

Summary of Colonial Economic Conditions

I. The New England Colonies

The poor, rocky soil, northern climate and closeness to the mountains made farming difficult. New England farms were typically small and families were able to grow just enough for themselves. This is called subsistence farming. Farmers were not able to make big profits. But, the closeness to the Atlantic fishing grounds and excellent natural harbors plus the forests full of trees for shipbuilding, led New Englanders to shipping, ship building and fishing as money making activities. They developed profitable trade networks, including the *Triangular Trade*, which includes the West Indies, Britain and Africa. Sugar, molasses, and slaves earned great fortunes.

II. The Middle Colonies

The land in the river valleys of the Middle Colonies was very fertile and the climate favored agriculture. This allowed the farms of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware to grow far more wheat, corn and oats than the families who worked the farms needed. These colonies became known as the bread basket of the colonies. The major rivers of the region, the Hudson, Delaware and Susquehanna, provided access to the sea and to the Native America tribes. The fur trade with the Indians was important. Iron and other minerals were also found in the Middle Colonies and the beginnings of industry were found here.

III. The Southern Colonies

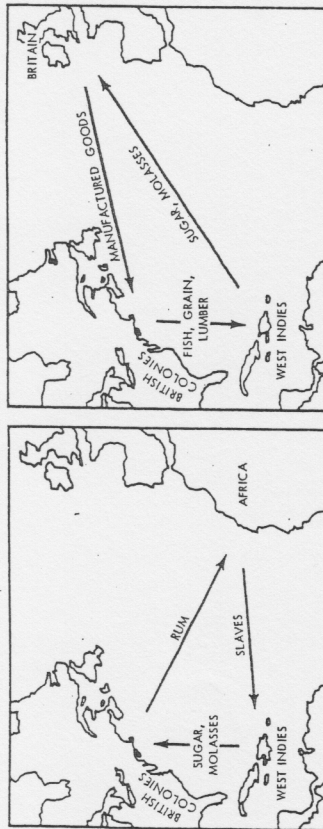
As in all of the colonies, wood products were abundant, especially pitch and tar, and needed for the ship building industry. The soil was fertile, climate was warm and these things combined to encourage all agricultural activities. A plantation economy developed that concentrated on the growing of crops intended to raise cash. These included tobacco, indigo and rice. These were mostly shipped to Britain and sold to buy manufactured goods. The great tobacco plantations used the soil up quickly, requiring the accumulation of more land by the planters. Some of these planters became very wealthy as their land and slave holding grew and they dominated Southern society and politics

IV. Labor Shortage

There was more land available than there were workers; this of course created a shortage of labor. Attempts to solve this problem led to:

Indentured Servitude. These people were the poor of Europe. In exchange for a free passage to America, where they sought economic opportunity, they agreed to serve as servants for a period of up to 7 years. They worked at every conceivable job, as household servants, farm workers and in the trades.

African Slavery. Slaves were brought into the Jamestown settlement as early as 1619. By 1719, slavery had spread to all 13 colonies, but it was concentrated in the Southern Colonies on the tobacco and rice plantations. By 1750, nearly half a million Africans were enslaved in the colonies.



Triangular Trade Routes