US History Chapter 4 Lesson 2: Colonial Government

English colonists brought with them English ideas on governance

1. Protected rights
2. Representative government

Protected Rights:

Government must respect civil rights or liberties. This idea first appeared in the Magna Carta, which King John signed on June 15, 1215. Protected English people from unjust treatment or punishment.

Representative Government:

Where people elect delegates to make laws and conduct government. For example the English Parliament.

Two chambers of Parliament: House of Lords and the House of Commons. The upper ruling class (English aristocracy) could sit on the House of Lords. House of Commons included commoners, mostly merchants or property owners elected by other property owners.

Mid 1600’s, Parliament and King James II, struggled for power. In 1688, Parliament removed King James II from power and crowned William and Mary to rule. They promised to govern England by the “statues [laws] in Parliament agreed upon, and the laws and customs of the same.” They called this peaceful transfer of power the Glorious Revolution. It brought forth the idea that no ruler would have more power than the legislature.

The English Bill of Rights

1689 – The Bill of Rights stated that the ruler could not suspend Parliament’s laws, impose taxes, or raise an army without consent of Parliament. Members of Parliament would be freely elected, citizens had the right to a fair trial and it banned cruel and unusual punishment.

Government in America

Charter colonies: a grant of rights by the English monarch to a company

Proprietary colonies: Property of an owner or group of owners. Thy ruled more or less as they wished.

Royal colonies: Parliament appointed a governor and council (upper house). Colonists selected an assembly (lower house). The governor and upper house usually did what Parliament told them, leading to conflict between the upper and lower house. Those that could vote were white men who owned property. Most women, landless poor, indentured servants and African Americans could not vote.

Local Government in the Colonies

Town meetings were places people discussed local issues. Later developing into local governments. Leading into a strong belief in their right to govern themselves.

English Economic Policies:

Mercantilism, an economic theory whose goal is building wealth and power by increasing exports and accumulating precious metals in return, most European nations were following this belief. The country must export (to sell to other countries) more than it imports (buys from other countries). The English followed this theory. They looked to America for raw materials and wanted the colonists to buy their manufactured goods.

In order to do this, the English passed the Navigation Acts in the 1650’s. The laws forced colonists to sell their raw materials to England, even if they could get a better price elsewhere. Goods bought by the colonists had to go through England first where they were taxed. All goods had to be transported on English ships with English crews.

Colonial Resistance:

At first colonists accepted the Navigation Acts, later the colonists would resent them. They wanted to make their own goods. They also wanted to sell their goods to other countries than England. They began smuggling goods to avoid these restrictions. This would cause conflict later.