Colonies Essay, Research Paper

The Colonies by 1763 : A New Society?

Between the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 and the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the most important change that occurred in the colonies was the emergence of society quite different from that in England. Changes in religion, economics, politics and social structure illustrate this Americanization of the transplanted Europeans.

By 1763, although some colonies still maintained established churches, other colonies had accomplished a virtual revolution for religious toleration and separation of church and state. Between the two established churches, in the colonies, Anglican and Congregational, a considerable number of people didn?t worship in any church. But in the colonies with a maintained religion, only a few belonged to it. As in England, Catholics were still discriminated against, but since their numbers were fewer the laws were less severe. Similarly, The Church of England was established in America, as it was in England already. However, in America the Congregationalists and Anglicans were the more dominate religions compared to the Catholics in Europe and England.

In a similar economic revolution, the colonies outgrew their mercantile relationship with the mother country and developed an expanding capitalist system of their own. England?s economic system was primarily based on mercantilism, which was directly related to the colonies. This concept of mercantilism said that wealth is power and however much power you have is how much gold and silver one country has in its treasury. For this concept to take place, England had to export more than import. Because the colonies had the raw materials needed England set up laws such as navigation laws to restrict what the colonies could do. For example of the navigation laws, the colonies had to ship everything to England first and could only buy England?s products. Also the colonies couldn?t manufacture certain products, and there weren?t any banks to ensure that England got all the money it possibly could. Yet, since, in the early days of the colonies, England didn?t pay much attention to them so they didn?t really follow the rules set on them now. Being trade companies set up the colonies, they already traded with each other and other countries as well continued to do so when the laws started. They produced crops such as tobacco, rice, and sugar. They also had shipbuilding companies. Plus, the colonies had a slave trade with the Dutch and the West Indies.

Building on English foundations of political liberty, the colonists extended the concepts of liberty the self-government far beyond those envisioned in the mother country. By 1775, the colonies had different forms of government. Eight of them had royal governors. Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware chose their own governors or proprietors. The last two, Connecticut and Rhode Island were independent and self governing, electing their own governors. Almost all of the colonies had a two-house legislature, which included the upper house or council, and the lower house or popular branch. There were strict qualifications for voting. Certain religious and property qualifications were necessary for one to be able to vote. Although satisfying the land requirement was somewhat easy, some that were qualified didn?t exercise the privilege. Even though America was not a true democracy, it was, however much more democratic than both England and Europe.

In contrast to the well-defined and hereditary classes of England, the colonies developed a fluid class structure, which enabled the industrious individual to rise on the social ladder. This however, rags-to-riches feature was a rarity in England, it means that just because one is born into a certain class doesn?t mean that one can?t change to different classes weather the move is up or down the ladder. The colonial social structure contained a variety of social classes. The main classes consisted of the upper class being the aristocrats, the middle class being the businessmen and the lower class being mostly the poor farmers. Also the colonies had a very distinct system of the social class, starting with the aristocrats, lesser professional men, farmers, hired hands, indentured servants, jailbird and slaves. These slaves had no equality with the whites and whites often feared their rebellion. The slaves were the closest to Europe?s lower classes. But compared with contemporary Europe America of the 1700?s was a place of equality and opportunity except for slavery.

When all things are considered, one can see the colonies didn?t always agree with the way England handled things, in the area of religion, economics, politics, and social structure. Through their determination to obtain a better life for themselves, they ventured away from England and created their own nation over time.