

Colonial Period to 1763

Overview

The Europeans began arriving after 1492 upon the shores of the Americas. They found a land rich in resources and native culture. As news reached Europe it sparked a wave of explorations and ultimately colonization. Many, if not most, of the early colonists America arrived under some version of bound labor, either as a slave or an indentured servant. This was the way many free persons could pay for their passage. Upon arrival they would be sold out to an artisan, gentleman or farmer according to his or her abilities. They would then work for 5-7 years which would repay their passage costs. Slaves obviously had little chance to earn their freedom, though some did.

Labor Related Issues of the Period

- Lack of economic opportunity in Old World.
- Remnants of feudal system in parts of Europe.
- Rise of non-landed wealth in Europe.
- Growth of artisans' guilds in Europe.
- Growth of cities in Europe.
- Economic opportunity of New World.
- Building of a stable society in New World by common laborers
- Development of independent craftsworker in northern colonies.
- Development of slave system in southern colonies.
- Growth of political organization and action in later years of period.
- Beginnings of representative government gives common man a voice
- Influence of geography on the American economy.
- Lack of an effective voice by laborers.

Selected Labor Related Events of the Period

1440s Opening of the African slave trade.

1619 Slavery introduced into Virginia
Virginia House of Burgesses formed, beginning of representative government in North America.

1620 Mayflower Compact signed creating "just and equal laws."

1620s Beginning of New England town meetings

1648 Boston shoemakers and coopers form guilds.

1676 Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, farmers revolt against corrupt government

1683 New York Chapter of Liberties gives freeholders the right to vote

- 1712 Carolina Slave Code created which regulates slave life.
- 1724 Carpenter's Company of Philadelphia chartered to assist carpenter's instruction and well-being.
- 1739 Stono Rebellion of slaves in South Carolina.
- 1765 The first society of working women is organized as an auxiliary of the Sons of Liberty, called the Daughters of Liberty.
- 1766 Green Mountain uprising of farmers against landowners over the inequality of political power.

Important Concepts

slavery, indentured servitude, free labor, mercantilism, profit, imperialism, apprenticeship, guild, colonialism, representative government