Ch. 3 Section 3 Comparing Regional Cultures
Life in Colonial America

• Why was wealth in land important?
• What rights and responsibilities did colonial women have?
• What was the nature of work and education in the colonies?
Colonial Society

- American colonists brought many ideas and customs from Europe. Most colonists believed:
  - The wealthy were superior to the poor.
  - Men were superior to women.
  - Whites were superior to blacks.
- The differences between social ranks could be seen in colonial clothes, houses, and manners.
- Ordinary people wore dresses or plain pants and shirts.
- Gentry ("gentle folk") wore wigs, silk stockings, lace cuffs, and the latest fashions.
- Gentry — men and women wealthy enough to hire others to work for them.
Wealth in Land

• For English colonists, land was the foundation for real wealth. Most landowners were white men.
• In the 1700s, gentry built mansions to display their wealth and filled them with fine furniture, silver, and porcelain.
• In each colony, a small group of elite, landowning men dominated politics.
Women and the Law
- Under English common law, a husband had complete control over his wife. Women could not
  - Own property.
  - Vote.
  - Hold office.
  - Serve on a jury.
- Husbands were allowed to beat their wives.

Women’s Duties
- Cooking
- Gardening
- Washing
- Cleaning
- Weaving cloth
- Sewing
- Assisting other women in childbirth
- Training daughters to do all of the above
The goal of the colonial household was to be self-sufficient. Everyone in the household worked to produce food and goods.

- Men grew crops, or made goods like shoes, guns, and candles.
- Women ran the household and assisted with the crops.
- Children helped both parents.
- Self-sufficient — able to make everything needed to maintain itself
Colonial Education

- During colonial times, children received very little formal education.
- Because Puritans believed everyone should be able to read the Bible, the New England Colonies became early leaders in the development of public education.
- In 1647, Massachusetts passed a law requiring towns to set up grammar schools for boys. Girls were expected to learn from their mothers at home.
- Generally, only the wealthy attended college, where they trained to be lawyers or ministers. Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary were the only three colleges in the colonies until the 1740s.