The Quakers, the Dutch, and the Ladies: Crash Course US History #4

Crash Course: U.S. History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=p47tZLJbdag
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Hi, I'm John Green, this is Crash Course US History, and today we're going to cram 150 years of American history into one video. Why? Well, many American history classes don't cover the colonial period at all, because most major American history tests have, like, one question about it.

Mr. Green, Mr. Green, so this isn't going to be on the test? That's awesome because I have some flirtatious notes to exchange with Jessica Alvarez.

Yeah, me from the past. So listen, would you rather do well on one test or lead a richer, more productive life as a result of having a better understanding of the complicated factors that led to the creation of the greatest nation in history? Stan, can I get a Libertage?

(Libertage)

So listen up me from the past! It's time to bask in our own greatness, and by greatness I mean morally dubious dominance over people who would have been just fine without us.

(Intro)

So, contrary to popular mythology Colonial America was more than just Jamestown and Massachusetts. There was, for instance, New Amsterdam. The tale goes, the Dutch traders bought the island of Manhattan from Lenape Indians for $24 in 1624 - that isn't quite true, but it contains a truth. The Dutch traders who founded their colony were business men and New Amsterdam was, above everything else, a commercial venture.

This is still true in New York, actually. I mean, Manhattan is all about Wall Street. In fact, Crash Course writer and history teacher Raoul Meyer is believed to be the last person living on the island of Manhattan who does not work for an investment bank.

So the Dutch let anyone into New Amsterdam who could help them turn a profit, including Jews and even Quakers. But they didn't like Indians very much, in fact they drove them out of the colonies.

But anyway the 24 dollars the Lenapes supposedly got for New England was 24 dollars more than the Dutch got when the English took over the colony in 1664 by sailing four frigates into the harbour and asking for the colony in a threatening voice.

So New Amsterdam became New York which was a mixed blessing. The population doubled in the decade after the English takeover but English rule meant less economic freedom for women who, under the Dutch were able to inherit property and conduct business for themselves. And under the English, free black people lost a lot of the jobs they had been able to hold under the Dutch.

Things were better in Pennsylvania. So much so that it was known as the "best poor man's country" which admittedly in the 17th century was a low bar to jump over. Given by Charles II to this guy William Penn in 1681, Pennsylvania was a huge tract of land round about here.

The land included contemporary Pennsylvania and Delaware and New Jersey. But we've made an editorial decision NOT to talk about New Jersey here on Crash Course due to my long-standing anti-New Jersey bias.

So Penn wanted his colony to be a haven for Quakers because he was a Quaker, as you know if you have ever seen a container of Quaker Oats.

Quakers were a pretty tolerant bunch, except when it came to slavery which they opposed vehemently. And under Penn's leadership, the colony showed remarkable religious toleration and also an amazing respect for Indian communities but then, after Penn was gone... yeah the usual.

In 1737, Pennsylvania colonists perpetrated one of the most famous frauds of colonial America: the Walking Purchase.

Indians agreed to cede a tract of land bound by the distance a man could walk in 36 hours but the clever governor James Logan hired a bunch of fast runners who marked out territory much larger than the Indians anticipated.

Quakers had to resort to such tricks because they were pacifists. I should also mention that they weren't particularly fond of loose living. The government prevented swearing and drunkenness for instance but, you know, it was still pretty great compared to the other colonies. More than half of the male population was eligible to vote and Pennsylvania's dual promise of religious freedom and cheep land attracted A LOT of German immigrants. Well I should say German-speaking immigrants.

There was of course not a Germany at the time as MANY viewers of Crash Course World History have pointed out to me. And now let us venture south, where we will find many mosquito-borne illnesses and somewhat less abolitionist sentiment. In 1663 English King Charles II gave eight English proprietors the right ot set up a colony just North of the Spanish-controlled Florida to serve as a buffer. This became South Carolina and its original settlers came from the sugar colony of Barbados, which helps to explain why they were so **awesome...** at slavery. They tried to enslave the Indians and ship them to the Caribbean but when that didn't work out they began to *import* African slaves. We're going to talk a lot more about slavery in future episodes but for now just bear in mind it sucked.

Okay, so in the last quarter of the 17th century the British colonies and the Americas experienced this series of crises.

Oh it's time for the mystery document?

[Music plays and there is electronic buzzing sound]

The rules here are simple: I guess the author of the document. I get it right no shock, I get it wrong shock. Okay.

"We accuse Sir William Berkeley as guilty of each and every one of the same, and as one who hath traitorously attempted, violated and injured His Majesties interest here, by a loss of a great part of his colony and many of his faithful loyal subjects, by him betrayed and in a barbarous and shameful manner exposed to the incursions and murther of the heathen, and we doe further declare these ensuing persons in this list, to have been his wicked and pernicious counsellors."

Both wicked and pernicious, those are some terrible counsellors.

Okay so this guy clearly hated William Berkeley, who I happen to know as governor of Virginia. Particularly upset about the colonists being incurred upon and murdered by the heathen (that is the Native Americans). Uhhh I mean I have a guess but I'm not brimming with confidence. Ah, the one person I know who hated William Berkeley was Nathaniel Bacon? [answer was correct]

Yes!!! Yes! Yes! No shock for me and no pleasure for you, you schadenfreudic crash course viewers.

So Nathaniel Bacon arrived in Virginia in 1673 and led an armed uprising against Governor Berkeley just three years later. And just to be clear, he was mad not because Berkeley did a poor job

protecting colonists from Indians, but because Berkeley wouldn't allow them to kill **more** Indians and take more land.

Berkeley had already given all the really good land to his cronies, those aforementioned "wicked and pernicious counsellors," leaving men like Bacon with serious beef. I hate myself.

Before the rebellion was quelled by the arrival of English warships, Bacon burned Jamestown and made himself ruler of Virginia and looted the Berkeley's supporters' land. Twenty-three of the rebels were hanged, but not Bacon, who died shortly after taking control from -- you guessed it -- dysentery! Dang it, dysentery, it's called "history" not "dysentery-story!"

Bacon's rebellion is sometimes portrayed as an early example of lower-class artisans and would-be farmers rising up against the corrupt British elite, which I guess kind of...

But the biggest effects of the rebellion were:

1. A shift away from indentured servants to slaves, and
2. A general desire by the English crown to control the colonies more.

Okay, so in 1686 King James II really tried to put the hammer down by consolidating Connecticut, Plymouth, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, and East and West Jersey into one big mega-colony called The Dominion of New England. It's near dictatorial ruler was former New York governor Edmund Andros, who proceeded to appoint his own officials and lay his own taxes without even consulting any of the elected assemblies.

Luckily -- or unluckily, depending on your perspective -- a major event in British history reversed this policy, the Glorious Revolution.

Now thankfully, this isn't Crash Course: British History or it would quickly turn into Crash Course: John is Bored History, but the upshot is that Britain got a fancy new royal family from Holland, which sparked uprisings in the colonies, and Andros was thrown into a Boston jail as the colonies re-asserted their independence.

And these new guys imposed the English Toleration Act of 1690, which decreed that all Protestants could worship freely. As Toleration Acts go, this one wasn't *that* tolerant-- I mean, it still discriminated against Jews-- but it did mark the end of the Puritan Experiment.

No longer would membership at a Congregationalist church be a requirement for voting in general-court elections, property ownership would now be the determining factor.

And Massachusetts would now have a governor from England, not from a company board residing inside the colony itself.

This was the context for one of the most talked-about events of colonial history, the Salem Witch Trials.

A lot of ink has been expended on this incident, and the interpretations of it are numerous and controversial, so I'm just gonna point out that when the Witch Trials -- which claimed the lives of fourteen of the nearly 150 women and men who were accused of witchcraft -- happened in 1691, New England as a colony had basically just failed in its religious mission.

The Tolerance Act meant that people in Massachusetts would have to accept even Quakers as virtual equals! Quakers!!

So it's not surprising that colonists would look for scapegoats, or that their male leaders would look to re-assert their gender dominance.

Okay, to talk about Colonial American economics, let's go to the Thought Bubble.

Most colonists were farmers, or worked on farms, and they were mostly small, unlike the giant plantations that predominated in the Caribbean. Since New England contains relatively little in the way of tropical diseases, and was increasingly free of Native Americans, the colonial population there skyrocketed so fast that families began to run out of land, so second and third sons increasingly had to go make their way in growing coastal cities.

We'll talk about this more in future episodes, but for now let's just note the idea of a person owning a small farm and the idea of freedom are pretty closely intertwined in the early part of American history. It's more of an "amber waves of grain" place than a "behold this metropolis" place.

In fact, they were richer than any other colonial elites. Were they rich enough to dominate the Constitutional Convention? Time will tell.

Now not everyone was a farmer or slave. There were growing numbers of artisans in the colonies. Although British colonial policy discouraged local manufacturing, the growing population in America meant that there was certain to be a market for locally produced goods, especially clothing and metalwork.

Remember, one of the heroes of the American Revolution -- Paul Revere –- was a silversmith.

Thanks, Thought Bubble.

So that variety of jobs leads us nicely into our last topic today: colonial society.

Although Americans like to think of themselves as class-less, pun intended, that's not really the case.

I mean, the colonies definitely had an elite ruling class, especially in the South, that did what it could to perpetuate itself. George Washington's father and grandfather were both justices of the peace, an important role in colonial times, meaning that George Washington had deeply elite roots.

So that was the top of colonial society and at the bottom was a growing number of poor people. While it's never good to be poor, it was better to be poor in the colonies than it was in England or much of the rest of Europe, which is why people kept indenturing themselves to get here.

America had lots of food, and there was the possibility of maybe, someday, getting some land -- provided you didn't die of dysentery -- OH, and also provided you weren't a woman.

Married women in 18th-century colonial America generally couldn't own property, and husbands usually willed their land to their sons and their personal items to their daughters, meaning that almost all landowners were male.

In the earliest days of colonization, when everyone was needed to ensure their survival of the colonies, women had a greater role in the economy, although they were still expected to be wives and mothers above all else.

Male dominance was written into law and solidified in practice. Women's work was mostly confined to the home, and especially for lower-class women, it involved a lot of drudgery.

As one woman, Mary Cooper, wrote in her diary in 1769,

"I am dirty and distressed, almost wearied to death. This day is forty years since I left my father's house and come here, and here have I seen little else but hard labor and sorrow."

Aaaand that's actually a good place to end, because it reminds us that history is about more than the lives of kings like James II and rebels like Nathaniel Bacon. And while history classes -- and exams -- tend to focus on those kinds of men -- and they were mostly men -- the real story of history is about regular people trying to take care of their families and not die.

The colonial era often gets skipped for its lack of large-scale drama, but those small scale dramas can be found in abundance.

Next week we'll go back to all that great men and dramatic events crap, when we start talking about the American Revolution. I'll see you then. Thanks for watching.

Crash Course is produced and directed by Stan Muller; our script supervisor is Meredith Danko; the associate producer is Danica Johnson; the show is written by my high school history teacher, Raoul Meyer, and myself, and our graphics team is Thought Bubble. Last week's phrase of the week -- oh wait, we don't do phrase of the week anymore. If you have questions about today's video, you can ask them in comments where they will be answered by our team of crack historians. Thanks for watching Crash Course, and as they say in my hometown: Don't Forget to Be Awesome.

(off camera): CRASH COURSE!!... Everything is fine.