Transatlantic commercial, religious, philosophical, and political exchanges led residents of the British colonies to evolve in their political and cultural attitudes as they became increasingly tied to Britain and one another.

I. Population Growth
   A. European Immigrants
      i. The number of non-English settlers continued to increase throughout the 18th century. For example, Scotch-Irish and German immigrants moved into Appalachia as the Native Americans were defeated.
   B. Africans
      i. By 1775, the African American population (both enslaved and free) made up 20% of the colonial population. About 90% lived in the southern colonies in lifelong bondage.
      ii. African Americans formed a majority of the population in South Carolina and Georgia.

II. The Structure of Colonial Society
   A. General Characteristics
      i. Self-Government
         a. Democratic Institutions
            1. Virginia House of Burgesses (1619)
               ▪ First elected legislature
               ▪ Representative government
            2. Mayflower Compact (1620)
               ▪ Direct democracy
               ▪ Majority rule
               ▪ Fair treatment
            3. New England Town Meetings
               ▪ Open to free property-owning men
               ▪ Had to be a member of the church
               ▪ Direct democracy
            4. Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639)
               ▪ Consent of the governed
               ▪ The will of the majority
      ii. Religious Toleration
         a. The 13 colonies were religiously diverse. As a result of this religious pluralism, there was no single dominant Protestant denomination.
      iii. No Hereditary Aristocracy
         a. Northern merchants and Southern planters amassed great wealth. Nevertheless, colonial society did not have a hereditary aristocracy.
      iv. Social Mobility
         a. With the major exception of African Americans, all people in colonial society had an opportunity to improve their standard of living and social status by hard work.
      v. “Puritan Ethic”
         a. Puritan Congregationalists were Calvinists, meaning that they believed in the doctrine of predestination. Since it was impossible to know who was predestined for Heaven, the notion developed that it might be possible to discern that a person...
was elect by observing their way of life, their hard work, and their good deeds. As a sign of showing your grace (that you had been saved), the Catholic notion of good works was morphed into what we can call the Puritan ethic.

B. The Family
   i. Men
      a. Landowning was primarily reserved to men, who also dominated politics.
      b. English law gave the husband almost unlimited power in the home, including the right to beat his wife.

   ii. Women
      a. During the colonial period, a women usually lost control of her property when she married. A married woman had no separate legal identity apart from her husband.
      b. Single women and widows had the right to own property. High mortality among husbands and fathers left many women in the Chesapeake colonies with unusual autonomy and wealth.
      c. Women could not hold political office, serve as clergy, vote, or serve as jurors.
      d. Pregnancies often preceded marriages, so there was no stigma attached.
      e. Families had many children, and the women were in charge of “inside affairs,” which including child rearing, cultivation of a garden, food preparation, manufacture of clothing, and obtaining domestic supplies such as candles and soap.
      f. Women could work in terms of textile production, dressmaking, tailoring, trading small commodities, and serving as a midwife.

   iii. Children
      a. Children played an important role in the household’s economy, and were therefore more valued than they were in Europe.

III. The Economy
   A. Overview
      i. Competition over resources between European rivals and American Indians encouraged industry and trade and led to conflict in the Americas.
      ii. Continuing trade with Europeans increased the flow of goods in and out of American Indian communities, stimulating cultural and economic changes and spreading epidemic diseases that caused racial demographic shifts.
      iii. Private ownership of land was a pinnacle of life, particularly in the South.

   B. New England
      i. In New England, the dominant occupation was as a small farmer. Fishing, wood products, shipbuilding, and limited industry were also typical. A vibrant merchant class dominated activities in urban areas. New England’s economy was increasingly not compatible with mercantilist policies.

   C. Middle Colonies
      i. In the Middle colonies, agriculture was the dominant occupation, but the farms were small. A vibrant merchant class dominated activities in urban areas such as New York and Philadelphia.

   D. Southern Colonies
      i. In the South, large plantations dependent on the export of “cash crops” were compatible with mercantilist economic policies.
ii. The introduction of tobacco cultivation made the British colonies in the Chesapeake region economically viable. By the mid-1700s, tobacco was the most valuable cash crop produced in the Southern colonies.

E. Cities
i. Functioning primarily as mercantile centers, colonial cities collected agricultural goods and distributed imported manufactured goods. Most colonial cities were ports that maintained close economic and cultural ties with England.

F. Monetary System
i. One way the British controlled the colonies was to limit the use of money. The growing colonies were forced to use much of the limited hard currency—gold and silver—to pay for the imports from Britain.
ii. To provide currency for domestic trade, many colonies issued paper money, but this often led to inflation.

G. Transportation
i. Transporting goods by water was much easier than attempting to carry them over land on rough and narrow roads and trails. Therefore, trading centers such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were located on the sites of good harbors and navigable rivers.
ii. An Atlantic economy developed in which goods, as well as enslaved Africans and American Indians, were exchanged between Europe, Africa, and the Americas through extensive trade networks.
iii. European colonial economies focused on acquiring, producing, and exporting commodities that were valued in Europe and gaining new sources of labor.

IV. Religion
A. Challenges with Established Churches
i. In colonies that maintained an established, state-sponsored church, only a minority of people belonged to it. In these colonies especially, a considerable segment of the population did not worship in any church.
ii. As time passed, the Puritans’ religious zeal began to diminish. The Half-Way Covenant eased requirements for church membership by allowing the baptism of the children of baptized but unconverted Puritans.

B. The Great Awakening
i. Overview
   a. The Great Awakening took the form of a wave of religious revivals that began in New England in the 1730s.
   b. The wave of revivals soon swept across all the colonies during the 1740s.
ii. New Light Ministers
   a. These ministers advocated an emotional approach to religious practice, which weakened the authority of traditional “Old Light” ministers and established churches. This led to the growing popularity of itinerant ministers.
   b. New Light ministers promoted the growth of New Light institutions of higher learning, such as Princeton.
   c. They sparked a renewed missionary spirit that led to the conversion of many African slaves and Native Americans.
   d. Their ministry led to a greater appreciation for the emotional experiences of faith.
e. New Light divisions appeared within both the Presbyterian and Congregational churches, resulting in growing religious diversity. There was also an increase in the number of women in church congregations. In fact, women became the majority in many church congregations.

f. New denominations included Baptists and Methodists.

g. Jonathan Edwards reached congregations on an emotional level with “fire and brimstone” sermons such as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

h. George Whitefield was an itinerant preacher who favored revivalism and emotionalism.

iii. Religious Impact

a. The presence of different European religious and ethnic groups contributed to a significant degree of pluralism and intellectual exchange, which were enhanced by the First Great Awakening and the spread of European Enlightenment ideas.

b. As sinners tearfully confessed their guilt and then joyously exulted in being “saved,” emotionalism became a common part of Protestant services.

c. Ministers lost some of their former authority among those who now studied the Bible in their homes.

iv. Political Influence

a. A movement as powerful as the Great Awakening affected all areas of life, including politics.

b. The Great Awakening laid one of the social foundations for the American Revolution. For the first time, the colonists—regardless of their national origins or their social class—shared in a common experience as Americans.

c. The Great Awakening had a democratizing effect by changing the way people viewed authority. If common people could make their own religious decisions without relying on the “higher” authority of ministers, then they might also make their own political decisions without deferring to the authority of the great landowners and merchants. This revolutionary idea was not expressed in the 1740s, but by the 1770s it would challenge the authority of a king and his royal governors.

V. Culture

A. Arts and Sciences

i. Architecture

a. The Georgian style of London was widely imitated in colonial buildings.

b. Homes were characterized by a symmetrical placement of windows and a spacious hall flanked by two fireplaces.

c. On the frontier, a one-room log cabin was the common shelter.

ii. Painting

a. Many colonial painters were itinerant artists who wandered the countryside in search of families who wanted their portraits painted.

iii. Literature

a. The emergence of a trans-Atlantic print culture led the colonies to develop their own forms of literature based on British works.
b. By far, the most popular and successful writer of the 18th century was Benjamin Franklin, whose witty aphorisms and advice were collected in *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, a best-selling book that was revised annually from 1732 to 1757.

c. Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) was the first notable American poet and the first woman to be published in colonial America.

d. Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) was the first published African American poet. Her writing helped create the genre of African American literature.

e. James Fenimore Cooper wrote the “Leatherstocking Tales,” which famously included “The Last of the Mohicans” (1757). Cooper was the first American writer to feature uniquely American characters like the “Western hero” but also the “noble savage.”

iv. Science
   a. Most scientists were self-taught. Benjamin Franklin won fame for his work with electricity and his developments of bifocal glasses and the Franklin stove.

B. Education
   i. Basic education was limited and varied among the colonies. Formal efforts were directed to males, since females were trained only for household work.
   ii. In New England, the Puritans’ emphasis on learning the Bible led them to create the first tax-supported schools. A 1647 law required towns to establish elementary schools for boys. Large towns had to establish grammar schools to prepare boys for college.
   iii. The first colonial colleges were sectarian, meaning that they promoted the doctrines of a particular religious group. The Great Awakening prompted the creation of new colleges.

C. Occupations
   i. Christian ministry was the only profession to enjoy widespread respect among the common people.
   ii. Physicians received little formal medical training other than acting as an apprentice to an experienced doctor.
   iii. Often viewed as talkative troublemakers, lawyers were not common in the 1600s. In that period, individuals would argue their own cases before a colonial magistrate.

D. The Press
   i. Newspapers
      a. In 1725, only five newspapers existed in the colonies, but that number grew to over 40 by 1776.
      b. Issued weekly, single-sheet newspapers contained items such as month-old news from Europe, ads for goods and services, pious essays giving advice for better living, and ads for the return of runaway slaves.

   ii. The Zenger Case
      a. Newspaper printers in colonial days ran the risk of being jailed for libel if any article offended the political authorities.
      b. In 1735, John Peter Zenger, a New York editor and publisher, was brought to trial on a charge of libelously criticizing New York’s royal governor. According to English common law at the time, injuring a governor’s reputation was considered a criminal act, regardless of whether a printed statement was true or false.
c. Ignoring the English law, the jury voted to acquit Zenger. While this case did not guarantee complete freedom of the press, it encouraged newspapers to take greater risks in criticizing a colony’s government.

E. The Enlightenment
   i. Spreading to the colonies from Europe, the leaders of the Enlightenment believed that the “darkness” of past ages could be corrected by the use of human reason in solving most of humanity’s problems.
   ii. A major influence on the Enlightenment and on American thinking was John Locke, who reasoned that while the government is supreme, it is bound to follow natural laws (life, liberty, property) based on the rights that people simply have because they are humans. He argued that sovereignty ultimately resides with the people rather than with the government, and citizens have a right to revolt against whatever government failed to protect their rights.

F. Emergence of a National Character
   i. The colonists’ motivations for leaving Europe, the political heritage of the English majority, and the influence of the American natural environment combined to bring about a distinctly American viewpoint and way of life.
   ii. Especially among white male property owners, the colonists exercised the rights of free speech and a free press, became accustomed to electing representatives to colonial assemblies, and tolerated a variety of religions.

VI. Politics
   A. Structure of Government
      i. Republicanism
         a. Key Principles
            1. Republicanism is the belief that government should be based on the consent of the governed. Republicanism ultimately inspired 18th-century American revolutionaries.
            2. Sovereignty comes from the people. Representation should therefore be apportioned based on population.
            3. A republic is preferable to a monarchy because it would establish a small, limited government that is responsible to the people.
            4. Widespread ownership of property is the bulwark of republican government.
            5. Standing armies are dangerous and should be avoided.
            6. Agrarian life is both desirable and virtuous.
         b. The British colonies experienced a gradual Anglicization over time, developing autonomous political communities based on English models with influence from inter-colonial commercial ties.
         c. Colonists’ resistance to imperial control drew on local experiences of self-government, evolving ideas of liberty, the political thought of the Enlightenment, greater religious diversity, and an ideology critical of perceived corruption in the imperial system.
iii. Relationship with England
   a. The governor was the crown official (appointed by the king) in North America. The Upper House included the governor’s council and is similar to the British House of Lords.
   b. The Lower House was elected and approved all new taxes. It was similar to the British House of Commons.
   c. The goals and interests of European leaders and colonists at times diverged, leading to a growing mistrust on both sides of the Atlantic. Colonists, especially in British North America, expressed dissatisfaction over issues including territorial settlements, frontier defense, self-rule, and trade.
   d. The British government increasingly attempted to incorporate its North American colonies into a coherent, hierarchical, and imperial structure in order to pursue mercantilist economic aims, but conflicts with colonists and American Indians led to erratic enforcement of imperial policies.