms because of intersection of rivers and mountains; no broad, fertile expanses of land like in South
  - Also important because black slavery was not profitable on small farms
The New England Way of Life

Contrasting Indian and English views of land

- Indians affected land only lightly
  - Saw right to use the land, but the idea of individual ownership of the land was alien to them
- The English radically affected land
  - Condemned Indians for “wasting” (by not using) the land; they used this as reason for taking land from Indians
  - Believed their duty was to “improve” the land by clearing forests, farming, building roads and houses
The New England Way of Life

- New Englanders left their mark on land
  - The introduction of livestock (pigs, horses, sheep, cattle) forced them to clear forests to create pastureland, increasing erosion and flooding
  - Used harbors for shipping and commerce, leading to shipbuilding and the use of forests
  - Codfish caught of coast, generating much wealth
The New England Way of Life

- The importance of New England
  - New Englanders spread throughout the nation, influencing other Americans
  - They built orderly communities around country, based on those in New England
  - “Yankee ingenuity” came to be part of the entire nation known for its can-do attitude
  - The “New England conscience” of high idealism inspired later reformers
The Early Settlers’ Days and Ways

- Most colonists were farmers who lived hard and humble, but comfortable lives.
- The colonists lived in abundance compared to Europeans.
  - Land was cheap.
  - They also received higher wages.
The Early Settlers’ Days and Ways

- Most colonists were middle class
  - Comfortable upper classes had no reason to leave Europe (‘‘Dukes don’t emigrate’’)
  - Poor people (except for indentured servants) didn’t have the money to emigrate
Colonists tried to prevent class distinctions in America

- Society was much more egalitarian than stratified Europe, especially the northern and middle colonies
- Some tried to recreate class distinctions, but generally were not successful
  - Rebellions of lower classes against upper classes occurred to control open class distinctions, such as Bacon’s Rebellion, Maryland Protestant rebellion (1676), Leisler’s Rebellion (1689 – 1691)