Chapter 4: Slavery, Freedom, and the Struggle for Empire, to 1763

I. Olaudah Equiano

II. Slavery and the Empire
   A. The Triangular Trades
      1. A series of triangular trade routes crisscrossed the Atlantic.
      2. Colonial merchants all profited from the slave trade.
      3. Slavery became connected with the color black and liberty with the color white.
   B. Africa and the Slave Trade
      1. With the exception of the king of Benin, most African rulers took part in the slave trade, gaining guns and textiles in exchange for their slaves.
      2. The slave trade was concentrated in western Africa, greatly disrupting its society and economy.
   C. The Middle Passage
      1. The Middle Passage was the voyage across the Atlantic for slaves.
      2. Slaves were crammed aboard ships for maximum profit.
      3. The numbers of slaves increased steadily through natural reproduction.
   D. Chesapeake Slavery
      1. Three distinct slave systems were well entrenched in Britain’s mainland colonies:
         a. Chesapeake
         b. South Carolina and Georgia
         c. Nonplantation societies of New England and the Middle Colonies
      2. Chesapeake slavery was based on tobacco.
      3. Chesapeake plantations tended to be smaller and daily interactions between masters and slaves were more extensive.
      4. Slavery transformed Chesapeake society into an elaborate hierarchy of degrees of freedom:
         a. Large planters
         b. Yeomen farmers
         c. Indentured servants and tenant farmers
         d. Slaves
   E. Freedom and Slavery in the Chesapeake
      1. With the consolidation of a slave society, planters filled the law books to protect their power over the slaves.
      2. Race took on more and more importance as a line of social division and liberties of free blacks were stripped away as “free” and “white” had become virtually identical.
   F. Indian Slavery in Early Carolina
      1. The Creek Indians initially sold the early settlers their slaves, generally war captives and their families.
      2. As the Carolina plantations grew, the Creeks became more concerned.
   G. The Rice Kingdom
      1. South Carolinian and Georgian slavery rested on rice.
      2. Rice and indigo required large-scale cultivation, done by slaves.
      3. The economy of scale for rice was such that plantations were large.
      4. By 1770, the number of South Carolina slaves had reached 100,000, well over half the colony’s population.
   H. The Georgia Experiment
      1. Georgia was established by a group of philanthropists led by James Oglethorpe in 1733.
2. Oglethorpe had banned liquor and slaves, but the settlers demanded their right of self-government and quickly repealed the bans.

I. Slavery in the North
1. Since the economics of New England and the Middle Colonies were based on small farms, slavery was far less important.
2. Given that slaves were few and posed little threat to the white majority, laws were less harsh than in the South.
3. Slaves did represent a sizable percentage of urban laborers, particularly in New York and Philadelphia.

III. Slave Culture and Slave Resistance
A. Becoming African-Americans
1. Their bond was not kinship, language, or even “race,” but slavery itself, and by the nineteenth century slaves identified themselves as African-American.
2. Most slaves in the eighteenth century were African by birth.

B. African-American Cultures
1. In the Chesapeake, slaves learned English, were part of the Great Awakening, and were exposed to white culture.
2. In South Carolina and Georgia, two very different black societies emerged:
   a. Rice plantations remained distinctly African.
   b. Urban servants assimilated into Euro-American culture.
3. In the northern colonies a distinctive African-American culture developed more slowly and African-Americans enjoyed more access to the mainstream of life.

C. Resistance to Slavery
1. A common thread for African-Americans was the desire for freedom.
   a. Many slaves ran away to Florida or cities.
2. The first eighteenth-century slave uprising occurred in New York City in 1712.

D. The Crisis of 1739–1741
1. The Stono slave rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina led to the tightening of the slave code.
2. A panic in 1741 swept New York City after a series of fires broke out that were rumored to have been part of a slave conspiracy to attack whites.

IV. An Empire of Freedom
A. British Patriotism
1. Despite the centrality of slavery to its empire, eighteenth-century Great Britain prided itself on being the world’s most advanced and freest nation.
2. Britons shared a common law, a common language, a common devotion to Protestantism, and a common enemy in France.
3. Britons believed that wealth, religion, and freedom went together.

B. The British Constitution
1. Central to this sense of British identity was the concept of liberty.
2. British liberty was simultaneously a collection of specific rights, a national characteristic, and a state of mind.
3. Britons believed that no man, even the king, was above the law.

C. The Language of Liberty
1. Increasingly the idea of liberty became more and more identified with a general right to resist arbitrary government.
2. It was common for “liberty” to be used as the battle cry of the rebellious.

D. Republican Liberty
1. Republicanism called for the virtuous elite to give themselves to public service.
2. The Country Party was critical of the corruption of British politics.
   a. *Cato’s Letters* was widely read by the American colonists.
E. Liberal Freedom
1. Liberalism was another political idea celebrating freedom and was put forth by the leading philosopher John Locke.
2. Lockean ideas included individual rights, the consent of the governed, and the right of rebellion against unjust or oppressive government.
3. Locke’s ideas excluded many from freedom’s full benefits in the eighteenth century, but they opened the door to many to challenge the limitations on their own freedom later.
4. Republicanism and liberalism eventually came to be seen as alternative understandings of freedom.

V. The Public Sphere
A. The Right to Vote
1. Ownership of property was a common qualifier for voting in the colonies.
2. Suffrage was much more common in the colonies than in Britain.
3. Property qualifications for office holding were far higher than for voting.
B. Political Cultures
1. Considerable power was held by those with appointive, not elective, offices.
2. Property qualifications for office holding were far higher than for voting.
3. By the mid-eighteenth century, the typical officeholder was considerably richer than the average person when the century began.
C. Colonial Government
1. During the first half of the eighteenth century the colonies were largely left to govern themselves, as British governments adopted a policy of “salutary neglect.”
2. The colonial elected assemblies exercised great influence over the appointed officials.
D. The Rise of the Assemblies
1. Elected assemblies became dominant and assertive in colonial politics in the eighteenth century.
2. The most powerful assembly was in Pennsylvania, followed by those in Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, and South Carolina.
3. Leaders of the assemblies found in the writings of the English Country Party a theory that made sense of their own experience.
E. Politics in Public
1. The American gentry were very active in the discussion of politics, particularly through clubs.
   a. Junto was a club for mutual improvement founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1727.
F. The Colonial Press
1. Widespread literacy and the proliferation of newspapers encouraged political discourse.
2. Book stores, circulating libraries, and weekly newspapers all contributed to the dissemination of information.
G. Freedom of Expression and Its Limits
1. Freedom of speech was a relatively new idea.
2. Freedom of the press was generally viewed as dangerous.
3. After 1695, the government could not censor print material, and colonial newspapers defended freedom of the press as a central component of liberty.
H. The Trial of Zenger
1. John Peter Zenger went on trial in 1735 for seditious libel.
   a. He was found not guilty.
b. The outcome promoted the ideas that the truth should always be permitted to hold sway and that free expression should be allowed.

I. The American Enlightenment
   1. Americans sought to apply to political and social life the scientific method of careful investigation based on research and experiment.
   2. One inspiration for the Enlightenment was a reaction against the bloody religious wars that wrecked Europe in the seventeenth century.
   3. Deism and natural laws embodied the spirit of the American enlightenment.

VI. The Great Awakening
   A. Religious Revivals
      1. The Great Awakening was a series of local events united by a commitment to a more emotional and personal Christianity than that offered by existing churches.
      2. The Great Awakening was led by flamboyant preachers like Jonathan Edwards.
         a. *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*
   B. The Preaching of Whitefield
      1. The English minister George Whitefield is credited with sparking the Great Awakening.
         a. He believed that God was merciful.
      2. The Great Awakening enlarged the boundaries of liberty as Old Lights (traditionalists) and New Lights (revivalists) defended their right to worship.
   C. The Awakening’s Impact
      1. The Great Awakening inspired criticism of many aspects of colonial society.
      2. A few preachers explicitly condemned slavery, but most slave masters managed to reconcile Christianity and slaveholding.
      3. The Great Awakening expanded the circulation of printed material in the colonies.

VII. Imperial Rivalries
   A. Spain in North America
      1. On paper a vast territorial empire, Spanish North America actually consisted of a few small and isolated urban clusters.
      2. Despite establishing religious missions and *presidios*, the population in Spanish North America remained sparse.
   B. The Spanish in California
      1. Spain ordered the colonization of California in response to a perceived Russian threat.
      2. California was a mission frontier.
   C. The French Empire
      1. The French empire in the early eighteenth century expanded.
      2. The French tended to view North America as a place of cruel exile for criminals and social outcasts.

VIII. Battle for the Continent
   A. The Middle Ground
      1. Indians were constantly being pushed from their homes into a “middle ground” between European empires and Indian sovereignty.
      2. The government of Virginia gave an immense land grant in 1749 to the Ohio Company.
B. The Seven Years’ War
   1. The war began in 1754 as the British tried to dislodge the French from western Pennsylvania.
   2. For two years, the war went against the British.
   3. The tide of war turned in 1757, when William Pitt became the British prime minister.

C. A World Transformed
   1. The Peace of Paris in 1763 resulted in the expulsion of France from North America.
   2. Pitt declared that peace would be as hard to make as war, and the war indeed put future financial strains on all the participants.

D. Pontiac’s Rebellion
   1. With the removal of the French, the balance-of-power diplomacy that had enabled groups like the Iroquois to maintain a significant degree of autonomy was eliminated.
   2. In 1763 Indians launched a revolt against British rule.

E. The Proclamation Line
   1. To avoid further Indian conflicts, London issued the Proclamation of 1763.
   2. The British aim was less to protect the Indians than to stabilize the situation on the colonial frontier and to avoid being dragged into an endless series of border conflicts.

F. Pennsylvania and the Indians
   1. The war deepened the hostility of western Pennsylvanian farmers toward Indians and witnessed numerous indiscriminate assaults on Indian communities.
   2. The Paxton Boys demanded that Indians be removed from Pennsylvania.

G. Colonial Identities
   1. The colonists emerged from the Seven Years’ War with a heightened sense of collective identity.
   2. The war also strengthened the colonists’ pride in being members of the British empire.