

Name _____

Date _____



Colonial America

Engage

What do you know about New England? Good clam chowder? What about the South? Sweet tea? What else? Regional differences are part of what makes the United States special. But where and why did these differences first begin?

Explore

Check out the map of the 13 original colonies. What do you notice?

Explain

After Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492, European countries raced to set up colonies there and become rich on the New World's abundant natural resources.

By the early 1600s, England was ready to set up colonies, too. Since South and Central America were already taken, England focused on North America's East Coast. (Actually, the first English settlement in North America had been established—and then mysteriously disappeared—about 20 years previously...but that's another story for another time.)

Of course, Indigenous people already lived in North America and had their own forms of government and culture. But that didn't stop England from claiming the land as their own.

England was relatively poor at the time. Instead of risking its economy on funding a colony, in 1606, King James I issued a charter to the private Virginia Company. Rich English gentlemen would invest money in the Virginia Company, hoping to turn a profit. On May 14, 1607, the Virginia Company founded Jamestown.

After Virginia, England issued more charters for new colonies.

The first 13 English colonies in America can be divided among three regions: New England, Middle, and

Southern.

The New England colonies were Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. Most colonists here were from England, and many came for religious freedom. The Puritans were unhappy with the Church of England and formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony so they could set up their own church. New England was relatively urban. Society was based around cities and towns. Religion was a part of daily life: It was taught in schools, and most towns had a meetinghouse for church services. New England's cold climate and rocky soil weren't ideal for farming. Instead, many colonists made a living from fishing and whaling. They also cleared forests and built ships from the lumber. Boston became a major port city for trading, buying, selling, and shipping goods.

The Middle colonies were more diverse than New England. Colonists came from England, the Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, France, and Scandinavia. They practiced different religions. This region had a relatively warm climate and fertile soil, so colonists were able to grow and sell grains like wheat, barley, rye, and oats. The economy was largely based in factories, manufacturing iron, paper, glass, and textiles. Artisans, including ironworkers, silversmiths, and shoemakers, were also successful here.

Because of the warm climate, rich soil, and long growing season, the Southern economy was built around large plantations growing cash crops. Most colonists lived on smaller farms and were pretty isolated from each other. As a result, religion and public schools didn't play a large role in the South. Children learned reading, writing, and other subjects at home with their tutors or parents.

Elaborate

What did play a huge role in the Southern colonies was slavery: Africans were kidnapped and brought to plantations to harvest crops. Slavery did exist in the New England and Middle colonies, but in much smaller numbers. By 1750, enslaved people made up nearly half the population of the Southern colonies. White owners did not pay them for their labor and treated them cruelly. Children born to enslaved people were also enslaved. Slavery would not legally end until 1863, long after the colonies had revolted and formed the United States of America.

Evaluate

To summarize, the 13 original colonies can be divided into three regions—New England, Middle, and

Southern—each with its own economy, geography, communities, and religious practices. How do you think these differences affect life in the United States today?