***America’s History* Author Video: Chapter Four**

**[[BIG IDEA:** In what ways were Britain’s American colonies affected by events across the Atlantic, and how were their societies taking on a life of their own?]]

In the first three chapters, you have explored the foundations of Britain’s American colonies. Chapter four asks, in what sense were these colonies British?

In one sense, they weren’t much like Britain at all. Their populations were astonishingly diverse by European standards: not only were there hundreds of thousands of Africans, but certain colonies were attracting lots of people from Germany, from Ireland, and from other parts of mainland Europe. There was no precedent in Europe for people who were so different from each other trying to build societies in common.

But in another sense, these colonies were very British. Historians talk about two revolutions in eighteenth-century Britain that directly affected the colonies: the consumer revolution, which brought all kinds of manufactured goods across the Atlantic and gave the colonies a shared material culture, and the print revolution, which made newspapers, pamphlets, and books much more common and helped to create a unified world of ideas.

The print revolution spread two important cultural movements: the Enlightenment, which stressed the ability of human beings to improve themselves by applying reason to social problems; and Christian Pietism, which emphasized human weakness and the importance of relying on God’s grace instead of one’s own abilities. Both of these movements had European origins, but in the colonies they took on distinctive American qualities.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Britain’s colonies were extremely dynamic—they were growing fast and changing fast. They were also extremely unstable, and by the mid-eighteenth century they were experiencing intense stresses. Could the British Empire help colonists solve their problems, or would it become an impediment to colonial development? This had become an urgent question by the 1760s.