

## History

**Lesson 3 of an enquiry of 6 lessons**

# What were the 13 colonies?

Mr Arscott



Britain was admired by enlightenment thinkers because the monarch's power was limited by parliament. So if the British monarch wanted to pass a new law or raise new taxes, parliament had to agree.

The British Parliament and monarch did not just govern countries in the British Isles. They also ruled **colonies** in other parts of the world. During the seventeenth century many people from Britain had migrated to the Americas and established colonies. These people are known as **colonists** because they set up or lived in colonies. The colonists had travelled to America for different reasons. Some had wanted to become wealthy farmers. Some had wanted to practise their religion without fear of **persecution**. Others had wanted to make their fortunes from the slave trade.



By the middle of the eighteenth century, Britain controlled 13 successful colonies in North America. Most of the colonists who lived in these places spoke English and would have said they were loyal to the British monarch. Most of the colonies had their own mini parliaments which governed the colony. But, the colonies were all different. Some like Massachusetts contained cities like Boston where people prided themselves on their individual freedoms. Other colonies, like Virginia, contained large numbers of enslaved people who had originally come from West Africa. These enslaved people were treated harshly and would not have been allowed to vote for representatives to sit in the Virginian parliament.



Some American colonists were attracted to Enlightenment ideas and wrote letters to the famous thinkers in Europe. Arguably, the way the 13 colonies were ruled fitted with enlightenment ideas. There was religious toleration and parliaments were there to protect the freedoms of colonists. But thinkers like Rousseau were very critical of the use of slaves. Secondly, Rousseau would worry about who had **sovereignty** over the colonies.

Was the English monarch in charge of what happened in the colonies or were the colonists free to rule themselves as they wanted?



# Glossary

**Colonies:** a part of the world which is ruled partially or totally by another country.

**Colonists:** someone who lives in a colony.

**Parliament:** a group of people who debate new laws and vote on taxes.  
Persecution: being treated badly because of religious or political beliefs.

**Sovereignty:** a political concept which means: having supreme power or authority. In absolute monarchies, the king or queen was understood as The sovereign. But Enlightenment thinkers questioned whether the people should have sovereignty.



# Comprehension Questions

1. What powers of the British monarch were limited by parliament?

Sentence starter: Parliaments limited the power of the British monarch by...

2. Why did colonists move to the Americas?
3. In which part of the Americas were the 13 Colonies located?
4. Describe a difference between two of the 13 Colonies.
5. Challenge question: Do you think the colonists living in America felt they had sovereignty?



# Extension Question

Would the Enlightenment thinkers have liked how the 13 Colonies were ruled?

Use the sentence starters and the key words to try and provide an extended answer to this question.

Sentence starters	Words to use
<i>On the one hand, the 13 Colonies were ruled in ways Enlightened thinkers would have liked because.....</i>	Approve Liberty Individual Freedom
<i>On the other hand, some Enlightenment thinkers might have disapproved of ...</i>	Monarchy The Church Rights
<i>Overall, I think...</i>	Sovereignty Slavery Parliament

