where sums have been appropriated to particular purposes, and the President General is previously impowered by an act to draw for such sums.

That the General accounts shall be yearly settled and reported to the several Assembly's.

That a Quorum of the Grand Council impowered to act with the President General, do consist of Twenty five members among whom, there shall be one or more from a Majority of the Colonies;

That the Laws made by them for the purposes aforesaid shall not be repugnant, but as near as may be agreeable to the Laws of England, and shall be transmitted to the King in Council for approbation as soon as may be, after their passing, and if not disapproved within Three Years after presentation to remain in Force.

That in case of the Death of the President General, the Speaker of the Grand Council for the time being shall succeed and be vested with the same powers and Authorities to continue until the Kings Pleasure be known.

That all Military Commission Officers whether for Land or Sea Service to act under this General Constitution shall be nominated by the president General; but the approbation of the Grand Council is to be obtained before they receive their Commissions. And all Civil officers are to be nominated by the Grand Council, and to receive the president Generals approbation before they officiate: But in Case of a vacancy by Death or removal of any officer Civil or Military under this Constitution, The Governor of the Province in which such vacancy happens, may appoint till the pleasure of the President General and Grand Council, can be known. That the Particular Military as well as Civil Establishments in each Colony remain in their present State this General Constitution notwithstanding; and that on sudden Emergencies, any Colony may defend itself, and lay the accounts of Expence thence arisen before the president General and Grand Council, who may allow and order payment of the same, as far as they judge such accounts just and reasonable.

After Debate on the foregoing Plan

RESOLVED

That the Commissioners from the Several Governments, be desired to lay the same before their Respective Constituents for their Consideration, and that the Secretary to this Board transmit a Copy thereof with this vote thereon, to the Governor of each of the Colonies which have not sent their Commissioners to this Congress.

His Honour proposed to the Board, that agreeable to their Resolutions of the 24 June they would now consider, the Expediency of Building Forts in the Indian Country. It was determined that considering the present wavering Disposition of the Sennecas, it was expedient that a Fort should be Built in their Country at a place called Irondequat or Tierondequat. Ordered

That a Committee be appointed to consider what further Forts may be necessary in the Country of the Six Nations, and that each Colony name a Member for this Committee.

ORDERED

That Mr Chambers and Mr Peters be a Committee to revise the Minutes settled and agreed to by this Board.

Adjourned till to Morrow Morning at 9 aClock.

E S S A Y S

Historians Jack P. Greene of the University of California, Irvine, and David Hackett Fischer of Brandeis University each have written a major synthesis answering the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: What is the sum of the colonial experience? Can we speak of "American culture" in the decades before the Revolution? Their answers differ profoundly.

Historians traditionally have identified New England, with its tradition of self-governing, small farming communities, as the core of American culture. Professor Greene demonstrates in the first essay that New England in fact was the one section that least participated in the shared colonial development. All the regions, although very different in their origins and despite continuing differences, converged into a common American pattern by the close of the colonial period.

Professor Fischer, on the other hand, presents evidence that the mainland colonies comprised four major regions, each settled by a particular group of people from a specific culture area in Europe. So distinct were these cultures, Fischer maintains, that traces of them survive even today. He concludes that the close of the colonial period saw not one but four colonial cultures.

Convergence and the Creation of a Colonial Culture

JACK P. GREENE

. . . If, as observed Samuel Williams, whose *History of Vermont,* published in 1794, was one of the first systematic attempts to analyze the main features of the emerging American society, a "similarity of situation and conditions" had gradually pushed the colonies toward a similitude of society and values, more specifically, toward "that natural, easy, independent situation, and spirit, in which the body of the [free] people were found, when the American war came on," still a second major influence—inheritance operating in the form of growing metropolitanization or anglicization—was important in helping to erode differences among the colonies. If this development was partly the result of efforts by metropolitan authorities to bring the colonies under closer political and economic control, it was also attributable to an ever more intense involvement between metropolis and colonies in virtually all spheres of life. Together with an increasing volume of contacts among individuals and the

Jack Greene, "Convergence: Development of an American Society, 1720–1780." Excerpts from chapter 8 of *Pursuits of Happiness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for The Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1988). Reprinted by permission of The University of North Carolina Press.

improved communications that accompanied them, this growing involvement drew the colonies more and more into the ambit of British life as the eighteenth century advanced and thereby tied them ever more closely to metropolitan culture.

As the ties with the metropolis thus tightened and became more robust, the pull of metropolitan culture grew, and the standards of the metropolis increasingly came to be the primary model for colonial behavior, the one certain measure of cultural achievement for these provincial societies at the outermost peripheries of the British world. Throughout the colonies, and especially among the emergent elites, there was a self-conscious effort to anglicize colonial life through the deliberate imitation of metropolitan institutions, values, and culture. Thus, before the mid-1770s, British-Americans thought of themselves primarily as Britons, albeit Britons overseas. Contrary to the dominant opinion among earlier historians, colonial comparisons of the colonies with Britain rarely came out in favor of the colonies. The central cultural impulse among the colonists was not to identify and find ways to express and to celebrate what was distinctively American about themselves and their societies but, insofar as possible, to eliminate those distinctions so that they might—with more credibility—think of themselves and their societies—and be thought of by people in Britain itself—as demonstrably British.

Among the several colonial regions, of course, there remained significant differences. . . . [T]he relatively greater affluence derived by the southern and West Indian colonies from staple agriculture had enabled them to purchase many more black slaves, to devote more time both to the pursuit of the good life and to politics and the law, to cultivate metropolitan cultural models more assiduously, to rely more heavily upon metropolitan cultural institutions rather than to develop their own, and to be more self-indulgent and less industrious. By contrast, New England still was considerably more religious, had much lower levels of wealth concentration, and, along with the Middle Colonies, was more heavily urbanized. The Middle Colonies were perhaps the least settled socially, were certainly more heterogeneous in the religious and ethnic composition of their free populations, and may have had the most highly developed social and commercial infrastructures. During the late eighteenth century, however, these differences were largely ones of degree.

Not even the presence of so many slaves in the southern and island colonies, certainly the most conspicuous difference between them and New England, was yet a crucial distinguishing feature among the colonies. In general, there was a steady diminution in the ratio of black slaves to the free population from the most southern to the most northern colonies. As late as 1770, however, slavery was still an expanding, not a contracting, institution in every one of the island and continental colonies except New Hampshire and Nova Scotia. New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania all had populations with a higher proportion of slaves than did the Chesapeake as late as 1700 to 1710 during the early stages of that region's large-scale transition to a slave labor system, and no colony had acted to try to ban slavery, which would be legal in Britain itself for another sixty years. Slavery was everywhere an integral and accepted component of British American culture, and

limitations of space were almost certainly more important than ratios of slaves to free people in contributing to the beginnings of a cultural rift between the island and continental colonies after 1750. Given the strong convergence of cultural development in colonial British America by the 1740s and 1750s, it is by no means preposterous to suggest that all of the colonies, including Massachusetts and Connecticut, would have used slavery as extensively as did the southern and West Indian colonies had they had the resources and the incentives to do so.

As between 1660 and 1760 each of the regions of colonial British America became both more creole and more metropolitan, as they increasingly assimilated to a common American social and behavioral pattern and to British cultural models, they became more and more alike, and this powerful social convergence resulted in the emergence and articulation of a common cultural pattern that, though present to some degree throughout the British American world, was especially evident among the continental colonies. If the central features of this pattern were most powerfully manifest at the center of British North America, in the Chesapeake and Middle Colonies, they were also present to a conspicuous degree in the peripheries, in the Lower South and New England. This pattern can be discussed under three rubrics: growth, differentiation, and values.

. . . [T]he growth of the colonies was genuinely impressive, and in each colonial region demographic growth was particularly dramatic. . . . Once a solid base had been established . . . in the Chesapeake and New England during the last half of the seventeenth century, population grew at a rapid rate, ranging between 200 and 300 percent every half-century. . . . This growth resulted from both immigration and natural increase. Perhaps as many as one out of five new whites were immigrants; a much higher proportion of new blacks, especially in the islands, derived from slave imports. By far the largest source of this vigorous demographic rise on the continent, however, was natural increase. This increase was primarily the result of three factors: declining mortality, younger ages at marriage of from four to five years for women than in Europe, and a bountiful food supply and high nutrition that already by the 1750s had operated to make male residents of the continental colonies three to three and one-half inches taller than their British counterparts. Natural growth was, however, lower in cities and in coastal areas of the Chesapeake and Lower South, where, as in the West Indies, mortality was significantly higher. Nevertheless, in overall population trends, the mortality differential between northern and southern colonies may have been at least partly offset by a more plentiful food and protein supply in the South, one indication of which was that the average height of militiamen during the Revolution increased from North to South. The special demographic vigor demonstrated by the continental colonies was no doubt also stimulated by the continuing availability of land and the high levels of economic opportunity to meet the demands of both the growing population and an expanding overseas commerce. . . .

The psychology of expansiveness implied by the demographic performance

of the populations of colonial British America, especially on the continent, was also reflected in the extent of territorial expansion and the mobility of the population. At the conclusion of Queen Anne's War in 1713, the continental settlers were still clustered in a series of noncontiguous nuclei close to the Atlantic seaboard. There were two large centers of settlement, one in the Chesapeake and another covering the coastal regions of eastern and southern New England and reaching up the Connecticut River valley. Two smaller concentrations of population fanned out from Philadelphia and New York, and there were isolated groups of settlement on the central Maine coast, in the upper Connecticut River valley in what is now southeastern Vermont, around Albany on the Hudson River, on the upper Delaware River in the vicinity of Easton, Pennsylvania, on the lower Delaware, at three widely dispersed points in Tidewater North Carolina, and at Charleston and Port Royal in South Carolina.

During the next fifty years, population spilled out in all possible directions from these nuclei until by the 1760s and 1770s there was one long continuum of settlement stretching from Georgia to Maine and reaching inland for more than 150 miles, and new nuclei were building in East and West Florida and Nova Scotia. This rapid spread of settlement was one sign of the high levels of geographical mobility among settlers in all regions on the continent. Although southerners were somewhat more mobile than New Englanders, no region had a persistence rate much above 60 percent during the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and farmers everywhere showed an especially strong propensity to move. Residents from New York north tended to move longer distances north into upper New York and New England; those from Pennsylvania south tended to move west and south into the broad upland areas between the seacoast and the Appalachian Mountains.

But the most striking evidence of growth lies in the economic realm. . . . [T]he economic performance of every region over time was impressive. Growth seems not to have been especially rapid before 1740, but every available indicator—numbers of slaves, rising levels of personal wealth, volume of agricultural production, amount of exports, value of imports from Britain, quantities shipped in the coastal trade—suggests extraordinary growth thereafter. McCusker and Menard estimate that the gross national product (GNP) multiplied about twenty-five times between 1650 and 1770, increasing at an annual average rate of 2.7 percent for British America as a whole and 3.2 percent for British North America. This increase, they posit, may have represented a real per capita growth rate of 0.6 percent, which was twice that of Britain and was "sufficient to double income" over that period. By the time of the American Revolution, this vigorous economic growth had produced a standard of living that may have been "the highest achieved for the great bulk of the [free] population in any country up to that time." . . . The sources of this remarkable prosperity lay in a combination of the demands for food and other commodities on the part of the burgeoning population and in growing overseas markets for colonial products. Though the proportion of income gained through exports declined over time, it was still substantial in 1770. . . . The value of exports per capita and per free white resident increased

from North to South, reflecting the greater per capita wealth of the free white populations of those regions. . . . Both import and export figures reflect the development of a considerable coastwise trade among the colonies. Though all four regions participated in this trade, it was dominated by New England and the Middle Colonies, and it marked the early stages in the articulation of an integrated "American" economy through which products from all regions were widely distributed for domestic consumption on a continental scale.

As McCusker and Menard have remarked, these figures "describe a strong, flexible, and diverse economy . . . able to operate without a considerable metropolitan subsidy," at least in peace time. In stark contrast to the situation during the first generations of settlement, none of these continental regions relied heavily on foreign investment. Rather, they "accumulated most of their capital on their own" through the productivity of their inhabitants, savings, and capital improvements, developments that were also reflected in the emergence of a resident and highly skilled commercial sector. The impressive performance of the economies of every one of these regions in turn probably also heralded, to one degree or another, increased specialization of production and a consequent lowering of production costs; improvements in transportation and a resulting decline in distribution costs; advances in human capital, including rising technical expertise; improvements in economic organization; and at least some technological advances such as occurred in shipbuilding and shipping.

This impressive demographic, territorial, and economic growth supported an increasingly complex society with an ever larger range, more dense distribution, and more deeply established agglomeration of social institutions. These included families and kinship groups; neighborhoods and hamlets; stores and artisanal establishments; local judicial and administrative institutions; churches; transportation facilities, including roads, bridges, ferries, and a few canals; and a variety of cultural institutions, including schools, libraries, clubs, and other social organizations. Although many of these institutions were well represented in the countryside, others, including especially commercial and artisanal establishments and cultural institutions, were most fully developed in the towns.

The extensive spread of population and the continuing rustication process it represented meant that as the eighteenth century proceeded, a declining proportion of the population lived in towns. Yet substantial urbanization occurred in all of the older settled areas, especially after 1720. Boston was the largest colonial town into the 1740s, when its population leveled off to between fifteen and sixteen thousand, where it remained for the rest of the colonial period. At some point between 1745 and 1760, the populations of both Philadelphia and New York passed that of Boston. By 1775 the population of Philadelphia was perhaps as high as forty thousand, that of New York twenty-five thousand. Also by 1775, Charleston and Newport had populations ranging between nine and twelve thousand; Baltimore and Norfolk, both of which had developed primarily after 1750 in the Chesapeake, traditionally the least urbanized area of continental America, had around six thousand; a dozen

towns—New Haven, Norwich, New London, Salem, Lancaster, Hartford, Middletown, Portsmouth, Marblehead, Providence, Albany, Annapolis, and Savannah—had between three and five thousand; and perhaps as many as fifty other places had between five hundred and three thousand people. . . .

The increasingly complex occupational structure of the towns, a trend that was also evident, if to a much less impressive extent, in the countryside, was one powerful indication of the results of the steady process of social differentiation that had been occurring in all the major regions of colonial British America during the century after 1660. For instance, the resident commercial sector of the population had developed during these years into an increasingly complex group ranging from petty retailers, peddlers, and hawkers at the lowest level up through primary traders composed mostly of country storekeepers and urban retailers, to secondary traders or wholesalers who collected local products from and distributed finished goods to retailers, to tertiary traders or large merchants who presided over the overseas trade and offered more and more sophisticated financial and insurance services to the commercial economy. A similar development can be followed with regard to the professions, including the ministry, medicine, and the law. . . .

The process of social differentiation can also be observed in the development of a much more sharply articulated social structure. To be sure, even at the end of the colonial period, the emerging social hierarchies in the several regions of colonial British America were all much less finely developed and more open than in metropolitan Britain. Nowhere was there anything remotely resembling a legally privileged aristocracy. Indeed, colonial society was not yet divided into well-defined social classes but consisted of two broad and not always discrete social categories, independents and dependents. *Independents* were those with sufficient property in land, tools, or personal goods to make them theoretically free from external control by any other person; *dependents* were those whose wills, in Sir William Blackstone's phrase, were subject to the control of the people on whom they depended.

By contemporary standards, the independent proportion of the population was very large. At the top of this category, the most successful planters, merchants, landlords, and lawyers were, by the 1720s and 1730s in the oldest colonies and by the 1740s and 1750s in the newer ones, a self-conscious and conspicuous elite that, though consisting of no more than two to three percent of colonial families, was distinguished from the rest of society by its substantially greater wealth and affluent and refined lifestyles. Manifest in their clothing, consumption patterns, housing, modes of transportation, education, cosmopolitan outlook, prominence in both public office and the emerging cultural infrastructures, and cultivation of the traditional values of the British rural and urban gentries, including liberality, civility, and stewardship, the superior social status of these developing elites was also evident in the large number of dependents their members could command and by the passive deference usually accorded them by other independent members of society. Yet this largely self-made group, as Richard Hofstadter has remarked, had "only a slender sense of the personal prerogative, the code of honor, or the grand extravagance" usually associated with its equivalents in Europe. Rather, it

exhibited "the disciplined ethic of work, the individual assertiveness, the progressive outlook . . . and the calculating and materialistic way of life" associated with the burgeoning middle classes of contemporary Britain. . . .

Certainly in the 1760s and 1770s, as earlier, the most impressive aspect of the free population of Britain's American colonies was the extraordinarily large number of families of independent middling status, which was proportionately substantially more numerous than in any other contemporary Western society. Situated immediately below the elite and, like their counterparts in England, sharing, in many cases, the values and the orientations of those just above them, this vast and increasingly differentiated body of yeoman farmers, artisans, smaller traders, and lesser professionals included the great bulk of independent people in the colonies. In every region of continental colonial British America, their sheer numbers meant that the emerging American society would be "a preponderantly middle-class world" in which "the simpler agencies of the middle class" would be "in strong evidence: the little churches of the dissenting sects, the taverns . . . the societies for [social and] self-improvement and 'philosophical' inquiry, the increasingly eclectic little colleges, the contumacious newspapers, the county court houses and town halls, the how-to-do books, the *Poor Richard's Almanack*."

In the developing American social schema, agricultural tenants and people employed with contracts in the service, industrial, and commercial sectors constituted an ambiguous intermediate group who, though they in many cases enjoyed sufficient resources in the form of their own skills and property to function and be regarded by the rest of society as independent people, were at least technically dependent on their landlords or employers. But such people formed only a small part of the social category of dependents. Because they were defined in the early modern British world as extensions of their husbands and fathers' legal and social personalities, wives and children together were certainly the largest groups of dependents in colonial America. At least within the confines of the free population, however, most, if not the vast majority, of women and children were members of families whose male head was independent. As a consequence, they assumed his independent social status.

When colonial Americans referred to *social* dependents, they were talking largely about people who fell into one or the other of three groups of laborers, all of whom were employed to provide a substantial amount of the extraordinary effort required to produce the food and the vendible commodities necessary to sustain this rapidly expanding and still highly exploitive society: free laborers, servants, and slaves. Although much of the labor in the farm colonies, especially in New England, where the pace of economic development was slower and the labor requirements much lower, had been supplied by family members, the demand for labor . . . was a persistent problem in the land- and resource-rich but labor-poor colonies from New York south to Barbados. Over time, first in New England and then in the Chesapeake and Middle Colonies, an expanding pool of free laborers, mostly younger men and women just getting started in life, slowly developed into a significant, if notoriously expensive, component of the labor market. By the mid-eighteenth century, male laborers in this category may have constituted as much as 10

percent of the adult male population of large towns and an even larger percentage of the inhabitants of smaller towns and long-established rural districts.

From the Middle Colonies south, however, servitude, which was also present in New England, especially before 1720, had almost certainly been a more important means of supplying the demand for labor beyond what could be provided by family members, and the predominant form of servant labor was provided through indentured servitude, a new institution developed in the first half of the seventeenth century to meet the heavy labor requirements of the West Indian and Chesapeake colonies. Servitude was a transitional status that enabled people to secure passage to the colonies in return for selling their labor for a set period of time, at the end of which they hoped to move into a position from which they could acquire land and an independent status. With the substitution of blacks for whites as plantation laborers, beginning in the West Indies and extending to the continent during the closing decades of the seventeenth century, servitude changed from an institution that supplied primarily unskilled labor to one that furnished considerable amounts of skilled labor, albeit by the mid-eighteenth century throughout the colonies slaves were more and more being trained to perform skilled tasks formerly assigned to servants. Notwithstanding these changes in the institution and use of white servitude, however, the demand for unskilled servant labor remained high in all regions of continental British America except New England. The especially high demand for such labor in the Chesapeake and Middle Colonies was evidenced by the eagerness with which buyers snapped up as many as forty to fifty thousand largely young, male, and minimally skilled convicts transported from Britain between 1718 and 1775.

Life was no picnic for servants, who had traditionally been and still in the mid-eighteenth century were often worked hard, but servitude at least held out an eventual promise of freedom and independence for the more ambitious and fortunate of those who survived their terms; the same could not be said for slaves.... [B]lacks—of whom all except perhaps 1 to 2 percent were slaves—constituted the largest single category of the dependent population, over a third of the population of colonial British America as a whole and more than 20 percent in the continental colonies in 1760. These substantial numbers remind us of the extraordinary extent to which the growth and prosperity of the emerging society of free colonial British America as well as the high incidence of independent individuals who lived there were achieved as a result of slave labor, of the forced emigration from their widely dispersed homelands of thousands of people of African descent and their systematic subjugation to an intrinsically harsh and virtually inescapable labor regime based on racial discrimination and enforced by the full power of the law....

In the Chesapeake, the first and oldest center of slavery on the continent, slaves, both those who lived on large plantations and the majority who resided on smaller units, mostly lived under the direct management of white families, were thoroughly subjected to the assimilative pressures of white paternalism, enjoyed relatively little autonomy, and had very few opportunities to obtain freedom. Having already acquired a more balanced sex ratio and a creole majority by the mid-eighteenth century, Chesapeake blacks early achieved a more stable family life; the proportion of new Africans, most of whom ended up on smaller units in newer areas, declined steadily; differences within the black population diminished more quickly; blacks developed no distinctive language and managed to retain relatively few African cultural survivals; and an Afro-American culture "evolved parallel with Anglo-American culture and with considerable congruence."

Slavery in the Lower South contrasted markedly with that in the Chesapeake. There, profitable staple agriculture developed later; the concentration of slaves on larger units with a minimum of white supervision and the widespread use of the task system tended to limit the effects of white paternalist ideology, to give blacks more autonomy in their daily lives, and to enable them, like West Indian slaves, to play a major role in the internal marketing system; Africans continued to be imported in substantial numbers throughout the eighteenth century; and a higher incidence of interracial sexual liaisons created the conditions for the appearance of at least a small black and mulatto free population. In such conditions, "the transformation of Africans into Afro-Americans . . . was a slow halting process that left most black people alienated from white society and fully equipped to establish their own distinctive culture," one that in language, patterns of familial descent, and work practices "incorporated more of West African culture into their new lives than any other black peoples on mainland North America."

Although there were outposts of the plantation system in the northern colonies, in the iron plantations of the Middle Colonies, and in the large stock-farming operations in the Narragansett country of Rhode Island, most blacks in the northern colonies tended to live and work either as agricultural workers on small units of production in the countryside or in small numbers as domestics, hired laborers, teamsters, and dock and maritime workers in towns. Indeed, as [Ira] Berlin has remarked, the importance of slaves "to the growth of Northern cities increased during the eighteenth century" as urban slavery "moved steadily away from the household to the docks, warehouses and shops." A steady rise in the "importance of slaves to the work force" in the northern colonies after 1730 led to considerable importations directly from Africa, particularly into Rhode Island and the Middle Colonies, throughout the middle decades of the eighteenth century. This development enabled blacks to draw upon and to "remain acutely conscious of their African inheritance" at the same time that their emerging Afro-American culture was being increasingly "integrated into the larger Euro-American one."

Notwithstanding the importance of these substantial differences among the slave systems of continental British North America, however, it is important to an understanding of the character of the emerging society and culture of British North America to emphasize certain basic similarities among them. No region displayed a manifest reluctance to employ slaves before the 1760s and 1770s. If only those colonies from New York south "had fairly elaborate slave codes," they all still "sanctioned slaveholding on the eve of the American Revolution" and "had at least the rudiments of a statutory law of slavery or race" that "defined slavery as a lifetime condition," made slave status "hereditable through the mother," identified it racially with people of African

descent, defined slaves as property, and established a system of "racial etiquette" designed to maintain a clear and permanent distinction between the free white inhabitants and their black slaves. Everywhere, this well-established system of racial slavery was thus based on "the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons" defined primarily on the basis of color and without "social existence" outside the persons of their free owners. Along with the continuing importance of the institution of servitude, the powerful presence, wide diffusion, and—except in Nova Scotia and New Hampshire—expanding use of slavery in the 1760s and 1770s throughout colonial British America provides a vivid reminder of just how fundamentally exploitive that society was.

If the emerging society of late colonial British America was at once expansive, mobile, prosperous, increasingly more differentiated, and exploitive of its least fortunate members, it fulfilled many of the most sanguine hopes of the first settlers. . . .

Notwithstanding the "serene rustic image of self-sufficient communities" invoked by some historians to characterize colonial British America, no group of colonists, as Carole Shammas has shown, were "commercial primitives" in the sense that they were entirely cut off from the secular market society of this broader Atlantic commercial world. Very few households had the resources necessary to be self-sufficient and therefore had both to supplement "homegrown products with textiles, flour, butter, and meat bought from tradesmen, peddlars, and neighboring producers" and to function in an environment in which the prices that were almost always "attached to their labor and goods" were invariably "affected by regional, continental, and international markets." Even in the most isolated areas of colonial New England, Shammas has found, colonial Americans "fully participate[d] in" this emerging commercial world. . . . Indeed, the social depth and extent of British-American involvement in this consumer revolution provided a remarkable testimony to the breadth of economic well-being among colonists in all regions: the top two-thirds of the population participated in it, whereas only the top quarter did so in Britain.

In this emerging secular and commercial culture, the central orientation of people in the littoral became the achievement of personal independence, a state in which a man and his family and broader dependents could live "at ease" rather than in anxiety, in contentment rather than in want, in respectability rather than in meanness, and, perhaps most important, in freedom from the will and control of other men. On the eastern side of the Atlantic, in Britain and in Ireland, and in the confined spaces of the small Atlantic and Caribbean island colonies, the proportion of independent men in the total male population was small. But in the continental colonies, the opportunity to acquire land, an independent trade, or both was so wide as to put the achievement of independence within the grasp of most able-bodied, active, and enterprising free men. The prospect for "a very comfortable and independent subsistence" held out by promotional writers, land developers, and government authorities contributed throughout the colonial era to act as a powerful magnet in attracting settlers to new colonies and newly opening areas.

Moreover, although the achievement of genuine affluence and a gentle status was confined to a relatively small number of people, as it was in contemporary Britain, the comparatively widespread realization of independence by people whose beginnings were modest, a realization achieved mostly by the disciplined application of industry to the mastery of the soil, contributed to an equally broad diffusion of an expansive sense of self-worth throughout the independent, mostly landowning adult male population. . . .

In this situation, the achievement and peaceful enjoyment of personal independence, the objective that had initially drawn so many of both the first settlers and later immigrants to the colonies, continued to be the most visible and powerful imperative in the emerging American culture, the principal aspiration and animating drive in the lives of colonists in all regions. The most popular cultural image in eighteenth-century British America was the biblical image of the independent farmer sitting contentedly and safely under his own shade trees in front of his own home in full view of his fields, his flocks, and his dependents, including slaves if he had them. This was precisely the image Thomas Jefferson evoked in the Declaration of Independence when he included among the inalienable rights of man not merely life and liberty but also the "pursuit of happiness." . . .

. . . [T]he people who created and perpetuated the new societies of colonial British America sought not merely personal independence as individuals and the welfare of their families but also the social goal of improved societies that would both guarantee the independence they hoped to achieve and enable them to enjoy its fruits. Indeed, demands and aspirations for improvement were nearly as prominent among settlers in these new societies as were those for independence and affluence.

Ubiquitous in the economic writers of early modern Britain, the language of improvement as it took shape in Britain primarily referred to schemes, devices, or projects through which the economic position of the nation might be advanced, the estates or fortunes of individuals might be bettered, or existing resources might be made more productive. . . . In the new and relatively undeveloped societies of colonial British America, . . . the term *improvement* acquired a much wider meaning: it was used to describe a state of society that was far removed from the savagery associated with the native Indians. An *improved* society was one defined by a series of positive and negative juxtapositions. Not wild, barbaric, irregular, rustic, or crude, it was settled, cultivated, civilized, orderly, developed, and polite. The primary model for an improved society was the emerging and more settled, orderly, and coherent society of contemporary Britain. For new frontier settlements within the colonies, it was the older occupied areas along the seacoast. With re-creation and not innovation as their aim, colonial British Americans generally aspired to a fully developed market society with credit, commercial agriculture, slavery, and a rapid circulation of money and goods. They wanted a settled and hierarchical social structure with social distinctions ranging from the genteel

down to the vulgar. In particular, they wanted a social structure that would enable successful independent and affluent people, in conformity with the long-standing traditions of Western civilization (and probably all other highly developed civilizations), to exploit dependent people. They desired authoritative, if not very obtrusive, political institutions that could facilitate their socioeconomic and cultural development and would be presided over by people whose very success in the private realm testified to their merit and capacity and gave them a legitimate claim to political leadership. They wanted vital traditional social institutions that would contribute to and stand as visible symbols of their improvement, including churches, schools, and towns. . . .

By the 1730s and 1740s in older colonies and by the 1740s and 1750s in the newer ones, both provincial and, except in the most recently settled areas, local politics were dominated by coherent, effective, acknowledged, and authoritative political elites with considerable social and economic power, extensive political experience, confidence in their capacity to govern, and—what crucially distinguished them from their European counterparts—broad public support. Second, they had viable governing institutions at both the local and provincial levels most of which were becoming more and more assimilated to those in metropolitan Britain, vigorous traditions of internal self-government, and extensive experience in coping with the socioeconomic and other problems peculiar to their own societies. Third, even though political participation was limited to white, independent, adult males, their political systems were almost certainly more inclusive and more responsive to public opinion than those of any other societies in the world at that time, and they were becoming more and more capable of permitting the resolution of conflict, absorbing new and diverse groups, and, as their recent histories had so amply attested, providing political stability in periods of rapid demographic, economic, and territorial expansion.

If the several colonial polities were becoming more expert, they were also becoming far more settled. By the mid-eighteenth century, levels of collective violence and civil disorder were ordinarily low, few colonies had outstanding issues that deeply divided the polity, society routinely accepted existing institutional and leadership structures, relations among the several branches and levels of government had been thoroughly regularized, rates of turnover among elected officials were low, changes in leadership followed an orderly process through regular constitutional channels without serious disruption of the polity, and factional and party strife was either being routinized or reduced to levels at which it was not dysfunctional within the political system. As was manifest in declining turnover among elected representatives to the colonial assemblies in most colonies, the electorate increasingly exhibited a passive and uncoerced deference toward the governing elite. With their attentions firmly concentrated on their own individual and family goals in the private realm, the vast bulk of the electorate seems, in ordinary times, to have had little interest in taking an active role in public life. Together, these developments brought a new stability and regularity to colonial political life in the three or four decades before 1760.

Notwithstanding these developments, the public realm everywhere re-

mained small. Citizens expected little from government . . . . Indeed, possessing limited powers, colonial governments necessarily exerted only weak authority and were heavily dependent upon public opinion, which sharply limited the scope for action among political leaders. Government in these always potentially highly participatory polities was necessarily consensual. Always open to challenge from dissatisfied elements among the free population, the several polities of late colonial British America invariably contained a latent potential for widespread popular mobilization.

If many of the features of these emerging American political systems revealed a growing capacity for accommodation among increasingly differentiated and complex social populations within the several colonial polities, the same can be said for developments in other areas of cultural life. The societies of all regions of colonial British America remained predominantly English. But the substantial immigration of non-English groups after 1713 and, notwithstanding the strong predisposition of people from many of these groups to settle in communities of their own kind, the consequent intermingling of peoples of diverse cultural and national backgrounds and competing religious persuasions slowly edged people toward a habit of compromise and an enhanced capacity for the toleration and acceptance of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. At the same time, the overwhelming cultural preoccupation with the pursuit of individual and family happiness in the socioeconomic area seems everywhere to have weakened the impulse to try to enforce a coercive religious uniformity. . . .

Among the several colonial regions, there remained significant differences. At least on the continent, however, these regions were becoming increasingly alike during the generations immediately preceding the American Revolution. Over that period, a common developmental process produced a slow but powerful cultural and social convergence that mitigated the sharp variations that had distinguished the several regions of colonial British America from one another during the early generations of settlement. Out of this steady process of convergence emerged the beginnings of an American cultural order that was waiting to be defined during and immediately after the era of the American Revolution. . . .

Divergence in Four Colonial Cultures

DAVID HACKETT FISCHER

Exodus: The Four Great Migrations, 1629–1750

After 1629 the major folk movements began to occur. . . . [T]he first wave (1629–40) was an exodus of English Puritans who came mainly from the eastern counties and planted in Massachusetts a very special culture with unique patterns of speech and architecture, distinctive ideas about marriage

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David Hackett Fischer, "Four British Folkways in America: The Origin and Persistence of Regional Culture in the United States," conclusion of *Albion's Seed* (New York: Oxford, 1989), excerpts from 785–788, 793–796, 803–820. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.