

Chapter 2

The Colonial Period: 1647-1776

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the Colonial period from 1647-1776 as the earliest settlers of New England came to North America in hopes of establishing the ideal religious community. They were quickly confronted with many harsh realities such as different ecology, complex relationships with Native Americans and different economic and demographic realities. They brought English Poor Laws with them and attempted to use the core principles that stressed public responsibility for relief of the poor who could not work and work for those who can. Townships were where relief was carried out. The core principles of English Poor Law remained: family responsibility, local responsibility and the residency requirement of legal settlements. Relief was offered in ways to encourage farm labor to remain in one area. By 1795, urban centers had grown and immigration increased, creating the need for the Poor Laws to be amended to control cost.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Compare the Poor Laws to public assistance policies in the United States since 1996.
- Summarize the major population and economic changes of the Colonial Period.
- Explain how the expansion of democratic values during the American Revolution was accompanied by increasing criticism of the Poor Laws.
- Compare social provision for veterans with that for other social groups.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How successful do you feel those earliest settlers were at establishing the ideal religious community that became America?
- In what ways did Elizabethan Poor Law Principles work to limit relief expenditures?
- Did the government and large farms dictate how relief was provided more than the principles of the Poor Laws?

- Do you feel whipping for not working is an effective behavioral restriction during Colonial times?
- In what ways did the Poor laws ensure public and individual protection?

- Why was it important for community leaders to ensure that sinful behavior was suppressed, including idleness?
- The family was the central force for maintaining economic, social and political stability. How did family governance being hierarchal support this?
- Explain the Protestant work ethic.
- Why were families that could not be financially independent considered dangerous?
- What was the role of colonial children as apprentices?
- What was the advantage of indenture or farming out of adults during colonial times?
- Jails and almshouses began to be built in the mid 18th century for the poor, old, disabled, seriously ill and criminal. This was a reflection of what factors?
- The function and purpose of outdoor versus indoor relief.
- Discuss how coercive work features of the Poor Laws served as a deterrence from seeking aid.
- How were the Poor Laws designed to protect those who held legal claim to settlement in particular locations?
- Describe how Poor Laws prioritized protecting society with the needs of the poor.
- Colonization increased the new global economy as European powers competed for supremacy.
- The role of disease such as smallpox and its impact on Colonial populations.
- The differentiation of the North and South and how their population changed in makeup.
- The selectivity of accepting immigrants in New England.
- The rise of indentured slaves and then slavery in the South.
- How did class differences evolve during the Colonial period?
- The impact of scarcity and rapid population growth.
- Where was the evidence for greater tolerance of human misfortune?
- The desire to maintain a hierarchical, stable social order as purpose of Poor Laws.
- The shift from communal to individualistic cultural perspective.
- Response to Poor Laws in the late Colonial Period that reduced their effectiveness.

SUGGESTED CHAPTER ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

- ❖ Ask students to read the documents at the end of the chapter: *An Act of Supplement to the Acts Referring to the Poor* and *The Binding of Moses Love, 1747*. Discuss the purpose and merits of these laws and the contracts for the Colonial period. Students can discuss the perspective of the one over the person and the persons themselves.

- ❖ Students can watch *The Story of US: Rebels* from the internet and see visual images of life for the average person during the Colonial period. Ask students to engage in discussion about the hardships of this time period. Discuss what aspects seem positive and what characteristics pose the greatest challenge.
- ❖ Use questions from discussion prompts or have students develop their own discussion questions. Ask students to divide into small groups of 3-5 people, discuss 2 questions and present to class. Open class discussion to feedback from other groups and professor.

ASSESSMENT FOR IN-CLASS USE

Multiple Choice and True False Questions

1. True or False: Long before the arrival of Europeans, the Southwest and Midwest once had been the center for cultures that supported large cities and significant religious institutions.

2. Elizabethan Poor Law Principles involved which 2 of the following concepts:
 - a) public responsibility for those that cannot work.
 - b) relief to the poor that worked.
 - c) relief to children and widows without the expectation they help support themselves.
 - d) work for the able bodied.
 - e) provisions for veterans.

3. The creation of a large class of mobile labor was a result of what during the 1600's?
 - a) strong ties to a particular area.
 - b) the supply of labor outstripped demand for workers.
 - c) the lack of public relief.
 - d) the overabundance of indoor relief

4. The following is an example of a behavioral restriction on relief recipients:
 - a) demonstrating efforts to find work.
 - b) relief is only provided if you are willing to move or not employed within a set time frame.
 - c) workers were not eligible for "passports."
 - d) whipping for not working

5. The largest percentage of the poor, as high as half in some areas, was made up of:
 - a) widows and their children.
 - b) elderly
 - c) disabled
 - d) working men

6. Which of the following factors did not give rise to economic need for the colonists?
 - a) high childhood mortality
 - b) smallpox and other diseases
 - c) reduced manufacturing
 - d) frequent wars
 - e) uncontrollable fire

7. True or false: The smallness of their numbers still made it difficult for public oversight of individual misfortunes during colonial times.

8. The rationale for the adoption of the Poor Laws rested on:
 - a) persistent unemployment
 - b) individual and public protection
 - c) a need for law and order

d) reducing vagrancy

9. The binding of children to apprentices sought to:

- a) better educate in honest and profitable trades.
- b) avoid the sloth of idleness.
- c) require the ability to read and understand the principles of religion.
- d) facilitate understanding of capital laws.
- e) all of the above.

10. The poor laws in the colonies often used apprenticeship as a reflection of the desire to merge home, work and spiritual life of the child. They use apprenticeship for:

- a) economy and Godliness
- b) economy and control
- c) economy and vocational aspiration
- d) economy and moral training

11. Almshouses replaced individual homes for all but the following:

- a) idle poor
- b) disabled
- c) elderly
- d) seriously ill

12. "Indoor relief" during the Colonial period is:

- a) relief provided by charities
- b) a place to use the restroom
- c) tax breaks for the poor
- d) care offered in homes other than one's own or institutions

13. The stigma of poverty was made public in the early 18th

- a) making the poor live in what we now call public housing
- b) spelling out the explicit rules and duties of the poor
- c) forcing the poor to find a buyer for their labor
- d) forcing the poor to wear a letter on their clothes

14. Poor laws during the Colonial period were not characterized by the following statement:

- a) the stigma of poverty was emphasized
- b) eligible poor were deterred from coercive work features
- c) relief as provided to anyone where their need was evident
- d) poor laws were designed to protect against those who threatened stability

15. True or False: The Poor Laws were most concerned with the care of the poor, rather than the protection of society.

16. In order to protect colonists who held legal claim to settlement:

- a) newly arriving immigrants were immediately indentured
- b) residency requirements became stricter under Colonial Poor laws
- c) militias were established in each township
- d) colonists elected what we today refer to as police chiefs

17. Conquest, expansion and population growth during the Colonial period included all but which of the following characteristics:

- a) work and religion as foci of administrative practice
- b) the colonists were English in their political and social heritage
- c) colonists were conquerors
- d) a lack of desire to enlarge the global economy

18. True or false: Within a century of 1st exposure, 95% of the indigenous population of eastern North America perished.

19. European population growth in the New England colonies was controlled by which of the following factors:

- a) dependent on England to determine who they would accept or reject as immigrants
- b) bound by a common set of religious and ethical motivations
- c) had underwritten the expenses of their passage and supplies through the purchase of shares in a joint enterprise
- d) all of the above
- e) b and c

20. The colonist interest in expanding schooling as a result of the belief the population should read the bible brought about the establishment of which college:

- a) Harvard
- b) UC Berkeley
- c) University of South Carolina
- d) Davidson

21. In Virginia, a greater tolerance of human misfortune led to:

- a) social welfare programs for Native Americans
- b) adoption of Poor Laws and apprenticeship for free men
- c) indoor relief for slaves
- d) the end of indentured servant contracts

22. The economic and social changes were accompanied by a shift in religion that emphasized a more:

- a) communal perspective
- b) allegiance to one's parish
- c) individualistic cultural perspective
- d) strong relationship to their community

23. The Poor Law's effectiveness was reduced in the late Colonial period due to:

- a) making the laws less restrictive
- b) the premise that helping the poor was counterproductive
- c) poverty being viewed as less attractive
- d) ample funding

24. Which is consistent with the belief system of Benjamin Franklin regarding the Poor Laws?

- a) we need to embrace and expand relief for the worthy poor
- b) social responsibility does not foster further dependency
- c) they were a constant reminder of English rule
- d) the cause of poverty is of an individual's own making and the growing wealth of upper class is justified

25. Veterans received preferential treatment in obtaining pensions for:

- a) domiciliary care
- b) elderly
- c) disabled
- d) widows and children
- e) all of the above

Essay Questions

- 1) Elizabethan Poor Laws principles stressed the following principles: local responsibility, family responsibility and residency requirements of legal settlement. In what ways are these principles still applied today?
- 2) In 17th century New England, the modern boundaries between public and private and church and state would have made little sense. In what ways did this violate the principles that later became the founding ideology of the American constitution?

- 3) The importance of home and family was balanced against a commitment to worldly engagement that later would be labeled as the "Protestant work ethic." What was the function of the "Protestant work ethic" in colonial times and is it still in effect today in America? Explain.

- 4) As a contemporary observer, describe some features of contemporary welfare policy that can find their origins in the Colonial Poor Laws? What are examples of public responsibility acting as a safety net? Do coercive work features still exist? Are there examples of direct deterrence in seeking aid today?

- 5) During the later Colonial era, economic and social changes were accompanied by a shift from a communal to an individualistic cultural perspective, particularly in regards to religion. Talk about what this means specifically and how it impacts the role of social welfare policy during this period. What do you feel is the perspective today and how does this influence social welfare policy today in America?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

Amenta, E. (1998). *Bold relief: Institutional politics and the origins of modern American social policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Herndon, R. W. & Murray, J. E. (2009). *Children bound to labor: The pauper apprentice system in early America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Katz, M. (1986). *In the shadow of the poorhouse: A social history of welfare in America*. New York: Basic Books.

Marten, J. (2009). *Children and youth in a new nation*. New York: University Press.

Morgan, T. (1993). *Wilderness at Dawn: The settling of the North American continent*. New York: Simon & Shuster.

Parish, P. (1997). *Reader's Guide to American History*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn.

Steele, I. K. (1994). *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tattner, W. (1994). *From Poor Laws to Welfare State: A history of social welfare in America*, 6th ed. New York: Free Press.

Journals

Budros, A. (2004). Social shocks and slave social mobility: Manumission in Brunswick County, Virginia, 1782-1862. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(3), 539-579.

Dwyer, R. (2010). Poverty, prosperity, and place: The shape of class segregation in the age of extremes. *Social Problems*, 57(1), 114-137.

Harris, L. M. (2004). Slavery, emancipation, and class formation in colonial and early national New York City. *Journal of Urban History*, 30(3), 339-359.

Midgley, J. (2008). Colonialism and Welfare. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 9 (2), 31-50.

Jay, Phyllis (2013). Social policy history (Colonial times to 1900). *Encyclopedia of Social Work*.

Websites

History place website.

Provides a timeline of early colonial U. S. growth. The timeline not only focuses on the growth of the colonies but also on laws from England and other European countries that had an impact on the colonists.

The Quakers website.

Describes the role that Quakers played in social and economic politics in the colonies.