

## 1. Introduction



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In 1723, a tired teenager stepped off a boat onto a wharf in Philadelphia. He was an odd-looking sight. Not having luggage, he had stuffed his pockets with extra clothes. The young man followed a group of “clean dressed people” into a Quaker meetinghouse, where he soon fell asleep.

The sleeping teenager with the lumpy clothes was Benjamin Franklin. He had recently run away from his brother James’s print shop in Boston. When he was 12, Franklin had signed a [contract](#) to work for his brother for nine years. But after enduring James’s nasty temper for five years, Franklin packed his pockets and left.

In Philadelphia, Franklin quickly found work as a printer’s assistant. Within a few years, he had saved enough money to open his own print shop. His first success was a newspaper called the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

In 1732, readers of the *Gazette* saw an advertisement for *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. An almanac is a book, published annually, that contains weather predictions, planting advice for farmers, and

information on other useful subjects. According to the ad, *Poor Richard's Almanac* was written by "Richard Saunders" and printed by B. Franklin. Nobody knew then that author and printer were the same person.

Franklin also printed proverbs, or wise sayings, in his almanacs. Some, like these, are still remembered today:

*A penny saved is a penny earned.*

*Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.*

*Fish and visitors smell in three days.*

*Poor Richard's Almanac* sold so well that Franklin was able to retire at age 42. A man of many talents, he spent the rest of his long life as a scientist, inventor, political leader, diplomat, and national postmaster.

Franklin's rise from penniless runaway to wealthy printer was one of many colonial success stories. In this chapter, you will learn what life was like for people throughout the colonies in the 1700s.

1. Suppose you are living in England in the 1700s. You have just finished reading "The Untold Story of Life in the American Colonies," a special edition of the *London Chronicle*. Below are eight headlines from this edition of the newspaper. Using a scale from 1 to 3, rate how accurate you think each headline is.

1: mostly accurate    2: partly accurate    3: mostly inaccurate

\_\_\_\_\_ Study Shows Farmers Spend Several Hours Playing Cards Each Day

\_\_\_\_\_ Unemployment Rises in Cities—Colonists Return to Mother Country

\_\_\_\_\_ Colonists Ignore Principles of Self-Government

\_\_\_\_\_ African Merchants Make Fortunes Trading Cloth for Rum

\_\_\_\_\_ Preachers Stir Colonists into a Frenzy

\_\_\_\_\_ Shocking Investigation: New England Schools Lack Spelling, Reading, and Arithmetic

\_\_\_\_\_ New Survey: American Wives Say They Work Harder Than Servants

\_\_\_\_\_ Colonists Use Honeybees to Get Work Done

## 2. Life on a Farm



[Click to read caption](#)

The colonists developed an economy based on farming, commerce (buying and selling goods), and handcrafts. Nine out of ten people lived on small family farms. Most farm families raised or made nearly everything they needed. One farmer wrote with pride about a typical year, “Nothing to wear, eat, or drink was purchased, as my farm provided all.”

The first and hardest task facing farm families was to clear the land of trees. The colonists had only simple, basic tools. They cut down trees with axes and saws. Then they used the same tools to cut square timbers and flat planks for building houses, barns, and fences.

Imagine living on a colonial farm. Your home is a single large room with a fireplace at one end. In this room, your family cooks, eats, and sleeps. Your parents sleep in a large bed built into one corner. Your younger brothers and sisters sleep in a smaller trundle bed, a bed that can slide under the big bed during the day. At bedtime, you climb a ladder next to the chimney to sleep in an attic or a loft. As your family grows, you help to build another room on the other side of the chimney.

The fireplace is the only source of heat for warmth and cooking, so keeping a supply of firewood is important. The fire is kept burning all the time because, without matches, it is very difficult to light a new one.

Cooking is one of the most dangerous jobs on your farm. Food is cooked in heavy iron pots hung over an open fire. While lifting or stirring these pots, your mother might burn her hands, scorch her clothes, or strain her back.

Your day on the farm starts before sunrise. Everyone wakes up early to share the work. Chores include cutting wood, feeding animals, clearing land, tending crops, building fences, making furniture and tools, gathering eggs, spinning thread, weaving cloth, sewing clothes, making candles and soap, cooking, cleaning, and caring for babies.

1. *Key Question*: How accurate is the headline “Study Shows Farmers Spend Several Hours Playing Cards Each Day”: mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?
2. What proportion of the colonial population lived on small family farms?
3. List two ways life on a farm in the 1700s was different from your life today.
4. If the headline about farm life is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

### 3. Life in Cities



Click to read caption

In 1750, one colonist out of 20 lived in a city. Compared to the quiet farm life, cities were exciting places.

The heart of the city was the waterfront. There, ships brought news from England as well as eagerly awaited items such as paint, carpets, furniture, and books.

Just beyond the docks, a marketplace bustled with fishers selling their catch and farmers selling fresh eggs, milk, and cheese. Close by were taverns, where food and drink were served. People gathered there to exchange gossip and news from other colonies.

The nearby streets were lined with shops. Sparks flew from the blacksmith's block as he hammered iron into tools. Shoemakers, clockmakers, silversmiths, tailors, and other craftspeople turned out goods based on the latest designs from England. There were barbers to cut colonists' hair and wigmakers to make it look long again.

Cities were noisy, smelly places. Church bells rang out several times a day. Carts clattered loudly over streets paved with round

cobblestones. The air was filled with the stench of rotting garbage and open sewers, but the colonists were used to it. Animals ran loose in the street. During hot weather, clouds of flies and mosquitoes swarmed about.

City homes were close together on winding streets. Most were built of wood with thatched roofs, like the houses the colonists had left behind in Europe. Their windows were small, because glass was costly.

For lighting, colonists used torches made of pine that burned brightly when they were wedged between hearthstones in the fireplace. Colonists also burned grease in metal containers called “betty lamps” and made candles scented with bayberries.

With torches and candles lighting homes, fire was a constant danger. Colonists kept fire buckets hanging by their front doors. When a fire broke out, the whole town helped to put it out. Grabbing their buckets, colonists formed a double line from the fire to a river, pond, or well. They passed the buckets full of water from hand to hand up one line to the fire. Then the empty buckets went back down the opposite line to be refilled.

1. *Key Question:* How accurate is the headline “Unemployment Rises in Cities—Colonists Return to Mother Country”: mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?
2. What proportion of the colonial population lived in cities?
3. Use your senses to describe life in a colonial city. Tell what you might see, hear, smell, taste, and touch there.
4. If the headline about city life is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

#### 4. Rights of Colonists

Colonists in America saw themselves as English citizens. They expected the same [rights](#) that citizens enjoyed in England. The most important of these was the right to have a voice in their government.

**Magna Carta** The English people had won the right to participate in their government only after a long struggle. A key victory in this struggle came in 1215, when King John agreed to sign [Magna Carta](#), or “Great Charter.” This agreement established the idea that the power of the monarch, or ruler, was limited. Not even the king was above the law.

The next major victory was the founding of [Parliament](#) in 1265. Parliament was made up of representatives from across England. Over time, it became a lawmaking body with the power to approve laws and taxes proposed by the king or queen.

In 1685, James, the Duke of York, became King James II. The king did not want to share power with an elected assembly in New York. Nor did he want to share power with an elected Parliament in England. When he tried to rule without Parliament, James was forced off his throne. This change in power, which took place without bloodshed, is known as the Glorious Revolution.



Click to read caption

**The English Bill of Rights** In 1689, Parliament offered the crown to Prince William of Orange and his wife, Mary. In exchange, they had to agree to an act, or law, known as the [English Bill of Rights](#). This act said that the power to make laws and impose taxes belonged to the people's elected representatives in Parliament and to no one else. It also included a bill, or list, of rights that belonged to the people. Among these were the right to petition the king (request him to change something) and the right to trial by jury.

English colonists saw the Glorious Revolution as a victory not only for Parliament, but for their colonial assemblies as well. They wanted to choose the people who made their laws and set their taxes. After all, this was a cherished right of all English citizens.

**Crime and Punishment** Each colonial assembly passed its own laws defining crimes and punishments. However, most crimes were treated similarly in all the colonies.

Certain very serious crimes could be punished by death. These included murder, treason (acts of disloyalty toward the government), and piracy (robbery at sea). Puritans in New England added other



crimes to this list based on their understanding of God's law in the Bible. In New England, colonists could be put to death for "denying the true God" or for striking or cursing their parents.

Crimes such as theft, forgery, and highway robbery carried harsh punishments in every colony. For these crimes, people might be jailed, whipped, or branded with hot irons.

Lesser crimes, such as drunkenness and breaking the Sabbath (working or traveling on Sunday), were punished with fines, short jail terms, or public humiliation. A colonist caught breaking the Sabbath, for example, might be locked in the town stocks. The stocks were a heavy wooden frame with holes for a person's neck, wrists, and ankles. Lawbreakers were locked for hours in this device in a public place where others could ridicule them.



[Click to read caption](#)

No group had firmer ideas about right and wrong than New England's Puritans. The Puritans required everyone to attend church on Sundays. They also forbade anyone to work or play on that day. The Puritans wrote their Sunday laws in books with blue paper bindings. For this reason, these rules came to be known as blue laws. Some blue laws persist to this day. In Connecticut, for example, it is still illegal for stores to sell alcohol on Sundays.

The Puritans were constantly on the watch for signs of Satan (believed to be an evil angel who rebelled against God). Satan was thought to work through witches. In 1692, fear of witchcraft overtook residents of Salem, Massachusetts, when several girls were seen acting strangely in church. The girls accused their neighbors of being witches and putting spells on them. Nineteen accused witches were

put to death during the Salem witch trials before calm was restored and the townspeople realized that the girls' accusations were untrue.

1. *Key Question*: How accurate is the headline "Colonists Ignore Principles of Self-Government": mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?

2. How did colonists see themselves? Why was this important for their rights?

3. How were the rights of English citizens strengthened during each of these years? Include the words in parentheses in your answers.

1215 (*Magna Carta, king*)

1265 (*Parliament, laws*)

1689 (*English Bill of Rights, taxes*)

4. If the headline about colonists' rights is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

## 5. Life for African Americans

Slavery in the colonies began in Virginia, with tobacco planters. From there, it spread both north and south. By the early 1700s, enslaved Africans were living in every colony. Even Benjamin Franklin owned slaves for a time. But like most people in the New England and Middle Colonies, Franklin found that hiring workers when he needed them cost less than owning slaves.

In the Southern Colonies, however, slavery expanded rapidly. From Virginia to Georgia, slaves helped raise tobacco, rice, indigo, and other cash crops.

**The Atlantic Slave Trade** Most of the slaves who were brought to the colonies came from West Africa. Year after year, slave ships filled with cloth, guns, and rum sailed from the colonies to the coast of West Africa. There, these goods were traded for Africans. The ships then returned to the Americas carrying their human cargo.

For the Africans packed onto slave ships, the ocean crossing—known as the Middle Passage—was a nightmare. According to his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano (oh-LAU-duh ek-wee-AH-noh) was just ten years old when he was put onto a slave ship. He never forgot “the closeness of the place . . . which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself.” Nor did he forget “the shrieks of the women, and groans of the dying.” The terrified boy refused to eat, hoping “for the last friend, Death, to relieve me.”

Although Equiano survived the voyage, many Africans died of sickness or despair. Even so, the Atlantic slave trade was very profitable. Many colonial merchants built fortunes trading in human beings.

**Work Without Hope** The slaves’ masters in America demanded that the Africans work hard. Most enslaved Africans were put to work in the fields raising crops. Others worked as nurses, carpenters, blacksmiths, drivers, servants, gardeners, and midwives (people who assist women giving birth). Unlike other colonists, slaves had little hope of making a better life. Their position was fixed at the bottom of colonial society.

Some slaves **rebelled** by refusing to work or running away. But most adapted to their unhappy condition as best they could. Slowly and painfully, they began to create a new African American way of life.

1. *Key Question:* How accurate is the headline “African Merchants Make Fortunes Trading Cloth for Rum”: mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?
2. In which colonial regions was slavery found? In which region did it expand most rapidly, and why?
3. Why did slaves have little hope of making a better life for themselves?
4. If the headline about life for African Americans is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

## 6. Religion



Click to read caption

Religion was an important part of colonial life. Most colonists tried to lead good lives based on their faith. Children grew up reading the Bible from cover to cover several times over.

**Puritan Church Services** In New England, the sound of a drum or horn called Puritans to worship on Sunday morning. “Captains of the watch” made sure everyone was a “Sabbathkeeper.” Sometimes houses were searched to ensure that everyone was at church.

Church services were held in the town meetinghouse. This was the most important building in the community and was used for all public meetings. Inside were rows of wooden benches, called pews, and a pulpit (a platform where the preacher stood). A “seating committee” carefully assigned seats, with the best ones going to older, wealthy people.

Services could last as long as five hours. At midday, villagers would go to “noon-houses” near the church to warm themselves by a fire, eat, and socialize. Then they returned to church for the long afternoon sermon.

**The Great Awakening** Beginning in the 1730s, a religious movement known as the [Great Awakening](#) swept through the colonies. This movement was spurred by a feeling that people had lost their religious faith. “The forms of religion were kept up,” a Puritan observed, but there was “little of the power” of God in it.

To revive people’s religious spirit, preachers traveled from town to town holding outdoor “revival” meetings. There, they delivered fiery sermons to huge crowds. Their words touched the hearts and souls of many colonists. Benjamin Franklin wrote about the change he observed in Philadelphia: “It seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms [Bible songs] sung in different families of every street.”

The Great Awakening had a powerful effect on the colonies. It helped spread the idea that all people are equal in the eyes of God. Ordinary people could understand God’s will if they had an open heart and a desire to know God’s truth. By encouraging ideas of liberty, equality, and self-reliance, the Great Awakening helped pave the way for the American Revolution.

1. *Key Question*: How accurate is the headline “Preachers Stir Colonists into a Frenzy”: mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?

2. What two adjectives best describe Puritan church services? Explain.

3. How did the Great Awakening help pave the way for the American Revolution? Number the sentences below from 1 to 5 to show the order in which they occurred.

- \_\_\_\_\_ These new ideas strengthened the principles of liberty, equality, and self-reliance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There was a feeling that people had lost their religious faith.
- \_\_\_\_\_ New ideas, such as “all people are equal in the eyes of God,” spread through the colonies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ By the 1770s, colonists valued the ideals of the Great Awakening, helping pave the way for the American Revolution.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Great Awakening began in the colonies in the 1730s.

## 7. Education

Except in New England, most children in the colonies received little formal education. Neither the Middle nor the Southern Colonies had public schools.

In the Southern Colonies, most families were spread out along rivers. A few neighbors might get together to hire a teacher for their children. Wealthy planters often hired tutors to educate younger children at home. Older children were sent to schools in distant cities, or even England, to complete their education.

In the Middle Colonies, religious differences among Quakers, Catholics, Jews, Baptists, and other religious groups slowed the growth of public education. Each religious group or family had to decide for itself how to educate its children. Some groups built church schools. Others were content to have parents teach their children at home.

Only in New England were towns required to provide public schools. The Puritans' support for education was inspired by their religious faith. They wanted their children to be able to read the Bible.

To encourage education, Massachusetts passed a law in 1647 that required every town with 50 families or more to hire an instructor to teach their children to read and write. Towns with more than 100 families were required to build a school. Similar laws were passed in other New England colonies.



Click to read caption

Parents were asked to contribute whatever they could to the village school. Contributions might be money, vegetables, firewood, or



anything else the school needed. Often, land was set aside as “school meadows” or “school fields.” This land was then rented out to raise money for teachers’ salaries.

Schools were one-room buildings with a chimney and fireplace in the center. There were no boards to write on or maps. Pencils and paper were scarce. Students shouted out spelling words and wrote sums in ink on pieces of bark. There was usually one book, the *New England Primer*, which was used to teach the alphabet, syllables, and prayers.

Most colonists believed that boys needed more education than girls. “Female education, in the best families,” wrote First Lady Abigail Adams, “went no further than writing and arithmetic; in some few and rare instances, music, and dancing.”

1. *Key Question*: How accurate is the headline “Shocking Investigation: New England Schools Lack Spelling, Reading, and Arithmetic”: mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?

2. Explain how education was provided in each region.

- a. New England Colonies
- b. Middle Colonies
- c. Southern Colonies

3. Name two ways in which a colonial school in New England was different from your school.

4. If the headline about education is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

## 8. Colonial Families

The concept of family has changed often throughout history. Today, most people think of a family as being made up of parents and their children. In colonial times, however, families might include grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and stepchildren.

**Marriage** Colonial men and women generally married in their early to mid-20s. Those who arrived in America as indentured servants were not allowed to marry until they had gained their freedom.

Men outnumbered women throughout the colonies. As a result, almost every woman was assured of receiving a marriage proposal. “Maid servants of good honest stock [family],” wrote a colonist, could “choose their husbands out of the better sort of people.” For a young woman, though, life as a wife and mother often proved to be even harder than life as an indentured servant.

**Large Families** Colonial families were generally large. Most families had between seven and ten children. (Benjamin Franklin had 16 brothers and sisters.) Farm families, in particular, needed all the hands they could get to help with chores.

Religious and cultural backgrounds influenced colonists’ ideas about raising children. But almost everywhere in the colonies, children were expected to be productive members of the family.

Married women gave birth many times, but nearly half of all children died before they reached adulthood. Childhood deaths were especially high in the Middle and Southern Colonies, where the deadly disease of malaria raged. Adults often died young as well. After the death of a wife or husband, men and women usually remarried quickly. Thus, households often swelled with stepchildren as well as adopted orphans (children whose parents had died).

Whether colonists lived in cities, in villages, or on isolated farms, their lives focused on their families. Family members took care of one another because there was no one else to do so. Young families often welcomed elderly grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins into their homes when they could no longer care for themselves. It didn’t matter

if there was barely enough room for everyone. No one would turn away a needy relative.

1. *Key Question*: How accurate is the headline “New Survey: American Wives Say They Work Harder Than Servants”: mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?
2. Give one interesting fact about colonial marriage, and tell how marriage in the United States today is different.
3. What is one reason why colonial families were so large?
4. If the headline about colonial families is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

## **9. Leisure**

While most colonists worked hard, they enjoyed their periods of **leisure** (time away from work). They also took advantage of gatherings, such as town meetings and Sunday services, to talk with neighbors and make friends.



[Click to read caption](#)

**Bees and Frolics** When possible, colonists combined work and play by organizing “bees” and “frolics.” New settlers might hold a “chopping bee” in which all the neighbors helped clear the trees off their land. Other frolics included corn-husking bees for men and quilting bees for women. Sharing the work made it faster and more fun.

The Germans introduced house and barn raisings to the colonies. At these events, neighbors joined together to build the frame of a house or barn in one day. The men assembled the four walls flat on the ground and then raised them into place. Meanwhile, the women prepared a huge feast. At the end of the day, everyone danced on the barn's new floor.

**Toys and Sports** Colonial children had a few simple toys, such as dolls, marbles, and tops. They played tag, blindman's bluff, and stoolball, which was related to the English game of cricket (a game like baseball). Children in New England also enjoyed coasting down snowy hills on sleds. Adults must have thought coasting was dangerous, because several communities forbade it.

Adults enjoyed several sports. Almost every village had a bowling green. Here, men rolled egg-shaped balls down a lane of grass toward a white ball called a jack. Colonists also played a game similar to backgammon called tick-tack and a form of billiards (pool) called trock.

In the Southern Colonies, fox hunting with horses and hounds was a popular sport. Card playing was another favorite pastime, one that New England Puritans disapproved of strongly. Horse racing, cockfighting, and bull baiting were also popular in the South.

Fairs were held throughout the colonies. At these events, colonists competed in contests of skill and artistry. There were footraces, wrestling matches, dance contests, and wild scrambles to see who could win a prize by catching a greased pig or climbing a greased pole.

1. *Key Question:* How accurate is the headline "Colonists Use Honeybees to Get Work Done": mostly accurate, partly accurate, or mostly inaccurate?

2. Write a definition for the "bee" described in this section of the student text.

3. Describe two leisure activities you would have enjoyed as an American colonist.

4. If the headline about leisure is inaccurate, write a new, more accurate headline about this topic.

## Summary



Click to read caption

**In this chapter, you read about various aspects of life in the American colonies during the early 1700s.**

**Farms and Cities** The colonists developed an economy based on farming, commerce, and crafts. Farm families produced most of what they needed for themselves. In the villages and cities, many trades and crafts developed.

**Rights of Colonists** American colonists expected to enjoy all the rights of English citizens, especially the right to have a voice in their own government. Colonial assemblies defined crimes and punishments. Punishments were often harsh, but for most of the 1700s, the colonists were content to be ruled by English laws.

**Life for African Americans** Enslaved African Americans had almost no rights or even hope for liberty. After being brought to America in chains, they faced a life of forced obedience and toil.

**Religion** Religion was very important to the colonists. The Great Awakening revived religious feeling and helped spread the idea that all people are equal.

**Education** Most colonial children received little education, except in New England. Instead, they were expected to contribute to the work of the farm or home.

**Family and Leisure** Most colonial families were large. They often included many relatives in addition to parents and their children. Much of colonial life was hard work, but colonists also found time to enjoy sports and games.

### **PROCESSING ACTIVITY**

1. You will now write your conclusions about the American colonies in a newspaper article entitled “What Life Is Really Like in the Colonies.” In this article, you will correct some of the inaccurate statements that were printed in the *London Chronicle*. Include the following in your article:

- an introductory paragraph.
- an accurate description of two or three aspects of life in the colonies. Write one paragraph for each aspect. In your descriptions, include your own conclusions. Support them with information from the primary and secondary sources and your Reading Notes.
- a short concluding paragraph about your overall understanding of life in the colonies.

# READING CHALLENGE

Click to read caption

**In the 1730s and 1740s, the Great Awakening shook up the English colonies. This religious movement caused an outpouring of Christian faith. It also prompted new ways of thinking about the church and society. As a result, it helped lay the foundations for political changes to come.**

Nathan Cole was working on his farm on the morning of October 23, 1740, when he heard the news. George Whitefield was coming.

A famous preacher, Whitefield was known for his powerful sermons. He had traveled all over the colonies, drawing huge crowds wherever he went. Now he was in Connecticut. In fact, he was preaching in nearby Middletown that very morning. Cole knew he had to move fast.

*I dropped my tool . . . and ran to my pasture for my horse with all my might fearing that I should be too late to hear him. I brought my horse home and soon mounted and took my wife up and went forward as fast as I thought the horse could bear . . .*

*And when we came within about half a mile [from the main road] . . . I saw before me a Cloud or fog rising. I first thought it came from the great river, but as I came nearer . . . I heard a noise something like a low, rumbling thunder and presently found it was the noise of horses' feet coming down the road and this Cloud was a Cloud of dust . . . As I drew nearer it seemed like a steady stream of horses and their riders . . . Every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear news from heaven for the saving of Souls.*

—Nathan Cole, in George Leon Walker, *Some Aspects of Religious Life in New England*, 1897.

Thousands of people were rushing to Middletown to hear Whitefield speak. “I saw no man at work in his field,” Cole wrote, “but all seemed to be gone.” When Cole and his wife reached the town, they found a large crowd gathered there. The mood was electric as they waited for Whitefield to appear.



What was behind all this excitement? Why would a preacher's arrival cause a commotion like that of a rock star or a Hollywood celebrity today?

In fact, Whitefield was a superstar of his time. He was the most famous figure in a religious revival that was sweeping the colonies. People were seeking a deep spiritual experience and a direct connection to God. They found that connection in preachers like Whitefield.

### **Origins of the Awakening**

Religion played a major role in the lives of colonists in the early 1700s. Most people attended church regularly. There were a number of different churches, but most provided a similar experience. They emphasized traditional religious teachings. Their ministers were educated men who valued reason over emotion. The atmosphere in church was calm and orderly.



Click to read caption

Some ministers, however, believed that the church had lost its way. They feared that religion had become a collection of formal, empty rituals. They wanted to wake people up and renew their faith. In their sermons, they offered an emotional message of sin and salvation that was aimed at the heart, not the head.

By the 1730s, a split was developing between old-line ministers and those favoring a new way. These two groups became known as the Old Lights and the New Lights. The Old Lights stressed tradition and respect for authority. The New Lights called for a more individual, personal form of worship. They wanted people to feel the spirit of God for themselves.

Whitefield and other New Light ministers often preached at open air revivals. They depicted the glories of heaven and the miseries of hell. Hearing these highly charged sermons, many people were seized by feelings of great joy or despair. They would weep, moan, and fall to the ground. As news of the revivals spread, the movement gained strength.



Click to read caption

### **Leading Lights: Whitefield and Edwards**

A number of ministers played key roles in the Great Awakening. The leading figures, however, were George Whitefield and Jonathan

Edwards. If Whitefield was the star of the movement, Edwards was its most important thinker.

Whitefield was a young Anglican minister in England when he joined the revival movement. In 1739, he defied church authorities by holding revival meetings across the country.

That same year, he traveled to the colonies, where he caused a sensation. Whitefield was a magnificent speaker with a beautiful voice and the skills of an accomplished actor. His words and gestures could lift audiences into an emotional frenzy. He toured from Maine to Georgia, appearing in towns and cities along the way. In Boston, some 20,000 people gathered to hear him speak. He was the most celebrated man in America.

Whitefield was pleased with his success. But he was also troubled by the wealth and vanity he saw in the colonies. Noting the fine clothing worn by wealthy citizens, he argued that Christians should dress simply and plainly. In Boston, he was disturbed to see young children dressed in fancy clothes:

*The little infants who were brought to baptism were wrapped up in such fine things . . . that one would think they were brought thither [there] to be initiated into, rather than to renounce, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world.*

While in Massachusetts, Whitefield visited Jonathan Edwards at his home in Northampton. Edwards had helped start the revival movement and had been a great influence on Whitefield. Edwards, in turn, recognized that Whitefield had given new life to the movement. He decided to increase his own efforts to win converts. In this way, he said, he hoped to “make New England a kind of heaven upon earth.”

S I N N E R S  
IN THE HANDS OF AN  
A N G R Y G O D.  
A  
S E R M O N

Preached at ENFIELD, July 8th, 1741.

At a Time of great Awakenings ; and attended with  
remarkable Impressions on many of the Hearers.

---

By JONATHAN EDWARDS, A. M.  
Pastor of the Church of CHRIST, in NORTHAMPTON.

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*Amos ix. 2, 3. Though they dig into Hell, thence shall mine  
Hand take them; though they climb up to Heaven, thence  
will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in  
the Top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence ;  
and though they be hid from my Sight in the Bottom of the  
Sea, thence I will command the Serpent, and he shall bite them.*

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at the EXCHANGE, 1769.

Click to read caption

Edwards began to preach in neighboring towns. In 1741, he gave his most famous sermon in Enfield, Connecticut. Called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," this sermon was directed at a congregation

that had resisted the revival message. Edwards told them that they had angered God with their sinful ways. God held them in his hand, he said, and could cast them into hell at any moment.

*The God that holds you over the pit of hell,  
much as one holds a spider . . . is dreadfully  
provoked; his wrath towards you burns like  
fire . . . 'Tis nothing but his hand that holds  
you from falling into the fire . . . Oh sinner!  
Consider the fearful danger you are in . . .*

*And now you have an extraordinary  
opportunity, a day wherein Christ has flung  
the door of mercy wide open, and stands  
in the door calling and crying with a loud  
voice to poor sinners; . . . many that were  
very lately in the same miserable condition  
you are in, are in now a happy state, . . .  
rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. How  
awful is it to be left behind at such a day!*

These words had a devastating effect. The congregation began to wail and beg for mercy. The “shrieks and cries were piercing,” wrote one witness. The uproar was so great that Edwards could not even finish his sermon.

### **The Impact of the Awakening**

Over the next few years, such incidents became more common. At the same time, the split between Old Light and New Light ministers grew wider. Churches were breaking apart. For the sake of unity, both sides agreed to make peace and heal their divisions. By the late 1740s, the Great Awakening was over.

The impact of the movement was deep and ongoing, however. New Light preachers had encouraged people to think for themselves and to make their own choices about religious faith. As a result, the church no longer had absolute authority in religious matters. Preachers also taught that everyone was equal in the eyes of God. As one preacher said, “The common people . . . claim as good a right to judge and act for themselves . . . as civil rulers or the learned clergy.” By

encouraging people to act independently and defy authority, the Great Awakening helped lay the groundwork for rebellion against British rule.

# Preparing to Write: Analyzing Speeches

In the 1730s, George II was the King of England. Few, if any, colonists questioned their loyalty to the king—even though he was more than 3,000 miles away. However, colonists soon began to think differently about the king. In less than 50 years, they would declare independence from English rule altogether.

Historians believe that some of the seeds of that new way of thinking were planted during the Great Awakening. Read these two excerpts from sermons at the time.

*The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute monarchs, who have the possessions and lives of their subjects wholly in their power . . . But the greatest earthly potentates [rulers] in their greatest majesty and strength . . . are but feeble, despicable worms of the dust, in comparison of the great and almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth.*

—Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” 1741

*The essence of government (I mean good government . . . ) consists in the making and executing of good laws [that provide for the common welfare] of the governed . . . We may very safely assert . . . that no civil rulers are to be obeyed when they [make laws] inconsistent with the commands of God . . . All commands running counter to the declared will of the Supreme Legislator of heaven and earth are null and void, and therefore disobedience to them is a duty, not a crime. Another thing may be [argued] with equal truth and safety, is, that no government is to be submitted to at the expense of that*

*which is the sole end of all government—the common good and safety of society.*

—Jonathan Mayhew, “A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers,” 1750

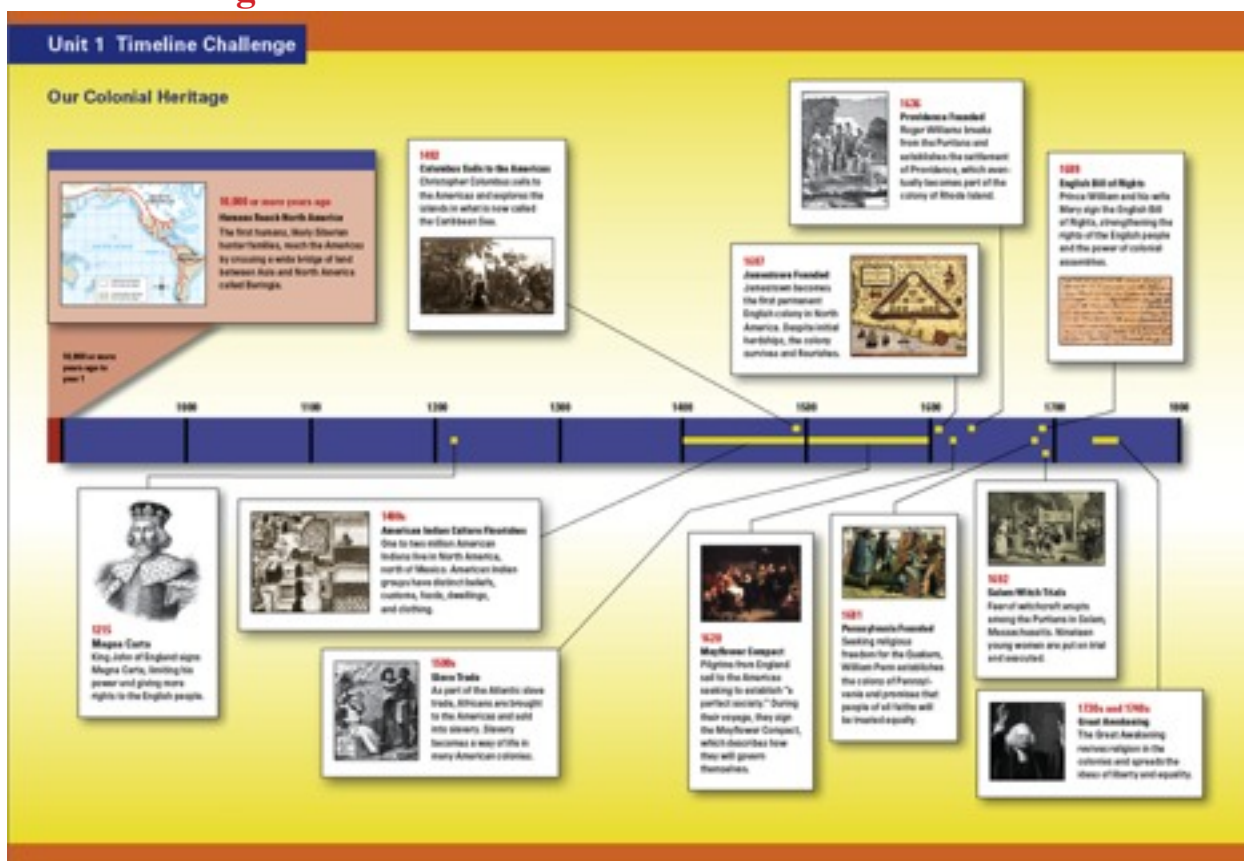
1. What does Jonathan Edwards say about the power of kings?
2. According to Edwards, which is greater: the power of God or the power of kings? Why?
3. What is the duty of good government, according to Jonathan Mayhew?
4. According to Mayhew, when should citizens disobey their government?
5. If you believed the teachings of Edwards and Mayhew, would you think you had a right—or even a duty—to disobey the king? If so, under what circumstances?

## Writing a Diary Entry

Suppose you had lived in one of the 13 colonies in 1750. Write a diary entry about your experience of the Great Awakening. In your entry, do the following:

- Tell how the sermons of the Great Awakening have affected you.
- Explain whether you feel the same way about people in authority as you did before the Great Awakening, and why or why not.

## Timeline Image



## Timeline Skills

Analyze the timeline in the student text. Also think about what you have learned. Then answer the following questions.

1. About when did the first humans reach the Americas? How did they get there?
2. What was the significance of Magna Carta?
3. About how many American Indians lived north of Mexico in the 1400s? In what ways did American Indian groups differ?
4. When did slavery in the Americas begin?



5. What was the first permanent English colony in the Americas? When was it founded?
6. What document described how the Pilgrims would govern themselves in the Americas?
7. How soon after the founding of Jamestown was the settlement of Providence founded? How soon after the founding of Providence was Pennsylvania founded?
8. What was the significance of the English Bill of Rights?
9. Why were 19 young women executed in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692?
10. What was the impact of the Great Awakening in the colonies?
11. Give two examples of how the environment influenced the cultures of American Indian groups.
12. Would you have preferred to live in Jamestown, Providence, or Pennsylvania? Give at least two reasons for your answer.
13. How did Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights influence colonists' view of government?