Model Essay - Regions of Colonies

Describe the physical geography of the colonial regions.

The definition of a region is a group of places that share similar characteristics. It is very common that physical geography is the characteristic that draws a region together. For instance, Michigan is in the Great Lakes Region. The physical geography of the colonial regions really did distinguish them from one another.

The physical geography of New England seemed harsh, but was chosen by the wealthy Puritans for the economic activities it could support. New England had jagged coast line which created harbors perfect for a fleet of ships, unlike the beaches of the South. Forests of white pine and oak provided wood for building ships. Fishing and Whaling grounds in seas the ships could reach would provided food and valuable exports. The North Atlantic stream just offshore would allow merchants to easily participate in the North Atlantic trade. All this made the thin, rocky soil and long winters characteristics the colony could handle.

The Middle Colonies physical geography allowed for less creativity in finding ways to make money. They would farm. This region hand much flat land, a long growing season, and fertile soil particularly suited to grain. Many immigrants particularly sought this region to use their skill as farmers of grain or millers in Europe, making the Middle Colonies the breadbasket for all the colonies.

The Southern Colonies also farmed due to their physical geography. The growing season in the Southern colonies was almost year-round. They also had much flat land in this region, in an area along the coast called the Tidewater. Here huge plantations developed to grow the profitable but labor intensive crops of rice, grown in swampy areas, and sugarcane. Later cotton would take over this flat land. An area called the Piedmont was in the west. Piedmont stands for foothills, as these were the foothills of the Appalachians.

The Backcountry was a frontier region dominated by the Appalachian Mountains. These mountains are very old and through erosion have become very ridged. Streams rushed down slopes and the forest remained dense, as farming was not large-scale enough, being only subsistence, to cause much land to be cleared, transporting the lumber out for sale would have been too difficult, and population was low. Very few roads were built in these difficult circumstances.

We live in a world today in which we never think of the physical world as being a factor that determines our destiny. If it is hot, we air-condition it. If it is not fertile, we fertilize it. If it is dry, we water it. If it is too hilly, we flatten it. We dredge harbors where there are none. But this type of human-environment interaction was not available in the 17th century, and so the colonial regions fell into ways of life dictated by the physical geography there.

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