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Governing and Regulating the Empire

In the last lecture I mentioned that I have a frame-work which hopefully will help you to understand US History, especially the period up to the Revolution, and even beyond. I called it the development/convergence model. Basically, it's a tool to help you place events in context. So, to review, each colony starts out differently, each has a different level of social, economic, and political complexity, as well as different family structures. Over time, they would begin to converge, some developing higher levels of social structure, others declining somewhat.

This helps to explain why, by the 1770s, they would unite to overthrow the crown and declare independence. That said, don't assume that the colonists knew or realized this was going to happen.

To reinforce this idea that they start at different levels, consider the following.

	Lower South	Chesapeake	Middle Colonies	New England
Life Expectancy	40	42	60+	Late 60s
Family Size	2 children	Rising after 1680	Very large	Very large
Race/Ethnicity	Black Majority	Black Minority	NW Europe	English
Economy	Rice	Tobacco	Farming	Farming/Fishing
Religion	Anglican Church	Anglican Church	Various	Congregational
Government	Proprietary	Royal	Mix	Corporate

While the colonies are becoming more similar to each other, this alone is not enough to explain colonial history or the coming of the American Revolution. You'll need to keep in mind a few other main themes:

Convergence/Development of the colonies.

Specific British policies that upset the colonists.

Creation of an ideology that justifies revolution and gets the common people to decide that independence is worth the risks.

We'll explore all of these in the coming weeks.

Now, back to **Governing and Regulating the Empire**.

The early history of the various colonies is characterized by very loose administration. These were mainly private company run for profit concerns. Again, the English government had turmoil at home and really didn't assert regular permanent control in the early years.

However, the King and Parliament would eventually "re-discover" its colonies and realize that they could provide income and raw materials for home manufacturing.

Of course, the colonists had become used to loose control and so would question some of these actions, but generally, policies seemed to benefit both sides of the Atlantic. Still, colonists wondered where the legitimate authority lay.

Mercantilism – Economic philosophers in the 17th century assumed that nations could expand their power only at the expense of other nations. Resources, they thought, were limited and a country needed to scarf up as much as it could, thus increasing its own wealth and denying other nations that same wealth.

Wealth equaled power and most believed there was only a limited amount of wealth in the world, for example gold.

Economic expansion rested on a favorable balance of trade, exporting more than you imported. Which resulted in a flow of money or precious metal into the mother country. A few things grew from this:

Wealth meant you could develop a strong navy to protect trade.
Colonies were useful as providers of raw materials and as a market for manufactured products.

Subsidizing and protecting the development of manufacturing in the mother country through tariffs and other restrictions is necessary.

Thus, in the mercantilist system, the colonies existed only to support the mother country.

Triangle trade – example of the mercantile system.

Cotton (colonies)

Cloth(England)

Slaves (Africa)

In this scheme cloth from England is traded for slaves, which are sent to the southern colonies to grow cotton, which is sent to England and converted to cloth, which is traded to Africa for slaves.

In order to control this trade, the English government passed a series of navigation acts which regulated shipping and trade between the colonies and England and the colonies and each other. The goal was to have British ships handle all trade so that taxes could be collected and the mother country could control the flow of raw materials within the empire. This resulted in the

creation of a bureaucracy to administer these acts including the Lords of Trade and the Board of Trade.

An immediate problem cropped up, smuggling. To avoid some of the taxes, some colonial traders turned to smuggling.

Legitimacy and Authority

Two events highlighted the question of where the legitimate governmental authority lay (in the colonies or in England?).

1) The Dominion of New England (1684-88) - In response to the smuggling that resulted from the Navigation Act, the English Government annulled Massachusetts charter and the colony came under the control of King James II. He incorporates all of New England and New York and New Jersey into a single entity called the Dominion of New England. His new governor, Edmund Andros (pronounced Andrews) was abrasive and his policies, for example passing taxes without consent and suppressing town meetings, made him very unpopular.

Within a few years James II faced a revolt in England and was forced to abdicate. The new rulers, William and Mary, restored Massachusetts charter and ended the Dominion. However, the new charter and additional navigation acts demonstrated that even William and Mary intended to regulate and govern British North America from England. Authority, it seemed was not in the colonies.

2) Bacon's Rebellion (1676) – In the Chesapeake, also, there were issues over where the legitimate government existed. As Virginians continued to grow tobacco they depleted the land. In order to continue tobacco production, they expanded and encroached on Native American land. These encroachments were met with violence and the Virginia frontier experienced a series of Indian wars.

A tobacco glut lowered prices at the same time that the Navigation Acts increased taxes. Virginia's planters were anxious due to all of the sudden changes and conflict.

In order to reduce frontier conflict, Virginia's Governor, William Berkeley, decided to reduce contact between the Colonists and the Indians by restricting the number of English that could legally trade with the Native Americans. Berkeley believed that unscrupulous traders were incited some of the tension by cheating the Indians. Of course, it was Berkeley who decided who would get a license to trade, and he was accused of favoring his friends.

One of those upset with Berkeley was Nathaniel Bacon. Bacon was a Cambridge educated colonist who apparently squandered his inheritance and

settled in Virginia to re-establish his wealth. Bacon had several issues with Berkeley. Bacon, whose plantation was on the frontier, had had one of his overseers killed by Indians and he felt that Berkeley didn't provide proper defense for the frontier. This belief was reinforced when Bacon requested that Berkeley commission him as a militia officer. Berkeley refused. Berkeley also refused to grant bacon a trade license.

Bacon recruited an army made up of fellow planters, farmers, indentured servants and even slaves. After dealing with the Indians on the frontier, Bacon marched on Berkeley and burned Jamestown. Berkeley fled, but Bacon dies of disease and Berkeley reasserted control and vigorously punished the rebels.

Some lost property, other lost their lives. Though at that time it seemed legitimate to punish those engaged in a rebellion, Berkeley was dismissed for his actions after the rebellion. Virginians were confused and wondered why Berkeley was recalled. Again, many questioned where the legitimate authority was placed?

Even more crucial were the racial implications of Bacon's Rebellion. The ease with which slaves had joined in a revolt against the government sent shudders through Virginia and the white ruling class instituted policies that insured that all whites would stick together in the future.

Conclusions

The English Government's effort to assert control in the colonies through regulation and active government resulted in a crisis of legitimacy. Colonists, who had generally been ignored during the first 50 years of settlement, were used to ruling themselves. Tension and confusion resulted from the assertion of governmental power. People weren't sure where the legitimate power lay. Efforts to provide order only exacerbated the situation as did haphazard responses to events.

Colonial assemblies were not willingly going to yield the control they had built and further conflict between the colonists' representatives in the assemblies and the King's governors loomed. A fight between local autonomy and royal authority seemed likely

Interestingly enough, lawyers, who were much maligned in the colonies, began to gain respect as representatives of the people and wealth in commerce. Often, their knowledge of law and history allowed them to negotiate between the conflicting sources of power.

Additionally, the empire remained loose enough that breaking the rules could lead to great wealth and the American colonists refused to accept their secondary status in the mercantile system. As we'll see, they believed that they were English citizens, not colonial outcasts. They sought to replicate English

society in America. In the process, they came to realize that they were really Americans and that they were much similar to each other than their counterparts in the mother country.



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