

Q73 – The colonists came to America for many reasons. Name one .

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

Colonists came to America for three main reasons: economic opportunity, political liberty, and religious freedom – including escape from persecution.

Virginia – the first colony – was bankrolled by English investors dreaming of finding gold in the New World. The settlement at Jamestown turned out to be a nightmare. Disease and starvation killed most of the settlers. The survivors found no gold ... but they soon discovered they could grow tobacco, a cash crop that saved the colony.

At the other end of the spectrum, Georgia was settled by the poor: men freed from debtors' prison by English philanthropists. Many of the colonies were settled by people seeking religious freedom.

The Mayflower brought dissenters from the Church of England to Cape Cod in Massachusetts: the Pilgrims of Plymouth Rock fame. The Pilgrims were followed a decade later by more dissenters: the Puritans who founded Boston.

Connecticut and Rhode Island were also settled by religious refugees – this time, fleeing Massachusetts.

Pennsylvania, too, was settled by religious refugees: the Quakers – followed by Mennonites and Moravians.

South Carolina welcomed French Protestants fleeing Catholic persecution while Maryland welcomed Catholics fleeing Protestant persecution.

Dutch investors founded a hub of commerce at New Amsterdam. The bustling port there became a haven for the persecuted – including the first Jewish settlement in North America. New Amsterdam is now better known as New York City.

Immigrants still come to America for the same reasons: liberty – and opportunity.