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**PROJECT REPORT ON**

**EARLY COLONIAL SOCIETY OF  
EUROPEAN IN AMERICA**

**2019 - 2020**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

**PATTAMUNDAI COLLEGE**

**PATTAMUNDAI**

## REPORT

A Project work on "Early Colonial Society of European in America" was undertaken by the students of +3 3rd year History Honours of the session 2019-2020 under my guidance. It is found from the study that the number of the Native Americans were minority in the early colonial Society rather European Immigrants and African Slaves having various religious and social groups were majority in numbers belonging to middle class people. Columbus's discovery of America became an eye opener for them availing economic opportunities here which was unreachable in their homeland. They belong to different social classes like Upper class Middle class, Lower class, Indenture Servants and African Slaves. It is also revealed that the above mentioned social classes were not equal in their Rights and status. In colonial Society, majority people lived in Rural areas and mostly worked hard in Plantation. There was discrimination between rich and poor in the Society. The position of women in the Colonial Society was very negligible. The women in the Rural areas had to work hard to maintain their livelihood but in Urban areas women used to enjoy the liberty and leisure. The women did not have their rights on Parental Properties after their marriage. The women in general took care for their livestock along with their husband and children. In Colonial America the Birth rate had its highest peak than the death rate. Re-marriage provision was prevalent in the Colonial Society and the Widowed Women were entitled one third property of their deceased husband. Education was given an importance in the then Colonial Society. Higher education and casting of votes were the rights given to the puritans. In religious sphere discriminations were found. So, the Religious revival was a great awakening in the days of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Lastly, it was observed and found from the study that the differences within the Colonial Society played a pivotal role in the early Colonial Society of Europeans in America.

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# **Early colonial Society of European in America**

## **Introduction**

After the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Europeans were gradually attracted to this New World. Hispaniola” became the first European settlement in America. The island was inhabited by Taino people since 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Here American means both North and South Americas, which also includes Greenland and the Caribbean Island. The history of European colonisation started either in tenth or eleventh century A.D when “West Norse” sailors explored and settled on the shores of present Canada. But the indigenous people resisted their settlements and Norse settlers had to abandon those settlements.

During the first two voyages between 1492 and 1493A.D Columbus reached the Bahamas and various Caribbean island including Hispaniola, Porto and Cuba. Spain was the first European powers to settle and colonise larger areas from North America and the Caribbean to the southern tip of South America. In 1547 John Cabot of England landed on North America coast. France founded colonies in eastern North America as well as in Caribbean islands and small coastal part of South America. Portugal colonised Brazil and tried to colonise the eastern part of present Canada. The Portuguese settled in the North West of River plate.

The early colonial society was mostly a society of European immigrants and Africans slaves. The Native Americans were in a microscopic minority due to some unfortunate reasons. European settlers who came to settle in the New World were from various religious and social groups. They included farmers, soldiers, adventurers, tradesman but never from the aristocracy. They were the Dutch of New Netherlands, the Swedes and Finns of New Sweden, the English Quakers of Pennsylvania, the English settlers of James town, the worthy poor of Georgia, the German who settled in the mid-Atlantic colonies and Ulster scots people of the Appalachian Mountains. The diverse groups from these various regions-built colonies of distinctive social, religious, political and economic style and al such groups became a part of United States of America (U.S.A) when it was formed in 1783.

## Colonial Society

During the process of immigration from Europe to America neither very rich nor very poor immigrated. Most of the settlers who came to America were termed as "Middle Sort". They were in fact the synonym of today's "Middle Class". There was a hereditary aristocracy in Colonial America. Accumulation of wealth was usually considered as the criteria sufficient to elevate person to the ranks of the elite. Colonists were largely farmers, artisans, merchants, and fisherman or craft people. Many came as indentured servants. All European immigrants found economic opportunity here that did not exist at home. Some of them a mashed large farmers.

American Society in the colonial era had racial, ethnic and religious diversity that was rare in Europe. America was not an uninhabited wilderness but was settled by indigenous Indian tribes upon whom early settlers often depended for food. These tribes were pushed aside or exterminated when they resisted the sale of their land to white settlers. The development of American society was also influenced by the presence of Africans slaves, with the first slaves imported in 1619 A.D. So, basically the early colonial society is broadly divided between two classes during the era of 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

- They were
- A. European Immigrants or European whites.
  - B. Imported slaves of African Blacks

## European Whites

- The following social classes were formed by European immigrants or European whites.
  1. **Upper Class:** The class was constituted of the elite, wealthy, well-bred and well educated minor aristocrats.

They include successful planters of the South and wealthy merchants of the North. The members of colonial society own land plantation and large houses. The members of colonial society had similar social status, roles, languages, dress and norms of behaviour. Sometimes they were described as Old Money. "They owned slaves, doctors, lawyers and ministers also included in the colonial society. The New rich were called the 'New Money.'

2. **Middle Class:** The owner of small farms, owners of stores, small business and skilled tradesman were included in the middle class. Saving enough money to get into business for himself was the dream of every journeyman. Primarily the ministers, doctors, lawyers were also belonging to this class. The middle class people were found both in rural and urban areas. They had the right vote. But they were not allowed to hold to high offices.

3. **Lower classes/poor Whites:**

In this strata of Colonial Society there were manual workers, servants, apprentices, sailors, hired hands and semiskilled tradesman. A few of them own a little property. Most of them were illiterate. Poor whites were forced to become tenant farmers. The tenant farmers received a share of the crop for their labour. This class of people had no right to vote. They were not allowed to held public offices.

4. **Indentured Servants and Convicts:**

Indentured servants first arrived in America in the decade following the settlement of Jamestown by the Virginia company in 1607 A.D. when idea of indentured servitude was born of a need for cheap labour. Out of this exigency the Virginia Company developed a system of indentured servitude to attract workers. The thirty years war had left Europe's economy depressed and many skilled and unskilled labourers were rendered unemployed. More than immigrants to America were indentured servants.

These indentured servants typically worked four to seven years in exchange of the expenditure for their passage, room, boarding, lodging and freedom. But it was not slavery, which was life long and hereditary.

An indentured servant's contract could be extended as punishment for breaking a law, such as running away or in the case of female servants, becoming pregnant. During their period of servitude the indentured servants could not marry.

For those who survived the work and received their freedom package were better off than those immigrants who came freely to the country. They included at least 25 acres of land, a years of corn, a cow, arms, and new clothes.

When the Black Africans came to America in 1619 initially they were treated as indentured servants and were given the opportunities of freedom. Slave laws are passed and the small freedom given to them was taken away. Landowners turned to African slaves as a more profitable and ever-renewable source of labour and the shift of indentured servants to racial slavery begun.

50,000 white convicts were also technically treated as Indentured servants in America. The indentured servants were not paid any wage for up to seven years. They could not vote.

### **Slaves or African Blacks.**

Starting from 1619 A.D. the Africans were brought to America to work, mainly in agriculture. In Virginia, most slaves work in tobacco fields. Men, women and children worked from sunrise to sunset with only Sunday to rest. Some of the enslaved Africans worked as cooks, laundress, manservants, blacksmiths, and coopers or in other skilled jobs. These men and women were generally considered better off than field slaves. They had to work generally under the watchful eyes of their masters. These enslaved house servants had little time for themselves. They were also another groups of Blacks called 'Free-Blacks'. Slaves constituted 20% of population of North America. Slavery was unknown in England but it was very much prevalent in America. The Native

Americans used the prisoners of war as slaves and used them in bondage to work for them.

**First batch of African Slaves came to American colonies in 1619 A.D**

Time Period	Number of Africans Slaves came to American Colonies
1620-1700 AD	21,000
1701-1760 AD	1,89,00
1761-1770 AD	73,000
1771-1790 AD	56,000
1791-1800 AD	79,000
1801-1810 AD	1,24,000
1810-1865 AD	51,000

In total twelve million slaves were brought to Americas from Africas. Five percent of them (around 5, 97,000) were brought to the American colonies. African slaves went to sugarcane growing colonies in Caribbean and Brazil were life expectancy was short.

**Rural Urban Divide**

- The farms of the landholders were in fact cultivated by tenant farmers, who received a share of their crop for their labour.
- The merchants and the rich traders lived in the farms.
- Unskilled labourers, stevedores and crew, members of fishing boats and whaling fleets were considered as urban poor.
- They were frequent economic recession in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.
- 90% of the colonial lived in rural areas and mostly worked in farm areas.
- Four major cities in the colonies were Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Charleston.

## Women in American Colonies

- Women in the American colonies assumed traditional role of the fair sex.
- Women married earlier giving the opportunities to produce more and more children.
- There was a high birth-rate and low death-rate.
- It was seen that most of the women had produced seven to eight children.
- The women took care for their livestock along with their husband and children.
- The women's were engaged in spinning and candle making.
- In rural areas women were working in small farms and small fields.
- In urban areas women had the privilege not to spin or to make candles.
- The urban women had more leisure and time and they helped their husbands in shops and other work basis.
- The women gave up their property right when they married.
- Women are allowed to manage their husband's business as a midwifery.

## Marriage

- In all the colonies marriage was usually by choice, but parent consent was necessary.
- If widowed, a woman was entitled to one third of her deceased husband's property.
- Remarriage was usually rapid because single parent could no maintain a household and raise children without of a partner.
- Until 1686, among the puritans marriage was a civil contract that carried specific obligations for husband and wife.
- The European double standard was evident in America, as it was much easier for a man to obtain a divorce from an adulterous spouse than it was for a woman to obtain divorce for the same reason.

- In German communities in Pennsylvania many women worked in fields and stables.
- Unlike English colonial wives, German and Dutch wives owned their clothes and other items.
- They were also given the ability to write wills disposing of the property brought into the marriage.
- However, by the mid of 18<sup>th</sup> century the values of American Enlightenment became established and weakened the view that husbands were natural rulers over their wives.

## Education

- In the colonial society importance was given to education.
- Schools were established in the Southern colonies for the benefit of the children of the farmer.
- Education for the lower orders of society was more readily available in most New England colonies, where a grammar school was provided for a hundred families.
- Girls were not allowed to receive college education.
- Higher education was particularly important to the Puritans.
- In Virginia the college of William and Mary was founded in 1691 A.D
- The prominent among them were Princeton college of New Jersey, the college of Philadelphia (1740), the college of Rhode Island (1764), the college of Dartmouth (1769), Kings Columbia (1754), Queens College at Rutgers (1766).
- The college of Philadelphia later on became the University of Pennsylvania.

## Religion

- Colonies were established in American mainland after widespread Reformation movement in Europe.
- Most English colonies were ethnically and religiously homogeneous in the seventeenth century.

- English Catholics and Puritans were seen in Maryland.
- In New England there were Puritans and Congregationalists.
- In the eighteenth century, the ethnic and religious diversity increased in all colonies with the influx of large number of Scots, Scots-Irish, French Huguenots, German Lutherans and Irish immigrants.
- In the largely Protestant English colonies public worship for Catholics and Jews was permitted in only three colonies, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Maryland.
- The Church of England was established only in Virginia and South Carolina, although some futile efforts were made to establish it elsewhere.
- The Great Awakening in the colonies during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was a great religious revival.
- While Church membership increased and interest in religion high during third period, the Awakening also split congregations into old and new fights.
- By 1776, the congregational church had the largest membership, with an over half a million members.

## **Past Time and Leisure Pursuits**

- The people of American colonies knew how to enjoy in the leisure time.
- They attended religious services and celebrate religious as well as cultural festivals.
- There were public cultural programmes.
- The rich people organised cultural programmes in their homes.
- Drinking was common.
- Per capital consumption of liquor was around seven gallon a year.
- Theatre was another past time and source of entertainment.
- For relaxation the elite I the colonial society often conducted scientific experiment.
- They exhibited projects on science.
- There was also a fascination to keep pets and take their care.

## **CONCLUSION**

On preparing a project on "Early colonial society of European in America", it is revealed from the case study that Europeans had explored and colonized north eastern part of North America typically refers to the events that took place in Americas between 1500 BC to 1800 BC. During this period, several European empires primarily Spain, Portugal, Britain and France began to explore and claim the natural resources and human capital of the Americas resulting in the de-establishment of some indigenous native nations like New Mexico, Alaska, the Northern Great Plains, the North-West territories in North America and the Darien in the central America and the North-West Amazon, the central Andes and the Guiana in South America.

Due to early European exploration and the colonization it resulted in the redistribution of the world's population as millions of people from Europe and Africa voluntarily and involuntarily migrated into the new world – America. As the settlers from Europe were of various socio – culture and religious group, there was emergency of multi diversity society. Initially neither very rich nor very poor people immigrated from Europe they were popularly known as middling short or middle class.

The study also revealed the classification of European society in America into different classes like Upper class, Middle class, Lower class and indenture servant and convicts. The wealthiest and most influential people become part of the "colonial society" during 18<sup>th</sup> century which represented through a small and wealthy social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization. The members of that group had similar social status, roles, language, dress, norms of behavior. There was a study regarding different social groups like "old money", "New rich", "gentry" and also "New money" within the colonial society.

There is also a strong evidence regarding existence of slavery in all the British colonies and they were imported for the first time in 1619AD .they constituted almost 20% of the North America population. Most of the slaves'

were working as enslaved house servants and others were working for plantation. In total twelve million slaves were brought to the Americas from Africa. The slaves did not acquire wages or receive rights. Majority of the colonists were living in rural areas and mostly worked in farms. Women in the American colonies were married at early age for giving them an opportunity to produce more and more children in order to maintain the norm of large family. Women were given the rights to manage their husbands business after their death. Divorce was almost impossible till late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Importance was given for education as a result number of schools and other higher educational institutions were established during the colonial period. There was also an atmosphere of religion toleration was developed in the colonies after widespread reformation movement in Europe.

With this, the students associated with this project might be cleared about the early Colonial Society of Europeans in America which was a multi diversified Society of different socio-cultural and religious groups and the people from Europe were migrated to the New World-America for the purpose of wealth as well as a new place for the revival of their religion.

TITLE OF THE PROJECT – EARLY COLONIAL SOCIETY OF EUROPEAN IN  
AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

+3 3<sup>RD</sup> ARTS (HISTORY HONOURS) SESSION -2019-2020

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