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Anglicanization and Americanization

Up to 1750, one of the goals of many American Colonists was to become more like the English in the mother country. This process is called "anglicanization."

By the 1750s, many would realize that their condition, the fact that they lived in a new world with ample land and under very different circumstances, made them realize that they were actually very different from their fellow Englishmen living in England. They were Americans (though maybe not really sure what that meant). Rather than replicate England, they increasingly considered what direction, as Americans, they should take.

Prior to the mid 18th Century, the people in each colony believed they were more like the English than each other. A Virginian thought his plantation was similar to the country estates of the English lords. He would look a Pennsylvanian or New Yorker (especially if German or Dutch) as foreigners. A person from Massachusetts would consider her economic pursuits to be very similar to what the English did. A Virginia planter who owned slaves seemed to be very different. Over time, the colonists would change their views completely, and would realize that they had much more in common with each other.

Anglicanization

Before that however, the colonists tried to act more English (of course, technically they were English) or sensed that the society that they were developing was becoming more like England.

How?

Socio- Economic -One of the myths of colonial history is that there was significant economic and social equality and broad land ownership. This was not really true. Rather, American colonial society did become increasingly stratified so that there were people who were really wealthy and people that were really poor, with various classes in between. The disparities in wealth reinforced the concept of deference in which lower citizens deferred or followed prosperous citizen. Society then was hierarchical and paternalistic. And social relationships were based not on equality but on power and authority. Wives deferred to husbands, children deferred to fathers, servants deferred to masters, etc.

We can see this trend by examining wealth and property ownership. In Chester County, Pennsylvania the top 10% of the people owned 33 % of the wealth. In one urban area the top 10% owned 60%, while the bottom 33% owned only 2% of the wealth. This is hardly equal wealth distribution. Also, increasingly agricultural workers were not independent landowning farmers. In one Maryland county 27% of those working in agriculture were tenants

who rented land. In other areas, laborers couldn't even afford to rent and work for wages instead.

Socio-economically, the colonies started to look more like England.

Legal changes

Primogeniture and entail – This is a common law legal concept requiring inheritance be passed to the oldest son so that the family wealth is not diffused and the family weakened as a result. In England, where land was limited this maintained the status of the ruling elite. In America, where land was plentiful, this initially was unnecessary.

However, eventually as the prime eastern land was depleted and Indians blocked and poor transportation blocked expansion colonists accepted this concept and applied it in America.

Coverture – This is another English legal concept in which women are stripped of their legal rights and they are transferred to a father or husband. In some areas, especially the Chesapeake and the lower South, where there were fewer women and where disease meant that a woman might outlive several husbands, inherit wealth and accrue property; many women actually had some power.

But as the number of women increased and disease declined women lost some of the power they held. The application of coverage reduced women's legal rights.

Also, the legal system applied other laws, especially those dealing with sexual offenses, with a double standard. Few men were punished for fornication and adultery, while women were still vulnerable to prosecution for these offenses.

Homes and Fashion

Imported fashion, architectural design like the Georgian style, and Chippendale furniture were in great demand. However, the Colonists could never really keep up with the English.

Americanization

Though they hoped to replicate the English, counter forces mitigated these efforts and the Colonists realized that they were really Americans. Four events or trends demonstrate this.

Population diversity – Colonial population grew more rapidly and became more diverse than England's.

The American population doubled every 25 years. In 1700 the ratio of English to Colonists was 20 to 1; by 1775 it was 3 to 1! During this period, most of the population growth was natural, not immigrant, so that most colonists were native born and had never even seen England.

While many colonists were of English descent, the population was more diverse.

Roughly 20 % of the population was African or of African descent.

Perhaps 375,000 Scots-Irish lived in the colonies.

Many Germans (33% of Pennsylvania's population was German), Swiss, Dutch, and French also lived in the colonies.

The Enlightenment – The Enlightenment was a 17th Century scientific revolution that involved rational, systematic investigation and reasoning in a search for general laws that applied to govern science, law, nature, the universe, and human relations.

The colonists were very interested in this. In the same way that the colonists broke with tradition by creating a new society, the Enlightenment broke with thousands of years of tradition in science. In fact, the skills required, observation, experimentation and curiosity all seemed to apply to the Enlightenment and the creation of a new society.

The most important Enlightenment philosopher from the colonist view may have been John Locke. Locke theorized many things, among them the belief that reason could help resolve social problems (note how this is very different from the belief that only God could!). Better society, then, created better people. Locke also suggested that people could alter their political system in order to affect these changes.

Because Americans were very literate and the number of sources, like newspapers and pamphlets, were large, these ideas spread easily in the Colonies and helped to create a common ideology.

The Great Awakening (1730s-60s) – Recall that declension had resulted in less church participation in New England. In the 1730s, religious revival swept through the colonies. Perhaps wealthy merchants became concerned with salvation, but, in any case, Preachers like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield spread a message about the emotional side of religion. It was also an anti-authority message that held the individual responsible for their own salvation.

This revival swept through all of the colonies and created a common religious language that held an anti-authoritarian message.

4) French and Indian War (1756-63) – Fighting in close proximity against the French and their Indian Allies the Colonial militia and British regular army

troops realized just how different they really were.

Americans volunteered for short enlistments, elected their own officers, and believed that their service was a contract that if not fulfilled entitled them to leave. So if proper supplies and food were not available, they could legal quit the war!

British regular troops faced long enlistments, perhaps 25 years. They faced severe discipline and used tactics that the militia opposed.

The differences were apparent. For example:

George Washington, who led militiamen during the war, said that his recruits “behaved like men and died like soldiers” while the English troops “behaved with more cowardice than is possible to conceive.”

General James Wolfe, who led the British troops believed the militia “the dirtiest most contemptible cowardly dogs that you can conceive.” They were “ungovernable and obstinate.”

He would soon learn that he was correct.



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