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CHAPTER

1

Urban America in the Colonial Age, 1600–1776

URBAN BEGINNINGS

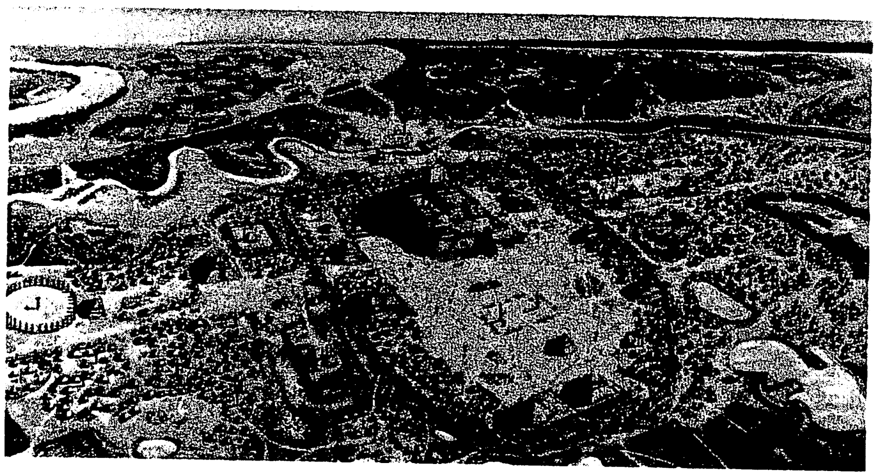
The history of city building on the North American continent preceded the arrival of the Europeans. Native tribes in the Mississippi Valley had built a city known as Cahokia, estimated to have had a population of thirty-five thousand long before whites settled the area. Artifacts recovered at Cahokia indicate the existence of far-flung trading networks, specialization of crafts, and clustered housing and markets, although by the time of European colonization this urban civilization had largely disappeared. Similarly, archaeological evidence of a Huron town in the Great Lakes region has revealed more than one hundred large structures that probably housed a population of between four and six thousand people in the fifteenth century. The Huron town was larger than the average European village of that period and larger than all but a handful of European colonial towns in America even after one hundred fifty years of colonization.

Even more than the Indians, however, the Europeans who colonized North America were urban-minded people, seeking commercial markets as well as the resources that the land promised to yield. A whole continent of forests, plains, and deserts already inhabited by diverse native Americans opened before the colonizers, but before they could plunge into that wilderness they needed central places for trade, defense, government, and worship. Thus they created cities—settlements that functioned to organize and protect populations and to accumulate and disseminate goods and communications.

Contact with Indians significantly shaped European patterns of settlement. Throughout the sixteenth century, contact and trade, although sporadic, provided native American communities and European explorers with exposure to each other's cultures—and to each other's diseases. By the time European colonizers planted permanent settlements, they were often drawn to sites previously occupied but now abandoned by Indians. As the Spanish, who colonized first, overthrew the powerful native empires of Central and South America, they rebuilt settlements on the ruins of what once had been lavish capitals. Cartagena, Mexico City, Lima, and Bogotá grew on these sites, some holding as many as fifty thousand inhabitants by 1700, a size that dwarfed all colonial cities to the north.

In North America, Spanish colonizers committed to securing territory and Christianizing the natives in what are now Florida and New Mexico found Indians living in villages. St. Augustine (1565) was founded at a place near villages of Saturiba people. Sante Fe (1610) was positioned in the center of native Pueblo settlements, close enough for conversion efforts but not so close as to heighten conflict over land use. The survival of the

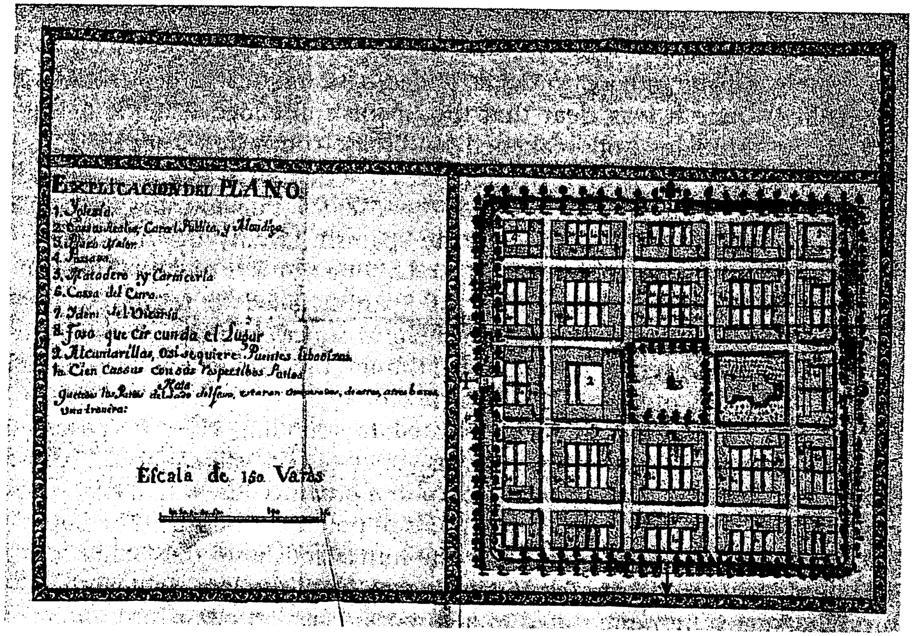
The Native American City of Cahokia. This photograph is based on a reconstruction of Cahokia printed by Valerie Waldorf. At the center of community life was the large earthenware temple that rose to a height of one hundred feet. Cahokia artisans mass-produced knives, salt, and stone hoe blades for local consumption and export. Note the outlying farms surrounding the more densely settled areas. Cahokia may have been a crossroads of trade and water travel in the heartland of North America.



Spanish colonizers depended on native food supplies and knowledge of local environments. For example, the soldiers at St. Augustine who did not follow the Indians' advice to drink boiled sassafras tea rather than local water died. Once it was clear that the Spanish intended to settle permanently, those Indians not weakened by disease contracted from the Europeans attempted to drive out the colonizers. Where natives lacked internal unity, they were unsuccessful, but in New Mexico, Pueblo tribes were able to join together in 1680 to drive out the Spanish. Twenty-five hundred native Americans surrounded Sante Fe, and after a number of days, the Spanish surrendered. Three expeditions of Spanish failed to reconquer New Mexico, but finally in 1693 with the help of superior weapons, the Europeans were able to retake the Santa Fe, though the land and people beyond its walls remained outside of Spanish control.

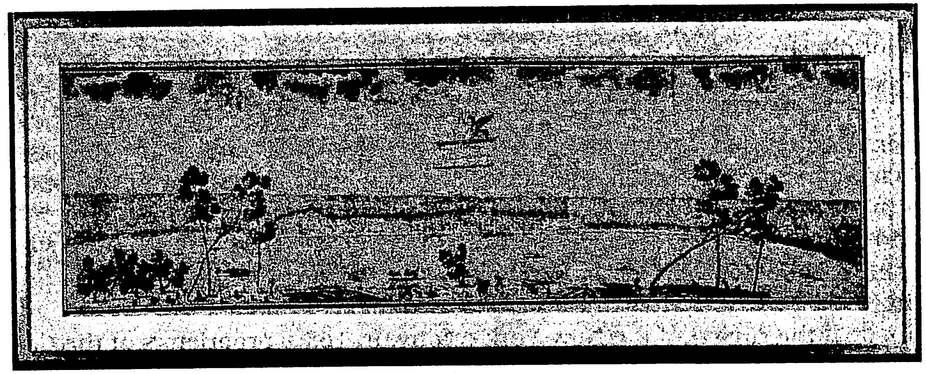
Spanish colonizers were committed to founding cities because the Spanish system of government was one of city-states and because Spaniards identified not with a kingdom or a province but with a city. Cities served a critical function as local symbols of political authority. The boundaries of a Spanish city extended into the hinterlands until they ran into the sphere of influence of another Spanish city. Until the late eighteenth century, St. Augustine represented in a corporate fashion all Spanish interests east of Santa Fe.

The Spanish also developed a formal system of town planning that they applied to their colonies in both North and South America. This was the Laws of the Indies, an enactment of 1583 that synthesized earlier practices of settlement, some from Roman times. The Laws specified uniform requirements for town location, street layout, and land use, and they shaped urban beginnings in Florida and the American Southwest. Early maps of St. Augustine, San Antonio, and San Diego show how the Laws influenced a common design of rectangular blocks, straight streets, and right-angle intersections grouped around a large, central plaza. Spanish colonization intended to distinguish among types of settlements: "pueblos" were to be centers of commerce and colonization; "missions" were established for the goal of religious conversion; and "presidios" were military outposts. But such distinctions often faded once actual settlement occurred. For example, San Antonio was originally established at the headwaters of a river on the site of an Indian village. Called Yanaguana by the natives, it was rechristened in 1691 as San Antonio. A band of seventy-two soldiers, settlers, and monks came to settle in San Antonio in 1718, and a quarrel between the chief military leader and the missionary priest led to separate settlements of a presidio and the mission later famous as the Alamo. Presidios were established at San Diego in 1769, San Francisco in 1776, Los Angeles in 1781, and Santa Barbara in 1782, but soon house and farm buildings sprang up beyond the presidio walls, and the military communities looked indistinguishable from the civil settlements of the pueblos.



Plan of San Antonio, Texas. Spanish colonists built this town according to a 1573 ordinance that specified a layout that situated the church and government buildings around a central plaza. Countless settlements, especially in the American West, followed the same design.

In contrast to the Spanish, the French explorers came not as colonizers but as individuals seeking personal gain. As traders, however, they needed centers for the exchange of goods, so they founded commercial ports along the waterways of colonial North America's perimeters. In the North and West, they built Quebec, Montreal, Detroit, and St. Louis, towns of varied design that usually conformed to the area's topography. These places acted as staging points for fur traders and missionaries who combed the Great Lakes and Mississippi River regions in the early 1700s. In 1718, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Beinville, founded New Orleans near the mouth of the Mississippi, on a site previously used by Choctaw tribes, as the jumping-off place for a project to expand the Bourbon empire by creating a colony based on slave-produced tobacco. By 1721, the population of New Orleans was half slave, and by 1731, slaves were four times as numerous as white settlers or French soldiers. In 1763, at the conclusion of the European colonial conflict known as the Seven Years' War, New Orleans was ceded to the Spanish. Although insurgents led a rebellion against Spanish rule in 1768, the next year, armed Spanish troops regained control over the city. Designed as a large walled settlement with square blocks and an open field on the waterfront, New Orleans developed into an important



New Orleans, 1726. This French watercolor shows an infant port town carved out of the forest along what subsequently became known as the Mississippi River. For the French settlers as well as the English, water-born commerce was vital to urban survival.

commercial crossroads later in the century when settlers spilled across the Appalachian Mountains toward the western river valleys.

Dutch settlers, like the Spanish, brought elaborate urban plans with them. In 1625, a group of colonists from the Dutch West India Company arrived on Manhattan Island with intentions to build a trading center called New Amsterdam, complete with a twenty-five-foot-wide main street and a central marketplace. The Dutch West India Company was a chief international supplier of slaves, and not surprisingly, slaveholding was extensive in New Amsterdam. Although the Dutch used New Amsterdam mainly as a fur trading center and made little effort to develop its harbor, the town soon would become one of the continent's great seaports.

These projects set important precedents for future American cities, but the English colonies along the North Atlantic coast, more than any other colonies, created and shaped American urban life. It was especially in the several settlements along or near the Massachusetts coast that the urban frontier began. These towns combined Puritan notions of social and religious harmony with the village orientation of agrarian peasant society to create a corporate communalism, a collective attitude and local identification that laid the foundations for the development of an urban spirit. The town of Boston, however, recast the mold. According to the precepts of John Winthrop, the colony of Massachusetts Bay was to be "as a City upon a Hill," a place that bound people together in the sanctification of God. But when, in 1630, the settlers relocated from Charlestown across the Charles River to Boston in order to take advantage of the better harbor there, they began a process that was to swell and diversify population and expand economic activity, thereby obliterating Winthrop's vision. For Boston was to become more than an agrarian-based town; its harbor and natural location as a commercial and administrative hub turned it into a prosperous, worldly city.

In subsequent decades, several other cities developed similarly along the Atlantic coast, all sustained by trade. In 1639, a group of religious dissenters founded Newport on the island of Rhode Island, ostensibly as a haven for the persecuted. The site they chose had the best harbor in southern New England, and it was this geographic advantage rather than religious tolerance that assured the town's future. When the British took New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1664, they inherited the finest natural port in North America. They preserved the commercial functions of the city and made it the capital of the New York colony. In 1680, proprietors of the Carolina colony moved their chief settlement from a marshy location to a peninsula jutting out between the Ashley and Cooper rivers in order to utilize its harbor and more healthful environs. The settlement, named Charles Town (later Charleston), soon became the largest and wealthiest town in the southern colonies. And in 1682, William Penn chose the site for Philadelphia one hundred miles up the Delaware River where it was joined by the Schuylkill. This was to be not only the capital of Pennsylvania colony and the most extensive experiment in city building that the colonies had yet witnessed, but also a place intended as "the most considerable for merchandize, trade, and fishery in these parts."

There were and would be others—Providence, Albany, New Haven, Baltimore, Williamsburg, Norfolk, Savannah—but throughout the colonial period, the five cities of Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were the largest and most influential. Although their origins spanned a half century, these cities resembled each other in several important ways. Most fundamentally, all were ports. As depots for immigrants and as transfer points for resources and products going to and coming from other parts of the world, they all linked their fortunes to the sea. In addition, all had planned beginnings, and all were products of the same civilization. Except for Newport, all originated in intent and leadership in London and Amsterdam, both centers of societies that judged cities to be necessary and desirable. Thus it is not surprising that the Dutch and particularly the British established settlements that assumed characteristics of genuinely urban places: the concentration of people, resources, and ideas. The colonial cities represented for the colonizers the transfer of civilization—an urban environment and the activities associated with it—from the Old to the New World.

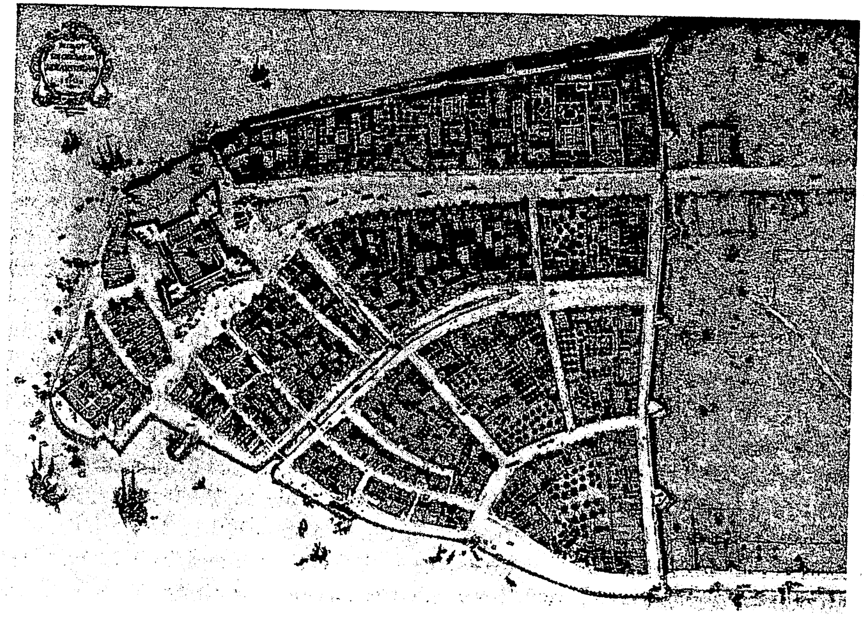
Because the major colonial cities were commercial and administrative centers, attracting inhabitants as much by natural economic forces as by official policy, they grew rapidly, as the population figures on page 7 reveal. None of the American port towns could compare with even the secondary commercial centers of western Europe, such as Lyons, which had reached forty-five thousand in the 1530s, or Norwich, which had grown to nine-

	Population		
	1690	1742	1775
Boston	7,000	16,382	16,000
Philadelphia	4,000	13,000	24,000
New York	3,900	11,000	25,000
Newport	2,600	6,200	11,000
Charleston	1,100	6,800	12,000

teen thousand by the 1570s. American port towns were small because they served regional populations that were still themselves small and because the risks of trade, the lack of agricultural hinterlands, and the low level of credit available to seaport entrepreneurs limited the opportunities for growth of a market economy on a scale comparable to European commercial capitals. Still, this surge of urban population satisfied British mercantile objectives of centralization for the sake of control. Indeed, the Crown encouraged the growth of towns because such concentrations of population facilitated defense and government of the colonists.

But the size and economic opportunities of these cities also prompted activities that stretched the intended limits of colonial administration and eventually threatened the colonial system. As links in the mercantilist system, the colonial ports collected and dispatched raw materials such as grain, rice, fish, furs, and lumber that were needed by England, and they received the manufactured wares of British merchants for American consumption. Thus most lines of communication initially extended from individual cities to the mother country rather than among the colonies themselves.

It was not long, however, before colonial towns bred their own merchants and tradesmen who began to look to the interior settlements in search of markets for locally produced as well as imported goods. Consequently, each city began to cultivate its own commercial hinterland, an activity that turned the colonial ports into small commercial powers themselves and enabled them to expand their economies beyond English goals of simple self-support. Just as the colonial mercantile relationship to England drained the colonies of raw materials and what little silver currency circulated, the cities began to draw products and coin from the countryside. The fur trade depended on close relationships with native Americans, and had the effect of drawing Indians into commercial exchange. As early as the 1640s, Boston traders tightened commercial ties westward and southward to Springfield and Hartford and along Long Island Sound, and by the eve of the Revolution inland trade had become an important concern to all of urban America. In Rhode Island, for example, a



Colonial New Amsterdam. This extraordinary map is a redrawing by John Wolcott Adams and N. Phelps Stokes of the Castello Plan of New Amsterdam, first drawn in 1660. The street leading out from the fort and into the undeveloped area is Broadway. The road along the fortification separating the settled area from the unsettled land is Wall Street.

Providence merchant, Welcome Arnold, shipped processed lime—a necessity for the production of mortar and plaster—not only to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore but also to smaller settlements in the New England interior. Arnold added retail consumer goods to his inland lime traffic, and he helped attach a broad hinterland to Providence that choked off any potential expansion by Newport, enabling Providence to surpass Newport's size and become New England's second city by 1800.

The importance of commerce partly explains why most major colonial cities were in the North. With the exceptions of Charleston and, to a lesser degree, Savannah and Norfolk, the South lacked the deep, safe harbors that benefited northern ports. But unlike the North, the South had many rivers that were navigable far inland. Ports were therefore less important in the South because trading ships did not have to stop at the coast to transfer cargoes to wagons and smaller boats that could travel into the interior. Also, the southern economy, tied to staple-crop agriculture, tended to be more self-sufficient and less dependent on trade than that of the more diversified North. Southern plantations produced much of their own food and clothing, and the region's wealth was invested more in labor than in commerce and industry. Finally, because a large proportion of southern residents were

slaves and indentured servants rather than wage laborers, there were relatively fewer people in the South with expendable incomes for commercial exchange.

Size and commercial activity, combined with benign neglect on the part of England, also forced colonial cities into the expansion of self-government. Most towns were created by charters of incorporation granted by the king or the provincial government. These charters defined the form and scope of local administration. Gradually, every colonial city except Charleston assumed self-management of local affairs, acquiring power either by piecemeal grant or by charter revision. Philadelphia and (after 1664) New York, capitals of proprietary colonies, resembled English cities in that they were municipal boroughs, incorporated by royal charter and administered by a mayor and council. The dominant English tradition of urban self-government was the closed municipal corporation, which reflected the particular commercial quality of cities. Political privileges rested in the hands of those who had skills or property, and the vast majority of local officials were chosen from merchants and artisans. In Philadelphia, many officers served for life, and in New York City the same officials were generally reelected year after year. Local ordinances were concerned with regulating and promoting trade. In an economy of scarcity, municipal corporations enforced community norms of commercial conduct. Most ordinances concerned such issues as limiting entry into certain skilled crafts, establishing standard weights and measures, fixing prices for locally produced goods, and controlling the quality of those goods. In New York and Philadelphia, the municipal corporation fixed a just price for bread and set the fees that carters could charge. Most city revenues were derived from license fees and rental of market stalls.

In contrast, the affairs of Boston and Newport were attended to in town meetings, an institution that resembled the assemblies of rural England yet grew out of Puritan congregationalism. Several times a year all male residents (freemen) of the town would meet to conduct local business—to elect officials, pass laws, levy taxes, and settle disputes. The more open structure and broader fiscal and administrative powers of Boston and Newport made their governments more efficient than those of New York and Philadelphia. Town meetings were thus symbols of order as well as agencies of government. However, they took place only a few times a year. In between, selectmen—chosen as executive officials—assumed governmental duties. Their power over appointments, judiciary decisions, and administration often diminished the initiative of the town meeting. The same men, usually those of high standing in both the marketplace and the church, tended to monopolize the councils of selectmen. Traditions of deference in Boston as well as in other colonial cities meant that a community's wealthiest and most well-established men stood for election and were returned to office year after year. Political factions or parties were considered dangerous, and municipal elections were not seen as forums for expressing differing political ideologies. Nor was political representation understood as expressing competing social, residential, or economic interests. Elections were a traditional means of confirming existing patterns of social order.

Throughout the colonial era the government of Charleston remained in the hands of the provincial assembly that appointed commissioners to manage the city's affairs. Assemblymen and commissioners often did not live in Charleston, and they represented interests that were seldom sympathetic to the city's welfare. The particular form of urban rule in Charlestown burdened the city with the least responsive government of the five ports.

Similar hierarchies were also the rule in non-British cities. During the French years in New Orleans, the city was governed by the superior council, the sole governing and judicial body in the colony, run by a handful of planters appointed by the Crown. During Spanish sovereignty, the superior council was replaced by a Spanish council, *cabildo*, composed of the governor, six perpetual regidors, two judges, an attorney general, and a clerk, with limited duties. In those years, New Orleans was run by Spanish military officers and courts backed by a garrison of Spanish-speaking white or mestizo troops from Cuba. In Spanish Santa Fe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, residents elected a four-member *cabildo*, which had the responsibility for advising the Spanish-appointed governor and governing the capital, in turn electing a magistrate, a bailiff, and a notary.

PROBLEMS OF GROWTH

The urban settlements of the British colonies did not seem much like cities in the early 1700s. Cattle grazed behind crudely built houses, and hogs wallowed in muddy streets. Urban dwellers of different classes, ethnic backgrounds, and occupations lived crowded together along streets near the harbor and wharves. No one could remain anonymous in a place whose boundaries extended no more than a mile in any direction. Paper money was scarce, so people often bought things by bartering with something they had grown or made. The church provided the principal social community beyond family and work lives; there were few newspapers, theaters, or other diversions. Oral discourse rather than written or printed words shaped communication, and a combination of superstition and belief in the Bible's prescriptions influenced people's behavior.

Yet, from their inception, local governments felt the pressures of urban growth. Many of the physical and social problems that vex modern urban society haunted every colonial city. Although the colonials lacked the practical experience and technological tools to solve these problems,

each town improvised, adjusted, and borrowed methods of response from Europe and from each other. Initially, individual citizens took steps to remove inconveniences, but quite early they combined and made collective efforts, often surrendering private initiative to government directive.

Urban organization requires efficient transportation and communication, so it is not surprising that town governments devoted much effort to determining where, how, and when new streets should be constructed. In every city—including Philadelphia, where gridiron street patterns had been established prior to settlement—individuals laid out new roads and paths where they were needed. As a result, narrow streets wound chaotically through some districts. In the 1700s, government intervened, and the construction of new streets became accepted as a function of public policy, even though such roads were merely open stretches cleared of obstructions. In New York City, officers of the municipal corporation expected private citizens to assume the cost of laying out roads as well as filling in swamps, digging wells, erecting bridges, dredging harbors, and building wharves. The city's control of public property made it possible for the municipality to impose these responsibilities on individuals.

The laying of streets, however, involved more than locating a route, removing stumps and rocks, and, occasionally, paving with gravel and cobblestones. Mud and stagnant water impeded traffic and threatened health, making drainage a pressing concern. Boston was most successful in meeting this problem: after 1713 the city began grading streets so that they slanted from the middle to side gutters. By the 1760s, other cities had initiated drainage projects. Cities dealt with related problems as well. The governments of Boston, New York, and Newport fined builders who erected structures in paths of traffic. Several towns constructed bridges over streams and marshes. These intrusions of public authority met with little resistance from private citizens.

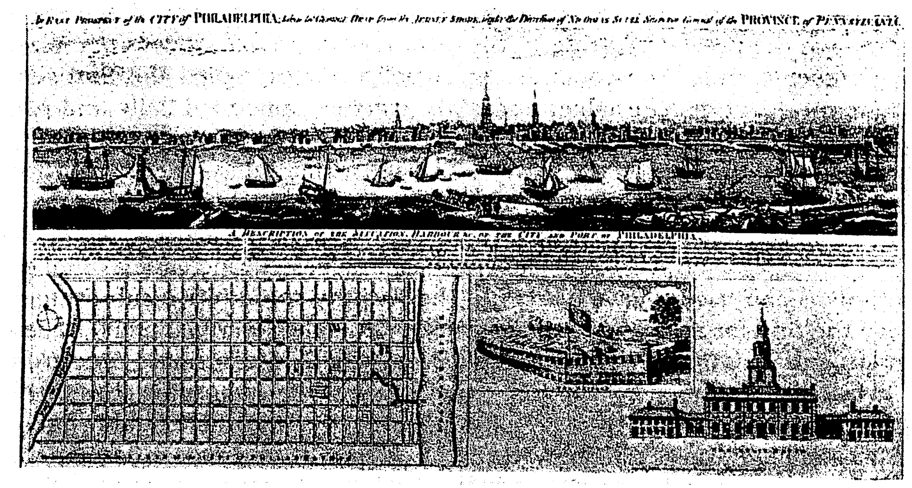
Once streets, sewers, and bridges were built, the difficulties were far from over, for as the colonial cities grew, so did their traffic. Streets served not only as transportation routes but also as play areas for children and foraging grounds for hogs, dogs, and cattle. By the mid–seventeenth century, congestion and accidents had become common street nuisances. To protect pedestrians and playing children, several towns levied fines for riding at fast gaits and for failure to keep horses and other draft animals under tight rein.

Regulations could not lessen the amount of traffic, however. In an attempt to ease the pressure, cities built more streets, undertook grading and paving projects, and paid more attention to street cleaning. The best streets were those of Boston and Newport, whose governments could levy taxes for highway improvements. Other cities had to depend on private means or other sources of funds, such as fines, license fees, or lotteries. After the Spanish gained control of New Orleans in 1769, the *cabildo* raised revenue for levee repairs by an anchorage tax on every vessel. Where projects were elaborate, as in Boston, full-time laborers were hired at public expense. Most cities, however, followed the English custom of requiring each householder to devote a certain number of days each year to labor on public works or hire a substitute. In Charleston slaves did most of the public work, and in Boston each free African American was forced to work on the roads eight days a year instead of doing watch duty, from which blacks were prohibited. Tossing refuse onto the streets had been one bad habit of European city dwellers, and colonial Americans were no more restrained. Their streets quickly became cluttered with human and animal waste, ashes, bones, shells, and other rubbish. Cities, beginning with Boston and New Amsterdam, responded by passing laws prohibiting the indiscriminate disposal of trash. A report from Boston in 1652 noted:

> At a meeting of all the Selckt men, it is ordered that no person inhabiting within said Town shall throw forth or lay any intralls of beasts or fowls or garbidg or Carion or dead dogs or Cattle or any other dead beast or stinkeing thing, in any hie way or dich or Common within this neck of Boston, but ar injoynened to bury all such things that soe they may prevent all anoyanc unto any. Further it is ordered that noe person shall throw forth dust or dung or shreds of Cloth or lether or any tobacco stalks or any such thing into the streets.

Such measures proved impossible to enforce and ineffective as deterrents. Nonetheless, American streets probably were cleaner, better constructed, and better lighted than most of their European counterparts. As early as the 1690s, Philadelphians were lighting lamps in front of their homes at night. Residents of other cities followed this example, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, local governments had begun to raise and allocate money for public street lighting.

Poor streets and traffic congestion caused only inconvenience; fire threatened existence. Indeed, fire was probably the most feared hazard of urban life and necessitated public regulations that were less imperative in the countryside. Most buildings in colonial American cities sat close together and were made of wood, so once started, a blaze was hard to confine. Lacking advanced technology, local authorities could take only limited and precautionary measures, such as regulating storage of gunpowder and other combustibles and establishing standards for construction of roofs and chimneys. These last provisions formed the first American building codes and included prohibitions on reed and straw roofing and on wood and plaster chimneys. Authorities also attempted to prevent fires by limiting places in which brush or rubbish could be burned and forbidding construction of wooden buildings in the center of town. In 1649, Boston adopted the English curfew, requiring all house fires to be covered or extinguished between 9 P.M. and 4:30 A.M. Nearly all American towns adopted the European tradition of community responsibility for extinguishing fires. Each city



Philadelphia in 1756. By the mid-eighteenth century, Philadelphia was the largest and most powerful city in colonial North America. Its bustling port served the city's import and export businesses.

contained at least one volunteer fire company made up of private citizens. Unfortunately, towns usually did not react to such urban dangers as fires until after a disaster had occurred. This was to be a recurring pattern in American urban history. Destructive or disruptive events usually provoked some civic reform, but then the concern would dwindle to apathy until another disaster struck and galvanized a new spurt of action. After the first of several major conflagrations struck Boston in 1653, public alarm prompted creation of the colonies' first urban fire code. The measure required every householder to keep a ladder to facilitate fire fighting. The town also bought ladders and hooks, and officials assumed the authority to order the leveling of any burning structure. Few other precautions were taken until 1676, when another conflagration threatened Boston. After it was extinguished, the town bought a fire engine from England and appointed a supervisor and twelve assistants to operate it. Even these measures were not enough, for in 1679 one of the worst fires in American history swept Boston, ravaging most of its commercial section. This disaster forced officials to organize the city into districts for more efficient fire control. Other towns acted similarly to meet the threat of fire, but Boston's destructive fires resulted in regulations and equipment that ranked among the most advanced in the world.

Protection was another problem emerging in the young cities. The seamen, transient laborers, and others attracted to the ports by the promise of jobs engendered by the market economy threatened the orderly world of family and communal governance, necessitating some type of agency to preserve the peace and protect property. At first, private citizens organized volunteer patrols. Subsequently, most police forces copied the European system of daytime constables and night watches appointed daily and paid for by the public. Although differing from town to town, the watch's duties consisted mainly of apprehending criminals, maintaining order by controlling brawlers and drunks, and watching for fires.

Constable and watch duty, required of every male citizen, proved to be a thankless and dangerous job, and as time passed, increasing numbers of townsmen tried to evade service. The wealthy could hire a substitute or pay the fine for not serving. Thus, most early police were laborers, tradesmen, and artisans—those who could least afford to contribute time from their daily livelihoods. Colonists' experiences while quartering the British army made them acutely aware of the abuses of power that could be taken by a standing army, and they were thus unwilling to create a permanent, professional police force. By the mid–eighteenth century, city dwellers faced rising danger to person and property from street riots, drunken brawls, and petty thievery. But they did not yet perceive this situation as a significant threat, and they remained uncommitted to the idea of a formal agency of law enforcement.

Notions of public health in the colonial era were probably more primitive than those of fire and police protection. The germ theory of disease had not yet been established; most people believed noxious vapors from stagnant water and decaying material caused sickness. Nevertheless, regulations that attempted to eliminate these vapors by controlling garbage disposal—a task at first left to hogs that roamed the streets—and prohibiting pollution of streams and ponds removed some of the breeding places of disease-carrying pests. Local laws prohibited citizens from dumping refuse and filth in certain public places, and men were hired to carry away trash and human waste. Most cities eventually passed measures that regulated the location and depth of privies and graves and confined tanneries and slaughterhouses to the edge of town. Measures controlling the disposal of waste were enacted with little, if any, objection to the use of governmental authority.

Town dwellers feared infectious diseases as much as fires, because once an epidemic began it was hard to stop. All the colonial cities except Charleston were located away from the climate and diseases of the tropics, but all were seaports and therefore vulnerable to epidemics brought in by infected seamen, vermin, and insects. Smallpox, the most frequent and dreaded danger, threatened every city. Boston and Charleston suffered smallpox epidemics that killed hundreds at a time. But as with fire, misfortune helped to create progressive policy, for by the 1760s, Americans were beginning to accept inoculation as the best preventive measure. Fevers, dysentery, and other diseases were also prevalent, and the cities combated them by requiring inspections of entering ships and refusing landing to

those on which sickness was found. Boston was the first city to establish quarantine regulations, and by the early 1700s, most other cities had followed its lead. In spite of limited medical knowledge, by 1770, city officials had succeeded remarkably well in controlling most major scourges except yellow fever, which continued to plague eastern and southern cities until the twentieth century.

Another problem of urban growth was the large number of indigent residents, whose care became a major responsibility of each city. Poverty has never been a problem peculiar to cities, but it took on new meaning in the urban context. In the early years of settlement, the incidence of poverty was low, especially relative to English towns. Generally, widows, orphans, and disabled people, impoverished by circumstances beyond their control, were the ones who required assistance. Colonists accepted the seventeenth-century English notion of public responsibility for the support of dependent classes. Poor relief accounted for much of local government expenditures. People in need remained with their families or in the homes of neighbors and were provided with clothes, firewood, and bread.

As towns grew, their involvement with market forces beyond their control brought increasing economic uncertainty—good times and bad times, high and low wages, periodic unemployment. The burden of providing manpower and resources for the European wars of 1689 to 1697, 1702 to 1713, and 1739 to 1747, and the inflation caused by emergency issuance of paper money, hurt a growing part of the urban population. Periodic unemployment, rising prices, and taxes that fell with unusual severity on the lower classes created poverty that was no longer the situational condition of the aged, widowed, or crippled but now a problem that touched the seasonally unemployed, war veterans, new immigrants, and migrants from inland areas seeking employment in the cities. Poverty was particularly visible in the cities, their being much more densely populated than the countryside. In Boston, relief expenditures for the poor rose from five hundred pounds in 1700 to four thousand pounds in 1736, and in New York from two hundred fifty pounds in 1698 to five thousand pounds in the 1770s. Boston, New York, and Philadelphia built almshouses in the 1730s in an attempt to reduce the cost of caring for the growing number of poor citizens by sheltering them under one roof. Some cities required the willing poor to support themselves by picking vegetables, weaving cloth, and making shoes. Almshouses also housed sick poor who could not work and the "Vagrant & Idle Persons" who would not work and were classed as criminals. Some cities stigmatized those on relief by requiring them to wear or carry badges designating their status as paupers. Another form of relief consisted of assigning (binding out) the needy to private businesses in a form of indentured servitude.

Many cities tried to minimize pauperism—as well as their tax money spent on the poor—by restricting immigration. Philadelphia, New York, and nearly all the New England towns had provisions requiring the registration, bonding, or inspection of all newcomers. Those who had no friends or relatives to vouch for them or who lacked visible means of support were ordered away. As the cities grew in size, however, so did the need for laborers and the opportunity for anonymity. By the early 1700s, the restrictions were breaking down, and many places were openly encouraging immigration.

Public relief efforts were increasingly supplemented by aid from private agencies. In the eighteenth century, organizations such as the Scots Charitable Society in Boston and New York, the Carpenters' Company in Philadelphia, and the Fellowship Society in Charleston, as well as churches and wealthy individuals, made substantial contributions for the alleviation of poverty. Still, as time passed, the numbers of urban poor grew ever larger. The proportion of a city's population assisted by public or private money at any one time is difficult to discern. But it seems that for every relief recipient several more lived at the subsistence level and received no aid and that poverty plagued American cities from the very beginning.

Attempts by colonial cities to solve their problems highlight an intertwining of private interest and public welfare. On the one hand, problems were common to all cities. They were predicaments of urban life, of many people living close together, and they required community regulation of formerly private activities. As one historian has written, "In the country a man might construct his home, build his fire, dig his well, erect his privy, and dispose of his rubbish without thought for the well-being of his neighbors, but in town these became objects of community concern and gradually of civic ordinance. In the country a man might be little affected by the poverty or wrong-doing of others, but the towns soon discovered their civic duty in the combatting and control of these social evils."[1] Many problems of health, fire, water, and communications were insoluble at the time, and colonial city dwellers simply tried collectively to minimize them and then to adjust as technological and scientific developments offered solutions. Social problems such as disorder and poverty remained baffling. Nevertheless, a kind of public unity plus the inheritance of a European tradition of public endeavor enabled colonial cities to address their problems and to set precedents for future urban generations.

THE SOCIAL MOSAIC

Between 1690 and 1740, the small colonial seaports grew into commercial centers that rivaled British provincial ports such as Hull, Bristol, and Glasgow. Like their counterparts abroad, the towns of colonial America not only experienced similar problems but also developed similar social mosaics that set them apart from the surrounding countryside. Racial, cultural, and

socioeconomic diversity jumbled urban society. With the exception of the New England towns, restrictions on immigration seldom worked; varied peoples quickly diluted the English composition of most cities. By the early 1700s, Africans and African Americans were almost as numerous as whites in Charleston, and there were substantial numbers of slaves in cities all the way up the coast to Boston. Scotch-Irish and Germans constituted important segments of the populations of Philadelphia and New York, where they met the growing need for laborers. The cities also housed more institutions for the entertainment, edification, and refreshment of their residents than did rural areas. The increasing population provided cities with human and economic resources for the creation of educational facilities and the dissemination of information from the outside world.

Most colonists migrated or descended from European society, where a distinct hierarchy of status prevailed, and they accepted the existence of social differences in America as being divinely sanctioned. Thus a Boston merchant asserted in 1700 that God "hath Ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be High and Honourable, some to be Low and Despicable, some to be Monarchs, Kings, Princes, and Governours, Masters and Commanders, others to be subjects, and to be commanded." From the beginning an ordered social structure crystallized in colonial America, but it operated differently in the cities than in the country. In cities the greater development of the market meant more opportunity to accumulate wealth. But it also created growing inequalities between those whose extensive resources allowed them to take risks and make profits and those whose modest resources made them more vulnerable to economic fluctuation. Though geographical distance did not divide these groups very far from one another in the compact cities, social distances increasingly separated rich from poor, employers from workers.

Colonial urban society consisted of four socioeconomic groups, distinguished by male occupation and wealth. In the top rank were affluent merchants and investors, plus an occasional clergyman or government official. These generally were men who had become wealthy from overseas and inland commerce or had accumulated enough capital to use in lucrative moneylending or land-rental businesses. Merchants often did more than buy and sell goods. In a time when banks, law offices, and construction companies were rare, merchants used their money and influence to assume the role of banker, legal arbitrator, and land developer. As historian Gary Nash has argued, those who controlled mercantile endeavors gained a disproportionate share of economic power in colonial cities through their impact on shipbuilding, credit, real estate, and the flow of marketable goods.[2]

White males in the top status group controlled most of the local wealth (which consisted primarily of property) and filled the higher positions in local government. As time passed, they procured proportionately more of the wealth than those in the lower ranks. According to data compiled by Nash, in 1687 the wealthiest 10 percent of Boston's population controlled 46 percent of the taxable wealth; by 1771, the top 10 percent owned 63 percent. In Philadelphia, over a comparable period, the richest 10 percent of the population increased their holdings from 46 to 72 percent of that city's taxable wealth.[3] In Boston and Philadelphia, as well as in other cities, this upper order was not a closed aristocracy. Its membership was large and diverse, including men who had advantages of birth and position as well as those who had risen from a lower rank. Throughout the colonial period, wealth, more than birth, was the principal criterion for admission to this upper group.

Wives of wealthy merchants led lives that were very different from rural women. Wealthy urban women had the benefit of a pool of less-wealthy female workers who could be hired as servants. Supervision of domestic labor was an involved and time-consuming activity. But because wives could send servants to buy and prepare food and could hire seamstresses to create clothing, they had time to write letters and diaries and to engage in rounds of social visiting. Daughters in well-to-do eighteenth-century households were the only American women at the time who could accurately be described as leisured. They did not have to help with household work, so that they were free to sleep late, study music and dancing, and read the latest novels. In cities, because goods were available for purchase, household production decreased as wealth and privilege rose. Once urban women were able to buy items such as tea, milk, butter, candles, linens, coats, and gowns, the seventeenth-century mode of housewifery symbolized by the spinning wheel became increasingly a badge of lower status.

Although the wealthy capitalists wielded considerable power, the lower ranks better embodied typical colonial urban life. Beneath the merchants and their allies was a large, diverse, fluctuating population of craftsmen, retailers, minor jobbers, and innkeepers that constituted the middle class. Among the craftsmen and retailers were coopers, who provided barrels and kegs that were essential for shipping and storage; carpenters and woodworkers, who provided housing and furnishings; food dealers; metalsmiths; and printers. These individuals carried on local manufacturing and merchandising in the preindustrial city, running the shops that predominated in every town. Often they were aided by an apprentice, indentured servant, or wife. Individual shopkeepers and craftsmen generally lived and worked in the same house.

Within most of the crafts a wide range of wealth and status existed, reflecting the hierarchy within each craft from apprentice to journeyman to master craftsman. The range of wealth was thus related to age but also to the possibilities within each craft. Artisans working with precious metals were more likely to earn a comfortable living than were cobblers, and house carpenters were more likely to become property owners than were tailors and stocking weavers. Artisans strived to earn a "competency," enough money to live in relative comfort, and in every city the average craftsman or shopkeeper usually owned enough property to vote, often also holding a minor office. Shopkeepers' and artisans' wives probably did not have to spin or weave, but occasionally they assisted in businesses and acted in place of their husbands in case of absence or death. They had responsibility for food preparation, which often included cultivating a garden and raising poultry. Daughters and wives also sewed extensively to keep their families clothed.

Economic expansion and the opportunity to rise in importance by acquiring wealth attuned colonial city dwellers to bourgeois standards. But such conditions also made the middle classes vulnerable to economic dislocation: their position on the social scale rose and fell over time, depending on economic developments. The early years of urban growth offered lucrative opportunities for small-scale investors and entrepreneurs. As the cities grew, however, so did the size and specialization of their economic operations. By the middle of the eighteenth century larger businesses were squeezing small investors out of high-return areas such as commercial shipping. Between 1687 and 1771 the proportion of taxable wealth owned by Boston's and Philadelphia's middle classes declined while the percentage owned by the upper segments rose. Evidence indicates that economic opportunities of the urban middle class in most cities shrank until westward expansion and the dawn of industrialization in the early 1800s opened new avenues for advancement.

The third economic group consisted of a growing number of free unskilled laborers, mariners, and some artisans. These people owned little or no property. Many were transients, earning a living on the docks and at sea or moving from town to town in search of work. They loaded, unloaded, and served as crew on ships that transported cargoes between the seaports and Europe and the West Indies. Other laborers dug wells, graded streets, and hauled wood and other goods. Their wives and daughters took in washing, kept boarders, spun cloth, and served as seamstresses and housekeepers for middle- and upper-class families. Many working-class families lived in crowded two- or three-room cottages at a bare level of subsistence, but in labor-scarce cities some could command high wages and acquire property. Geographic mobility and chances for improvement precluded the development of a permanent urban proletariat. The entrance to most crafts remained open, and local restrictions on newcomers failed to prevent working-class families from migrating. Still, cities housed much higher proportions of poor and propertyless people than did rural areas. By the close of the colonial period, the poor constituted between 20 and 30 percent of many a city's population—though the percentage was smaller in southern towns, where large numbers of slaves reduced the proportion of white laborers. The fortunes of the free urban working classes were especially sensitive to economic fluctuations. If the local economy was expanding, they could subsist and even improve their lot. But when economic uncertainty and decline brought sacrifice and deprivation to the middle and upper classes, the working classes struggled for survival.

Indentured servants were positioned below free labor and above slaves in the social structure. Indentured servitude was closely linked to immigration because most indentured servants traded four or seven years of labor for passage across the Atlantic and on arrival were sold at the docks to the highest bidder. They were an important part of the labor force in New York and Philadelphia. In the early years of urban settlement, many indentured servants were probably kin of emigrating Englishmen who paid their passage in return for their labor. Later, German and Scotch-Irish provided the majority of bound white laborers. By the 1730s, German and Scotch-Irish indentured servants were most numerous in Philadelphia. There they worked not just in households but in ropewalks, shipyards, bakeries, and liveries, and by the mid-1740s, they constituted more than one-fifth of the city's white male work force.

A rising standard of living and limited mobility up the social scale were possible for about four-fifths of colonial city dwellers—a sizable majority—but the remainder, consisting of Africans, African Americans, and native Americans, both slave and free, formed a permanent, inescapable lower class. In the Southwest the availability of native American labor near the mission at San Gabriel was one of the main attractions prompting northern Mexican colonists to found the city of Los Angeles. Native American slaves could be found in several northern towns as well, although by 1715, the difficulties of dealing with Indian slaves prompted Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut to pass laws forbidding importations from Charleston, the center of the Yamasee Indian slave trade.

African slaves were the most common form of bound labor everywhere. In 1690, about one in nine Boston households included at least one slave, and in 1698, more than one-third of New York households had slaves. Although the Quakers who dominated Philadelphia later repudiated slavery, earlier settlers freely bought and sold slaves. After 1714, sizable numbers of slaves were imported into all the northern port towns. By 1750, about one-fifth of all Boston families owned slaves. By 1746, an estimated one-half of New York households owned slaves.

In most colonial cities, slaves did much of the heavy manual work and provided most of the domestic service. Slave ownership was almost universal among the urban elite; costumed slave coachmen and livery grooms were a common way of visibly displaying wealth. Newspaper advertisements in New York City for skilled male slaves suggest that some members of the artisan class prospered sufficiently to substitute bondsmen for apprentices. In all the ports, male slaves worked as seamen and in the

ropewalks, shipyards, and sail manufactories. The importance of these slaves to the commercial growth of cities increased during the eighteenth century.

Northern slavery was characterized by particular patterns that distinguished it from slavery in the Chesapeake Bay area and low-country south. For one thing, northern slavery was disproportionately urban. During the eighteenth century, between one-fifth and one-fourth of the slaves in New York colony lived in New York City, one-third of the slaves in New Hampshire and Massachusetts lived in Portsmouth and Boston, and nearly half of Rhode Island's slave population lived in Newport. Crowded urban housing conditions forced slaves into back rooms, lofts, and makeshift alley shacks. Under these circumstances few masters held more than one or two slaves, and masters discouraged their slaves from establishing families. As a result there were more male slaves than females in the cities, especially in the early years, and slave women had fewer children than did white women. As Ira Berlin has argued, "The inability or unwillingness of urban masters to support large households of slaves put a severe strain on slave family life, but it also encouraged masters to allow their slaves to live out, hire their own time, and thereby gain a measure of independence and freedom."[4]

In the cities, slaves tended to live and work nearby to whites. This proximity gave slaves firsthand knowledge of their masters' world, as well as familiarity with the circumstances of working class whites, with whom they interacted in taverns and at fairs. This knowledge of white culture in combination with the job opportunities provided by the complex northern economy, the close ties between master and slave, and the social life of city streets helped urban slaves to make better lives for themselves. In the eighteenth century some urban slaves informally enjoyed the rights to hold property of their own, visit friends, live with their families, or hire out their own time.

The cosmopolitan nature of the cities also sped the transformation of African to African American. In the early years of northern urban slavery, most slaves did not arrive directly from Africa but came through the West Indies or the mainland South. This seasoning in slavery had worked to destroy ties to African tribal culture but had also prepared slaves to turn urban opportunities to their own advantage. Between 1732 and 1754, slaves were imported into the cities directly from Africa. As Berlin has written, "Newly arrived Africans reawakened urban slaves to their African past by providing direct knowledge of West African society."[5] The result was the construction of communities within communities, places where blacks could find friendships, marriage partners, and other kinds of association based on racial commonalities. Northern slaves designated their churches "African" and called themselves "Sons of Africa." They showed their new knowledge of African culture most clearly in the celebration of Negro

Election Day, a West African ritual festival of role reversal celebrated commonly in New England and middle-colony towns in the mid-eighteenth century. Celebrations took different forms in different communities, but everywhere a day of merrymaking that drew in slaves from the surrounding countryside culminated in the selection of kings, governors, and judges. While the "governors" settled minor disputes, slaves dressed in their masters' clothing and rode their masters' horses. Negro Election Day ritualized a momentary release from bondage and also endorsed leadership within the African-American community. (Whites, confident of their control over the institution of slavery, supported Election Day, even sometimes joining in the festivities themselves.) In these interstices of urban life, slaves developed strong and cohesive African-American traditions that would sustain future urban black communities.

In southern cities like New Orleans, where Africans and African Americans far outnumbered whites, the possibility of free blacks made whites nervous. Although a master very occasionally freed a slave, most slave owners abided by the laws discouraging emancipation. The only exception occurred in 1729, when the governor, concerned about threats from Natchez Indians who had allied with the French, freed two dozen slaves in exchange for their leading a bloody attack on a nearby Indian village. These freed slaves served as a regular company to fight with whites against the Natchez and Chickasaw in the 1730s. By 1751, the Louisiana superior council passed police regulations protecting a racial regime, prescribing regulations for the day-to-day governance of all blacks, not just slaves, by all whites.

After 1769, Spanish policy in New Orleans expanded opportunities for slaves to buy their freedom. The Spanish continued to regulate slaves and free blacks with extensive legislation, but they hoped that the system of freedom purchase would divide the slave majority by weakening its potential for united action and give a stake in the system to a small but growing number of slaves who might be able to garden, work at trades, hunt, or nurse the sick to gain money to buy their freedom. Taking advantage of this policy by industriously buying their freedom and often their homes as well, free blacks expanded their community in New Orleans slowly at first but at an increasing rate that would alarm French planters by the 1790s.

In southern port cities like Charleston and Savannah, urban African-American slaves' extensive knowledge of white culture contrasted sharply with the survival of West African tribal traditions in the plantation areas. The coastal cities needed workers to transport and process plantation staples, to serve the hundreds of ships that docked at the wharves, to run the planters' urban households, and to satisfy the planters' taste for luxury goods. Slaves did most of this work. Throughout the eighteenth century, slaves constituted more than half of the population of Charleston and other low-country ports. Bondsmen handled virtually all goods arriving or leaving these cities' harbors. Slave artisans also played a large role in urban life, employed by master craftsmen in every variety of work. Slave artisans labored along the waterfront as shipwrights, coopers, and ropemakers and also in the higher trades as silversmiths and cabinetmakers. In addition, slave women controlled much of the marketing in the low-country ports, mediating between slave-grown produce from the countryside and urban consumption.

Mobile, often skilled, and occasionally literate, southern urban slaves understood the white world and, like their counterparts in northern cities, used their knowledge to enlarge their independence. They hired out their own time, earned wages, kept market stalls, even opened shops, lived apart from their masters, and rented houses of their own, sometimes even keeping families intact. Some female slaves gained special positions as a result of intimate sexual relations with white masters, and the small free mulatto population of Charleston was the product of such relationships. In Charleston the considerable size of the slave population relative to the white population made slaveholders much less sanguine than their northern counterparts about the existence of an independent African-American community. But even though restrictions and regulations attempted to limit the autonomous space for communal institutions, the small communities that developed below the bluff in Savannah and along Charleston's Neck confirmed the growing independence of urban African-American culture.

Urban life, with its varied activities and social contacts, was less regimented for a slave than servitude in the country, but it remained restrictive. By the early 1700s most towns had passed ordinances, such as curfews, regulations of movement on city streets, and prohibitions on certain purchases, limiting the private activities of all nonwhites, slave and free. Actual slave insurrections in New York City in 1712 and at the Stono River in South Carolina (twenty miles from Charleston) in 1739, and rumors of slave conspiracy in New York City in 1741 inspired whites to react with terror and execution, exposing the violent coercion that lay just beneath the surface of white paternalism. After the 1712 revolt, thirteen slaves died on the gallows; one starved to death in chains; three were burned at the stake; one was broken on the wheel; and six committed suicide. Mounted whites who stopped the march of rebels from Stono on its way south to Florida killed several slaves and set their heads on mileposts along the road. In New York in 1741, eighteen slaves and fourteen whites were sentenced to be tortured and hanged; thirteen slaves were condemned to burn to death at the stake; and another seventy were transported to the West Indies.

White women, like male and female slaves, were viewed as dependents whose existence depended on their place within the household. Commonly accepted norms of paternal power, female submission, and mutual obligation dictated the nature of relations between wife and husband, just as they ordered those between man and God, slave and master, child and parent. The nuclear family was the central focus of colonial society, even more than in England, because migration had severed individuals and families from their wider kin connections. As dependents, women generally were assumed to be incapable of expressing autonomous political or religious opinions. An adult woman's authority derived from her role as mistress of the household. Under her husband's supervision she directed the household's daily affairs, and should fate or circumstance prevent her husband from fulfilling his role as head of the household, the wife could appropriately stand in his place without changing the patriarchal order of society.

Over time, however, colonial governments increasingly legalized the status of women as deputy husbands by passing statutes that allowed women some limited powers to run businesses in the absence of their husbands. The laws did not endorse women's economic independence; rather they were a means of preventing women whose men were dead or absent from relying on public relief. Nevertheless these laws facilitated women's economic activity, and they implicitly allowed a married woman to have a separate estate. Although self-supporting working widows (and increasingly, spinsters) in the eighteenth century never exceeded 10 percent of the adult female population, they congregated in the towns and cities. In Boston as early as the 1740s, 13 percent of the city's sixteen thousand residents were widows, almost all of them poor, according to the town records.

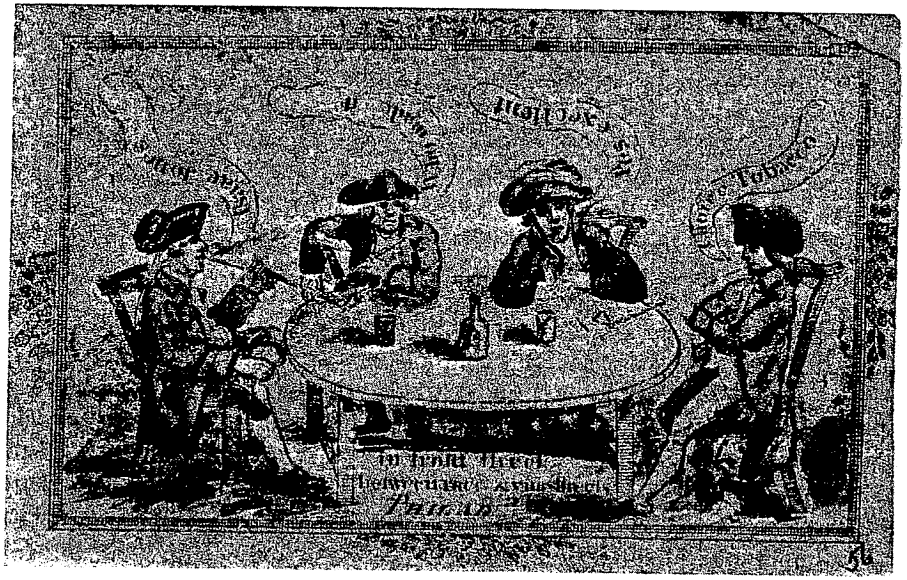
In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some working widows managed trades inherited from their husbands, at least until sons could replace them, and were therefore found in every type of occupation—including mortician, blacksmith, and reporter. But most employed women worked at trades connected to household production and in ventures they started themselves, usually catering to female clients. In Baltimore, 8 percent of the city's households were headed by women in 1796, and two-thirds of these were widows, less than half of whom worked to support themselves. The rest were unmarried, almost all of whom were employed. Although their number included printers, mill owners, and speculators, positions they invariably inherited when they became widows, most of Baltimore's working women, like those elsewhere, entered trades originating in domestic work: seamstresses, laundresses, dyers, soap and candle makers, and lacemakers. As shop proprietresses, they dealt in china, groceries, pastries, dry goods, and millinery. As in other cities, they ran inns, boardinghouses, and taverns. By the end of the eighteenth century women held the majority of liquor licenses in most towns. Women ran dame schools and small boarding schools and worked as midwives, wet nurses, and domestic servants, usually earning less in wages than unskilled white men or hired-out male slaves, barely eking out a living for themselves and their children.

The continuing development of the market economy in cities and the resultant economic specialization heightened distinctions between the

world of men in the marketplace and the world of women in the home. In wealthy families in the North and South, use of servants for cooking and cleaning reoriented women's domestic activities to child rearing, and the importance of women's maternal functions began to be recognized. In the North, the special concerns of Quakers and Puritans with children's spiritual upbringing had the same effect of emphasizing the role of women in their maternal capacity. Historian Mary Beth Norton has found that by the time of the Revolution, urban women's knowledge of family property was limited to the furnishings of the houses in which they lived, unless they were widows or had worked outside the home, while rural women's household tasks sometimes gave them access to information about family property in fields and livestock. Men's knowledge of household accounts and household purchases was similarly limited.[6] Norton's findings suggest that men and women did indeed inhabit different worlds and that the distinctive qualities of urban life sharpened the boundaries separating men's and women's daily lives.

The variety within the colonial urban population fostered new social institutions, modified old ones, and created new communities. An institution particularly affected by urbanization was the church. The initial period of growth of American towns was one in which religion pervaded every aspect of life. Whether in the Puritan North, the Anglican South, or the more divided middle colonies, the clergy were held in high esteem and exerted power over family life, education, and government. Religion defined and enforced social discipline and even entered economic relations.

As time passed, two developments peculiar to urban growth threatened the supremacy of organized religion in the colonial cities. First, population growth and diversity spurred the multiplication of rival sects, which broke down religious unity. Baptists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans contested Quaker preeminence in Philadelphia and Congregational hegemony in the New England cities. Particularly in New England, Puritan ministers could no longer command communal deference, since many families imitated the British aristocracy and joined the Church of England. The evangelical revivals known as the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s broke with great force in the cities, where crowds congregated by the thousands to hear the charismatic George Whitefield and others assault traditional sources of authority and permanently shatter the monopolistic hold of the educated clergy on religious discourse. Second, cosmopolitanism and economic opportunity provided townspeople with several alternatives to church attendance. Secular activities and amusements increasingly lured some people away from the church, provoking Puritan minister Cotton Mather to lament with characteristic alarm that "the peculiar Spirit and Error of the Time [is] *Indifference to Religion.*" Although church membership grew in nearly every city, it rose slowly, and as a result the gap between a town's total population and its total church members continually widened.



Inside a Colonial Tavern. Taverns, inns, and grog shops served as centers of male sociability, business, and politics in virtually every colonial city. This trade card, a form of advertisement by a Philadelphia tobacconist, shows the link between pipe smoking and drinking in a tavern.

As colonial towns grew, taverns began to intrude upon the church's share of people's time. Open to all men, these public houses were the most egalitarian of colonial establishments. All classes came here to drink, eat, talk, and hear news of the day. But taverns served more than mere social functions; they were centers for the discussion of politics, transaction of business, distribution of broadsides and pamphlets, and delivery of mail from visiting ships. As the number of taverns multiplied and as members of various social groups began seeking out people of their own sort, many establishments acquired a reputation for catering to one class or another. But in most cities formal distinctions between taverns did not exist. Of course the services provided were only for men; it was highly improper for a respectable woman to be seen tipping a cup of grog.

By the early 1700s, taverns and groggeries had become the most flourishing centers of urban life. However, their informality and the profusion of rum and other alcoholic beverages also made them natural locations for disorder and vice. In response to rising complaints, most towns adopted the English policy of licensing establishments. This did not diminish the number of public houses—by the 1720s, there were more than a hundred licensed taverns in Boston, and in the peak year of 1752, New York authorities issued 334 licenses—but it did give governments some measure of control. Coffeehouses and inns also became important centers for social,

political, and commercial activity. In New York, for example, the Tontine Coffeehouse served as the merchants' exchange, and the Exchange Coffeehouse was the clearinghouse for real estate transfers.

In addition to the activities of the public houses, cities offered the vast majority of educational and cultural opportunities in colonial America. Family and church had the primary responsibility for education, and most children still learned to read at home, but supplementary schooling was fairly widespread. Following the lead of Boston, many cities supported some type of public school by the 1720s, and they all could boast several private schools for the wealthy as well as religious and charity schools for the poor. Even native Americans and African Americans could obtain learning, however limited, from English missionary groups such as the Anglican-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. At the same time, scores of bookstores appeared in the larger cities, and the colonial bookseller became instrumental in the spread of literary culture. Cities, notably Boston and Philadelphia, pioneered the establishment of public libraries.

Not only did the cities house and distribute written works, but they also printed them. By 1700, printers in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York were producing books and pamphlets of secular and religious prose and poetry. More important, these printers supplied almanacs and newspapers, vital to urban life. In the eighteenth-century seaports the printing and distribution of political pamphlets, minutes of legislative proceedings and assembly votes, instructions to representatives, and special election pamphlets had the effect of broadening politics, giving all literate colonists access to the examination and discussion of controversial issues previously within the reach of only the political elite. In St. Augustine, under English control after 1763, there were still no local newspapers, but official notices were posted outside the stores of leading merchants, where broadsides critical of the government also could be read. Townspeople could hear news at taverns, at the town market, at the public slaughtering pen, at the town gate, or even in the public bathhouse. And because the cities housed almost all of the museums, scientific associations, concerts, theaters, and artists, they dominated science and the arts. John Smibert, the noted eighteenth-century American portrait painter, worked in Newport and Boston; plays and dance exhibitions were increasingly popular in New York and Charleston; and writers from all five colonial cities contributed scientific papers to the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society.

CITIES IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

While colonial cities were generating common internal problems and complex social structures, they remained appendages of the British Empire, founded and governed as nodes in a larger administrative and economic network. For more than a century American city dwellers lived outwardly at peace with the mother country, but beneath the relatively calm surface three forces were gnawing away at the foundations of British mercantile control. First, in order to meet immediate problems of local organization and services, the colonial towns had developed their own governments. These institutions exercised considerable authority over local ordinances, taxes, and finances because the Crown and Parliament either were uninterested in devoting attention to every detail of colony management or were unable to do so. This situation was particularly true in Boston, where the town meeting influenced so many local matters. By 1750, every one of the dozen or so other major colonial towns also had achieved some degree of governmental independence, and they jealously protected it. Second, colonial merchants had managed to coexist with the restrictive Navigation Acts by arranging with sympathetic customs collectors to pay only a fraction of the required duties or by evading the law altogether and engaging in illicit trade. Thus much of the trading community acquired and expected profits outside of the mercantilist system. Such profits were not always assured, though. When British creditors demanded payments before American merchants were able to comply, or when local or foreign customers were unable to pay on time for goods delivered, a credit crunch staggered commerce. Such instances, however, prompted Americans to search even more avidly for new markets, outside the British colonies as well as inside. Third and perhaps most important, many colonial townspeople came to view their self-government and commercial independence as the most natural and just system for them, and any interference with it as illegal and tyrannical.

The Peace of Paris, which ended the French and Indian (Seven Years') War in 1763, signaled a new era during which new British policies agitated these forces and converted them into the sparks of American independence. At war's end Great Britain faced the tasks of organizing a newly enlarged empire abroad and relieving economic pressure at home caused by soaring costs of colonial defense and administration. Thus, in 1764, Parliament, under the leadership of George Grenville, passed the Molasses Act, attempting for the first time to raise revenue in America. This measure clamped down on smuggling and provided for stricter enforcement of a new, though reduced, molasses duty. Since 1733, the duty had been sixpence per gallon; now it was to be threepence. The Stamp Act followed in 1765, the first direct internal tax ever laid on the colonies. It required revenue stamps, costing from a halfpenny to upwards of twenty shillings, to be attached to all newspapers, almanacs, broadsides, pamphlets, advertisements, licenses, bonds, leases, and numerous other legal documents and commercial papers. These acts hit cities the hardest, affecting merchants, lawyers, and printers directly and artisans, shopkeepers, tradesmen, and laborers indirectly. Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 did not lighten the

burden, for in 1767 Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, adding import duties to glass, lead, paper, paint, and tea.

It is not surprising, then, that cities provided the arenas for much of the resistance to new British policies. The earliest and most organized activity came from the merchants. For them the Peace of Paris brought not only restrictive taxes but also the demise of wartime prosperity, which had been derived largely from trade with England's enemies. The merchants' first reaction was to try to recapture evaporating profits by encouraging more inter- and intracolonial trade. In April 1764, some Boston merchants organized the Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce Within the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and in the following months New York and Philadelphia merchants formed similar associations. That year, several prominent New Yorkers revived the Society for the Promotion of Arts, Agriculture and Economy (which had existed briefly forty years earlier) to encourage more local manufacturing and ostensibly offset the Navigation Acts and the high prices of imported goods. Leaders of other cities followed this example. None of the efforts worked. They failed to change not only Parliament's policies but also the skewed balance of trade that drained the colonies of hard money, the only medium accepted by royal tax collectors and London creditors. Therefore, in 1765, merchants, particularly in the northern cities, adopted new tactics—boycotts and the nonimportation of British goods. They also formed associations to petition Parliament and the Crown for relief, to enforce nonimportation agreements, and to communicate with other colonies. It was this community of interests, activated in the 1760s but dating back to the seventeenth century, that coordinated resistance against the British and tied the first knots of American union.

Early protest activities included few notions of American independence. Merchants wished mainly to revive the conditions that had existed before 1763 and that had brought prosperity to traders in every city except Boston. To be sure, the merchant community was not unified. Some, such as Thomas Hutchinson and his brother-in-law Andrew Oliver, were deeply enmeshed in British mercantile trading networks and obligated by profitable royal connections as well as their own financial interests to support parliamentary policies. Men like Hutchinson and Oliver lived a life-style modeled on that of the British aristocracy and favored more, rather than less, British presence in America. Other merchants, however, had won wealth and position from smuggling as well as legitimate trade, without any help from the mother country, and cared little about the English social hierarchy. As their protests to economic restrictions mounted, they became increasingly antimonarchical and resentful that royal officials and restrictions blocked their exercise of political power commensurate with their economic resources. Still, until the 1770s, most merchants were concerned far more with profits than with independence.

While debate among the merchants was beginning to undermine the previously unquestioned consensus concerning the prerogatives of British government, conflict among merchants and artisans continued over who would rule at home. English norms of deferential politics had been profoundly challenged in periodic upheavals of divisive political partisanship. In Boston as early as 1689 a thousand townspeople resisted the usurpation of local prerogatives by Sir Edmund Andros, pouring into the streets, forming militia units, and surrounding the Town House. A committee of safety, consisting primarily of merchants and clergymen, assumed control and imprisoned Andros. This unusual mobilization of ordinary people led to demands for a broadened suffrage and left in its wake continued questioning of the proper relationship between rulers and ruled.

Similarly in the late 1600s, tensions between Dutch and English and elite and plebeian segments of New York's population surfaced during the few years in which Jacob Leisler, a militia officer of German origin, established an interim government amidst the power vacuum created by the Protestant revolt going on in England. Shortly after their assumption of power, the Leislerians freed imprisoned debtors. Then they called for the election of justices of the peace and militia officers and petitioned the Crown for a charter "in the like manner and with the same or more privileges as Boston," clearly aiming for a more participatory system. Leislerian mobs went so far as to attack the property of some of New York's wealthiest merchants. But when a newly appointed royal governor arrived in March 1691, Leisler surrendered the government. He was tried and found guilty of treason by an all-English jury, but the ethnic and class tensions that surfaced during his reign persisted. In Philadelphia between 1684 and 1689 a religious schism split the Quaker community and expressed not only religiously inspired but also widely felt political and economic grievances.

Throughout the eighteenth century, political and economic questions continued to divide the urban community. How much paper money should be issued, and would it be redeemed to benefit wealthy creditors or poor debtors? How best might Boston intervene in the provision of foodstuffs: to ensure a profit for provisioners or to make food available to citydwellers at the lowest costs? Could the Morris faction successfully challenge the political hold of Governor Cosby in New York? Could Penn's proprietary party be dislodged from power in Philadelphia? Even in a city like St. Augustine, where loyalty seemed widespread and there were no organized groups of opposition, dissent within the governing elite opened up the question of who would rule at home. A group of dissenters led by Chief Justice William Drayton challenged the authority of the British-appointed governor by calling for an elected house of assembly. The governor saw the opposition as fomented by revolutionary fervor elsewhere, considering Drayton's principles as "of the leveling kind, and a piece with the seditions and rebellions in the other colonies."[7] These issues aroused communities among the urban

electorate and transformed the spirit of urban politics from hierarchy and deference to contentiousness and participation.

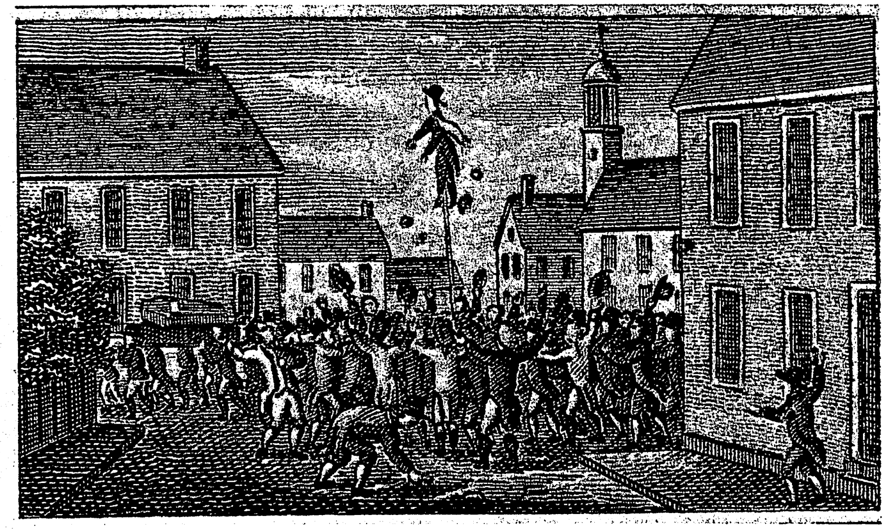
The factional mobilization around these issues, the heightening of partisanship through the distribution of inflammatory political broadsides, pamphlets, and newspaper articles, the fluctuations between prosperity and hard times, war-inflated prices, and scarce money prompted artisans, shopkeepers, and small merchants to organize as political actors. These groups encountered the additional challenge of upper-class resistance to their ambitions to enter the local political arena. Nevertheless most craftsmen qualified for the franchise, and by using leverage at the polls, they wedged their way into both legal and extralegal agencies. In Philadelphia, artisans were filling half or more of the local offices by the 1770s, and in Charleston in 1769, artisans assumed one-third of the positions on a committee to enforce a boycott against the Townshend Acts. Relations between merchants and artisans were often acrimonious, but many could agree on boycotts and nonimportation. In the end, both sought to advance their own interests, and increasingly their objectives were the same—relief from British oppression.

The grievances of the poor and propertyless classes also intensified in the twenty-five years before the Revolution, but these groups could not vote, and none held office in colonial cities. High prices and unemployment were particularly severe in the 1760s, and thousands who lived at or near the subsistence level faced calamity. Jobs were even scarcer in cities where British troops were stationed, such as New York and later Boston, for many soldiers bolstered their meager pay by underbidding local laborers and artisans for employment. Moreover, the British navy continued to forcibly impress, or draft, American seamen and laborers for service on British ships, arbitrarily carrying off able-bodied breadwinners, angering and frightening whole communities. Historian Jesse Lemisch has estimated that on one night in 1757 a force of three thousand British soldiers operating in New York impressed some eight hundred men, about one-fourth of the city's adult male population.[8] Several hundred men were subsequently released, but the scope of the raid reveals the impact that mass impressment could have on a city.

Even without the vote the lower classes had a powerful way to express their political voice. When the rich would not act to relieve suffering in a period of economic decline, common people felt justified in taking collective action through rallies, campaign literature, petitions, club activity, and physical attack. In Boston the widespread feeling that ideals of community well-being were being sacrificed to new standards of entrepreneurial freedom and individual gain activated the crowd. In 1710, because of Queen Anne's War, grain prices were higher in the West Indies than they were in Massachusetts, even though there was a bread shortage in Boston. When grain merchant Andrew Belcher decided to avail himself of the opportunity to sell at these higher prices, ordinary Bostonians descended on Belcher's loaded ship, sawed through the rudder, and tried to run it aground. Three years later the crowd again punished Belcher, who still insisted on his right to profit without regard to the cost to the community. This time, crowds attacked and emptied his warehouses, shooting the lieutenant governor when he tried to intervene. In 1727, a crowd of Bostonians destroyed a controversial public market that appeared to offer unfair competition to small retailers.

The lower classes used the same kinds of protest demonstrations against what were viewed as unjust British interventions in American affairs and in doing so established themselves as a distinct political entity. A crowd battled against impressment by British naval officers for three days in Boston in 1747, attacking naval officers and their press gangs. Another crowd manhandled and intimidated customs officials and destroyed customhouse property in Boston in 1768. Still another crowd battled British soldiers in New York's Liberty Hill riot in 1770. In many circumstances the crowds acted with the tacit approval of men of higher position. But the inclusiveness of the crowd, drawing women, children, servants, and black people into insurrectionary activity, and its empowering of otherwise dispossessed people always contained suspicion of wealth and the threat of wider social revolt.

In responding to the hated Stamp Act, crowds in many cities moved dangerously close to unsettling public order. In 1765, Boston crowds went beyond their goal of intimidating stamp distributor Andrew Oliver by burning and beheading his effigy, attacking Oliver's house, and exacting a public promise from him not to fulfill the duties of his office. Nine days later the crowd attacked the homes of several customs officials and then settled some old scores with Thomas Hutchinson by demolishing his elaborately built house. Hutchinson had long been a supporter of British policies that fell with particular severity on the lower classes. In New York City, crowds pushed merchants beyond the more passive resistance of a boycott and nonimportation strategy into openly defying Parliament by continuing commerce without any stamps. In Charleston, in October 1765, an organized crowd forced the resignation of the South Carolina stamp distributor. However, when Charleston slaves appropriated the call for liberty as they paraded through the streets in January 1766, white resistance leaders mustered the local militia and warned outlying areas of a possible slave insurrection. Nonetheless, by November 1, when the Stamp Act was to go into effect, not a single stamp distributor in the colonies was willing to carry out the duties of his office, due in large part to crowd activities in colonial ports. In most cities the merchant-gentry held the revolutionary initiative as the impending armed struggle with the British drew near, but crowd activism was an enduring legacy of eighteenth-century urban life.



New Hampshire Stamp Master in Effigy. This woodcut, produced fifty years later, shows a crowd parading the effigy of the New Hampshire stamp distributor through the streets of Portsmouth in 1765. The crowd carries a coffin to symbolize the death of the Stamp Act.

One city—Boston—epitomized all the elements that were pulling the American colonies away from the mother country. Boston, alone among American cities, did not experience population growth after 1740, and its economy had been floundering since the early 1700s. Not only did Philadelphia and New York undercut Boston's commercial dominance, but also nearby rivals such as Providence, Portland, Salem, Gloucester, and Lynn raided its regional hinterland, already too small to support the amount of interior trade that blessed cities to the south. Boston's early acceptance of public responsibility for social welfare became a liability as expenses and taxes soared in response to mounting numbers of poor and the city's heavy commitment to municipal improvements. As a result, the city lost its attractiveness; its population declined from 16,382 in 1743 to 15,631 in 1760. The economic maladies that only brought discomfort to other cities in the 1760s aggravated existing sores in Boston.

As described above, crowds in Boston had been active throughout the eighteenth century. During the Stamp Act crisis, protest occurred in other cities, but after the repeal of the Townshend Acts in 1768, crowd activities receded except in Boston. There, activities of the Sons of Liberty, particularly the harassment of customs officials, provoked the British into sending two regiments of troops. The presence of redcoats only deepened anxiety on both sides, and tensions burst on the night of March 5, 1770, when a line of soldiers fired into a jeering crowd in front of the customshouse, killing five and injuring six. Radicals such as Sam Adams were quick to capitalize on the "Boston Massacre," spreading word of all the (and some extra) gory details throughout the colony and down the Atlantic Coast. Although not the first clash between troops and colonists, the Boston Massacre not only deepened anger and resentment in Boston but also raised fears in other cities that they would be the next recipient of British brutality.

Boston became the center of resistance three years later in a confrontation over the Tea Act, in which Parliament granted a virtual monopoly of the American tea trade to the British East India Company. When the first three ships carrying tea arrived at Boston Harbor in December 1773, Sam Adams and his associates summoned an extralegal mass meeting whose results are well known—the Boston Tea Party. This gathering attracted five thousand people, nearly one-third of the city's population and the largest mass assembly in the city's history. As the meeting adjourned on the night of December 16, a number of men wearing Indian costumes boarded the ships and dumped their tea into the bay. The reaction of the British to this threat to imperial authority was an important catalyst in shifting colonial resistance into rebellion. Parliament closed the Boston port and asserted its prerogatives in a series of four "coercive" acts, which limited town meetings and elections in all of Massachusetts, provided for the quartering of troops in the colony's towns, removed the prerogative of the towns to try British officials accused of crimes in America, and organized a provincial government in Quebec without a representative legislature.

Only the Port Act punished Boston directly; the other measures reinforced the power of Parliament and the Crown along a broader spectrum. But they all struck at the two most cherished aspects of American urban life—self-government and commerce. By choking off the city's economic bloodstream and its organs of self-government, Parliament not only deepened desperation in Boston but also threatened the other cities. Bostonians now faced certain ruin of the remainder of their commerce. Moreover, their town meetings and local elections had been reduced to meaningless exercises. All their attempts at reform and redress had failed. As G. B. Warden has observed, Sam Adams now "had little trouble in persuading his neighbors and countrymen that England was 'making war' against every colonial right, and destroying every traditional means of security and self-preservation."[9] It was not difficult to spread the fear that if the British could tether the freedoms of Massachusetts and Boston, they could do the same to other colonies and cities. When Adams and the Committee of Correspondence sent an appeal to Philadelphia and New York asking all Americans to join a boycott of trade with Great Britain, New York merchants responded by organizing the Continental Congress, which not only conceived American independence but also nurtured American union. Surely, to quote Richard C. Wade, "In this perspective, the American Revolution began on the cobblestones of Boston rather than on the rolling greens of Lexington."[10]

Women in cities were critical to the success of the Revolution, despite their formal status as dependents without political voice. They were central to the boycotts of imported products and later to the production of household manufactures. Their operation of businesses in their husbands' absences allowed cities to keep functioning during wartime. Women took part in revolutionary crowds and in New York countered wartime price inflation by forcing storekeepers to charge just prices. These activities did not expand the boundaries of women's sphere but rather took place in the shady areas where household and community interests overlapped and at a historical moment when household and community life were politicized. Neither interest in politics nor patriotic contribution enabled women to become full citizens, but the revolutionary years were shaped by women's as well as men's activities.

African Americans in cities did as much as they could to use revolutionary rhetoric and circumstances to challenge slavery. Slaves in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, pleaded with their state legislature that "the name of slave may not more be heard in a land gloriously contending for the sweets of freedom." Their efforts were critical to the northern states' gradual abolition of slavery in new constitutions and laws written after 1776.

The predicaments of cities did not alone cause the American Revolution; the final break with England resulted from a number of forces that had merged at various moments in history. Yet cities were instrumental in the timing and organization of the Revolution not only because they bore the weight of British policy but also because they possessed the facilities and human resources to implement resistance and then rebellion. Their meetinghouses provided forums for debate and protest, their printing shops spread news and propaganda, and their taverns and coffeehouses furnished workshops where logistics were planned.

The separation of the thirteen colonies from Great Britain mirrored a process that had been going on in the American cities for nearly one hundred years. Residents of each town had cast off traditional notions of deference and had replaced them with politics more contentious and more participatory, and these lay at the heart of new revolutionary understandings of representation. Urban citizens had developed a sense of community and an allegiance to a particular place where older visions of commonwealth mingled with newer visions of individual enrichment. Motivated by familiar ideals of public interest and newly developed conceptions of self-interest, merchants and mechanics could urge resistance to new British taxes and ultimately to the British Empire itself. In the process of freeing themselves, urban dwellers found that they had new thoughts of freedom, the perfectibility of humanity, and the desire to shape their own futures. By the 1770s, common interests and grievances, aided by increased intercolonial communication, had spread these concepts of community, individualism, and personal agency beyond particular cities to encompass all the colonies. Thus cities, with their experience of collectivism, opportunity, and diversity, not only kindled but fed the flames of American independence.

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