

The Enlightenment

During the 1700s, the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that began in Europe, and the Great Awakening, a colonial religious movement, influenced people's thinking throughout the thirteen colonies.

EUROPEAN IDEAS INSPIRE THE COLONISTS During the Renaissance in Europe, scientists had begun looking beyond religious beliefs and traditional assumptions for answers about how the world worked. Careful observation and reason, or rational thought, led to the discovery of some of the natural laws and principles governing the world and human behavior. The work of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Sir Isaac Newton established that the earth

revolved around the sun and not vice versa. This observation, which challenged the traditional assumption that the earth was the center of the universe, was at first fiercely resisted. It was thought to contradict the Bible and other religious teachings. The early scientists also concluded that the world is governed by fixed mathematical laws rather than solely by the will of God. These ideas about nature led to a movement called the **Enlightenment**, in which philosophers valued reason and scientific methods.

Enlightenment ideas spread from Europe to the colonies, where people such as **Benjamin Franklin** embraced the notion of obtaining truth through experimentation and reason. For example, Franklin's most famous experiment—flying a kite in a thunderstorm—demonstrated that lightning is a form of electrical power.

Enlightenment ideas spread quickly through the colonies by means of books and pamphlets. Literacy was particularly high in New England because the Puritans had long supported public education, partly to make it possible for everyone to read the Bible. However, Enlightenment views were disturbing to some people. The Enlightenment suggested that people could use science and logic—rather than the pronouncements of church authorities—to arrive at truths. As the English poet John Donne had written, “[The] new philosophy calls all in doubt.”

The Enlightenment also had a profound effect on political thought in the colonies. Colonial leaders such as Thomas Jefferson reasoned that human beings are born with natural rights that governments must respect. Enlightenment principles eventually would lead many colonists to question the authority of the British monarchy. **D**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

D What effects did the Enlightenment have on political thought in the colonies?

The Great Awakening

By the early 1700s, the Puritans had lost some of their influence. Under the new Massachusetts charter of 1691, Puritans were required to practice religious tolerance and could no longer limit voting privileges to members of their own church. Furthermore, as Puritan merchants prospered, they developed a taste for fine houses, stylish clothes, and good food and wine. As a result, their interest in maintaining the strict Puritan code declined. A series of religious revivals aimed at restoring the intensity and dedication of the early Puritan church swept through the colonies. These came to be known collectively as the **Great Awakening**.

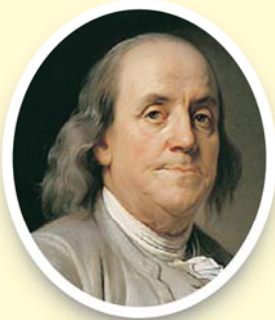
Vocabulary

revival: a time of reawakened interest in religion

The British minister George Whitefield was a major force behind the Great Awakening. In his seven journeys to the American colonies between 1738 and 1769, Whitefield preached dramatic sermons that brought many listeners to tears. ►



KEY PLAYERS

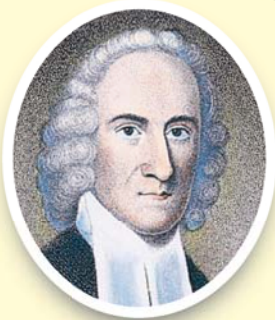


BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
1706–1790

A true student of the Enlightenment, Benjamin Franklin devised an orderly method to develop moral perfection in himself. In his autobiography, he records how he decided on a list of virtues he thought he should have. Then, every night, he reviewed whether his behavior lived up to those standards and recorded his faults in a notebook.

Originally, he concentrated on only 12 virtues until a Quaker friend told him he was too proud. Franklin promptly added a 13th virtue to the list—the virtue of humility, which he felt he never quite achieved.

Franklin took great pleasure in seeing his character improve. He wrote: “I was surpris’d to find myself so much fuller of faults than I had imagined; but I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish.”



JONATHAN EDWARDS
1703–1758

Unlike Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards did not believe that humans had the power to perfect themselves. Descended from a long line of Puritan ministers, he believed that “however you may have reformed your life in many things,” all were sinners who were destined for hell unless they had a “great change of heart.”

Edwards was a brilliant thinker who entered Yale College when he was only 13. His preaching was one of the driving forces of the Great Awakening. Ironically, when the religious revival died down, Edwards’s own congregation rejected him for being too strict about doctrine. Edwards moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1751, where he lived most of his remaining years as a missionary to a Native American settlement.

RELIGIOUS REVIVALS Among those clergy who sought to revive the fervor of the original Puritan vision was **Jonathan Edwards**, of Northampton, Massachusetts. One of the most learned religious scholars of his time, Edwards preached that it was not enough for people simply to come to church. In order to be saved, they must feel their sinfulness and feel God’s love for them. In his most famous sermon, delivered in 1741, Edwards vividly described God’s mercy toward sinners.

A PERSONAL VOICE

JONATHAN EDWARDS

“The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors [hates] you, and is dreadfully provoked: His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire . . . and yet it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment.”

—“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

While the Great Awakening, which lasted throughout the 1730s and 1750s, restored many colonists’ Christian religious faith, the movement also challenged the authority of established churches. Preachers traveled from village to village,

attracting thousands to outdoor revival meetings, giving impassioned sermons, and stirring people to rededicate themselves to God. Some colonists abandoned their old Puritan or Anglican congregations, while independent denominations, such as the Baptists and Methodists, gained new members.

EFFECTS OF THE GREAT AWAKENING AND ENLIGHTENMENT Although the Great Awakening emphasized emotionalism and the Enlightenment emphasized reason, the two movements had similar consequences. Both caused people to question traditional authority. Moreover, both stressed the importance of the individual: the Enlightenment by emphasizing human reason, and the Great Awakening by de-emphasizing the role of church authority. Because these movements helped lead the colonists to question Britain’s authority over their lives, they were important in creating the intellectual and social atmosphere that eventually led to the American Revolution. **E**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

E What effects did the Great Awakening have on organized religion in the colonies?