

Name _____

Date _____

Democracy in Colonial Wethersfield, Connecticut

Directions: The following activity is designed to introduce you to document-based questions of the kind required on advanced placement examinations. For homework, read the documents on colonial Wethersfield, Connecticut. Before you begin, fold a piece of notebook paper into fourths, and label each portion with one of the categories of evidence required to answer the question posed before Document A. As you read, jot down notes in the appropriate place on your chart indicating evidence related to the question. In front of each piece of evidence, put a + (plus) if the note suggests a step toward greater democracy, and a - (minus) if it suggests a trend away from democracy. After each note, write, in parentheses, the letter of the document where you found the evidence. On the back of the sheet, write down questions you have about specific documents.

Was American society, as evidenced by Wethersfield, Connecticut, becoming more "democratic" in the period from the 1750s to the 1780s? Discuss with reference to property distribution, social structure, politics, and religion.

✓ Document A

Approximate population distribution of
Wethersfield Village in 1756 and 1774.

	1756	1774
Whites	1,120	1,727
Free Blacks	40	62
Slaves	40	35

✓ Document B

Approximate distribution of taxable property
in Wethersfield Village in 1756 and 1773

Adult White Males Ranked in Deciles According to Value of Assessed Property		Average Tax Assessment of Property in Pounds Sterling (£)		Per Cent of Total Value of Assessed Property	
		1756	1773	1756	1773
Highest	10%	£127	£163	35.0	50.9
2nd	10%	71	65	19.5	20.4
3rd	10%	57	35	15.7	10.9
4th	10%	45	24	12.4	7.5
5th	10%	29	16	8.0	5.0
6th	10%	20	11	5.6	3.5
7th	10%	10	5	2.6	1.5
8th	10%	3	1	1.0	.2
9th	10%	1	0	.1	.0
Lowest	10%	0	0	.0	.0

Based on a representative sample of 100 adult white males.

✓ Document C

Distribution of land holdings in
Wethersfield Village in 1756 and 1773.

Number of Acres in Holding	Per Cent of Total Land Holdings	
	1756	1773
1,000 or more	0	2
200-999	2	2
100-199	3	11
50-99	13	12
10-49	42	19
1-9	23	21
no land	17	33

Document D

Wealthiest adult white males in Wethersfield
Village and their assessments in 1756 and 1774.

Year	Name	Assessment in Pounds Sterling (£)
1756	John Chester, Sr.	£320
	Thomas Belden	300
	Ebenezer Belden	290
	Josiah Grizwold	213
	Samuel Buck	188
1774	John Chester, Jr.	491
	Ebenezer Belden	323
	Josiah Buck	231
	Thomas Belden	217
	Silas Deane	208

Based on a representative sample of 100 adult white males.

Document E

Note: The pictures below are modern photographs of Wethersfield Village houses built between 1750 and 1775. The name of the original owner and the original owner's tax assessment on his total property (1775) are indicated.



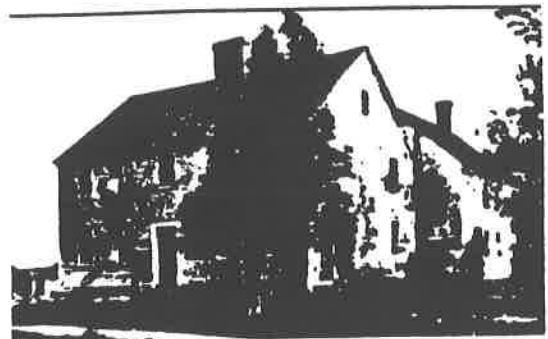
Joseph Webb, £178



Charles Bulkley, £30



Thomas Harris, £52



Titus Buck, £17

Document F

"Reflecting on the conversations passed between us at Philadelphia, I am inclined to think that a number of inhabitants from this Colony [Connecticut] would venture on a settlement on the Ohio [River]. . . . [The Connecticut man's] first principle is to possess a disencumbered freehold, be it ever so small, in preference to the largest under quit rents and landlords. . . . The lands given should be divided into lots of about two or three hundred acres to each family and not more, for a Connecticut farmer with two hundred and fifty or three hundred acres of good land, is a rich man, that is, as rich as he wishes to be, for this Colony is now so full of inhabitants that there is not more than twelve acres to a person. . . .

"I could procure a number [of settlers], sufficient for one town, who would incline to settle a little (or rather as much as possible), on the New England plan. . . . I will describe the method of settling and governing one of them, from which sample you will be acquainted with the whole. All lands in New England (except in New Hampshire) are absolutely in the disposal of the General Assembly. . . . The Assembly grants on the following conditions: seventy families settle within such and such a time, four or five years perhaps. They, being settled, shall support a minister, or clergyman, of some of the protestant professions [i.e., denominations]. Dissenters [i.e., Congregationalists] to be preferred; also a school master. When they become more numerous and are desirous of it, they may send deputies to the general assembly, but when they do this and not before, they are liable to be taxed by the Assembly, for the support of the government. . . . All their domestic [concerns are] under their own regulation; they meet at least once in each year, and make choice of a number of the more steady of their number for selectmen, as they are called. These are officers . . . conducting all the public affairs of the town, in which they are accountable to no one but to the inhabitants in full meeting . . . their power expires within the year, when new ones [are chosen], or they are rechosen; they are in short a sort of censors on the manners of the people. They summon the people together as they judge proper. . . . Thus each town is in some degree a distinct republic with power even of passing what they call by-laws not repugnant to those of the Colony passed in General Assembly, where all are united by a representation chosen by each annually (or twice each year as is the case with us in Connecticut)."

Silas Deane, Wethersfield merchant and a Connecticut delegate to the First Continental Congress, to Patrick Henry, a Virginia delegate to the First Continental Congress; written from Wethersfield, January 2, 1775.

✓ Document G

Approximate Distribution of Adult White Males By Political Status in Wethersfield Village in the Periods 1751-1756 and 1771-1776

Political Status	Per Cent of Adult White Males	
	1751-1756	1771-1776
Able to meet freeman (voter) requirements	65	67
Taking freeman's oath (i.e., registering to vote)	40	62
Actually voting	30	53
Elected to all town offices (includes major offices, such as Selectmen and militia officers and minor offices such as jurors and surveyors)	32	52

✓ Document H

Distribution of Major Town Offices among Assessed Adult White Males in Wethersfield Village in the Periods 1751-1756 and 1771-1776

Adult White Males Ranked in Deciles According to Value of Assessed Property		Per Cent of Adult White Males Elected to Major Town Office	
		1751-1756	1771-1776
Highest	10%	67	40
2nd	10%	15	37
3rd	10%	7	3
4th	10%	7	5
5th	10%	4	2
6th	10%	0	0
7th	10%	0	8
8th	10%	0	5
9th	10%	0	0
Lowest	10%	0	0

✓ Document I

Note: The following letter was written by the Rev. Ebenezer Frothingham, a so-called Separatist minister, who had been jailed under Connecticut law for preaching in Wethersfield without the consent of the Rev. James Lockwood, the minister of the officially established Congregational Church in Wethersfield parish. Lockwood had initiated legal proceedings against Frothingham with the civil authorities.

"I [write] this by paper to Let you know this time perhaps you have a prejudice in your heart against me . . . [in] taking me from my Business that God in his providence Called me to . . . [Y]ou had no warrant from the word of God to do, nor no authority under heaven – as a Civil authority has no Right to meddle with Ecclesiastical affairs (if I had transgress'd it was to the Church [to which] Christ the great sheperd has Committed all the power. . . .) Let me Intreat & warn you not to touch them [Separatists] in matters of Religion to Carry them before [civil] authority for in so doing you touch the apple of Christ's Eye, and these Lives will be a swift witness against you. . . ."

Rev. Ebenezer Frothingham, letter sent from the Hartford jail to the Rev. James Lockwood, minister of the First Church of Christ, Wethersfield, April 25, 1745

✓ Document J

"In a civil community there is a necessary subordination of persons: some are entrusted with authority and power to rule over others, and to manage and conduct the public affairs: whilst others are in places of inferiority and subjection: and the health and prosperity of the community very much depends on the faithful discharge of the duties incumbent on the various members of it, resulting from the stations they hold in, or relations they bear to the state. . . ."

"As rulers are raised up by God, not for their own sakes, but for the people's; there is the highest reason they should be treated with respect, honour, and submission. For people to treat their persons or characters with rudeness and disrespect; to slight or vilify their laws or rashly censure their administrations; to cherish uneasy or mutinous dispositions, or give into seditious and riotous practices, is very inexcusable."

Rev. James Lockwood, minister of the First Church of Christ, Wethersfield; an Election Sermon preached before the Connecticut General Assembly, May 9, 1754

✓ Document K

Note: The following two laws were enacted by the Connecticut Assembly in 1770.

" . . . no person in this colony, professing the Christian protestant religion, who soberly and conscientiously dissent from the worship and ministry established by the laws of the colony and attend public worship by themselves, shall incur any of the penalties . . . for not attending the worship and ministry so established on the Lord's day or on account of their meeting together by themselves on said day for the public worship of God in a way agreeable to their consciences."

" . . . all ministers of the Gospel that now are or hereafter shall be settled in this colony, during their continuance in the ministry, shall have all their estates . . . exempted out of the lists of polls [i.e., poll taxes] and rateable [i.e., assessable] estates."

✓ Document L

Note: The following is an account by Jared Ingersoll, a prominent New Haven attorney, of his detention in Wethersfield by a crowd of men who hoped to subvert the Stamp Act by forcing him to resign his position as distributor of stamps for Connecticut.

"After some little Time, I dismounted and went into the House with the Persons who were called the Committee, the main Body continuing out doors. And here I ought not to omit mentioning that I was told repeatedly that they had no Intentions of hurting me or my Estate; but would use me like a Gentleman; this however I conclude they will understand was on condition I should comply with their demands. . . . This Committee behaved with Moderation and Civility, and I thought seemed inclined to listen to certain Proposals which I made, but when the Body of the People came to hear them they rejected them, and nothing would do but I must resign [as distributor of stamps]. . . ."

"The Commandant [of the Committee] told me with seeming Concern in his Countenance that he could not keep the People off from me any longer; and that if they once began, he could not promise me where they would end. I now thought it was Time to submit. . . . Upon this I looked out at a front Window, beckoning the People and told them, I had consented to comply with their desires; and only waited to have something drawn up for me to sign. . . . Outside when I had done, a person who stood near me, told me to [shout] Liberty and Property, with three Cheers, which I did, throwing up my Hat into the Air; this was followed by loud Huzzas, and then many of the People were pleased to take me by the hand and tell me I was restored to their former Friendship. I then went with two or three more to a neighbouring House [Joseph Webb's house] where we dined."

Jared Ingersoll; account of "The Wethersfield
Affair," Connecticut Gazette, September 27, 1765

✓ Document M

"To all Christian people believing in, and relying on that God to whom our Enemies have at last forced us to appeal, Be it known. . . . Driven to the last necessity and obliged to have recourse to arms, in defence of our Lives and our Liberties, and from the suddenness of the occasion deprived of that Legal Authority whose dictates we ever with pleasure obey, we find it necessary, for preventing disorders, irregularities and misunderstandings, in the course of our march and service, solemnly to agree to, and with each other, on the following Regulations and Orders, binding ourselves by all that is dear and sacred, carefully and constantly to observe and keep them. . . ."

"So long as we continue in our present situation of a voluntary Independent Company, we engage to submit on all occasions to such decisions as shall be made and given by the majority of the officers we have chosen; and when any difference arises between man and man, it shall be laid before the officers aforesaid, and their decision shall be final. . . ."

"Scorning all ignoble motives, and superior to the low and slavish practice of enforcing on men their duty by blows, it is agreed, that when private admonition for any offence, by any of our Body committed, will not reform, public [warning] shall be made, and if that should not have the desired effect, after proper pains taken, and the same repeated, such incorrigible person shall be turned out of the Company as totally and unworthy of serving in so great and glorious a cause, and be delivered over to suffer the contempt of his Countrymen. . . ."

"In witness whereof, We have hereunto set our hands this 23 April, 1775."

Agreement of the Wethersfield Company of
Volunteers under the command of Capt. John
Chester, Jr., April 23, 1775, signed by all
volunteers prior to their engagement in the
Battle of Bunker Hill

✓ Document N

"A stranger in the colony, upon hearing the inhabitants talk of religion, liberty, and justice, would be induced to believe that the Christian and civil virtues were their distinguishing characteristics; but he soon finds his mistake on fixing his abode among them. Their laws grind the poor, and their religion is to oppress the oppressed. The poll-tax is unjust and cruel. The poor man is compelled to pay [the poll tax]. . . . work four days on the highways, serve in the militia four days, and pay three shillings for his hut without a window in it. The best house and richest man in the colony pays no more!"

"The law is pretended to exempt episcopalians, anabaptists, quakers, and others, from paying rates to the Sober Dissenters [i.e., Congregationalists]; but, at the same time, gives the Sober Dissenters power to tax them for minister, school, and town-rates, by a general vote; and no law or court can put asunder what the town has joined together. — The law also exempts [all members of other Christian churches who attend their own church] from paying to Sober Dissenters. . . . But, hence, if a man is sick, and does not attend more than 26 Sabbaths in a year, he becomes legally a Sober Dissenter. . . ."

Rev. Samuel Peters, Anglican clergyman from
England who visited much of Connecticut;
History of Connecticut, 1782

Document O

. . .
How bless'd the sight of such a numerous train [people]
In such small limits, tasting every good
Of competence, of independence, peace,
And liberty unmingled; every house
On its own ground, and every happy swain [young man]
Beholding no superior, but the laws,
And such as virtue, knowledge, useful life,
And zeal, exerted for the public good,
Have rais'd above the throng. For here, in truth,
Not in pretence, man is esteem'd as man.
Not here how rich, of what peculiar blood,
Or office high; but of what genuine worth,
What talents bright and useful, what good deeds,
What piety to God, what love to man,
The question is.

. . .
Beneath their eye,
And forming hand, in every hamlet, rose
The nurturing school; in every village, smil'd
The heav'n-inviting church, and every town
A world within itself, with order, peace,
And harmony, adjusted all its weal [well-being].

Timothy Dwight, prominent Connecticut poet
and later President of Yale; "Greenfield Hill"
(a poetic description of a typical Connecticut
town), 1794

