

COLONIAL AMERICA: WOMEN

Women's lives during colonial times were much different than today. They were expected to marry by age 20, have children, work in the home, and obey their spouse. There were limitations on women, but they played a vital role in the growth and survival of the colonies.



EDUCATION

Most colonial women received little formal education. Some learned to read and write, but most were illiterate. Girls were taught the skills necessary to manage a home by their mother. It was believed that women did not need an education since they were supposed to only work in the home. Puritan women were typically taught to read so they could study the Bible.

MANAGING HOME

Women mainly managed their home during colonial times. They raised their children, cooked meals, wove cloth, sewed clothes, and kept the home in order. They worked extremely hard day and night. In addition to keeping up the home, they also tended to livestock, made candles, dyed cloth, and worked in the garden.

LAWS

Women in Colonial America had few legal rights or freedom. It was expected that women would obey the man in their life, be that their father, brother, or husband. Women could not hold public office or vote. Married women were legally represented by their husbands. Their husbands could legally abuse them. If they ran away, they could be forcibly returned home. Married women were not allowed to make a will or own property. Unmarried women and widows had more rights than married women. They could buy and sell property, make a will, or sign contracts. A widow received one-third of her husband's property when he died. She sometimes took over her husband's business.

SLAVES

Slave women had the most challenging life of anyone in colonial society. On top of being a slave, they were also women, so they had absolutely no rights. Many slave women were expected to work in the fields all day, raise children, and take care of their own family's household.



WEALTHY

Wealthy plantation owners and merchants' wives lived very different lives than those of an average farmer's wife. They had few legal rights still, but did not have to work nearly as hard. They usually had domestic slaves to work around the home. Wealthy women managed the help and saw their home was properly maintained.

CITY

Women who lived in the cities led different lives than those who worked on the farm. They were able to socialize outside the home and some worked jobs in town, such as seamstresses, innkeepers, midwives, or nurses.

Name _____

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IDENTIFY: Use the word bank to identify each term described.

slave	innkeeper	wealthy	husband
abuse	illiterate	Puritan	rights
candles	marry	widow	business

1.	Job some women had in the city
2.	These women did not have to work as hard
3.	Many women were this- they could not read or write
4.	Received one-third of their husband's property
5.	Women were expected to do this by age 20
6.	Women made these to light their home
7.	Women who were taught to read so they could study the Bible
8.	A married woman's identity was represented by this person
9.	Had the toughest lives of anyone in colonial society
10.	Men were legally allowed to do this to women
11.	Married women could not own these or vote
12.	Unmarried women and widows had more of these than women who were married

MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.



13. Which of the following was **NOT** a responsibility of married women during colonial times?

- A. Tending the garden
- B. Sewing clothes
- C. Tending livestock
- D. Planting crops

14. **“There were limitations on women, but they played a vital role in the growth and survival of the colonies.”**

What is the best meaning of *vital*, as used in the quote?

- A. Full of life
- B. Necessary and important
- C. Destructive
- D. Related to humans

15. Which of the following is an accurate statement about unmarried women in colonial times?

- A. They were not allowed to own property.
- B. They could not make a will.
- C. They had fewer rights than married women.
- D. They could sign contracts.

16. What is the main reason girls were not educated in Colonial America?

- A. They were not as important as men.
- B. They were only expected to work in the home.
- C. They would work jobs in the city that did not require them to read or write.
- D. They were only expected to have children.

17. What is the main reason women slaves had it the hardest of people in Colonial America?

- A. They had no rights.
- B. They were often beaten.
- C. They were not only women, but also slaves, so they had absolutely no rights.
- D. They were returned to their husbands if they tried to escape.