Social Tensions en’ Route to Revolution

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Introduction

By the 17th century, England began to expand her empire into the New World. The people that would come to settle colonies in North America, arrived for a myriad of reasons, and with a number of purposes. While her first colony on the North American continent was founded for commercial reasons, several of the proceeding colonies were founded by individuals looking to rid themselves of the religious persecutions they faced in England. This brought both Protestant and Catholic refugees to the New World. Some came in hopes of finding financial opportunities, and still others arrived on the shores of the continent for the simple reason of owning their own land.

Whatever the reason, the peoples destined to build new societies in America came from all walks of life, and held a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Coupled with their assorted religious persuasions, and their growing mixture of nationalities, these would lend themselves to create a social diversity that would at times turn to strife, yet in the long run create a melting pot of new governmental and social concepts and ideals.

As the colonies formed, they began to develop new understandings of the social, political, and economic freedoms that were not open to them in England and in Europe in general. And while this led to an explosion of new ideas and inspirations, various pressures and tensions began to develop as well. Coupled with the apprehension of life in a strange land, these tensions soon expressed themselves in their new societies, as the colonists strove to deal with each other, their environment, and their lives in the New World.
What began to bring about a change in society in the New World as opposed to that of the Old World? As the American colonies matured, social anxiety inevitably began to develop, and rivalries and tensions grew between both individuals and various groups within the new societies they were creating. Much of this revolved around what became known as the “organic ideal”. This organic ideal referred to a shared body of cultural beliefs whereby society was seen as and built around a collection of interdependent parts existing in a social hierarchy centered around harmony. As in England and in Europe, everyone and everything had its place. Competition was frowned upon, and this anti-competitive society was held together by custom and need, much as it was in the Old World.

As long as the old order was in place, the colonies operated in much the same way society did in England and Europe. In England, individual rights and customs were respected as could be found under English law. Still, society was stratified, with the aristocracy and nobility seen as being above those of lesser birth – the commoners. The Church reiterated this concept by expounding upon the belief in what was known as the “great chain of being”. This was the belief that God had determined everyone’s place in society, and it was beyond anyone to question their place. To do so was to question God and risk eternal damnation.

Wealth generally went hand-in-hand with one’s standing in society as predicated by birth. With the advent of the mercantile system under King Charles I however, economic opportunity had increased well beyond the noble class to now include a merchant class that could now obtain wealth regardless of their property holdings, or their birth. This led to the growth of a “middle class” that began to obtain wealth through trade and business activity. The demand for social and political change was held in check as economic opportunity presented itself, much as can be found in China today. Individuals were at first more concerned with increasing their economic standing and opportunities, rather than with social and political change.

Enviable, this began to change in the American colonies due to the lack of constraints that the frontier afforded. Once the initial establishment of the American colonies had occurred, the organic ideal began to change and decline, and social tensions began to grow. With this came a rise in individualism, and this was accompanied by a growing discontent with authority. Almost from the beginning, the “chain of being” and the “organic ideal” were under pressure in the American colonies. Expanding freedoms were a natural reality of life in the colonies, which were a world away from the royal and aristocratic world of England and Europe.

By the mid 1700’s, the American colonies begun to develop very workable democratic institutions of government. This was nothing new, as England’s political affairs had operated under an evolving parliamentary monarchy that allowed for extended democracy and representation. In the American colonies, this led to a growing sense of self determination concerning both individual and internal colonial affairs. England’s own internal political problems and its “salutary neglect” of the American colonies spurred this on. Under James II, there had been a short lived attempt to bring the American colonies under greater control, but once again, England’s internal problems had taken precedence and James II was forced to abdicate the thrown under intense political, and finally military pressure from Parliament.
A Time for Change

Between the end of the Dominion of New England and the French and Indian War, the American colonies began to handle their own internal affairs with little English intervention. This “salutary neglect” allowed the colonies to concentrate on developing democratic societies in their colonies, and as the old order passed away, the organic ideal began to experience ever increasing pressures. This was further predicated on several forms of growing rivalries. Counted among these were religious, ethnic, economic, and cultural factors. In the light of this pressure, the established social order and the organic ideal began to change. Those that had previously been held in check under the old order, by the Church, and by the organic ideal, now began to bring about change. “The rise in individualism and competition increased in the colonies and helped to lay the foundation for what would eventually become the American Revolution (Tillson, 1991).” This would develop in different ways in the various colonies and under different circumstances. The individual colonies would be affected by factors which were in some cases unique to each colony, and in other instances common among them. The various colonies were separated by geographic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and political differences.

Among the colonies were New York, Virginia and its backcountry, the New England colonies, Pennsylvania, the Chesapeake Bay area, the Carolinas and their backcountry, and the southernmost colony of Georgia. In each of these various colonies, tensions were growing according to their particular set of internal circumstances. Each would deal with their problems in different ways. This would create a variety of circumstances and solutions to the growing problems that each colony faced.

These circumstances and solutions would ultimately produce the revolutionary tendencies that would lead to conflict, and eventually lead to war with England. For her part, England would exasperate the growing tensions as she tried to reestablish greater control over her American colonies. The American Revolution would therefore become an indirect result of the decline of the organic ideal. The question then becomes, what factors predicated the decline in each colony, and how did each colony deal with that change?

The New England Colonies

In the New England colonies, the communion of belonging was held within contracts, covenants, and consent. These were the factors that held the cities, towns, and villages together. Each town operated smoothly as long as the farmers, merchants, and businessmen limited their competition. Basically, everyone was entitled to a piece of the economic pie. This worked fine under a limited number of individuals. But as the numbers of inhabitants grew and the scramble for wealth and gain increased, the general pressures of life in the New World began to tear at the seams of the organic ideal.

Unlike in England, the separation of society in the American colonies was not predicated upon aristocratic birth, but rather it was built upon wealth. Unlike England, where land was the basis for wealth, and was limited, this was not the case in the American colonies. In England, most land belonged to the nobility (aristocracy) and there was little or no opportunity for common peoples to ever own land. This was the case due in no small measure to the introduction of the “feudal system” after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire. This meant that almost all
commoners worked for a noble, irrespective of the merchant class. The availability of land in the American colonies was what drew the great majority to the American colonies. The opportunity to own land meant that even commoners could now own land and improve their economic futures, and those of their families. The introduction of “headrights” allowed for anyone that would agree to go to the New World to receive land in return. Still, a person had to be able to afford the passage. In many cases, people were forced to turn over their headrights to pay for their passage.

The headright grants had been implemented to encourage further immigration and this had afforded the opportunity for wealthy investors to secure large estates in the American colonies. This in turn began to create an elite class in England’s New World colonies. Many of these were absentee landowners that had paid the passage for those that could not afford the cost of the voyage and in the process had been awarded their headrights. Headrights generally consisted of some fifty acres per person, allowing wealthy merchants and nobles in England to acquire large tracts of land in the American colonies. Those that did come to North America, became an elite class among the majority of common immigrants.

Resentment soon began to grow towards this elite class and their employed subordinates who managed their lands. “In large part, the disputes were due to the fact that the greatest colonial proprietors were absentee landlords (Berford, pp. 296).” Further, the expansion in population in the New England colonies brought about crowding in the already settled areas. This led new immigrants to settle in outlying areas and along the frontiers, as competition increased at the same time. The organic ideal principle of anti-competition was quickly being overwhelmed in the face of this growing expansion and demand for a share of the marketplace.

At the same time, the expansion into the frontiers meant that the new landowners now lived further from the covenant town centers, which made them less subject to community scrutiny. That scrutiny is what helped to maintain the integrity of the organic ideal’s principles. Once that was removed, competition became the only principle that mattered. Still, the elite class held the advantage as their size gave them an advantage over the smaller landowners, allowing them a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Also, the fact that they generally owned better lands and those lands were closer to the rivers and marketplaces increased the growing resentment toward them.

The advantage that the new immigrants held was that they were not under the scrutiny of the established communities and town covenants. This gave them a growing sense of individualism and independence. As the New England colonies expanded, the control of the colonial governors in the outlying areas also diminished. The expanding representation in the colonial assemblies in the New England colonies and the growing rivalries that developed contributed to the growing tensions.

The fact that the elite class supported the royal governors and the old order was another factor in the growing social tensions in the New England colonies. When shortages began to develop in the larger cities and towns, the issues that separated the groups came to a head. When bread riots broke out in Boston, this demonstrated additional signs of strife between the “haves and the have nots”. As New Englanders looked around, they could not help but see that the organic ideal was crumbling at their feet. These changes were not isolated to the New England colonies. How then did the growing social tensions and changes affect other colonies?
New York Colony

New York colony had originally been founded and settle as New Amsterdam by the Dutch. In 1694, King Charles II of England awarded the lands to his brother, the Duke of York. He then devised a plan that saw the English Navy sail into New Amsterdam harbor and capture the city. The former Dutch colony then fell into English hands, and removed the perceived threat to the other English colonies. The colony quickly began to grow and expand and with that expansion came the same rivalries and strife that were enveloping the New England colonies.

Added to this was the ethnic and national problems created by the earlier settlement by the Dutch. Therefore, in New York colony, the organic ideal was under attack from all sides. First divisions along ethnic lines soon grew as the earlier Dutch settlers squared off against the newer English arrivals, and they began to encroach upon one another’s lands. “This developed into a sectional dispute and division along the Hudson River divide (Tillson, pp.285).” The Hudson Bay Company had previously claimed territory above the New York colony while it was still in the hands of The Netherlands (Dutch). Once the colony was under English control, English settlers began to move into the territory from both the north and the south of the former Dutch colony, as well as into the newly renamed city of New York.

Secondly, religious disputes presently emerged between the Dutch and Scotts Presbyterians, and the English Anglicans and Puritans. These differences were nothing new, and were brought over from England and Europe where they had previously existed. Religious divergences between peoples and nations could be traced back to Europe and the Protestant Reformation. The issue of religion was one of the earliest contentions addressed in the American colonies with a growing move toward “religious toleration”. Still, the problem of religious adversity would persist well into the establishment of the coming new nation – the United States.

Beyond the concerns of religion and ethnic tensions was the growing dislike and rivalry between the merchant class and the landowners in New York colony. At the center of this rivalry was the dispute over fair dispensation of taxation. Most taxation was based upon landownership, which fell heavily on the former Dutch landowners as opposed to the more recent English merchants that had flooded into the colony. Still, as more and more English settlers populated the colony, they began to side with the Dutch settlers against their English counterparts.

The disputes and rivalries soon spilled over into the political arena when the royal governor of New York, William Cosby, came into conflict with the High Court justice and the leading assembly representative Lewis Morris. Morris proposed that taxation be more equitably spread to greater include merchants. Landowners overwhelmingly supported Morris over the issue of taxation, while the merchants supported Cosby who followed the English belief that to increase the taxation of merchants would reduce trade, which was the life blood of the mercantile system.

This became an open debate that swept over New York. It became indicative of the growing acceptance of competition at a time when such competition was still deplored as an unacceptable attitude within the organic ideal. Cosby would later dismiss Morris as justice, and file suit against John Peter Zenger in a famous libel suit. Governors like Cosby added to the growing dislike of authorities. The organic ideal was swiftly losing ground in New York, but was this the case in other colonies?
Pennsylvania Colony

At the same time, Pennsylvania colony found itself in the middle of ethnic tensions. Proportional schemes such as headrights had created an influx of population into Pennsylvania. Many of these people held “old world” perspectives and connections. As they began to settle into the free land offered in the Pennsylvania colony they brought those beliefs and understandings with them. This put them in direct conflict with earlier settlers and their offspring that had developed an understanding of “new world” customs and perspectives.

The newly arriving groups, mostly from Scotland, Ireland, and Germany immediately attempted to preserve their identities by creating individual communities, rather than integrating into established ones. They also shunned established churches. Instead, they founded their own churches, creating a religious divide that furthered their separation from the established communities. Religious hostilities also developed between the founding Quakers (William Penn was a Quaker) and the growing numbers of Presbyterians, Catholics, and Lutherans. Rivalries and animosities hastily developed between all of these groups.

As these people developed farming communities and businesses in and around Philadelphia, the town quickly grew into a burgeoning city. It soon became a major site for imports as well. As imports increased, small businesses in the city began to suffer. Coupled with the immense growth in population flooding the workforce, the class structure that had been the basis of stability began to fracture. This immediately led to the corruption of the organic ideal in the colony, as the common folk became further removed from their dependence on the goods supplied by the elite class. The elite class was rapidly being transplanted in Pennsylvania by a growing merchant class and the influx of immigrants. These people had and felt less dependence and connection to the earlier settlers in the colony. The organic ideal in Pennsylvania was soon being crushed by the weight of its lack of necessity. Newer immigrants simply did not develop or have a dependency upon the elite wealthy class.

By the time the change was realized by the elite class and its supporters in the assemblies and government, it was too late. The growth in immigration and the expansion of towns and cities such as Philadelphia quickly grew beyond the control of the elite, who found themselves replace by the stronger voices of the more populous commoners. In Philadelphia, imports began to be shipped directly to the city from Europe. This meant that the demand for local goods began to drop off as the population swelled. Both large and small businesses began to suffer. The elite class, which had enjoyed deference in both economic and social standing quickly found their position in the community threatened. This scene would repeat itself across the northern colonies as well.

For the elite class, the change was a misgiving, for all the other groups, it would be seen as a dawn of a new world, within the New World. As the majority of the population began to represent common immigrants who had less and less dependence upon the elite, social tensions increased. The elite class would take refuge in its control of the government, but that control would not last. The democratic institutions that had been founded in Pennsylvania and in the other American colonies would expand. These would be embraced by the growing populations, who would demand an increasing voice in social, economic, and political affairs. The organic ideal in Pennsylvania was deteriorating even as the elite worked feverishly to maintain it.
Throughout the northern colonies, the organic ideal was being eroded by a growing tide of immigration, religious contention, and ethnic rivalry. Were the southern colonies subject to the same pressures, or different ones? Separated by geographic differences, the Carolina colonies would be affected by some of the same forces, as well as different ones. To encourage settlement, the territories were freely open to those of various ethnic and religious persuasions. But just as in the northern colonies, an elite wealthy class developed early on in both North and South Carolina.

Divided by geography into two distinct sections, South Carolina soon was at war with itself. Charleston had become the center for economic activity early on due to its coastal location. This meant that most trade into and out of the colony found its beginning and end there. The city also became the seat of political power in the colony. The elite class, which held deeds to most of the land in the coastal areas, maintained their homes there. They mirrored the wealthy absentee landowners in London whom they looked to emulate. Because these men owned much of the productive land in the colony and therefore its wealth, they naturally assumed control of politics and the government.

The elite class in South Carolina would hold a firm grip on the economic and political power of the colony. The large number of absentee landowners who owned land there, were unaffected by the trouble in the colony. They expected their managers to maintain and protect their interests in the colony. As long as the status quo was preserved, they were happy to continue to receive their growing share of wealth that the colony provided. As unrest in South Carolina increased with its growth, the elite both in the colony and in England were detached from the distress being realized by most of the general population.

As was found in the northern colonies, the increase in population began to drive settlers into the backcountry where land was more plentiful, but where life was much more unpredictable. Those moving into the backcountry faced not only the rigors of the frontier, but the growing presence of rogues and desperados. Lawlessness in the backcountry was a constant ailment and threat to those living in the interior of the colony. “The fundamental social division in the backcountry was between those that did and did not rely primarily on hunting for their subsistence . . . the former being seen as little more that white Indians (Klein, pp.668-669).”

As populations in the interior increased, the conflict between planters and hunters intensified. Farmer settlers in the backcountry supplied growing amounts of agricultural commodities to the coastal communities, and its merchants and exporters. As their conflict with hunters and the lawless increased, they demanded greater protection from the elite and the government. When this was not forthcoming, resentment and hostility began to develop a sectional rift in South Carolina. This led to a growing independence in the interior as settlers looked to themselves and each other to meet their needs. As their reliance on the elite class diminished, so did their deference to the coastal elite. In turn, the organic ideal began to die as well.

In North Carolina, the situation was just as grave. Farmers and hunters vied for virtually the same lands, and they held the same animosities toward each other. Practically from the beginning of expansion into the interior, they and were at war with one another. While suspicion and distrust dominated the dealings between farmers and hunters, both groups held contempt for the elite class in the colony, who they rightly believed were unconcerned about their plights.
When the coastal government refused to supply militia units to protect the interior, backcountry settlers created groups of “regulators” who were retained to protect the growing number of outlying farms and settlements. These were made up of “hired guns” as well as common farmers and hunters as well, each trying to safeguard their own interests. Regulators became the policemen in the backcountry, and were both a blessing and a curse depending on the circumstance.

Political corruption was rampant in the colony, and this was exasperated by tax extortion, much of which was hoisted upon those in the interior. The taxation on lands sold to settlers, but still held under deeds claimed by the elite, was then passed on to farmers and settlers. In many instances the increasing taxation and mortgages forced settlers into defaults, leading to foreclosures. This meant that lands they had worked hard to clear and develop reverted back to the elite deed holders, leaving the settlers with nothing to show for their hard labor.

The result was the Regulator War between 1764 and 1771. Backcountry regulators would fight an ongoing series of pitched battles with Carolina militia units which looked to protect the interests of the wealthy elite and its government. Eventually the resources and numbers of the regulators became no match for the militia units. The conflict wound down as regulator leaders were hunted down and executed, while others escaped westward into Tennessee and Kentucky. The Regulator War resulted in the demise of the organic ideal in North Carolina. The government had used force to secure its interests and those of the wealthy elite, while denying that support to the frontiersmen. Many would later see this as a forerunner to the American Revolution, where power (England) looked to impose its will against the revolt of the less influential.

In both the North and South Carolina backcountries, dealing with the Native Americans was always a paramount concern. The fact that the land being settled by increasing numbers of European immigrants was held by Indian tribes led to ever present attacks and reprisals. As European colonists struggled to claim and settle the interior lands, native peoples fought just as vigorously to maintain the hold on their ancestral lands. This battle would continue even after the establishment of the United States, as those who now called themselves Americans looked to spread out across the continent.

**Virginia Colony**

Virginia colony would deal with a different set of circumstances altogether. Being the site of the first English settlement, its early history would be firmly founded on the organic ideal of deference to the elite and the social network of interdependence and reliance. The very first permanent colony at Jamestown was only able to survive its early years by the entrenched stability that the organic ideal afforded. The social hierarchy that developed was predicated on the need that each group within the colony had upon the other.

Once the colony was firmly established and prosperity became the norm, the organic ideal in Virginia began to show cracks as the stress of rivalries and competition took hold. Built on the volatile tobacco trade, many became wealthy and prospered. This created a “gentry class” that consisted of both commoners and a previous elite class of landowners. Competition was fierce to buy up land along waterways that afforded both fertile soil and the ability to transport goods. At the same time, ownership of larger and larger estates along waterways was seen as a way to reduce the number of competitors.
The gentry in Virginia soon developed into an upper and lower elite. This shaped a different form of deference, where standing and status became even more important. The lower elite looked to attain an upper status, while the upper elite attempted to maintain their higher standing. “This led to a fading social harmony as interaction between the groups was soon based upon blatant self – assertion (Isaac, pp.484).” This became publicly evident as inconsistencies began to show themselves in the court system between the treatment of upper gentry, lower gentry, and commoner offenders of the law. The organic ideal of deference was not intended to extend to the law, and this would create a growing discontent in the colony. Further, the elite gentry used political office to increase their economic interests, while limiting those of their rivals.

Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 would erupt as a result of what many commoners understood to be the disproportional dispensation of justice and protection. When they originally attempted to address the colony’s governor, he turned a deaf ear to their concerns. The government looked to protect the interests of larger wealthy landowners whose holding were readily secured by the militia. The revolt saw the forced closure of the courts and the burning of Jamestown by the dissenters, angered by the lack of protection from frontier Indian attacks. Supported by the wealthy gentry, the militia instead looked to crush the rebellion. The death of Nathaniel Bacon and the execution of some twenty of the other leaders ended the revolt. As a result, the elite gentry in Virginia quickly reestablished their control over the colony and its government.

As slave labor in the colony increased, this created competition with working class commoners who looked to perform the same jobs. Former indentured servants that now expected to be paid fully for their work, found it increasingly hard to obtain employment as slaves were moved into the positions they anticipated filling. At the same time, common whites began to see that they had much in common with the slave population when it came to control over their lives and their work. As their disenchantment grew, their deference toward the elite gentry disintegrated as did the organic ideal.

Ethnic tensions in Virginia also increased with the immigration of Scottish merchants into the colony. To compete with the larger landowners, small farmers were willing to sell their tobacco at a discount to Scottish merchants who began to buy greater amounts of the commodity from those sources. This in turn cut into the profits of the elite gentry. Scotts were soon held in contempt for what the gentry saw as price deflation and fixing in the marketplace. The ethnic rivalries were quickly combined with economic concerns to fan the flames of resentment as they strengthen competition.

Virginia soon found itself overwhelmed by discontent from the top of its social and economic structure all the way to the bottom. The deference that had held Jamestown together and which was the basis of the extended organic ideal for the colony was now nearly completely eroded and nonexistent. Ethnic tensions had further become a problem in the cities and towns where commerce was the economic foundation. On top of this was the competition between the various groups all looking to cut out their own portion of success. Standing on the brink of its demise, the organic ideal would not withstand the coming religious transformation that swept across the colonies.

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The Great Awakening

The most overwhelming threat to the organic ideal would be the coming evangelical movement which renounced the very foundation of the elite class in the American colonies.
Deference as found in the organic ideal had been built upon the religious reverence created by church leaders. Whether it was the Puritan, Anglican, Quaker, or Catholic Church, in every colony the idea of a hierarchy was generated and held in place by the religious leaders of the various churches. This could be traced back to Europe and was carried into the colonies. However, by the early part of the 18th century, the religious fever in the colonies had begun to diminish as more and more people were beyond the control of the churches due mainly to expansion away from the town centers.

The “Great Awakening” had its origins in the Wesleyan revivals beginning in Oxford, England. In the American colonies, the evangelical movement began in the larger towns and cities and “became the first strictly American event (Miller, pp.159).” Ministers such as John Edwards of Boston, began to deliver “fire and brimstone” sermons that carried the threat of God’s wrath upon a sinful population. When the renowned English evangelist George Whitefield arrived in the colonies in 1739, the Great Awakening found a catalyst that would help it sweep across the colonies.

Carried forward by Methodists, Congregationalists, and Baptists, the movement also looked to include slave conversions. As the Great Awakening spread, the gentry elite which held a preferred standing in the established churches, perceived a threat to their position in society. They responded by stereotyping the growing number of evangelists as ignorant, poor, and illiterate deadbeats who were only looking to cash in on the people’s fears. While the movement did not directly attack the status quo, or the organic ideal, the elite saw it as a threat to “their” churches and the established hierarchy.

The real threat of the Great Awakening was its message of an individual salvation outside of, and indifferent to the temporal authority of the Church. Across the colonies, people began to rid themselves of the belief that their disobedience to authority would lead to their damnation. This began to erode the deference toward government officials, particularly those from England, as well as the elite and the Church leadership. That veneration and approval became less and less a factor governing people in the American colonies as the Great Awakening progressed. “And while the Awakening preached a message of harmony and humility, it was understood this referred to an individual relationship with God, rather than with the Church, the gentry elite, or any government (Bishop, pp.44)”.

The Great Awakening also began to foster the first unity among the colonies. As fliers went forth and circulated, proclaiming where evangelists would be speaking, more and more people began to travel between the colonies. The size of the gatherings led most of the later meetings to be held not only outside of the established churches, but also outside to accommodate the hundreds of people in attendance. Estimates were in the thousands for more than a few of the biggest gatherings. This soon began to cultivate a growing sense of unity as peoples from various colonies found common spiritual interests together, away from the elite controlled traditional churches.

The final result of the “Awakening” saw the formation of new religious denominations and their universities. Now seeing themselves as the autonomous colonies, Protestantism would multiply beyond the Puritan and Anglican churches to produce distinctly American religious entities. With them came the formation of their own universities to train ministers in “their understanding” of the scripture, and the worship of God.
England’s Culpability

Finally, England cannot be held without some responsibility for the overall transition as well. In the decades leading up to the French and Indian War in North America, homeland concerns helped to promote a policy of “salutary neglect”. The necessity of addressing her own internal political problems meant that England had less concern for those occurring in her American colonies. This created a loosening of dependence, as well as control from England. Simply put, the American colonies were allowed to follow their own path in those decades. Once England had finally placed its own house in order, it was too late to correct the colonies to her liking. When she tried to do so, the animosities and rivalries that had before focused on controlling groups in the colonies, now turned on England.

When laws were passed to limit trading, manufacturing, and eventually further settlement, England set in motion the movement toward revolution. The “Navigation Acts” were a series of laws passed by Parliament to take greater control of colonial affairs. The later “Acts” would limit manufacturing in the American colonies, and trade with other nations. Both of these actions took money directly out of the pockets of American colonist and led to widespread smuggling of goods, both into and out of the colonies.

With the Proclamation of 1763 the American colonists were forbidden to settle lands formally held by France, even though they had helped in the victory. While neither of these events led directly to revolutionary tendencies, they did never-the-less ignite resentments. This would begin to smolder and finally completely wash away any traces of the organic ideal. English concerns for its welfare made her blind to the fact that the American colonies were moving toward revolt.

With the end of the French and Indian War came the influx of greater numbers of administrators. At the same time, the large numbers of troops sent to defeat the French remained in the colonies. Either one of these would have offended and embittered the American colonists, but taken together they were seen as examples of outright English tyranny. With the passage of the Stamp Act and Quartering Act in 1765, it was more than the colonists could take. Open revolt ensued and the seeds for revolution were sown. It would take another decade for them to germinate and spring to life.

Conclusions

Step by step, the king and Parliament took measures that set the stage for the coming revolution. The colonists themselves had laid the foundation, as the organic ideal had slowly dissolved in the face of growing resentments, competitions, and rivalries. What had been the early adhesion that held Jamestown and the ensuing colonies together, had slowly but surely eroded away.

Each colony was to deal with a myriad of pressures from ethnic rivalries, economic competition, religious contentions, and class opposition. Sectional differences and geographic distinctions and their problems also played a major role in several of the colonies. For these and other reasons, the organic ideal of deference, anti-competition, and loyalty to tradition faded away in the American colonies.
The advent of the Great Awakening then became the catalyst that pushed deference to 
authority aside. This had in turn opened the door to the colonial questioning of authority. From 
there, they soon challenged the right of those who held power to do so. The society of the 
organic ideal had finally changed, and the Great Awakening had helped to bring about that 
change.

In the final analysis, all these factors began to tear at the thinning fabric of the organic ideal 
and foster revolutionary tendencies. The animosity toward traditional authority and then the 
anxiety over it dissolution, coupled with the growing indifference to authority was leading to 
revolution well before the first shots were fired in 1775. In the truer sense of the word, from the 
time the first settlers established their colonies in America, a revolution had begun – 
transformation.

Questions

1. What can be seen as common factors in the various colonies that led the demise of the 
organic ideal?

2. How important was the rise of competition and the decline in deference to the demise of 
the organic ideal, say in colonies such as Virginia and the Carolinas?

3. Why was the Great Awakening seen as the catalyst for the demise of the organic ideal?

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