

British Colonies in America: Massachusetts Bay and Virginia Compared

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The historic colonies of Massachusetts Bay and Virginia between 1607 and 1750s were most influential in forming the modern American society. From them, many current states emerged. Maine, Massachusetts, the Virginias, and more states stand today because of this rich history (Haskell, 2017; Nagl, 2013). The climatic conditions differed across the two colonies. These factors shaped the political and economic dimensions of each side differently. However, conventional approaches applied in resolving problems. Native Americans, for instance, played a critical role in the formation and sustenance of both colonies (Haskell, 2017; Nagl, 2013). However, they experienced essential similarities and differences that informed their society. Political, economic, social approaches affected the formation and progress of colonies, thereby making them both similar and different in given ways.

The sense of freedom was one of the most critical differences between the British colony of Massachusetts Bay and that of Virginia. While political and religious liberties mattered to the former, the latter considered economic freedom the most valuable. On the one hand, most of the English settlers in Massachusetts Bay were fleeing religious persecutions back in their native country. They were seeking political autonomy that would protect their religious rights and beliefs. Therefore, the colonies of Massachusetts believed in religious freedom as critical to human existence. Self-governance provided the only means of achieving the goals (Nagl, 2013). Virginia colonialists viewed the colony as a place for business opportunities and wealth-creation. The rich in the territory used their money to gain power and influence. The high class in the society ran politics and decided on political decisions on behalf of the disfranchised majority of the low level (Haskell, 2017). The result was a highly wide gap between the rich and the poor. Economic freedom was most important to the colony of Virginia. Therefore, Virginia emphasized economic prowess as Massachusetts got ruled as a purely socialist organization.

The two colonies also differed on the economic foundations and focus. Virginia relied mostly on the slave labor to run its plantation farming of tobacco (Haskell, 2017). However, the Massachusetts Bay emphasized the ship-building industry that provided the backbone of its economy (Nagl, 2013). In other words, the former was an agricultural economy as the latter was a ship-building one. Since plantation farming required a high human labor supply, slavery became part of the means to this end for Virginia. However, the necessary high-skills for the ship-building meant that only a few of the minority population would work in the industry (Nagl, 2013). Therefore, the majority of ship-builders became immigrant whites from England. Slavery was minimal in the Massachusetts Bay colony compared to the counterpart of Virginia.

The differences in the economic and foundations principles of the two colonies set them into various political approaches to democracy. The socialist Massachusetts Bay colony advanced a more inclusive region compared to Virginia's capitalist counterpart (Haskell, 2017; Nagl, 2013). The latter experienced a high economic divide. because the majority poor remained under the rule of the wealthy minority, society became undemocratic. For instance, the poor, mostly slaves working in the large tobacco farms, were never allowed to vote (Haskell, 2017). In other words, the white minority decided on who ruled and how they did so. However, the white majority dominated the Massachusetts Bay colony (Nagl, 2013). Consequently, political equality got practiced in the region. Everyone voted and took an active role in the running of the territory.

Apart from the differences, Massachusetts Bay and Virginian colonies had some similarities. To begin with, both colonies got formed in about the same period – early 17th century by English incomers with the same spirit of seeking self-determination. Virginia got formed in about 1607, thereby making it ahead of the Massachusetts Bay colony by a decade (Haskell, 2017). The latter got formed around 1620, with mainly immigrants fleeing religious

persecution from England (Nagl, 2013). Despite the differences in the reasons for becoming colonies, both also sought to have self-governance. While Virginia used the economy as the driver of governance, the Massachusetts Bay colony applied religion and social freedoms as vital. Indeed, both territories realized self-governance with clear political structures and systems.

Moreover, both colonies experienced similar problems at the beginning, thereby prompted them to seek help from the natives. Both territories were formed by English immigrant people who came to the Americas for various reasons. While the Massachusetts Bay struggled with the cold weather conditions of winter, Virginia also strived to overcome some climatic change issues. A significant number of people died in the cold weather of the Massachusetts Bay due to diseases related to the extreme conditions. Similarly, the colony of Virginia also experienced new infections. They both asked for help from the natives – who gave their support in various ways (Haskell, 2017; Nagl, 2013). In Massachusetts Bay, the locals helped the incoming Pilgrims with the material goods for sustenance. They mark the day of Thanksgiving as a reminder of the selfless support given during that period. Indeed, the incoming colonialists viewed the locals as partners and respected their geographical territories in return. For Virginia, the locals provided the land for plantation farming – a vital driver of the economy (Haskell, 2017; Nagl, 2013). The two colonies thrived due to twin factors of abilities to overcome their problems as well as get support from the locals.

Overall, no one can understand the modern settings and cultures of the American states that fall within these two colonies without a proper understanding of their backgrounds. The differences and similarities between them exist to date. Moreover, the differences in governance still exist despite the unification into a federal nation from an agrarian economy to full capitalist culture marked Virginia to date. Conversely, democratic representation as a culture still exists in Massachusetts and related states. These characteristic differences

emerged from their historical foundations. Besides, the natives played a critical role in the building and sustenance of these societies. In other words, both Massachusetts Bay and Virginia colonies show how vital interdependence and individual differences across politics, economy, and social setup matter in shaping a society.

References

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