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Economy and the Shaping of the Immigration Policy of the British American Colonies (1624-1775)

Beghdadi Farouk
University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed-Algeria
beghdadifarouk@gmail.com
0000-0003-0194-6044

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Abstract: *Peopling the English colonies in North America was of great importance. The English adopted many strategies to attract immigrants because they needed big numbers of workers to maintain their plantations and their presence in the new continent. This paper deals with the influence of the economic conditions of the British North American colonies in the shaping of their immigration policy. Usually, the focus is on the impact of immigration on the economy of a given society; however, the present work tries to investigate the role that the economy of the colonies played in molding the colonists' policies towards the attraction of immigrants. The major issue of the paper is centered on the factors that influenced the colonial strategy towards immigration. The work suggests that the colonists' economics played a key role in drawing the basis of the colonies' immigration policy).*
Keywords *: Colonial America, immigration, white immigrants, black slaves, immigration policy, economic influence.*
Resumé *: Cet article traite le sujet de l'influence des conditions économiques des colonies britanniques nord-américaines dans l'élaboration de leur politique d'immigration. Habituellement, l'accent est mis sur l'impact de l'immigration sur l'économie d'une société donnée ; Cependant, le travail actuel tente d'étudier le rôle de l'économie des colonies dans la détermination des politiques des colons à l'égard de l'attraction des immigrants. Le travail suggère que l'économie des colons a joué un rôle clé et a contribué à dessiner les grandes lignes de leur politique d'immigration.*
Mots clés *: Amérique coloniale, immigration, immigrants blancs, esclaves noirs, politique d'immigration, influence économique.*

1. Introduction

Immigration has always constituted an important element in the U.S. history. During the colonial era, the colonists needed the influx of considerable numbers of workers/immigrants to populate and most importantly to maintain the economic stability of the newly established colonies. They adopted some policies in the hope of attracting sufficient numbers of hands. However, it is necessary to know the policy-maker before one can deal with the immigration policies that the colonists adopted, since there were

Corresponding author : Beghdadi Farouk

three different types of systems of government in the British American colonies. Each colony had a royal, a charter, or a proprietary government. According to their systems of government, the colonies were also divided into three categories: royal colonies, charter colonies, and proprietary colonies. It is worthy to note that the thirteen colonies had been established as either charter or proprietary colonies, but most of them were transformed into royal colonies.

2. The Systems of Government of the Thirteen Colonies

The following table shows the system of government of each colony at the eve of the American Revolution:

Colonies	Year of establishment	Region	Initial system of government	New system of government
Virginia	1607	Southern colonies	Charter	Royal in 1624
Massachusetts	1620	New England	Charter	Royal in 1691
New Hampshire	1623	New England	Charter	Royal in 1686
Maryland	1632	Southern colonies	Proprietary	Royal from 1691 to 1715 then returned proprietary
Connecticut	1635	New England	Charter	
Rhode Island	1636	New England	Charter	
North Carolina	1653	Southern colonies	Proprietary	Royal in 1719
South Carolina	1663	Southern colonies	Proprietary	Royal in 1729
New York	1664	Middle colonies	Proprietary	Royal in 1685
New Jersey	1664	Middle colonies	Proprietary	Royal in 1702
Delaware	1664	Middle colonies	Proprietary	
Pennsylvania	1781	Middle colonies	Proprietary	
Georgia	1732	Southern colonies	Charter	Royal in 1752

Table 1. Proprietary, Charter, and Royal Colonies

The four New England colonies were established as charter colonies, but Massachusetts and New Hampshire became royal colonies. On the other hand, all the middle colonies were established as proprietary, and then New York and New Jersey

became royal colonies. The Southern Colonies had both charter and proprietary systems of government before Virginia and the Carolinas became royal colonies. Maryland was turned to a royal colony for a period of twenty-four years before it was restored to proprietary in 1715. At the eve of the revolution, eight among the thirteen British colonies were operating under a royal system of government, three colonies remained under proprietary governments, and only two colonies kept their charter governments.

The process of the transition in status of the colonies occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and under different monarchs. The Stuarts changed the status of six colonies starting with King James I (1603-1625) who turned Virginia into a royal colony in 1624. After King James II (1685-1689) took the crown, New York and New Hampshire saw their status change to royal colonies in 1685 and 1686 respectively. Queen Mary II (1689-1694) also changed the status of Massachusetts and Maryland in 1691. For Maryland, the proprietary government was reestablished later in 1715, when the Hanoverian King George I (1714-1727) restored Maryland's property to the Calvert family. In 1702, New Jersey became a royal colony under the control of Queen Anne (1702-1714), who was the last to rule from the Stuart House. When the Hanoverians took the lead, they turned three colonies to royal starting with North Carolina under King George I in 1719, and South Carolina and Georgia under George II (1727-1760) in 1729 and 1752 respectively.

The colonial political diversity could be seen in how the colonies were governed under those three types of governments. The Royal colonies were under the direct control of the King who appointed the governors. All the decisions in the colonies' assemblies were to be made referring to the English laws and with the consent of the British monarch. The Charter colonies were owned by investors who were granted charters from the King. The investors were allowed to form a government and make laws that did not contradict the way the colony had to be governed, and which had previously been determined in the charter. The Proprietary colonies were owned by a single person or a group of persons such as a family. The proprietors received the territories from the British monarch and had the power to make laws freely, which explains the amount of freedom and opportunities that were present in those colonies compared with the other ones.

Since the colonies were operating under three different systems of government, one may say that their policies towards immigrants were not the same. The change in status of some colonies may draw the attention towards the change that might have occurred on the strategies of those colonies before and after becoming Royal, and to the impact of such political transition on the number of newcomers. One may inquire about the number of immigrants that the other colonies which remained non-Royal received, and the role that the nature of the system of government played in shaping their immigration policies.

3. Colonial Immigration Policy

This work is divided into two parts; the first part deals with the white immigration to the colonies, and then the second is devoted to the forced migration of the black Africans. The immigration of the whites was voluntary and the immigrants themselves chose the destination under different circumstances, whereas the black Africans were forced to join the colonies as slaves. In addition, the whites' move to the New World

started with the settlement of the first colonies and continued throughout the colonial period, but the black African influx, though it started in the beginning of the seventeenth century, began to constitute an important source of newcomers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Any comparison would be unequal since neither the origin, purpose, or motives of the two waves are similar. Another factor also reinforces the choice of dividing the study into two parts is the data available about colonial immigration; most of the data which deal with this period make a separation between the black and the white immigrants. It is noteworthy to precise that the numbers afforded in this study and which were taken from official and trustworthy sources are only approximations because there had been no official records of immigration before 1820.[1]

- ***Colonial Policy towards White Immigrants***

The following table shows in details all the thirteen colonies, their year of establishment, their initial status and the transition of some of them into Royal colonies, and most importantly the evolution of the number of white immigrants in every colony and all the three regions of the British American colonies until 1775:

	Colony	**Change in status**	**1688**	**1700**	**1754**	**1775**
New England colonies	Massachusetts	Charter/ Royal (1691)	44.000	70.000	207.000	352.000
	New Hampshire	Charter/ Royal (1686)	6.000	10.000	50.000	102.000
	Rhode Island	Charter	6.000	10.000	35.000	58.000
	Connecticut	Charter	17.000-20.000	30.000	133.000	202.000
	Total		**75.000**	**120.000**	**425.000**	**712.000**
Middle colonies	New York	Proprietary/ Royal (1685)	20.000	30.000	85.000	238.000
	New Jersey	Proprietary/ Royal (1702)	10.000	15.000	73.000	138.000
	Pennsylvania	Proprietary	12.000	20.000	125.000	341.000
	Delaware	Proprietary				37.000

[1] On March 2nd, 1819, the Steerage Act was passed and required all passenger ships and vessels to provide detailed information about all the passengers arriving at the U.S. ports. The act went into effect on January 1st, 1820 and it was the beginning of keeping official statistics about immigration to the country.

	Total		**42.000**	**65.000**	**353.000**	**754.000**
Southern colonies	Maryland	Proprietary/Royal (1691-1715)/ Proprietary	25.000	25.000	104.000	174.000
	Virginia	Charter/ royal (1624)	50.000	40.000	168.000	300.000
	North Carolina	Proprietary/ Royal (1719)	8.000	5.000	70.000	181.000
	South Carolina	Proprietary/ Royal (1729)		7.000	40.000	93.000
	Georgia	Charter/ Royal (1752)			5.000	27.000
	Total		**83.000**	**77.000**	**387.000**	**775.000**
	Total population		**200.000**	**262.000**	**1.165.000**	**2.241.000**

Table 2. The Evolution of the White Population in the Thirteen Colonies 1688-1775 [2]

The analysis of the data shown in the previous table allows studying the evolution of the white immigration to the colonies before and after their change in status. It is noteworthy to say that the peopling of all the colonies had been steady before 1775. One can notice that by 1775, the New England colonies, the Middle colonies, and the Southern colonies had very close numbers of white inhabitants; the three regions crossed the bar of 700.000 souls. The average year of establishment of the eight royal colonies is 1863, which is so close to that of the other five colonies (1860). The number of immigrants that each colony received is important in trying to figure out the impact of the transition of some colonies into royal; the eight royal colonies counted 1.431.000 inhabitants against 812.000 citizens in the other ones. The comparison between the average number of inhabitants in both types of colonies leads to the conclusion that they received almost the same numbers; the average number of a royal colony is 178.000 compared to 162.400 for a charter or proprietary colony. Not only Massachusetts, New York, or Virginia exceeded the threshold of 200.000 inhabitants, (Wright, 1900: 8) the charter colony Connecticut and even the proprietary Pennsylvania did so, which reinforces the fact that the change of status of the colonies did not affect the number of newcomers that flew to their soils.

The previous analysis suggests that the immigration policy of the colonies had not been influenced by the change in status of some of the colonies. The numbers expressed clearly that though the colonies were established in different regions, and had different

[2] Some statistics in the table were taken from (Wright, 1900: 8-11)

systems of governments but they all succeeded in attracting big numbers of immigrants. One can only say that the decisive element was the immigration policy that the colonies adopted in their unremitting attempts to provide abundant laborers to secure their rising plantations. Though the colonists of the Royal and Proprietary colonies could do little without referring to their Monarch or Proprietor in establishing their policy of immigration, their policies did not differ much from the Charter colonists who enjoyed more freedom. The reason behind that was that the Monarch along with the colonists shared the same objective of acquiring the laborers who were necessary for covering the shortage of laborers in the plantations and ensuring a stable growth of the colonies' resources, and consequently the British economy. The only thing that mattered to both sides, the colonists and the monarchy, was the identity of those newcomers. The English had preferences in admitting new immigrants; they adopted some policies that were intended to either encourage or discourage immigration. The policies were not the same in all the colonies, each colony tried to have a suitable policy according to its economic, political, and religious perspectives.

The white immigrants were recruited with some conditions according to the colonies' restrictive measures, but their economic necessity and their indispensable presence to maintain the economic growth shaped the colonists' immigration policy towards them. For instance, when the English monarchy ceased sending English servants to the colonies between 1661 and 1685 as a consequence of their commitment to the economic policy of *Mercantilism*,[3] the American settlers quickly turned to another source of immigrants, other European immigrants along with the black Africans, to fill the gap left by the lack of the English laborers. The colonists' policy that was adopted in admitting new immigrants was based mainly on economics and was shaped by the need to cover the shortage of workhands because it was essential to preserve their colonies.

The economic zeal persuaded the colonists to adopt several strategies as part of their immigration policies in the hope of attracting the required immigrants to their colonies. For both sides, the colonists and immigrants, the economic attraction was enough to make them agree upon a system which was established for those who were unable to finance their passage to make them able to join the Americas. The colonists attracted the European workers by offering better economic opportunities and greater freedom, and at the same time, the immigrants' desire to flee their deplorable situation in Europe, which was characterized by poverty and persecution, was fueled by the hopes of success and tolerance in America. To make things easier, the settlers paid the cost of the voyage to the colonies, and in return the immigrants had to work for their masters for a period of time, usually four to seven years, in which they were fed and sheltered but received no salary. The indentured servitude system seemed to satisfy all sides. Thus, the colonists could afford enough servants to their expanding plantations and the immigrants were able to flee Europe's problems and dream of a new start in a new world.

- ***Colonial Policy towards Black African Slaves***

[3] Mercantilism is an economic policy based on the *theory which states that the wealth of a nation is in its people, thus the loss of the people means the loss of the nation's wealth and the collapse of the economy*.

The evolution of the total population of the colonies was steady and increased rapidly. A clear difference between the two centuries would be noticed; contrary to the previous century, the eighteenth century's growth was spectacular. The evolution of the population was thanks to the big number of European immigrants as well as the African slaves who were imported to the colonies, especially in the South. The latter imported the majority of the slaves. The slaves' proportion was very high in some Southern colonies; for instance, the blacks constituted 60% of the total population of South Carolina, and 41% of Virginia in 1760. (Purvis, 1999:127) On the other hand, the New England and Middle colonies did not recruit big numbers of slaves; this is seen in the very low proportions that the slaves constituted. The slaves as well as the indentured servants constituted an economic importance for the colonists, but their regional concentration was subject to the colonists' needs.

It is central to state that before the 1660's the black slaves were not economically as important as the white servants for a number of reasons. The colonists' needed labor was well covered by those, mainly English, white indentured servants. The colonists were finding profits with the servants as they immigrated in sufficient numbers. In addition, the price of the slaves was more expensive than that of the servants due to the fact that the blacks were less desired and thus less available. (Ordahl Kupperman, 1995: 176) It is noted that a slave would cost twice the price of a white servant. (McNeese, 2007:16) The colonists preferred to hire English indentured servants for their better economic profitability and, also, because they shared the same language and culture rather than the black Africans, especially in the absence of a legal status since the institution of chattel slavery was not yet recognized in the British North American colonies. The importation of black African slaves was very slow at the beginning; they could not cross the bar of 10.000 until 1690 which constituted only 8 per cent of the total population of the colonies. (Purvis, 1999:127) By contrast, the indentured servants' numbers were much higher than the black slaves in the seventeenth century.

Throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, the English settlers began thinking about recruiting more slaves to cover the shortage created by the shrinking number of the English indentured servants. The English government took restrictive measures towards the emigration of the English people into the colonies. As noted earlier, the early 1660's witnessed a radical change in the English vision towards its economic growth in which people were seen as the source of wealth, and consequently were not permitted to leave the country. The number of white indentured servants, who came mainly from England, dropped down. In addition to that, the improved economic condition in England was a factor that reduced the coming of more workers. The colonists faced a period that was characterized by the lack of indentured servants, and obviously their prices rose in the market. The black Africans were a suitable alternative to replace the indentured servants.

The lack of hands coincided with the period in which the colonies' agriculture was in constant growth, and as a result the need for additional workers was increasing as well. In addition to the facts discussed in the previous paragraph, the black African slaves outweighed the indentured servants because of some motives; the black slaves constituted the source of inexpensive and available labor sought by the planters. The length of the contracts terms of the white indentured servants constituted an important element in the

change of the colonists' standpoint towards hiring African slaves. The English settlers found themselves locked in a cycle; the fixed terms meant the perpetual quest for new workers from Europe to secure their crops. On the other hand, unlike the indentured servants who were legally protected against any aggression or maltreatment of their masters, the blacks were hired without being affiliated to a given status; it was not until the 1660's that the colonies, in the absence of laws regarding the African slavery, made their own, and thus the institution of chattel slavery was established in the British North American colonies.

The establishment of the institution of slavery occurred gradually in the colonies. The economic need and profitability of the black Africans fueled the adoption of laws apropos slavery. The beginning of the legalization of slavery in the colonies coincided with the English discouragement of emigration from England along with an economic growth, which raised the colonists' desire to recruit blacks. There were a set of laws that aimed at legalizing the status of the forced black African immigrants and downgrading them to permanent slavery. Those laws rested on four essential elements. The first element was the length of the period of bondage. For instance, in the 1660's, Virginia, Maryland, and New York established lifelong slavery for the black Africans. The black slaves had to serve their masters throughout their entire lives and did not have any right for freedom. Secondly, the fact that it had been possible for the black slaves to gain freedom by converting to Christianity persuaded the colonists to decree that baptism would not make any slave free. Thirdly, the status of the children of the slaves preoccupied the colonists; the colony of Virginia initiated the legal process and passed a law regarding them in 1662. The law made it unambiguous that the children born in the colony would inherit the status of their mothers; the children born to the slave mothers would also be slaves. Finally, in the goal of strengthening the racial separation between the slaves and the white settlers, marriage between the black slaves and the whites was not tolerated. In 1664, Maryland passed a law that punished any white woman who married a slave by serving during her husband's life. By the end of the seventeenth century, no white could marry a slave in Virginia after interracial marriage was banned in 1691. Gradually, the other colonies put restrictive measures on the black Africans. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was almost impossible for the blacks to hope for freedom, and the large influx of imported slaves began to flow through slave trade.

The year 1672 saw the intervention of the monarchy in support of the colonies' immigration policy. Amidst the legalizing process of the slaves, the *Royal African Company*[4] was established to fuel the colonists' strategy towards the importation of the black slaves. In fact, the company initiated the slave trade towards the British New World colonies. The company enjoyed a special privilege; the English crown granted monopoly to the company to trade with the colonies. Therefore, it established trading posts in West Africa, and supplied the British colonies with the slaves needed for their expanding plantations. Nonetheless, with the colonists' rapid expansion of the agricultural fields, the company was no longer able to cover the planters' needs. It remained as the *"only legal*

[4] Royal African Company (1660- 1752); formerly known as *Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa*, was a British mercantile company that exploited gold in Africa but it was also engaged in slave trade. (Pettigrew, 2013)

slave trading company in England until 1698." (Kachur, 2006:34) In that year, and as a reaction to the mounting need for slaves, the English allowed the private merchants to incorporate the English slave trade in the North American colonies. The black slaves were imported to the colonies and sold in slave markets. Among the main northern markets were those of Boston, New York City, and Bristol, Rhode Island, but the major slave markets were established in the south mainly in South Carolina and Virginia due to the large plantations that were established in the Southern colonies, and which needed more workers. As noted earlier, it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that the slave trade flourished in the colonies, and the numbers of imported slaves began to flow in significant numbers. In the eve of the revolution, more than 200,000 African slaves were imported to the colonies. (Jones, 1960:32) The largest portion of the imported slaves was sold to the Southern colonies; South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland constituted the major purchasers of the imports to the colonies as shown in the following table.

Years	**New York**	**Pennsylvania**	**Maryland**	**Virginia**	**South Carolina**	**Georgia**	**Total**
1770-75	100	…	1,042	3,932	20,943	830	26,847
1760-69	240	1,032	3,381	9,709	20,810	3,380	38,552
1750-59	69	130	2,297	9,197	15,912	126	27,731
1740-49	141	72	3,815	12,113	1,563	…	17,704
1730-39	1,377	297	5,111	16,226	20,464	...	43,475
1720-29	1,467	76	3,927	12,466	8,817	…	26,753
1710-19	1,104	(b)	1,995	6,333	2,746	…	12,178
1700-09	(b)	(b)	2,586	7,283	206	…	10,075
Total	**4,498**	**1,607**	**24,154**	**77,259**	**91,461**	**4,336**	**203,315**

(b) No data available.

Table 3. Slaves imported from overseas to the thirteen colonies, 1700-1775 (Purvis, 1999:166)

The slave trade constituted an economic necessity for the South whose economy was heavily relying on agriculture. The importation of huge numbers of slaves was to maintain the economic stability and contribute in the growth of the plantations.

Despite the fact that the European servants continued to arrive in the colonies, the coming of the black slaves was vital for the colonies' economy, especially in the South; without the slaves' contribution, the Southerners would have faced important shortage in labor and, thus, difficulties to expand their plantations. The African slaves constituted

almost half of the total number of the eighteenth century immigrants to the colonies in 1775. In the South, t-he black slaves substituted the white servants as the main source of labor. Among the estimated 200,000 blacks who were brought to America in the eighteenth century, nine-tenths were purchased by Southern colonies. (Jones, 1960:32)

Decade	**Africans**	**Germans**	**Northern Irish**	**Southern Irish**	**Scots**	**English**	**Welsh**	**Other**	**Total**
1700-09	9,000	100	600	800	200	400	300	100	11,500
1710-19	10,800	3,700	1,200	1,700	500	1,300	900	200	20,300
1720-29	9,900	2,300	2,100	3,000	800	2,200	1,500	200	22,000
1730-39	40,500	13,000	4,400	7,400	2,000	4,900	3,200	800	76,200
1740-49	58,500	16,600	9,200	9,100	3,100	7,500	4,900	1,100	110,000
1750-59	49,600	29,100	14,200	8,100	3,700	8,800	5,800	1,200	120,500
1760-69	82,300	14,500	21,200	8,500	10,000	11,900	7,800	1,600	157,800
1770-75	17,800	5,200	13,200	3,900	15,000	7,100	4,600	700	67,500
Total	**278,400**	**84,500**	**66,100**	**42,500**	**35,300**	**44,100**	**29,000**	**5,900**	**585,800**

Table 4. Estimated immigration to Thirteen Colonies, 1700-1775
(Purvis, 1999: 164)

The African forced immigrants surpassed the major European immigrants who arrived in large waves such as the Germans and the Irish. The previous table shows the importance of the slave labor to the colonists. Their importance was only economic; they were treated as a means of permanent profitability. Unlike the agrarian Southerners, the Northerners' immigration policy did not rely on the slaves since their economy was based on industry. The Northerners needed more skilled and qualified workers. The slaves were present in the North but in small numbers; they were used as farm workers, household servants, and artisans. (DeFord, 2006:7) The small numbers of the blacks in bondage show that they did not constitute an economic need in the North.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the English colonization in North America was difficult; the settlers endured hard times to secure their colonies. The colonial immigration policy was driven by the economic situation of the colonies.

The major issue that the settlers faced was populating those settlements and providing the indispensable laborers for the growth of the plantations. They adopted many ambitious strategies to attract workers to the colonies. At the beginning, their immigration policy rested on advertisement, land grants, and most importantly on indentured servitude system. The colonists used all the effective ways to supply the cultivated areas with the

needed hands. After, they turned to slave importation to cover the shortage in labor caused by the decreasing number of European servants and the rapid growth of the Southern plantations on the other hand.

The colonists' immigration policy was fruitful since the English colonies prospered and their economy flourished. It is worthy to note that the major element that molded the colonial immigration policy was the economic conditions of the colonies, and the legal steps that were taken were economically-oriented since it was necessary to provide workers in the goal of maintaining their economic stability.

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