

## 18th Century Colonial America: Ideas

### Politics & Voting in 18th Century Colonial America

- 60% of white male colonists owned land
- 60-80% of white men could vote
  - 10-20% of total population
  - 5% in Britain

More people were able to be active in the political process, and that process was really localized, so people felt able to understand and effect that process. A lot of times you knew — or at least perhaps had met — many of the people that held government offices — and elections could be won or lost by just a handful of votes. Election days were seen as big events, and candidates would provide food and alcohol for voters. When it came time to voter, there were no secret ballots--you simply stood up and stated for whom you were voting.

Election day often meant food & liquor provided by the candidates.

- In 1768, Jefferson hired two men to provide rum to voters outside the polling place
- In one colonial election, a candidate's brother sat outside the polling place with a gun, threatening to shoot anyone who did not vote for his brother

### The Colonial Press & Literacy Rates

"An American [colonist], especially of New England, who cannot read or write " writes John Adams at age 29, "is as rare a phenomenon as a comet."


- New England: 70% of white men and 45% of white women could read
- Southern colonies, about 50-60% of men and 40% of women.
- With a literacy rate greater than Britain, the colonies by mid century hosted more newspapers than the mother country.

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# COLONIAL AMERICAN NEWSPAPER COLLECTION

*Explore your early American ancestry with Colonial newspapers from the 1700s at GenealogyBank.com.*

Title	Location	Years
Connecticut Gazette	New London, CT	1763 ~ 1844
New London Summary	New London, CT	1758 ~ 1763
Georgia Gazette	Savannah, GA	1763 ~ 1802
Maryland Gazette	Annapolis, MD	1728 ~ 1832
Boston News Letter	Boston, MA	1704 ~ 1776
Boston Evening Post	Boston, MA	1735 ~ 1775
Boston Post Boy	Boston, MA	1735 ~ 1775
New England Weekly Journal	Boston, MA	1727 ~ 1741
Weekly Rehearsal	Boston, MA	1731 ~ 1735
New England Courant	Boston, MA	1721 ~ 1726
Publick Occurrences	Boston, MA	1690 ~ 1690
New Hampshire Gazette	Portsmouth, NH	1756 ~ 1851
New York Gazette	New York, NY	1759 ~ 1821
Weekly Post Boy	New York, NY	1747 ~ 1770
New York Weekly Journal	New York, NY	1733 ~ 1750
New York Evening Post	New York, NY	1744 ~ 1752
Independent Reflector	New York, NY	1752 ~ 1753
Germantowner Zeitung	Germantown, PA	1763 ~ 1777
Pennsylvania Gazette	Philadelphia, PA	1736 ~ 1775
Pennsylvania Journal	Philadelphia, PA	1742 ~ 1793
American Weekly Mercury	Philadelphia, PA	1719 ~ 1746
Wochentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote	Philadelphia, PA	1762 ~ 1779
Pennsylvanische Fama	Philadelphia, PA	1750 ~ 1750
Newport Mercury	Newport, RI	1758 ~ 1876
Rhode Island Gazette	Newport, RI	1732 ~ 1733
Providence Gazette	Providence, RI	1762 ~ 1825
Virginia Gazette	Williamsburg, VA	1736 ~ 1780

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### Ben Franklin Letter to Peter Collinson on German immigrants, May 9, 1753

Those that come here [German immigrants] are generally of the most ignorant Stupid sort of their own Nation.... Not being used to Liberty, they know not how to make a modest use of it...and I suppose in a few years [interpreters] will be also necessary in the Assembly, to tell one half of our Legislators what the other half say; in short unless the stream of their importation could be turned from this to other Colonies...they will soon so out number us, that all the advantages we have will not [be] ...able to preserve our language, and even our Government will become precarious.

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### Office Holding

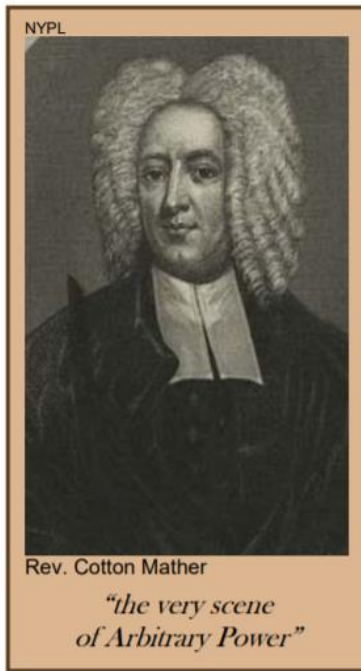
Property Qualification for holding office higher were than property qualifications for voting:

- South Carolina: must own 500 acres of land & 10 slaves or property worth £1,000 to hold office
- New York Assembly: 52 of 72 men in the assembly owned the large NYC estates



"The Election Day Medley" showing the intensity & frequency of colonial debate

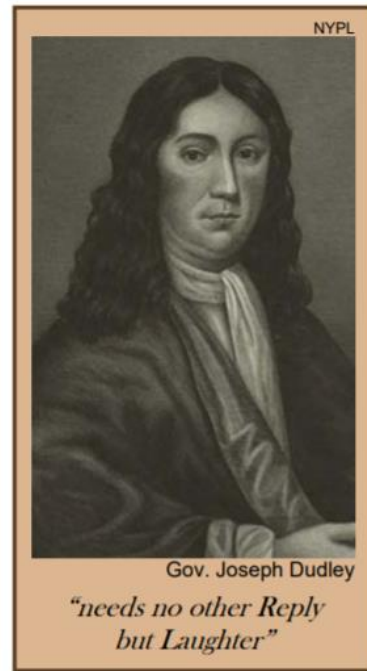
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### Is the Governor Corrupt?

A Pamphlet War in Boston  
1707

A long-lived and bitter power struggle between the old-guard Puritan leaders of the Massachusetts Bay colony — including the reverends Increase and Cotton Mather — and the royal governor Joseph Dudley, an American-born Tory appointed to impose more stringent control over the colony, exploded during the harsh years of Queen Anne's War (1703-1713). Accusing Dudley of profiting from illegal trade with the French and Indian enemies, and of failing to negotiate the return of captives or provide adequately for the colony's defense, Dudley's opponents sent a recall petition (*A Memorial*) to the Queen. Dudley soon published his confident self-defense (*A Modest Enquiry*). Dudley was not recalled and remained in power in 1715, when he was replaced after Queen Anne's death.



In a short time, printers could turn out single-page broadsides and multi-page unbound pamphlets (many of the texts in this Toolbox appeared first as printed pieces from colonial or British printing presses). One phenomenon of the quick-print world was the pamphlet war—back-and-forth volleys among two or more ideological adversaries (the Twitter wars of the 18th century).

Franklin, the American inventor, statesman, and publisher, achieved success with *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Almanacks were very popular books in colonial America, offering a mixture of seasonal weather forecasts, practical household hints, puzzles, and other amusements. *Poor Richard's Almanack* was also popular for its extensive use of wordplay, and some of the witty phrases Franklin coined are still used today.

Poor Richard, 1739.

A N

# Almanack

For the Year of Christ

1 7 3 9,

Being the Third after LEAP YEAR.

<i>And makes since the Creation</i>	Years
By the Account of the Eastern Greeks	7247
By the Latin Church, when ☉ ent. ♀	6938
By the Computation of <i>W. W.</i>	5748
By the <i>Roman</i> Chronology	5688
By the <i>Jewish</i> Rabbies	5500

*Wherein is contained,*

The Lunations, Eclipses, Judgment of the Weather, Spring Tides, Planets Motions & mutual Aspects, Sun and Moon's Rising and Setting, Length of Days, Time of High Water, Fairs, Courts, and observable Days.

Fitted to the Latitude of Forty Degrees, and a Meridian of Five Hours West from *London*, but may without sensible Error, serve all the adjacent Places, even from *Newfoundland* to *South-Carolina*.

By *RICHARD SAUNDERS*, Philom.

PHILADELPHIA:

Printed and sold by *B. FRANKLIN*, at the New Printing-Office near the Market.

## 18th Century Colonial America: Ideas

The Enlightenment (“Age of Reason”)

Originated in France & England (Locke, Newton)

- Human reason
- Could explain the world
- Combat ignorance, superstition, fanaticism
- Promote progress
- Reform society (positive change)

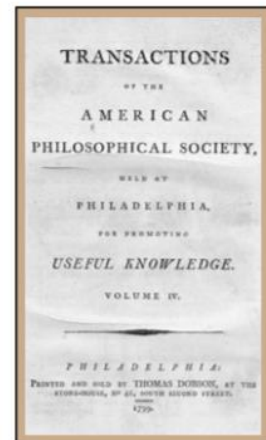
During the eighteenth century, many educated Americans began to be influenced by the outlook of the European Enlightenment. This philosophical movement, which originated among French thinkers and soon spread to Britain, sought to apply to political and social life the scientific method of careful investigation based on research and experiment. Enlightenment ideas crisscrossed the Atlantic along with goods and people. Enlightenment thinkers insisted that every human institution, authority, and tradition be judged before the bar of reason. The self-educated Benjamin Franklin’s wide range of activities—establishing a newspaper, debating club, and library; publishing the widely circulated Poor Richard’s Almanack; and conducting experiments to demonstrate that lightning is a form of electricity—exemplified the Enlightenment spirit and made him probably the best-known American in the eighteenth-century world.



Benjamin Franklin

A PROPOSAL  
for Promoting  
USEFUL KNOWLEDGE  
among the British Plantations in America

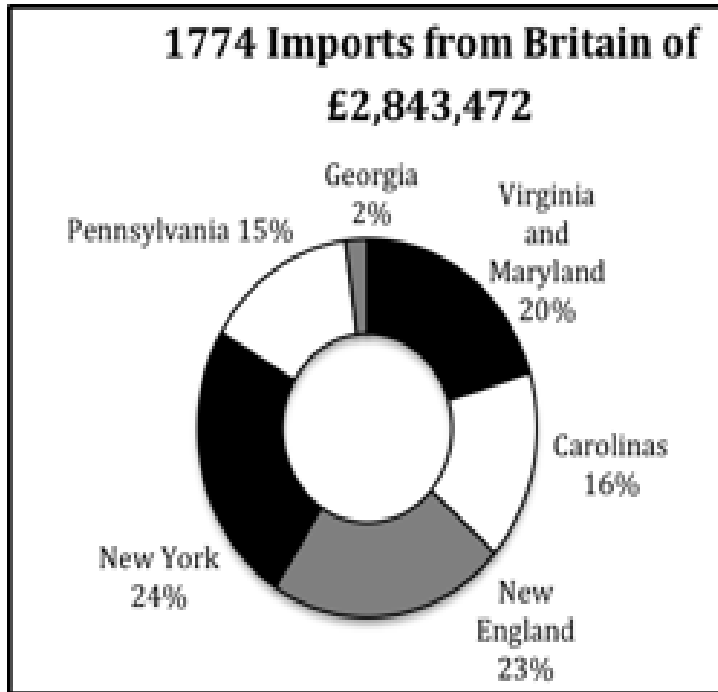
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1743



In 1743, sixteen years after he had formed the Junto in Philadelphia for weekly meetings of learned conversation, and twelve years after instituting the first lending library in the colonies. Benjamin Franklin envisioned a colonies-wide society for the discussion and promotion of science, modelled after the Royal Society of London. To announce his plan, he published a broadside in 1743 titled *A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America*. With the colonies well established and over a century old, Franklin began, there was greater opportunity for scientific pursuit and technological innovation. But without a mechanism for communicating new ideas and discoveries, they “die with the Discoverers and are lost to Mankind.” From Franklin’s impetus came the American Philosophical Society, which exists to this day. (Five years after *Proposal*, Franklin spurred another society of learning — the College of Philadelphia, later the University of Pennsylvania. It is evident that no colonial American did more to “promote useful knowledge” than Benjamin Franklin.)

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Preoccupied with events in Europe and imperial rivalries, successive British governments during the first half of the eighteenth century adopted a policy of “salutary neglect” toward the colonies, leaving them largely to govern themselves. With imperial authority so weak, the large landowners, merchants, and lawyers who dominated colonial assemblies increasingly claimed the right to control local politics. Convinced that they represented the will of the people, elected colonial assemblies used their control of finance to exert influence over appointed governors and councils. In the eighteenth century, as economic development enhanced the power of American elites, the assemblies they dominated became more and more assertive. Their leaders insisted that assemblies possessed the same rights and powers in local affairs as the House of Commons enjoyed in Britain.



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**1774 Exports to Britain of  
£ 1,855,246**

