

Life As A British Colonist

Life in the Colonies

- Most Colonists lived along the Atlantic Seaboard, close to the shoreline for reasons of trade and communications.
- The colonies, or at least British control, ended at the Appalachian mountains
- If you were male, good chance (est. 60%) you owned land; in a city- Philadelphia was the biggest- you were likely a merchant or artisan
- The Colonies were growing fast (30%-40% each decade, at least 5 times the modern rate) with newcomers
- Life was good as a British colonist; most colonists lived in decent homes, wore decent clothes, that compared favorably to people back in Europe.

British Rights and Liberties

- To a British person of the time, it seemed that Britain was an empire held together not by force of arms but by trade and a shared love of liberty
- Liberty was viewed as the most important possession of a free people
- England, and later Britain, had a long history of limiting government authority, and protecting rights and liberties:
 - *Magna Carta* (1215) established the King's Power is not absolute
 - The English Civil War (1642-1651) and Glorious Revolution (1688-1689) established the supremacy of Parliament, the people's representatives
 - The English Bill of Rights (1689) protected free speech and the right to petition the government, and established the idea the King must seek *consent of the governed*

Being a British Colonist

- As a colonist you thought of yourself as equal to other British subjects; but you felt far away from the sophistication back in England
 - You felt that you lived on the periphery of empire- on the edge of what the British called a ‘howling wilderness’
- While all British people cared about rights and liberties, the colonies were full of people who had fled Britain to protect those rights, or their descendants
- This would be irrelevant for a long time, because the British largely let the colonies to regulate themselves; this absence of policy becomes the policy itself
- When Parliament begins passing laws for the colonies without their input, the question becomes: did we forfeit some of our rights in migrating to the New World?