

## *Magna Carta – 1215*

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John, by the Grace of God, King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Earl of Anjou, to his Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls, Barons, Justiciaries, Foresters, Sheriffs, Governors, Officers, and to all Bailiffs, and his faithful subjects, -- Greeting....

Know ye, that We, in the presence of God, and for the salvation of our own soul, and of the souls of all our ancestors, and of our heirs, to the honor of God, and the exaltation of the Holy Church and amendment of our Kingdom, by the counsel of our venerable fathers, Stephen Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England, and Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Henry Archbishop of Dublin, William of London, Peter of Winchester, Joceline of Bath and Glastonbury, Hugh of Lincoln, Walter of Worcester, William of Coventry, and Benedict of Rochester, Bishops; Master Pandulph our Lord the Pope's Subdeacon and familiar, Brother Almeric, Master of the Knights-Templars in England, and of these noble persons, William Mareschal Earl of Pembroke, William Earl of Salisbury, William Earl of Warren, William Earl of Arundel, Alan de Galloway Constable of Scotland, Warin Fitz-Gerald, Hubert de Burgh Seneschal of Poitou, Peter Fitz-Herbert, Hugh de Nevil, Matthew Fitz-Herbert, Thomas Basset, Alan Basset, Philip de Albiac, Robert de Roppel, John Mareschal, John Fitz-Hugh, and others our liegemen; have in the First place granted to God, and by this our present Charter, have confirmed, for us and our heirs for ever:

(1) That the English Church shall be free, and shall have her whole rights and her liberties inviolable; and we will this to be observed in such a manner, that it may appear from thence, that the freedom of elections, which was reputed most requisite to the English Church, which we granted, and by our Charter confirmed, and obtained the Confirmation of the same, from our Lord Pope Innocent the Third, before the rupture between us and our Barons, was of our own free will: which Charter we shall observe, and we will it to be observed with good faith, by our heirs for ever.

We have also granted to all the Freemen of our Kingdom, for us and our heirs for ever, all the underwritten Liberties, to be enjoyed and held by them and by their heirs, from us and from our heirs.

(2) If any of our Earls or Barons, or others who hold of us in chief by military service, shall die, and at his death his heir shall be of full age, and shall owe a relief, he shall have his inheritance by the ancient relief; that is to say, the heir or heirs of an Earl, a whole Earl's Barony for one hundred pounds: the heir or heirs of a Baron for a whole Barony, by one hundred pounds; the heir or heirs of a Knight, for a whole Knight's Fee, by one hundred shillings at most: and he who owes less, shall give less, according to the ancient custom of fees.

(3) But if the heir of any such be under age, and in wardship, when he comes to age he shall have his inheritance without relief and without fine.

(7) A widow, after the death of her husband, shall immediately, and without difficulty have her marriage and her inheritance; nor shall she give any thing for her dower, or for her marriage, or for her inheritance, which her husband and she held at the day of his death: and she may remain in her husband's house forty days after his death, within which time her dower shall be assigned.

(8) No widow shall be compelled to marry herself, while she is willing to live without a husband; but yet she shall give security that she will not marry herself without our consent, if she hold of us, or without the consent of the lord of whom she does hold, if she hold of another.

(9) Neither we nor our Bailiffs, will seize any land or rent for any debt, while the chattels of the debtor are sufficient for the payment of the debt; nor shall the sureties of the debtor be compelled, while the principal debtor is able to pay the debt; and if the principal debtor fail in payment of the debt, not having wherewith to discharge it, the sureties shall answer for the debt; and if they be willing, they shall have the lands and rents of the debtor, until satisfaction be made to them for the debt which they had before paid for him, unless the principal debtor can shew himself acquitted thereof against the said sureties.

(12) No scutage nor aid shall be imposed in our kingdom, unless by the common council of our kingdom; excepting to redeem our person, to make our eldest son a knight, and once to marry our eldest daughter, and not for these, unless a reasonable aid shall be demanded.

(14) And also to have the common council of the kingdom, to assess and aid, otherwise than in the three cases aforesaid: and for the assessing of scutages, we will cause to be summoned the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls, and great Barons, individually, by our letters. --And besides, we will cause to be summoned in general by our Sheriffs and Bailiffs, all those who hold of us in chief, at a certain day, that is to say at the distance of forty days, (before their meeting,) at the least, and to a certain place; and in all the letters of summons, we will express the cause of the summons: and the summons being thus made, the business shall proceed on the day appointed, according to the counsel of those who shall be present, although all who had been summoned have not come.

(17) Ordinary lawsuits shall not follow the royal court around, but shall be held in a fixed place.

(20) A free-man shall not be fined for a small offence, but only according to the degree of the offence; and for a great delinquency, according to the magnitude of the delinquency, saving his contenment: a Merchant shall be fined in the same manner, saving his merchandise, and a villain shall be fined after the same manner, saving to him his Wainage, if he shall fall into our mercy; and none of the aforesaid fines shall be assessed, but by the oath of honest men of the vicinage.

(21) Earls and Barons shall not be fined but by their Peers, and that only according to the degree of their delinquency.

(30) No Sheriff nor Bailiff of ours, nor any other person shall take the horses or carts of any free-man, for the purpose of carriage, without the consent of the said free-man.

(31) Neither we, nor our Bailiffs, will take another man's wood, for our castles or other uses, unless by the consent of him to whom the wood belongs.

(39) No freeman shall be seized, or imprisoned, or dispossessed, or outlawed, or in any way destroyed; nor will we condemn him, nor will we commit him to prison, excepting by the legal judgement of his peers, or by the laws of the land.

(51) And immediately after the conclusion of the peace, we will remove out of the kingdom all foreign knights, cross-bow-men, and stipendiary soldiers, who have come with horses and arms to the molestation of the kingdom.

(61) But since we have granted all these things aforesaid, for GOD, and for the amendment of our kingdom, and for the better extinguishing the discord which has arisen between us and our Barons, we being desirous that these things should possess entire and unshaken stability for ever, give and grant to them the security underwritten; namely, that the Barons may elect twenty-five Barons of the kingdom, whom they please, who shall with their whole power, observe, keep, and cause to be observed, the peace and liberties which we have granted to them, and have confirmed by this our present charter, in this manner: that is to say, if we, or our Justiciary, or our bailiffs, or any of our officers, shall have injured any one in any thing, or shall have violated any article of the peace or security, and the injury shall have been shown to four of the aforesaid twenty-five Barons, the said four Barons shall come to us, or to our Justiciary if we be out of the kingdom, and making known to us the excess committed, petition that we cause that excess to be redressed without delay. And if we shall not have redressed the excess, or, if we have been out of the kingdom, our Justiciary shall not have redressed it within the term of forty days, computing from the time when it shall have been made known to us, or to our Justiciary if we have been out of the kingdom, the aforesaid four Barons, shall lay that cause before the residue of the twenty-five Barons; and they, the twenty-five Barons, with the community of the whole land, shall distress and harass us by all the ways in which they are able; that is to say, by the taking of our castles, lands, and possessions, and by any other means in their power, until the excess shall have been redressed, according to their verdict; saving harmless our person, and the persons of our Queen and children; and when it hath been redressed, they shall behave to us as they have done before.

And whoever of our land pleaseth, may swear, that he will obey the commands of the aforesaid twenty-five Barons, in accomplishing all the things aforesaid, and that with them he will harass us to the utmost of his power: and we publicly and freely give leave to every one to swear who is willing to swear; and we will never forbid any to swear. But all those of our land, who, of themselves, and of their own accord, are unwilling to swear to the twenty-five Barons, to distress and harass us together with them, we will compel them by our command, to swear as aforesaid.

And if any one of the twenty-five Barons shall die, or remove out of the land, or in any other way shall be prevented from executing the things above said, they who remain of the twenty-five Barons shall elect another in his place, according to their own pleasure, who shall be sworn in the same manner as the rest.

In all those things which are appointed to be done by these twenty-five Barons, if it happen that all the twenty-five have been present, and have differed in their opinions about any thing, or if some of them who had been summoned, would not, or could not be present, that which the greater part of those who were present shall have provided and decreed, shall be held as firm and as valid, as if all the twenty-five had agreed in it: and the aforesaid twenty-five shall swear, that they will faithfully observe, and, with all their power, cause to be observed, all the things mentioned above.

And we will obtain nothing from any one, by ourselves, nor by another, by which any of these concessions and liberties may be revoked or diminished. And if any such thing shall have been obtained, let it be void and null: and we will never use it, neither by ourselves nor by another.

It is also sworn, both on our part, and on that of the Barons, that all the aforesaid shall be observed in good faith, and without any evil intention. Witnessed by the above, and many others.

Given by our hand in the Meadow which is called Runningmead, between Windsor and Staines, this 15th day of June, in the 17th year of our reign [i.e., 1215: the new year began on May 28th].

## *The (English) Bill of Rights, 1689*

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Whereas the said late King James II having abdicated the government, and the throne being thereby vacant, his Highness the prince of Orange (whom it hath pleased Almighty God to make the glorious instrument of delivering this kingdom from popery and arbitrary power) did (by the advice of the lords spiritual and temporal, and diverse principal persons of the Commons) cause letters to be written to the lords spiritual and temporal, being Protestants, and other letters to the several counties, cities, universities, boroughs, and Cinque Ports, for the choosing of such persons to represent them, as were of right to be sent to parliament, to meet and sit at Westminster upon the two and twentieth day of January, in this year 1689, in order to such an establishment as that their religion, laws, and liberties might not again be in danger of being subverted; upon which letters elections have been accordingly made.

And thereupon the said lords spiritual and temporal and Commons, pursuant to their respective letters and elections, being new assembled in a full and free representation of this nation, taking into their most serious consideration the best means for attaining the ends aforesaid, do in the first place (as their ancestors in like case have usually done), for the vindication and assertion of their ancient rights and liberties, declare:

1. That the pretended power of suspending laws, or the execution of laws, by regal authority, without consent of parliament is illegal.
2. That the pretended power of dispensing with the laws, or the execution of law by regal authority, as it hath been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal.
3. That the commission for erecting the late court of commissioners for ecclesiastical causes, and all other commissions and courts of like nature, are illegal and pernicious.
4. That levying money for or to the use of the crown by pretense of prerogative, without grant of parliament, for longer time or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal.
5. That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.
6. That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of parliament, is against law.
7. That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defense suitable to their conditions, and as allowed by law.
8. That election of members of parliament ought to be free.
9. That the freedom of speech, and debates or proceedings in parliament, ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of parliament.
10. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.
11. That jurors ought to be duly impaneled and returned, and jurors which pass upon men in trials for high treason ought to be freeholders.
12. That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void.
13. And that for redress of all grievances, and for the amending, strengthening, and preserving of the laws, parliament ought to be held frequently.

And they do claim, demand, and insist upon all and singular the premises, as their undoubted rights and liberties....

Having therefore an entire confidence that his said Highness the prince of Orange will perfect the deliverance so far advanced by him, and will still preserve them from the violation of their rights, which they have here asserted, and from all other attempt upon their religion, rights, and liberties:

The said lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, assembled at Westminster, do resolve that William and Mary, prince and princess of Orange, be, and be declared, king and queen of England, France, and Ireland....

Upon which their said Majesties did accept the crown and royal dignity of the kingdoms of England, France, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto belonging, according to the resolution and desire of the said lords and commons contained in the said declaration.

From *The Statutes: Revised Edition* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1871), Vol. 2, pp. 10-12.

## *The First Charter of Virginia; April 10, 1606*

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JAMES, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. WHEREAS our loving and well-disposed Subjects...have been humble Suitors unto us, that We would vouchsafe unto them our License, to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People into that part of America commonly called VIRGINIA....

We, greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their Desires for the Furtherance of so noble a Work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government: DO, by these our Letters Patents, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well-intended Desires;

And do therefore, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, GRANT and agree, [that they] may inhabit and remain there; and shall and may also build and fortify within any the same, for their better Safeguard and Defense, according to their best Discretion, and the Discretion of the Council of that Colony

And we do also ordain, establish, and agree, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, that each of the said Colonies shall have a Council, which shall govern and order all Matters-and Causes, which shall arise, grow, or happen, to or within the same several Colonies, according to such Laws, Ordinances, and Instructions, as shall be, in that behalf, given and signed with Our Hand or Sign Manual, and pass under the Privy Seal of our Realm of England; Each of which Councils shall consist of thirteen Persons, to be ordained, made, and removed, from time to time, according as shall be directed and comprised in the same instructions....

And that also there shall be a Council, established here in England, which shall, in like manner, consist of thirteen Persons, to be for that Purpose, appointed by Us, our Heirs and Successors, which shall be called our Council of Virginia; And shall, from time to time, have the superior Managing and Direction, only of and for all Matters that shall or may concern the Government, as well of the said several Colonies, as of and for any other Part or Place, within the aforesaid Precincts of four and thirty and five and forty Degrees abovementioned...

...And that they shall, or lawfully may, establish and cause to be made a Coin, to pass current there between the people of those several Colonies, for the more Ease of Traffick and Bargaining between and amongst them and the Natives there, of such Metal, and in such Manner and Form, as the said several Councils there shall limit and appoint....

Also we do, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, DECLARE, by these Presents, that all and every the Persons being our Subjects, which shall dwell and inhabit within every or any of the said several Colonies and Plantations, and every of their children, which shall happen to be born within any of the Limits and Precincts of the said several Colonies and Plantations, shall HAVE and enjoy all Liberties, Franchises, and Immunities, within any of our other Dominions, to all Intents and Purposes, as if they had been abiding and born, within this our Realm of England, or any other of our said Dominions....

IN Wetness whereof, we have caused these our Letters to be made Patent; Witness Ourselves at Westminster, the tenth Day of April, in the fourth Year of our Reign of England, France, and Ireland, and of Scotland the nine and thirtieth.

# *Mayflower Compact, 1620*

## *Agreement Between the Settlers at New Plymouth*

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**IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN.** We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King *James*, by the Grace of God, of *Great Britain, France, and Ireland*, King, *Defender of the Faith*, &c. Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of *Virginia*; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid: And by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience. **IN WITNESS** whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at *Cape-Cod* the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King *James*, of *England, France, and Ireland*, the eighteenth, and of *Scotland* the fifty-fourth, *Anno Domini*, 1620.

Mr. John Carver,  
Mr. William Bradford,  
Mr Edward Winslow,  
Mr. William Brewster.  
Isaac Allerton,  
Myles Standish,  
John Alden,  
John Turner,  
Francis Eaton,  
James Chilton,  
John Craxton,  
John Billington,  
Joses Fletcher,  
John Goodman,  
Mr. Samuel Fuller,  
Mr. Christopher Martin,  
Mr. William Mullins,  
Mr. William White,  
Mr. Richard Warren,  
John Howland,  
Mr. Steven Hopkins,

Digery Priest,  
Thomas Williams,  
Gilbert Winslow,  
Edmund Margesson,  
Peter Brown,  
Richard Britteridge  
George Soule,  
Edward Tilly,  
John Tilly,  
Francis Cooke,  
Thomas Rogers,  
Thomas Tinker,  
John Ridgdale  
Edward Fuller,  
Richard Clark,  
Richard Gardiner,  
Mr. John Allerton,  
Thomas English,  
Edward Doten,  
Edward Liester.

## *The Charter of New England : 1620*

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JAMES, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. to all whom these Presents shall come, Greeting, Whereas, upon the humble Petition of divers of our well disposed Subjects, that intended to make several Plantations in the Parts of America...and have diverse Years past by God's Assistance, and their own endeavors, taken actual Possession of the Continent hereafter mentioned, in our Name and to our Use, as Sovereign Lord thereof, and have settled already some of our People in Places agreeable to their Desires in those Parts, and in Confidence of prosperous Success therein, by the Continuance of God's divine Blessing, and our Royal Permission, have resolved in a more plentiful and effectual Manner to prosecute the same, and to that Purpose and Intent have desired of Us, for their better Encouragement and Satisfaction herein, and that they may avoid all Confusion, Questions, or Differences between themselves, and those of the said first Colony, We would likewise be graciously pleased to make certain Adventurers...one...distinct...Body, and to grant unto them, such Estate, Liberties, Privileges, Enlargements, and Immunities there, as in these our Letters-Patents hereafter particularly expressed and declared.

And for as much as We have been certainly given to understand by divers of our good Subjects...And also for that We have been further given certainly to know, that within these late Years there hath by God's Visitation reigned a wonderful Plague, together with many horrible Slaughters, and Murders, committed amongst the Savages and brutish People there, heretofore inhabiting, in a Manner to the utter Destruction, Devastation, and Depopulation of that whole Territory, so that there is not left for many Leagues together in a Manner, any that do claim or challenge any Kind of Interests therein, nor any other Superior Lord or Sovereign to make Claim hereunto, whereby We in our Judgment are persuaded and satisfied that the appointed Time is come in which Almighty God in his great Goodness and Bounty towards Us and our People, hath thought fit and determined, that those large and goodly Territories, deserted as it were by their natural Inhabitants, should be possessed and enjoyed by such of our Subjects and People as heretofore have and hereafter shall...by [God's] Mercy and Favor, and by his Powerful Arm, be directed and conducted thither.

And for the better Plantation, ruling, and governing of the aforesaid New-England, in America, We will, ordain, constitute, assign...that from henceforth, there shall be for ever hereafter, in our Town of Plymouth, in the County of Devon, one Body politic and corporate, which shall have perpetual Succession, which shall consist of...forty Persons, and no more, which shall be, and shall be called and known by the Name the Council...

We do hereby for Us, our Heirs and Successors, grant unto the said Council established at Plymouth, that they and their Successors, by the same Name, be and shall be, and shall continue Persons able and capable in the Law, from time to time, and shall by that Name, of Council aforesaid, have full Power and Authority, and lawful Capacity and ability, as well to purchase, take, hold, receive, enjoy, and to have, and their Successors for ever, any Manors, Lands, Tenements, Rents, Royalties, Privileges, Immunities,...Goods...whatsoever, of or from Us, our Heirs, and Successors, and of or from any other Person or Persons whatsoever...

And further, of our special Grace, certain Knowledge,...We do by these Presents give and grant full Power and Authority to the said Council and their Successors, that the said Council for the Time being, or the greater Part of them, shall and may, from time to time, nominate, make, constitute, ordain, and confirms by such Name or Names, Style or Styles, as to them shall seem Good; and likewise to revoke, discharge, change, and alter, as well all and singular, Governors, Officers, and Ministers, which hereafter-shall be by them thought fill and needful to be made or used, as well to attend the Business of the said Company here...

And We do further...grant, declare, and ordain, that such principal Governor, as from time to time shall be authorized and appointed in Manner and Form in these Presents heretofore expressed, shall have full Power and Authority to use and exercise [martial] Laws in Cases of Rebellion, Insurrection and Mutiny in as large and ample Manner as our Lieutenants in our Counties within our Realm of England have or ought to have....

And lastly, because the principal effect which we can desire or expect of this Action, is the Conversion and Reduction of the People in those Parts unto the true Worship of God and Christian Religion, in which Respect, Wee would be loath that any Person should be permitted to pass that We suspected to affect the Superstition of the Church of Rome, We do hereby declare that it is our Will and Pleasure that none be permitted to pass, in any Voyage from time to time to be made into the said Country, but such as shall first have taken the Oath of Supremacy; for which Purpose, We do by these Presents give full Power and Authority to the President of the said Council, to tender and exhibit the said Oath to all such Persons...

...upon the humble Petition of the said Council for the time being, and their Successors, to us, our Heirs and Successors, We, our Heirs and Successors, shall and will forthwith make and pass under the Great Seal of England, to the said Council and their Successors, such further and better Assurance, of all and singular the Lands, Grounds, Royalties, Privileges, and Premises aforesaid granted, or intended to be granted, according to our true Intent and Meaning...as by the learned Council of Us, our Heirs, and Successors, and of the said Company and their Successors shall,...be reasonably...advised. And further our Will and Pleasure is, that in all Questions and Doubts, that shall arise upon any Difficulty of Instruction or Interpretation of any Thing contained in these our Letters-patents, the same shall be taken and Interpreted in most ample and beneficial Manner...

In Witness, &c.

Witness our self at Westminster, the Third Day of November, in the Eighteenth Year of our Reign over England, &c.

## *Charter Of Massachusetts Bay (1629)*

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And further, That the said Governour and Companye, and their Successors, maie have forever one comon Seale, to be used in all Causes and Occasions of the said Company, and the same Seale may alter, chaunge, breake, and newe make, from tyme to tyme, at their pleasures. And our Will and Pleasure is, and Wee doe hereby for Us, our Heires and Successors, ordeyne and graunte, That from henceforth for ever, there shalbe one Governor, one Deputy Governor, and eightene Assistants of the same Company, to be from tyme to tyme constituted, elected and chosen out of the Freemen of the saide Company, for the twyme being, in such Manner and Forme as hereafter in theis Presents is expressed, which said Officers shall applie themselves to take Care for the best disposing and ordering of the generall buysines and Affaires of, for, and concerning the said Landes and Premisses hereby mentioned, to be graunted, and the Plantation thereof, and the Government of the People there....

And further, Wee will, and by theis Presents, for Us, our Heires and Successors, doe ordeyne and graunte, That the Governor of the saide Company for the tyme being...shall have Authoritie from tyme to tyme upon all Occasions, to give order for the assembling of the saide Company, and calling them together to consult and advise of the Bussineses and Affaires of the saide Company, and that the said Governor, Deputie Governor, and Assistants of the saide Company, for the tyme being, shall or maie once every Moneth, or oftener at their Pleasures, assemble and houlde and keepe a Courte or Assemblee of themselves, for the better ordering and directing of their Affaires

In all and every, or any of which saide greate and generall Courts soe assembled, Wee doe for Us, our Heires and Successors, give and graunte to the said Governor and Company, and their Successors, That the Governor, or in his absence, the Deputie Governor of the saide Company for the tyme being, and such of the Assistants and Freeman of the saide Company as shalbe present, or the greater nomber of them so assembled, whereof the Governor or Deputie Governor and six of the Assistants at the least to be seaven, shall have full Power and authoritie to choose, nominate, and appointe, such and soe many others as they shall thinke fitt...And to make Lawes and Ordinances for the Good and Welfare of the saide Company, and for the Government and ordering of the saide Landes and Plantation, and the People inhabiting and to inhabite the same, as to them from tyme to tyme shalbe thought meete, soe as such Lawes and Ordinances be not contrarie or repugnant to the Lawes and Statuts of this our Realme of England.

And, further our Will and Pleasure is, and Wee doe hereby for Us, our Heires and Successors, ordeyne and declare, and graunte to the saide Governor and Company and their Successors, That all and every the Subjects of Us, our Heires or Successors, which shall goe to and inhabite within the saide Landes and Premisses hereby mentioned to be graunted, and every of their Children which shall happen to be borne there, or on the Seas in going thither, or retorning from thence, shall have and enjoy all liberties and Immunities of free and naturall Subjects within any of the Domyions of Us, our Heires or Successors, to all Intents, Constructions, and Purposes whatsoever, as if they and everie of them were borne within the Realme of England. And that the Governor and Deputie Governor of the said Company for the Tyme being, or either of them, and any two or more of such of the saide Assistants as shalbe thereunto appointed by the saide Governor and Company at any of their Courts or Assemblies to be held as aforesaide, shall and maie at all Tymes, and from tyme to tyme hereafter, have full Power and Authoritie to minister and give the Oathe and Oathes of Supremacie and Allegiance, or either of them, to all and everie Person and Persons, which shall at any Tyme or Tymes hereafter goe or passe to the Landes and Premisses hereby mentioned to be graunted to inhabite in the same.

And, Wee doe of our further Grace, certen Knowledg and meere Motion, give and graunte to the saide Governor and Company, and their Successors, That it shall and maie be lawfull, to and for the Governor or Deputie Governor, and such of the Assistants and Freemen of the said Company for the Tyme being as shalbe assembled in any of their generall Courts aforesaide, or in any other Courtes to be specially sumoned and assembled for that Purpose, or the greater Parte of them (whereof the Governor or Deputie Governor, and six of the Assistants to be alwaies seaven) from tyme to tyme, to make, ordeine, and establishe all Manner of wholesome and reasonable Orders, Lawes, Statutes, and Ordinances, Directions, and Instructions, not contrairie to the Lawes of this our Realme of England, aswell for setting of the Formes and Ceremonies of Government and Magistracy, fitt and necessary for the said Plantation, and the Inhabitants there, and for nameing and setting of all sorts of Officers, both superior and inferior, which they shall finde needefull for that Governement and Plantation, and the distinguishing and setting forth of the severall duties, Powers, and Lymytts of every such Office and Place....and for the directing, ruling, and disposing of all other Matters and Thinges, whereby our said People, Inhabitants there, may be soe religiously, peaceable, and civilly governed, as their good Life and orderlie Conversation, maie wynn and incite the Natives of Country, to the Knowledg and Obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of Mankind, and the Christian Fayth, which in our Royall Intention, and the Adventurers free Profession, is the principall Ende of this Plantation.

And Wee doe further, for Us, our Heires and Successors, give and graunt to the said Governor and Company, and their Successors by theis Presents, that all and everie such Chiefe Comaunders, Captaines, Governors, and other Officers and Ministers, as by the said Orders, Lawes, Statuts, Ordinances, Instructions, or Directions of the said Governor and Company for the Tyme being, shalbe from Tyme to Tyme hereafter imploied either in the Government of the saide Inhabitants and Plantation, or in the Waye by Sea thither, or from thence, according to the Natures and Lymitts of their Offices and Places respectively, shall from Tyme to Tyme hereafter for ever, within the Precincts and Partes of Newe England hereby mentioned to be graunted and confirmed, or in the Waie by Sea thither, or from thence, have full and Absolute Power and Authoritie to correct, punishe, pardon, governe, and rule all such the Subjects of Us, our Heires and Successors, as shall from Tyme to Tyme adventure themselves in any Voyadge thither or from thence, or that shall at any Tyme hereafter, inhabite within the Precincts and Partes of Newe England aforesaid, according to the Orders, Lawes, Ordinances, Instructions, and Directions aforesaid, not being repugnant to the Lawes and Statutes of our Realme of England as aforesaid. . . .

## *The Charter of Massachusetts Bay - 1691 (1)*

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WILLIAM & MARY by the grace of God King and Queen of England Scotland France and Ireland Defenders of the Faith &c... To all to whom these presents shall come, greeting. Whereas his late Majesty King James the First, Our Royal Predecessor... established [a colony] at Plymouth in the County of Devon for the Planting, Ruling, Ordering, and Governing of New England in America...

... And Whereas the said Council, did... give, grant, bargain, sell... and confirm to Sir Henry Roswell, Sir John Young, Knights Thomas Southcott, John Humphreys, John Endicot, and Simond Whetcomb, their heirs and assigns, and their Associates for ever, all that part of New England... which lies and extends between a great River there commonly called Monomack, Merrimack, and a certain other River there called Charles River being in a Bottom of a certain Bay there commonly called Massachusetts...

...and all Jurisdictions, Rights, Royalties, Liberties, Freedoms, Immunities, Privileges, Franchises,... and Commodities whatsoever which they, the said Council established at Plymouth... then had or might use exercise or enjoy in or within the said Lands and Premises...

And to the end that the affairs and businesses which from time to time should happen and arise concerning the said Lands and the Plantations of the same might be the better managed and ordered, and for the good Government thereof, Our said Royal Grandfather King Charles the First did by his said Letters... Create and make the said... [gentlemen listed]... and all such others as should thereafter be admitted... one Body Politic... by the Name... of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, and did grant unto them and their successors diverse powers, Liberties, and privileges...

We would be graciously pleased by Our Royal Charter to Incorporate Our Subjects in Our said Colony, and to grant... them such powers privileges and Franchises as [in] Our Royal Wisdom should be thought most [conducive] to Our Interest and Service and to the Welfare and happy State of Our Subjects in New England[,] and We being graciously pleased to gratify Our said Subjects and also to the end [that] our good Subjects... may be brought under such a form of Government as may put them in a better condition of defense, and considering as well the granting unto them, as unto Our Subjects in the said Colony of the Massachusetts Bay our Royal Charter... We do by these presents... Will and ordain that the territories and colonies commonly called... the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay and Colony of New Plymouth, the Province of Maine, the Territory called Acadia or Nova Scotia, and all that Tract of Land lying between... [be] incorporated, and We do by these presents unite... the same into one real Province by the Name of Our Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England...

...from henceforth for ever there shall be one Governor, one Lieutenant or Deputy Governor, and one Secretary of Our said Province or Territory, to be from time to time appointed and commissioned by us, Our Heirs and Successors, and Eight and Twenty Assistants or councilors to be advising and assisting to the Governor of Our said Province or Territory for the time being as by these presents is hereafter directed ... said Councilors or Assistants are to be Constituted, elected and chosen in such form and manner as hereafter in these presents is expressed and for the better execution of Our Royal Pleasure...

And further, We Will and by these presents, for us, Our Heirs and Successors, do ordain and grant that there shall and may be convened held and kept by the Governor... every last Wednesday in the month of May, every year, for ever and at all such other times as the Governor of Our said Province shall think fit and appoint a great and General Court of Assembly, which said Great and General Court of Assembly shall consist of the Governor and Council or Assistants for the time being and of such-Freeholders of Our said Province or Territory as shall be from time to time elected... by the major [portion] of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the respective Towns or Places who shall be present at such Elections...

...We doe by these presents for us, Our heirs and Successors, grant, establish, and ordain that for ever hereafter there shall be a liberty of Conscience allowed in the Worship of God to all Christians (Except Papists) Inhabiting or which shall Inhabit or be resident within our said Province or Territory...

... the great and General Court or Assembly... shall for ever have full power and authority to erect and, Constitute... [Courts] to be held in the name of us, Our heirs and successors for the hearing, trying, and determining of all manner of crimes,... pleas,... and things whatsoever arising or happening within Our said Province or Territory or between persons inhabiting or residing there... and [grant to the] General Court or Assembly of our said Province or Territory for the time being full power and Authority from time to time to make, ordain, and establish all manner of wholesome and reasonable orders, laws, statutes, and ordinances, directions, and instructions either with penalties or without (so [long] as the same be not repugnant or contrary to the Laws of this our Realm of England) as they shall Judge to be for the-good and welfare of our said Province or Territory...

...In Witness whereof We have caused these our Letters to be made Patents Witness Ourselves at Westminster the Seventh Day of October in the Third year of Our Reign.

*(1) The charter of 1629 had been canceled by a judgment of the high court of chancery of England on June 18, 1684.*

## *Charter of Delaware - 1701*

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WILLIAM PENN, Proprietary and Governor of the Province of Pennsylvania and Territories thereunto belonging, To all to whom these Presents shall come, sendeth Greeting.

WHEREAS King CHARLES the Second, by his Letter Patents, under the Great Seal of England, bearing Date the Fourth Day of March, in the Year One Thousand Six Hundred and Eighty, was graciously pleased to give and grant unto me, and my Heirs and Assigns for ever, this Province of Pennsylvania, with divers great Powers and Jurisdictions for the well Government thereof.

AND WHEREAS the King's dearest Brother, JAMES Duke of YORKE and ALBANY, &c....did grant unto me [in 1682], my Heirs and Assigns, all that Tract of Land, now called the Territories of Pennsylvania, together with powers and Jurisdictions for the good Government thereof.

AND WHEREAS, for the Encouragement of all the Freemen and Planters, that might be concerned in the said Province and Territories, and for the good Government thereof, I the said WILLIAM PENN, in [1683] ...did grant and confirm unto all the Freemen, Planters and Adventurers therein, divers Liberties, Franchises and Properties, as by the said Grant, entitled, The FRAME of the Government...being found, in some Parts of it, not so suitable to the present Circumstances of the Inhabitants, was in [1700], delivered up to me, by Six Parts of Seven of the Freemen of this Province and Territories, in General Assembly met...

AND WHEREAS I was then pleased to promise, That I would restore the said Charter to them again, with necessary Alterations, or in lieu thereof, give them another, better adapted to answer the present Circumstances and Conditions of the said Inhabitants; which they have now, by their Representatives in General Assembly met at Philadelphia, requested me to grant.

KNOW YE THEREFORE, That for the further Well-being and good Government of the said Province, and Territories; and in Pursuance of the Rights and Powers before-mentioned, I the said William Penn do declare, grant and confirm, unto all the Freemen, Planters and Adventurers, and other Inhabitants in this Province and Territories, these following Liberties, Franchises and Privileges, so far as in me lieth, to be held, enjoyed and kept, by the Freemen, Planters and Adventurers, and other Inhabitants of and in the said Province and Territories thereunto annexed, for ever.

### FIRST

BECAUSE no People can be truly happy, though under the greatest Enjoyment of Civil Liberties, if abridged of the Freedom of their Consciences, as to their Religious Profession and Worship: And Almighty God being the only Lord of Conscience,...That no Person or Persons, inhabiting In this Province or Territories, who shall confess and acknowledge One almighty God, the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the World; and professes him or themselves obliged to live quietly under the Civil Government, shall be in any Case molested or prejudiced, in his or their Person or Estate, because of his or their conscientious Persuasion or Practice, nor be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious Worship, Place or Ministry, contrary to his or their Mind, or to do or suffer any other Act or Thing, contrary to their religious Persuasion.

AND that all Persons who also profess to believe in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World, shall be capable (notwithstanding their other Persuasions and Practices in Point of Conscience and Religion)to serve this government in any Capacity, both legislatively and executively...

### II.

...there shall be an Assembly yearly chosen, by the Freemen..., to consist of Four Persons out of each County, of most Note for Virtue, Wisdom and Ability, (or of a greater Number at any Time, as the Governor and Assembly shall agree) upon the First Day of October for ever; and shall sit on the Fourteenth Day of the same Month, at Philadelphia, unless the Governor and Council for the Time being; shall see Cause to appoint another place ...Which Assembly shall have Power to choose a Speaker and other their Officers; and shall be Judges of the Qualifications and Elections of their own Members; sit upon their own Adjournments; appoint Committees; prepare Bills in order to pass into Laws; impeach Criminals, and redress Grievances; and shall have all other Powers and Privileges of an Assembly, according to the Rights of the free-born Subjects of England, and as is usual in any of the King's Plantations in America...

III.

THAT the Freemen in each respective County, at the Time and Place of Meeting for electing their Representatives to serve in Assembly, may as often as there shall be Occasion, chuse a double Number of Persons to present to the Governor for Sheriffs and Coroners, to serve for Three Years, if so long they behave themselves well...

V.

THAT all Criminals shall have the same Privileges of Witnesses and Council as their Prosecutors.

VIII.

...BUT, because the Happiness of Mankind depends so much upon the Enjoying of Liberty of their Consciences, as aforesaid, I do hereby solemnly declare, promise and grant, for me, my Heirs and Assigns, That the First Article of this Charter relating to Liberty of Conscience, and every Part and Clause therein, according to the true Intent and Meaning thereof, shall be kept and remain, without any Alteration, inviolably for ever.

AND LASTLY, I the said William Penn, Proprietary and Governor of the Province of Pennsylvania, and Territories "hereunto belonging, for myself, my Heirs and Assigns, have solemnly declared, granted and confirmed, and do hereby solemnly declare, grant and confirm, That neither I, my Heirs or Assigns, shall procure or do any Thing or Things whereby the Liberties in this Charter contained and expressed, nor any Part thereof, shall be infringed or broken: And if any thing shall be procured or done, by any Person or Persons, contrary to these Presents, it shall be held of no Force or Effect.

In WITNESS whereof, I the said William Penn, at Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, have unto this present Charter of Liberties, set my Hand and broad Seal, this Twenty-Eighth Day of October, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and One, being the Thirteenth Year of the Reign of King WILLIAM the Third, over England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, &c., and the Twenty-First Year of my Government.

WILLIAM PENN.

# Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, 1639

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For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God by the wise disposition of his divine providence so to order and dispose of things that we the Inhabitants and Residents of Windsor, Hartford and Wethersfield... well knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to maintain the peace and union of such a people there should be an orderly and decent Government established according to God, to order and dispose of the affairs of the people at all seasons as occasion shall require; do therefore associate and conjoin ourselves to be as one Public State or Commonwealth...

1. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that there shall be yearly two General Assemblies or Courts, the one the second Thursday in April, the other the second Thursday in September following; the first shall be called the Court of Election, wherein shall be yearly chosen from time to time, so many Magistrates and other public Officers as shall be found requisite: Whereof one to be chosen Governor for the year ensuing and until another be chosen, and no other Magistrate to be chosen for more than one year...which being chosen and sworn according to an Oath recorded for that purpose, shall have the power to administer justice according to the Laws here established ...according to the Rule of the Word of God...
2. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that the election of the aforesaid Magistrates shall be in this manner: every person present and qualified for choice shall bring in (to the person deputed to receive them) one single paper with the name of him written in it whom he desires to have Governor, and that he that hath the greatest number of papers shall be Governor for that year...
4. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that no person be chosen Governor above once in two years, and that the Governor be always a member of some approved Congregation...
5. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that to the aforesaid Court of Election the several Towns shall send their deputies, and when the Elections are ended they may proceed in any public service as at other Courts. Also the other General Court in September shall be for making of laws, and any other public occasion, which concerns the good of the Commonwealth.
7. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that after there are warrants given out for any of the said General Courts, the Constable or Constables of each Town, shall forthwith give notice distinctly to the inhabitants of the same, in some public assembly or by going or sending from house to house, that at a place and time by him or them limited and set, they meet and assemble themselves together to elect...certain deputies to be at the General Court...which said deputies shall be chosen by all that are admitted Inhabitants in the several Towns and have taken the oath of fidelity; provided that none be chosen a Deputy for any General Court which is not a Freeman of this Commonwealth.

The aforesaid deputies shall be chosen in manner following: every person that is present and qualified as before expressed, shall bring the names of such, written in several papers, as they desire to have chosen for that employment, and these three or four, more or less, being the number agreed on to be chosen for that time, that have the greatest number of papers written for them shall be deputies for that Court; whose names shall be endorsed on the back side of the warrant and returned into the Court, with the Constable or Constables' hand unto the same.

9. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that the deputies thus chosen shall have power and liberty to appoint a time and a place of meeting together before any General Court, to advise and consult of all such things as may concern the good of the public, as also to examine their own Elections...
  10. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that every General Court, except such as through neglect of the Governor and the greatest part of the Magistrates the Freemen themselves do call, shall consist of the Governor... ,In which said General Courts shall consist the supreme power of the Commonwealth, and they only shall have power to make laws or repeal them, to grant levies, to admit of Freemen, dispose of lands undisposed of, to several Towns or persons, and also shall have power to call either Court or Magistrate or any other person whatsoever into question for any misdemeanor, and may for just causes displace or deal otherwise according to the nature of the offense; and also may deal in any other matter that concerns the good of this Commonwealth, except election of Magistrates, which shall be done by the whole body of Freemen.
- In which Court the Governor or Moderator shall have power to order the Court, to give liberty of speech, and silence unseasonable and disorderly speakings, to put all things to vote, and in case the vote be equal to have the casting voice. But none of these Courts shall be adjourned or dissolved without the consent of the major part of the Court.
11. It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that when any General Court upon the occasions of the Commonwealth have agreed upon any sum, or sums of money to be levied upon the several Towns within this Jurisdiction, that a committee be chosen to set out and appoint what shall be the proportion of every Town to pay of the said levy, provided the committee be made up of an equal number out of each Town.

14th January 1639 the 11 Orders above said are voted.

## Other comparative information:

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### Virginia law of 1632 -

All men that are fittige to beare armes, shall bringe their pieces to the church.....

### Virginia law of 1637

All persons except negroes to be provided with arms and ammunition or be fined at the pleasure of the Governor and Council.

### Virginia law 1638

Noe man shall goe to works in the grounds without their armes, and a [breastplate] uppon them [in those] places where the commander shall require it.

All Virginia laws: source (Hening)

### Massachusetts law of 1775-1776

....that part of the militia of this colony, commonly called the training-band, shall be constituted of all the able-bodied male persons therein, from sixteen years old to fifty....each company....shall be called together by their captain or commanding officer....for the purpose of choosing one clerk, four serjeants [sic], four corporals, one drummer, and one fifer....that each and every officer and private soldier....shall equip himself, and be constantly provided with, a good fire-arm, with a steel or iron ramrod....and a bayonet.... (Acts & Resolves)

In March, 1631, The Massachusetts bay Colony ordered that each town should make sure that all men were armed within two weeks. Citizens who did not own arms would have to purchase them, and those who could not afford them would have to take out and repay a loan from the town. In 1632, a new law ordered that men who still had not armed themselves should be hired out as servants to pay for the cost of arms. In Plymouth, beginning in 1633, each man was required to have a musket, sword, cartridge belt, two pounds of powder, and ten pounds of bullets. (Boorstin 354-55)

In colonial warfare [on the frontier where Indian attack threatened] all were soldiers because all lived on the battlefield....(Boorstin 349)

"A well-grown boy, at the age of twelve or thirteen years, was furnished with a - small rifle and a shot-pouch. He then became a fort soldier, and had his port-hole assigned him."

- Rev. Joseph Doddridge of Virginia in the 1760s (Boorstin 350)

*Estimated Literacy Rates in the Colonies/States and Europe, 1760-1790*

Colonies/U.S.	Percent Literate		Europe	Percent Literate
	Male	Female		
New England 1760	89	46	Scotland 1790	90
New York City 1760-65	87	67	Sweden 1790	90
Pennsylvania 1775	70		Netherlands 1790	70
Philadelphia 177-75	82	80	Belgium 1790	61
Virginia 1790	68		England & Wales 1790	60
			France 1790	55
Colonial Average, 1760	75	40	German states 1790	55

Source: Purvis

I thank God, we [in Virginia] have not free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have [for the next] hundred years. For learning has brought heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them and libels against the government. God keep us from both.

- William Berkeley, Royal Governor of Virginia, 1671 (Boorstin 332)

Questions to consider:

1. How do the proportions of colonists who were literate compare to those of Europe?
2. Where were literacy rates highest in the colonies? Lowest? What might account for the differing rates?
3. Where were literacy rates highest in Europe? What might explain this?

#### Ownership of Land and Slaves Among Property-Holding Adults, 1774

Property-owning Categories	Land Ownership		Slave Ownership	
	% Owning Land	Average Value of Land Owned	% Owning Slaves	Average Value of Slaves
Adult men over 44	80.3	£222	33.7	£60
Adult men under 45	78.4	£123	34.4	£48
Gentlemen	94.7	£346	42.5	£123
Merchants	58.2	£260	53.5	£39
Artisans	56.1	£83	14.6	£9

(Purvis, p. 113)

#### Average Wealth (in British Pounds Sterling) Owned by Property-Owning Adults, 1774

Property-owning Class	New England	Mid-Atlantic Colonies	Southern Colonies	Thirteen Colonies (Overall)
Men	£169	£194	£410	£260
Women	£42	£103	£215	£132
Adults 45 and Older	£252	£274	£595	£361
Adults 44 and Younger	£129	£185	£399	£237
Urban	£191	£287	£641	£233
Rural	£151	£173	£392	£255
Esquires-gentlemen	£313	£1223	£1281	£572
Merchants	£563	£858	£314	£497
Professions, Sea Captains	£271	£241	£512	£341
Farmers Only, planters	£155	£180	£396	£262
Farmer-Artisans, ship Owners, fishermen	£144	£257	£801	£410
Shop and Tavern Keepers	£219	£222	£195	£204
Artisans	£114	£144	£138	£122
Mariners, Laborers	£52	£67	£383	£62

## *On colonial society, politics, and economic divisions:*

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...In each of the thirteen colonies a highly stratified society already existed....In the northern colonies, the wealthiest 10 percent of the population owned about 45 percent of the property. In the South, although the upper class was larger, wealth was more concentrated in the hands of the well-to-do. In some parts of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, 10 percent of the taxpayers owned 75 percent of the property....

Much more significant than this concentration of wealth was its dispersion through the rest of the population. Some 40 percent of the people were small independent farmers who largely supported themselves from their own land. When artisans, shopkeepers, inkeepers were added to this group, there emerged a thriving middle class who owned property worth about £400 on the average. This was modest wealth in an economy where the average landless laborer earned £30 a year. Above this pivotal group was an upper middle class of substantial farmers, prosperous artisans, and professional men, largely doctors and lawyers, who were worth between £500 and £1000 a year. Less than 20 percent of the population - in some states only 10 percent - were on the poverty line, with less than £50 of property to their names. Even in southern states such as Virginia, some 30 percent of the white men owned farms of between 100 and 500 acres, the average being 230 acres.

Moreover, even between the extreme upper level of American society and the very lowest, there was not an overwhelming gap. A great landowner, such as Robert Livingston of New York or Charles Carroll of Maryland, might earn £1800 a year from his estates, but there were lawyers in Charleston, Boston, and New York who earned twice as much from their practice, and a prosperous tavern keeper might easily clear £1000 a year. Because aristocracy was not a legal reality, there was no built-in awe to add to the distance between the rich man and the poor man. In one section of New Jersey, for instance, three landowners, each worth more than £16000, were far and away the richest and most prominent people in the neighborhood. But they associated freely with the "poor and industrious farmers and mechanics" who were their neighbors and on their farms set "a laborious example to their domesticks." The less wealthy neighbors were often seen "at the tables & in the parlors of their betters enjoying the advantage and honour of their society and conversation."

One reason for this familiarity was the fact that poor or middling men had the power to vote for or against the rich man if, as many of the well-to-do did, he sought the right to represent them in the colony's assembly or become the town's first selectman. Contrary to the widespread idea that property qualifications limited the voters in colonial America, more recent research has inclined historians to conclude that almost anybody could vote if he was so inclined. In Massachusetts, for instance, anyone over the age of twenty-one who owned land yielding 40 shillings in rent a year or property worth £40 could vote. In states ranging from Massachusetts to New Jersey to Virginia, between 80 to 90 percent of adult males could easily scrape together sufficient property to qualify as voters.

As Thomas Hutchinson, the governor of Massachusetts, informed a British official in 1772, the £40 "may be in clothes, household furniture or any sort of property....and even into that there is scarce ever any inquiry and anything with the appearance of a man is admitted [to vote] without scrutiny." An equally strong disinclination to challenge anyone who wanted vote prevailed in the rest of America. Even in New York, where aristocrats were supposedly dominant, the latest research shows between 50 and 60 percent of all adult white males voting in New York City. Previous generations of American historians were confused by the relatively small number of voters in American colonial elections. Only recently has there been a focus on the turnout in heavily contested elections, particularly in towns and cities where it was easy for men to go the polls. The light turnout of the countryside was primarily attributable to the difficulties of traveling over wretched roads and more than normal voter inertia induced by rural isolation. Even in our highly urbanized and overcommunicated society, seldom do more than 70 percent of Americans vote, and in state and local elections the percentage often slips below 50 percent.

But there was a remarkable tendency throughout colonial America to elect men of distinction - which usually meant men of wealth - to political office. Even in Massachusetts, the most vigorously democratic of all the colonies, this was a visible fact....This tradition of deference was a kind of shadow cast by the aristocratically dominated society from which America had sprung. But politically there was an enormous difference between the New World and the Old World...The American leaders were in intimate contact with the people they represented. The average American in a colonial assembly was elected by 1200 people. (Fleming, 25-29)

A...social vagueness came into being in America. The ancient...idea of a "calling" had been displaced by the idea of opportunity. Few American men dared to look to their inherited stations to define their callings. They had to look to their opportunities...No prudent man dared be too certain of exactly where he was or what he was about; everyone had to be prepared to become someone else. (Boorstin 194-5)

The poorest labourer upon the shore of the Delaware thinks himself intitled [sic] to deliver his sentiments in matters of religion or politics with as much freedom as the gentleman or the scholar. Indeed, there is less distinction among the citizens of Philadelphia, than among those of any civilized city in the world....For every man expects one day or another to be upon a footing with his wealthiest neighbor....

- Rev. Jacob Duche', 1772 (Boorstin 316)

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