

# The Rise of the Atlantic World, 1400–1625

At ten o'clock on a moonlit night the tense crew spotted a glimmering light. At two the next morning came the shout, "Land! Land!" At daybreak they entered a shallow lagoon. The captain, Christopher Columbus, rowed ashore, the royal flag fluttering in the breeze. "And, all having rendered thanks to the Lord, kneeling on the ground, embracing it with tears of joy for the immeasurable mercy of having reached it, [he] rose and gave this island the name San Salvador." The date was October 12, 1492. The place was a tiny tropical island less than four hundred miles southeast of present-day Florida.

Other than his crew, the only witnesses to Columbus's landing were some Taíno Indians who watched from a distance as he claimed for Spain the island that they called Guanahani. Soon curiosity overcame their fears. Gesturing and smiling, the Taínos walked down to the beach, where the newcomers quickly noticed the cigars they offered and the gold pendants in their noses.

The voyagers learned to savor the islanders' tobacco and trade for golden ornaments. Columbus was sure that he had reached Asia—the Indies. Two months later, bringing with him some "Indians" and various souvenirs, he sailed home to tell of "a land to be desired and, once seen, never to be left."

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

African and European Peoples

Europe and the Atlantic World,  
1440–1600

Footholds in North America,  
1512–1625

Columbus' achievement marked not only Europe's discovery of America but also a critical step in the formation of an Atlantic world. After 1492 peoples from Europe, Africa, and North and South America became intertwined in colonial societies, obligatory and forced labor relations, trade networks, religious missions, and wars. Traveling freely or as captives, they left familiar settings for new worlds in which their customary ways of thinking and acting were repeatedly challenged. Adding to the challenges were the far-reaching environmental effects of sudden, unprecedented interactions not only of humans but also of animals, plants, and germs. Significantly shaping this Columbian exchange, as these environmental consequences are often termed, were the efforts of several European nations to increase their wealth and power through the control of the land and labor of non-Europeans they considered less than civilized.

In much of what is now Latin America, the coming of Europeans quickly turned into conquest. In the future United States and Canada, European mastery would come more slowly. More than a hundred years would pass before truly self-sustaining colonies were established. Nevertheless, from the moment of Columbus's landing on October 12, 1492, the American continents became the stage for the encounter of Native American, European, and African peoples in the emergent Atlantic world.

**This chapter will focus on four major questions:**

- How did trade and political centralization transform West Africa before the advent of the Atlantic slave trade?
- How did European monarchs use commerce and religion to advance their nations' fortunes?
- What role did the Columbian exchange play in the formation of an Atlantic world?
- Why did Indians in North America sometimes welcome and other times resist European traders and colonizers?

## AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN PEOPLES

Even before the Atlantic world emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and continuing thereafter, each continent bordering the Atlantic Ocean was undergoing change. In the Americas, some societies rose, others fell, and still others adapted to new circumstances (see

Chapter 1). Both West Africa and western Europe were also being transformed. In Africa, the growth of long-distance trade enabled some empires and kingdoms to flourish at their rivals' expense. A market economy was emerging alongside older social and religious customs. Meanwhile, in Europe, ambitious monarchs joined forces with profit-minded merchants to propel the territorial expansion of some nation-states. At the same time, an intellectual Renaissance was underway, and profound divisions among Roman Catholics were leading to a religious Reformation.

### Mediterranean Crossroads

One of the most vibrant areas in the Eastern Hemisphere was the Mediterranean Sea. Here African, Asian, and European peoples had interacted in both peace and war since ancient times. By 1400 hundreds of small ships were crossing the sea annually, unloading luxury goods from one part of the world and loading others for the next leg of their journeys. West African gold enriched Turkish sultans; European guns strengthened North African armies; and Indian spices stimulated Italian palates. In Africa and Asia many of these goods moved to and from the Mediterranean by caravans that traveled thousands of miles. Merchant ships linked East and South Asia with the Arabian peninsula and East Africa, and others connected northern and southern Europe. But before the fifteenth century, intercontinental travel and trade were unknown on the Atlantic Ocean.

Mediterranean commerce was closely intertwined with religion and politics. From the seventh to the fourteenth centuries, Islam spread, often by conquest, to Southeast Asia, West Africa, and much of southern Europe. During the same period, Roman Catholic rulers introduced Christianity to new areas of central and northern Europe. Political leaders sought to capture some of the wealth being generated by commerce, while merchants valued the security afforded by close ties with strong rulers. Above all, each of the two religions provided a common faith and identity to peoples spread over vast distances, reinforcing the political and economic links being forged between them.

Religion did not always divide people along political or economic lines. Christian and Muslim rulers on the Mediterranean frequently signed treaties with one another in order to secure commercial ties and protect against piracy. Christians, Jews, and Muslims, especially merchants, often traveled and lived in lands where they were in the minority. In the fourteenth century, for example, Morocco was Muslim-dominated but welcomed and tolerated Jews as well as Christians. In several

parts of the Mediterranean world, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian scholars read and commented on one another's work, a collaboration that led to Europe's Renaissance (see below).

But other Christians and Muslims regarded one another as enemies. Since the eleventh century, European Christians had conducted numerous Crusades against Islamic "infidels" in Europe and the Middle East, and some Muslim leaders waged *jihad* (holy war) against Christians. While the Islamic Ottoman Empire conquered Christian strongholds in the eastern Mediterranean, the Christian monarchies of Portugal, Castile, and Aragón undertook a "reconquest" of the Iberian peninsula by expelling non-Christians. Portugal was entirely Christian by 1250. In 1492 Castile and Aragón drove the last Muslim rulers from Spain and decreed that all remaining Jews convert to Catholicism. Such Jews were called *conversos*.

### West Africa and Its Peoples

Before the advent of Atlantic travel, the broad belt of grassland, or savanna, separating the Sahara Desert from the forests to the south was a major arena of long-distance trade and of rivalries among states for control of that trade. The trans-Saharan caravan trade stimulated the rise of grassland kingdoms and empires whose size and wealth rivaled any in Europe at the time. The richest grassland states were in West Africa, with its ample stores of gold. During the fifteenth century, the empire of Mali was the leading power in the West African savanna (see Map 2.1). Its Muslim rulers had access to a network of wealthy Muslim rulers and merchants in North Africa and the Middle East. Mali imported salt from the Sahara as well as brass, copper, cloth, spices, manufactured goods, and Arabian horses. Mali's best-known city, Timbuktu, was widely recognized for its intellectual and academic vitality and for its beautiful mosque, designed and built by a Spanish Muslim architect.

Early in the fifteenth century, divisions within Mali's royal family severely weakened the empire, leading several territories to secede. A successor empire, Songhai, flourished briefly and forcibly united most of the seceded territory. But by the sixteenth century, most of Mali and Songhai had been absorbed by Morocco to the north.

Immediately south of the grassland empires lay a region of small states and chiefdoms. In Senegambia at Africa's westernmost bulge, several Islamic states took root. Infestation by the tsetse fly, the carrier of sleeping sickness, kept livestock-herding peoples out of Guinea's

coastal forests, but many small states arose here, too. Among these was Benin, where artisans had been fashioning magnificent metalwork for centuries.

Still farther south, along the coast and inland on the Congo River, a welter of chiefdoms gave rise to four major kingdoms by the fifteenth century. Their kings were chiefs who, after defeating neighboring chiefdoms, installed their own kin as local rulers of the newly conquered territories. Of these kingdoms, Kongo was the most powerful and highly centralized.

With gold having recently been made the standard for nearly all European currencies, demand for the precious metal rose. During the fifteenth century, this demand brought thousands of newcomers from the savanna and Central Africa to the region later known as Africa's Gold Coast. New states emerged to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by exporting gold, though none was as extensive or powerful as Mali at its height. Similarly eager to capitalize on its neighbor's resources were the Portuguese, who in the mid-fifteenth century used new maritime techniques to sail along



**MAP 2.1**  
**Europe, Africa, and Southwestern Asia in 1500**

During the fifteenth century, Portugal led the way in integrating Europe with Africa in a new Atlantic world. Several voyages near the end of the century extended Europe's reach to India and the Americas.

West Africa's coast in search of gold and slaves (see below).

West African political leaders differed sharply in the amounts and kinds of political power they wielded. Some kings and emperors enjoyed semigodlike status, which they only thinly disguised if they adopted Islam. Rulers of smaller kingdoms depended largely on their ability to persuade, to conform to prevailing customs, and to satisfy their people when redistributing wealth.

In West Africa, the cohesiveness of kinship groups knitted society together. As did Native Americans, Africans lived within a network of interlocking mutual obligations to kinfolk (see Chapter 1). Not just parents but also aunts, uncles, distant cousins, and persons sharing clan ties formed an African's kin group and claimed his or her first loyalty. Africans held their grandparents in high esteem and accorded village or clan elders great deference. In centuries to come, the tradition of strong extended families would help enslaved Africans in the Americas endure the forced breakup of nuclear families by sale.

West Africans viewed marriage as a way for extended families to forge alliances for mutual benefit. A prospective husband made a payment to his bride's kin before marriage. He was not "buying" a wife; in effect, he was posting bond for good behavior and acknowledging the relative prestige of his own and his bride's kin groups. West African wives generally maintained lifelong links with their own kin groups, and in many societies children traced descent through the mother's, not the father's, bloodline. All this buttressed women's status.

A driving force behind marriage in West Africa was the region's high mortality rate from frequent famines and tropical disease epidemics. The shortage of people placed a high premium on the production of children. Children represented the labor force of the future who, within a few years, would contribute to a family's wealth by increasing its food production and the amount of land it could cultivate. Men of means frequently married more than one wife in order to produce children more frequently, and women generally married soon after reaching puberty.

West Africans depended on farming by both men and women for most of their food. The abundance of land relative to population enabled African farmers—like many Native Americans and unlike Europeans—to shift their fields periodically and thereby maintain high soil quality. Before planting new fields, men felled the trees and burned off the wild vegetation. After several years of intensive cultivation, largely by women, farmers shifted to a new location. After a few years, while the soil

of the recently used fields was being replenished, they returned to repeat the cycle. In the coastal rain forests West Africans grew such crops as yams, sugar cane, bananas, and eggplant, among other foods, as well as cotton for weaving cloth. On the grasslands the staff of life was grain—millet, sorghum, and rice—supplemented by cattle raising and fishing.

By the fifteenth century the market economy, stimulated by long-distance trade, extended to many small families. Farmers traded surplus crops at local marketplaces for other food or cloth. Artisans wove cotton or raffia palm leaves, made clothing and jewelry, and crafted tools and religious objects of iron and wood. While gold was the preferred currency among wealthy rulers and merchants, cowry shells served as the medium of exchange for most people.

Religion permeated African life. Like Native Americans and Europeans, Africans believed that another world lay beyond the one people perceived through their five senses. This other world was only rarely glimpsed by living persons other than priests, but the souls of most people passed there at death. Deities spoke to mortals through priests, dreams, religious "speaking shrines," and magical charms. More than most religious traditions, those of West Africa emphasized the importance of continuous revelations as foundations of spiritual truth. Such an emphasis on revelations originating from multiple sources precluded the development of fixed dogma and institutional hierarchies as found in Islam and in medieval Christianity (see below). Also like Native Americans and Europeans, Africans explained misfortunes in terms of witchcraft. But African religion differed from other traditions in its emphasis on ancestor worship, in which departed forebears were venerated as spiritual guardians.

Africa's magnificent artistic traditions were also steeped in religion. The ivory, cast iron, and wood sculptures of West Africa (whose bold designs would influence twentieth-century western art) were used in ceremonies reenacting creation myths and honoring spirits. A strong moralistic streak ran through African folk tales. Storytellers transmitted these tales in dramatic public presentations with ritual masks, dance, and music of a highly complex rhythmic structure, which is now appreciated as one of the foundations of jazz.

Among Africans, Islam appealed primarily to merchants trading with North Africa and the Middle East and to kings and emperors eager to consolidate their power. Some Muslim rulers, however, modified Islam, retaining elements of traditional religion as a concession to popular opinion. By the fifteenth century, Islam had

only begun to affect the daily lives of some cultivators and artisans in the savanna. Similarly, the impact of Christianity, introduced by the Portuguese, remained limited until the nineteenth century.

### European Culture and Society

When Columbus landed on San Salvador in 1492, western Europe was undergoing a mighty cultural revival known as the Renaissance. Intellectuals and poets believed that their age marked a return to the ideals of ancient Greek and Roman civilization. European scholars had recently discovered scores of forgotten ancient texts in philosophy, science, medicine, geography, and other subjects. Western Europeans came across these texts, and a rich tradition of commentary on them, in the writings of Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, and Jewish scholars. Armed with the new learning, Renaissance scholars strove to reconcile ancient philosophy with Christian faith, to explore the mysteries of nature, to map the world, and to explain the motions of the heavens.

The Renaissance was also an era of intense artistic creativity. After a century-long economic recession, money had accumulated by 1500 to pay for magnificent architecture, and wealthy patrons—especially in several Italian city-states—commissioned master painters and sculptors to create works glowing with idealized human beauty. Europeans celebrated these artistic achievements, along with those of writers, philosophers, scientists, and explorers, as the height of civilization to which all other cultures ought to aspire.

But European society was quivering with tension. The era's artistic and intellectual creativity was partly inspired by intense social and spiritual stress as Renaissance Europeans groped for stability by glorifying order, hierarchy, and beauty. A concern for power and rank (“degree”) dominated European life between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Writing near the end of the Renaissance, William Shakespeare (1564–1616), expressed these values with eloquence:

The heavens themselves, the planets and this  
center [earth]  
Observe degree, priority, and place. . .  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And hark, what discord follows!

Gender, wealth, inherited position, and political power affected every European's status, and few lived outside the reach of some political authority's taxes and laws. But this order was shaky. Conflicts between states, between religions, and between social classes constantly threatened the balance.

At the heart of these conflicts lay deep-seated forces of change. By the end of the fifteenth century, strong national monarchs in France and England had unified their realms and reduced the ability of both the Catholic Church and the nobility to dictate national policy. On the Iberian Peninsula, King Ferdinand of Aragón had married Queen Isabella of Castile in 1479 to create the Spanish monarchy. The new nation's crowning achievement came in 1492, not with Columbus' “discovery,” the full significance of which was not immediately appreciated, but with the final “reconquest” of the peninsula (discussed above).

Most Europeans, about 75 percent of them, were peasants. Peasants ranged from a few prosperous families with large holdings to landless laborers who barely scraped by on odd jobs. Taxes, rents, and other dues to landlords and Catholic Church officials were burdensome, and poor harvests or war drove even well-to-do peasants to starvation. Not surprisingly, peasant revolts were frequent, but the authorities mercilessly suppressed such uprisings.

Conditions among European peasants were made worse by a sharp rise in population, from about 55 million in 1450 to almost 100 million by 1600, while agricultural yields remained pitifully low. Families in many areas cooperated in plowing, sowing, and harvesting as well as in grazing their livestock on fallow fields and jointly owned “commons.” But with new land at a premium, landlords, especially the English gentry, wanted to “enclose” the commons—that is, convert the land to private property. Peasants who had no written title to their land were especially vulnerable, although some small landowners (called “yeomen” in England) with secure titles kept their land, and a few even profited by enclosure.

The environmental effects of land scarcity and population growth further exacerbated peasants’ circumstances. Beginning at the end of the sixteenth century, lower-than-average temperatures marked a “Little Ice Age” that lasted for two centuries. During this time, many European crops were less abundant or failed to grow. Hunger and malnutrition were widespread, and full-scale famine struck in some areas. Another consequence of population growth was deforestation resulting from increased human demand for wood to use as fuel and building materials. Deforestation also deprived peasants of wild foods and game (whose food sources disappeared with deforestation), accelerating the exodus of rural Europeans to towns and cities.

European towns were numerous but small, typically with several thousand inhabitants each. A great metropolis like London, whose population ballooned from fifty-five thousand in 1550 to two hundred thousand in 1600, was quite exceptional. But all towns were dirty and disease-ridden, and townspeople lived close-packed with their neighbors.

Unappealing as sixteenth-century towns might seem today, many men and women of the time preferred them to the villages and tiny farms they left behind. Immigration from the countryside—rather than an excess of urban births over deaths—accounted for towns’ expansion. Most people who flocked into towns remained at the bottom of the social order as servants or laborers and could not accumulate enough money to marry and live independently.

The consequences of rapid population growth were particularly acute in England, where the number of people doubled from about 2.5 million in 1500 to 5 million in 1620. As throughout western Europe, prices rose while wages fell during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (see Figure 2.1), widening the gap between rich and poor. Although English entrepreneurs expanded textile production by assembling spinners

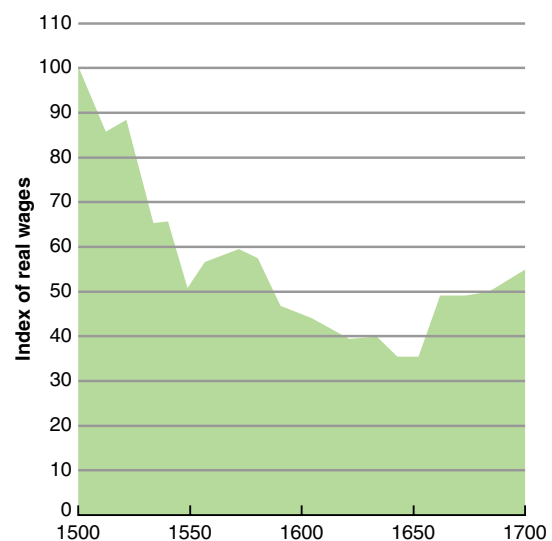
and weavers in household workshops, the workers were competing for fewer jobs in the face of growing competition that was diminishing European markets for English cloth. Enclosures severely aggravated unemployment, forcing large numbers of people to wander the country in search of work. To the upper and middle classes, these poor vagabonds seemed to threaten law and order. To control them, Parliament passed Poor Laws that ordered vagrants whipped and sent home, but most offenders only moved on to other towns.

As in America and Africa, traditional society in Europe rested on maintaining long-term, reciprocal relationships. European reciprocity required the upper classes to act with self-restraint and dignity, and the lower classes to show deference to their “betters.” It also demanded strict economic regulation to ensure that no purchaser paid more than a “just price”—one that permitted a seller a “reasonable” profit but that barred him from taking advantage of buyers’ and borrowers’ misfortunes to make “excessive” profits.

Yet for several centuries Europeans had been compromising the ideals of traditional economic behavior. “In the Name of God and of Profit,” thirteenth-century Italian merchants had written on their ledgers. By the sixteenth century, nothing could stop the charging of

**FIGURE 2.1**  
**Decline in Real Wages in England, 1500-1700**

This index measures the drop in purchasing power due to inflation and declining wages. It indicates that by around 1630, living standards for English workers had declined by about two-thirds since the base year, 1500.



Source: E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins, “Builders’ Wage-Rates, Prices and Population: Some Further Evidence,” *Economica*, XXVI (1959): 18–38; adapted from D.C. North and R. P. Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 111.

interest on borrowed money or sellers' price increases in response to demand. New forms of business organization slowly spread in the commercial world—especially the impersonal joint-stock company with many investors, the ancestor of the modern corporation. Demand rose for capital investment, and so did the supply of accumulated wealth. A new economic outlook gradually took form that justified the unimpeded acquisition of wealth and insisted that individuals owed one another nothing but the money necessary to settle their transactions. This new outlook, the central value system of capitalism or the “market economy,” opposed traditional demands for the strict regulation of economic activity to ensure social reciprocity and maintain “just prices.”

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans therefore held conflicting attitudes toward economic enterprise and social change, and their ambivalence remained unresolved. A restless desire for fresh opportunity kept European life simmering with competitive tension. But those who prospered still sought the security and prestige provided by high social status, whereas the poor longed for the age-old values that would restrain irresponsible greed.

Perhaps the most sensitive barometer of social change was the family. Throughout Europe the typical household consisted of a small nuclear family—two parents and several children—in which the husband and father functioned as a head whose authority was not to be questioned. The role of the wife and mother was to bear and rear children as well as assist her hus-

band in providing for the family's subsistence. Children were regarded as potential laborers who would assist in these tasks until they left home to start their own families. The household, then, was not only a family of intimately related people but also the principal economic unit in European society. Peasants on their tiny farms, artisans and merchants in their shops, and even nobles in their castles all lived and worked in households. People who did not live with their own families resided as dependents in the households of others as servants, apprentices, or relatives. Europeans regarded those who lived outside family-based households with extreme suspicion, often accusing them of crime or even witchcraft.

In a common cliché of the age, the nuclear family was a “little commonwealth.” A father's authority over his family was supposed to mirror God's rule over Creation and the king's over his subjects. Even grown sons and daughters regularly knelt for their father's blessing. The ideal, according to a German writer, was that “wives should obey their husbands and not seek to dominate them; they must manage the home efficiently. Husbands . . . should treat their wives with consideration and occasionally close an eye to their faults.” In practice, the father's sovereignty often had to make room for the wife's responsibility in managing family affairs and helping to run the farm or the workshop. Repeated male complaints, such as that of an English author in 1622 about wives “who think themselves every way as good as their husbands, and no way inferior to them,” suggest that male domination had its limits.



## Religious Upheavals

Christianity, to which most sixteenth-century Europeans adhered, taught that Jesus Christ, God's Son, had redeemed sinners by suffering crucifixion and rising from the dead. Equally vivid was Christians' belief in the devil, Satan, whom God had hurled from heaven soon after the Creation and who ceaselessly lured people to damnation by tempting them to do evil. The non-Christian minority encompassed scattered Jewish communities plus Muslims in southern Europe. But all Europe's population—Christians, Jews, and Muslims—worshiped a single supreme being, based on the God of the Hebrew Bible.

Although Christianity had spread throughout Europe by the sixteenth century, older, non-Christian beliefs persisted. Many Europeans feared witches and thought that individuals could manipulate nature by invoking unseen spiritual powers—that is, by magic. Others looked to astrology, insisting that a person's fate depended on the conjunction of various planets and stars. Such beliefs in spiritual forces not originating with a supreme deity resembled those of Native Americans and Africans.

The Catholic Church, based in Rome, taught that Christ's sacrifice was repeated every time a priest said Mass, and that divine grace flowed to sinners through the sacraments that priests alone could administer—above all, baptism, confession, and the Eucharist (communion). The Church was a huge network of clergymen and religious orders, male and female, set apart from laypeople by the fact that its members did not marry. At the top was the pope, the “vicar [representative] of Christ.”

The papacy wielded awesome spiritual power. Fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century popes dispensed extra blessings, or “indulgences,” to repentant sinners in return for such “good works” as donating money to the Church. Indulgences promised time off from future punishment in purgatory, where the dead atoned for sins they had already confessed and been forgiven. (Hell, from which there was no escape, awaited those who died unforgiven.) Given people's anxieties about sinful behavior, indulgences were enormously popular. The jingle of one successful indulgence seller in early sixteenth-century Germany promised that

As soon as the coin in the cash box rings,  
The soul from purgatory's fire springs.

The sale of indulgences provoked charges that the materialism and corruption infecting economic life had spread to the Church. In 1517 a German monk, Martin Luther (1483–1546), attacked the practice. When the

papacy tried to silence him, Luther broadened his criticism to encompass the Mass, purgatory, priests, and the pope. After Luther refused to recant, the Roman Church excommunicated him. Luther's revolt initiated what became known as the Protestant Reformation, which changed Christianity forever. (The word *Protestant* comes from the *protest* of Luther's princely supporters against the anti-Lutheran policies of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.)

To Luther, indulgence selling and similar examples of clerical corruption were evil not just because they bilked people. The Church, he charged, gave people false confidence that they could earn salvation simply by doing good works. His own agonizing search for salvation had convinced Luther that God bestowed salvation not on the basis of worldly deeds, but solely to reward a believer's faith. “I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him,” recalled Luther, “until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the [New Testament] statement that ‘the just shall live [be saved] by faith.’ . . . Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.” Luther's spiritual struggle and experience of being “reborn” constituted a classic conversion experience—the heart of Protestant Christianity.

Other Protestant reformers followed Luther in breaking from Catholicism, but they challenged his interpretation of Christianity. Whereas Luther stressed faith in Christ as the key to salvation, French theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) insisted on the stark doctrine of predestination. Calvin asserted that an omnipotent God predestined most sinful humans to hell, saving only a few in order to demonstrate his power and grace. It was only these few, called the “elect” or the “godly,” who would have a true conversion experience. At this moment, said Calvin, a person confronted the horrifying truth of his or her unworthiness and felt God's transcending power. A good Christian, in Calvin's view, would never be absolutely certain that he or she was saved and could do nothing to affect the outcome. But good Christians would be pious and avoid sin because they knew that godly behavior was a sign (not a cause and not a guarantee) of salvation.

Calvinists and Lutherans, as the followers of the two Reformation leaders came to be called, were equally horrified by more radical Protestants such as the Anabaptists, who appealed strongly to women and common people with their criticisms of the rich and powerful and sought to restrict baptism to “converted” adults. Judging the Anabaptists a threat to the social order, governments and mainstream churches persecuted them.

But Protestants also shared much common ground. For one thing, they denied that God had endowed priests with special powers. The church, Luther claimed, was a “priesthood of all believers.” Protestant reformers insisted that laypeople take responsibility for their own spiritual and moral conditions. Accordingly, they placed a high value on reading. Protestants demanded that the Bible be translated from Latin into spoken languages so that believers could read it for themselves instead of relying on priests for knowledge of its contents. The new faith was spread by the newly invented printing press. Wherever Protestantism became established, basic education and religious indoctrination followed. Finally, Protestantism represented a yearning in many people for the simplicity and purity of the ancient Christian church. More forcefully than Catholicism, it condemned the replacement of traditional reciprocity by marketplace values. Protestantism’s greatest appeal was to all those—ordinary individuals, merchants, and aristocrats alike—who brooded over their chances for salvation and valued the steady performance of duty.

In the face of the Protestant challenge, Rome was far from idle. Reformers like Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), a Spanish nun from a *converso* (converted Jewish) family, urged members of Catholic holy orders to repudiate corruption and to lead the Church’s renewal by living

piously and austere. Another reformer, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), founded a militant religious order, the Jesuits, whose members would distinguish themselves for centuries as royal advisers and missionaries. The high point of Catholic reform came during the Council of Trent (1545–1563), convened by the pope. The council defended Catholic teachings and denounced those of the Protestants. But it also reformed Church administration in order to combat corruption and encourage wide public participation in religious observances. This Catholic revival, the Counter-Reformation, brought the modern Roman Catholic Church into existence.

The Protestant Reformation changed the religious map of much of Europe (see Map 2.2). Lutheranism became the state religion in the Scandinavian countries, and Calvinism made significant inroads in France, the Netherlands (ruled by Spain), and England, where it competed with Catholicism and with the moderately reformed Church of England. The tiny states comprising the modern nations of Germany and Switzerland were divided among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists.

### The Reformation in England, 1533–1625

England’s Reformation began not with the writings of a theologian or with cries of the people, but with the actions of a king and Parliament. King Henry VIII (ruled 1509–1547) wanted a male heir, but his queen, Catherine of Aragón, failed to bear a son. Frustrated and determined, Henry asked the pope to annul his marriage. Equally determined, the pope refused. Henry then persuaded Parliament to pass a series of acts in 1533–1534 dissolving his marriage and proclaiming him supreme head of the Church of England (or Anglican Church). The move justified Henry’s wholesale seizure of Catholic Church properties as means of consolidating royal power.

Religion remained a source of conflict in England for more than a century after Henry’s break with Rome. Under Edward VI (ruled 1547–1553), the church veered sharply toward Protestantism; then Mary I (ruled 1553–1558) tried to restore Catholicism, in part by burning several hundred Protestants at the stake.

The reign of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) marked a crucial watershed. After the reign of “Bloody Mary,” most English people were ready to become Protestant; *how* Protestant was the divisive question. Militant Calvinists, now called Puritans, demanded a wholesale purification of the Church of England from “popish [Catholic] abuses.” They affirmed salvation by predestination, denied Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, and believed that a

learned sermon was the heart of true worship. They wished to free each congregation and its minister from outside interference by Anglican bishops and encouraged lay members (nonclergy) to participate in church affairs. Above all, Puritans insisted that membership in a true Christian church be reserved exclusively for those who had had a conversion experience. In this respect, they repudiated the Catholic and Anglican churches, both of which extended membership to anyone who had been baptized. Nevertheless, some Puritans, hoping to reform the Church of England from within, declined to break openly with it. Others, called Separatists, insisted that a “pure” church had to avoid all contact with Anglican “pollution.”

The severe self-discipline and moral uprightness of Puritans appealed to only a few among the titled nobility and the poor. Puritanism’s primary appeal was instead to the small but growing number of people in the “mid-dling” ranks of English society—landowning gentry, yeoman farmers, merchants, shopkeepers, artisans, and university-educated clergymen and intellectuals. Self-discipline had become central to both the secular and spiritual dimensions of these people’s lives. From their ranks, and particularly from among farmers, artisans, and clergymen, would later come the settlers of New England (see Chapter 3).

Elizabeth distrusted Puritan militancy; but, after 1570 when the pope declared her a heretic and urged Catholics to overthrow her, she regarded English Catholics as even more dangerous. Thereafter, she courted influential Puritans and embraced militant anti-Catholicism.

Under Elizabeth, most Puritans came to expect that they would eventually transform the Church of England into independent congregations of “saints.” But her successor, James I (ruled 1603–1625), the founder of England’s Stuart dynasty, bitterly opposed Puritan efforts to eliminate the office of bishop. He made clear that he saw Puritan attacks on bishops as a direct threat to the throne when he snapped, “No bishop, no king.” Although James insisted on outward conformity to Anglican practice, he quietly tolerated Calvinists within the Church of England who did not dissent loudly.

## EUROPE AND THE ATLANTIC WORLD, 1440–1600

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, European wealth was concentrated in Mediterranean city-states such as Florence and Venice. Over the next two centuries, much of this wealth shifted from the Mediterranean to



**MAP 2.2**

### Major Religions in Europe, c. 1560

By 1560 some European lands were solidly Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinist, but others remained bitterly divided for another century or more.

the Atlantic, where the monarchs of several nation-states were consolidating their power over vast territories in Europe and the Americas. Although England and France were also active, the first of the emerging new Atlantic powers were Portugal and Spain. Situated on the Iberian Peninsula where the Mediterranean and Atlantic come together, Portugal and Spain led a new European imperialism across the oceans of the world. Two prominent outcomes of this new imperialism were a trans-Atlantic slave trade and the colonization of new lands, especially in the Americas. Out of the new imperialism and the multiple intercontinental encounters that resulted arose a new Atlantic world.

### Portugal and the Atlantic, 1440–1600

Portugal led the shift from a Mediterranean to an Atlantic world. While European merchants had long traded with Asia and Africa by way of the Mediterranean (see above), some recognized that they could increase their profits by establishing direct contacts with sources

of prized imports. During the fifteenth century, tiny Portugal led the way in overcoming impediments to long-distance oceanic travel.

Important changes in maritime technology occurred in the early fifteenth century. Shipbuilders and mariners along Europe's stormy Atlantic coast added the triangular Arab sail to the heavy cargo ships they used for voyaging between England and the Mediterranean. They created a more maneuverable vessel, the caravel, which sailed more easily against the wind. Sailors also mastered the compass and astrolabe, by which they got their bearings on the open sea. Without this maritime revolution, European exploration would have been impossible.

Renaissance scholars' search for more accurate readings of ancient texts enabled fifteenth-century Europeans to look at their world with new eyes. The great ancient Greek authority on geography was Ptolemy, but Renaissance cartographers corrected his data when they tried to draw accurate maps based on

recent European and Arabic observations. Thus, Renaissance "new learning" helped sharpen Europeans' geographic sense.

Led by Prince Henry "the Navigator" (1394–1460), Portugal was the first nation to capitalize on these developments. Henry gained the support of merchants seeking to circumvent Moroccan control of the African-European gold trade and of religious zealots eager to confront Muslim power. He hoped to find a sea route to Asia that would enable Portugal to bypass Mediterranean traders in tapping the markets of that continent as well. Henry encouraged Portuguese seamen to pilot the new caravels far down the African coast, searching for weak spots in Muslim defenses and for opportunities to trade profitably. By the time of his death, the Portuguese operated a successful gold-making factory at Arguin and had established trade ties south of the Sahara. In 1488 Bartolomeu Días reached the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip. A decade later Vasco da Gama led a Portuguese fleet around the Cape of Good Hope and on to India (see Map 2.1).

Ultimately the Portuguese failed to destroy older Euro-Asian commercial links, although they remained an imperial presence in the Indian Ocean and present-day Indonesia. Meanwhile, they had brought Europeans face-to-face with black Africans and an already flourishing slave trade.

### The "New Slavery" and Racism

Slavery was well established in fifteenth-century Africa. The institution took two basic forms. Many Africans were enslaved because of indebtedness. Their debts were purchased by kings and emperors who made them servants or by families seeking additional laborers. They or their children were either absorbed into their new families over time or released from bondage when their debts were considered paid off through their work. But a long-distance commercial trade in slaves also flourished. For several centuries, Middle Eastern and North African traders had furnished local rulers with a range of fine, imported products in exchange for black laborers. Some of these slaves had been debtors, while others were captured in raids and wars.

One fifteenth-century Italian who witnessed Portuguese and Muslim slave trading noted that the Arabs "have many Berber horses, which they trade, and take to the Land of the Blacks, exchanging them with the rulers for slaves. Ten or fifteen slaves are given for one of these horses, according to their quality." Portuguese traders quickly realized how lucrative the trade in slaves

could be for them, too. The same Italian observer continued, “Slaves are brought to the market town of Hoden; there they are divided. . . . [Some] are taken . . . and sold to the Portuguese leaseholders [in Arguin]. As a result every year the Portuguese carry away . . . a thousand slaves.”

Although in 1482 the Portuguese built an outpost, Elmina, on West Africa’s Gold Coast, they primarily traded through African-controlled commercial networks. Often Portuguese merchants traded slaves and local products to other Africans for gold. The local African kingdoms were too strong for the Portuguese to attack, and African rulers traded—or chose not to trade—according to their own self-interest.

Despite preventing the Portuguese from directly colonizing them, West African societies were profoundly affected by the new Atlantic slave trade. Portuguese traders enriched favored African rulers not only with gold and other luxury products but also with guns. As a result, they exacerbated conflicts among African communities and helped redraw the political map of West Africa. In Guinea and Senegambia, where most sixteenth-century slaves came from, small kingdoms expanded to “service” the trade. Some of their rulers became comparatively rich. Farther south, the kings of Kongo used the slave trade to expand their regional power and voluntarily adopted Christianity, just as rulers farther north had converted to Islam. Kongo flourished until the late sixteenth century, when rival powers from the interior destroyed it.

Although slavery had long been practiced in many parts of the Eastern Hemisphere, there were ominous differences in the slavery that arose once the Portuguese began voyaging to West Africa. First, the unprecedented magnitude of the trade resulted in a demographic catastrophe for West Africa and its peoples. Before the Atlantic slave trade finally ended in the nineteenth century, nearly 12 million Africans would be shipped in terrible conditions across the sea. Slavery on this scale had been unknown to Europeans since the collapse of the Roman Empire. Second, African slaves were subjected to new extremes of dehumanization. In medieval Europe and in West Africa itself, most slaves had lived in their masters’ households and primarily performed domestic service. Africans shipped to Arab lands endured harsher conditions, but were regarded as humans. But by 1450 the Portuguese and Spanish created large slave-labor plantations on their Atlantic and Mediterranean islands (see Technology and Culture: Sugar Production in the Americas). These plantations produced sugar for European markets, using capital supplied by Italian

investors to buy African slaves who toiled until death. In short, Africans enslaved by Europeans were regarded as property rather than as persons of low status; as such, they were consigned to labor that was unending, exhausting, and mindless. By 1600 the “new slavery” had become a central, brutal component of the Atlantic world.

Finally, race became the ideological basis of the new slavery. Africans’ blackness, along with their alien religion and customs, dehumanized them in European eyes. As their racial prejudice hardened, Europeans justified enslaving blacks as their Christian duty. From the fifteenth century onward, European Christianity made few attempts to soften slavery’s rigors, and race defined a slave. Slavery became a lifelong, hereditary, and despised status.

### Europeans Reach America, 1492–1541

Europeans’ varying motivations for expanding their horizons converged in the fascinating, contradictory figure of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), the son of a weaver from the Italian port of Genoa. Columbus’s

## Sugar Production in the Americas

Beginning with Christopher Columbus's first expedition, organisms ranging from bacteria to human beings crossed the Atlantic in both directions. This Columbian exchange had wide-ranging ecological, economic, political, and cultural consequences for the lands and peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. One significant set of consequences arose from the transfer of Mediterranean sugar production to the Americas. Out of this transfer came the single-crop plantation system, based on enslaved African labor, and a new consumer product that revolutionized diets and, quite literally, taste in Europe and its colonies.

Domesticated in New Guinea before 8000 B.C., sugar cane was one of the earliest wild plants harvested by human beings. By 350 B.C. sugar was an ingredient in several dishes favored by elites in India, from where it spread to the Mediterranean world. It became a significant commodity in the Mediterranean in the eighth century A.D. when expanding Arabs carried it as far west as Spain and Morocco. The Mediterranean would remain the center of sugar production for Europe over the next seven centuries.

The basic process of making sugar from the sugar cane plant changed little over time. (Sugar made from sugar beets did not become widespread until the nineteenth century.) The earliest producers discovered that

one of the six species of cane, *Saccharum officinarum*, produced the most sugar in the shortest span of time. The optimal time for harvesting was when the cane had grown twelve to fifteen feet in height, with stalks about two inches thick. At this point, it was necessary to extract the juice from the plant and then the sucrose (a carbohydrate) from the juice as quickly as possible or risk spoilage. Sugar makers crushed the cane fibers in order to extract the liquid, which they then heated so that it evaporated, leaving the sucrose—or sugar—in the form of crystals or molasses, depending on its temperature.

Sugar production was central to the emerging Atlantic world during the fifteenth century, after Spanish and Portuguese planters established large sugar plantations in the Madeira, Canary, and Cape Verde islands off Africa's Atlantic coast. Initially, the islands' labor force included some free Europeans, but enslaved Africans soon predominated. The islands were the birthplace of the European colonial plantation system. Planters focused entirely on the production of a single export crop and sought to maximize profits by minimizing labor costs. Although some planters used servants, the largest-scale, most profitable plantations imported slaves and worked them as hard as possible until they died. Utilizing such methods, the island planters soon outstripped the production of older sugar makers in the

Mediterranean. By 1500 the Spanish and Portuguese had successfully tapped new markets across Europe, especially among the wealthy classes.

On his second voyage in 1493, Columbus took a cargo of sugar from the Canaries to Hispaniola. Early efforts by Spanish colonists to produce sugar failed because they lacked efficient milling technology, because the Taíno Indians were dying so quickly from epidemic diseases, and because most colonists concentrated on mining gold. But as miners quickly exhausted Hispaniola's limited gold, the enslaved Africans brought to work in the mines became available for sugar production. In 1515 a planter named Gonzalo de Velloso hired some experienced sugar masters from the Canaries who urged him to import a more efficient type of mill. The mill featured two vertical rollers that could be powered by either animals or water, through which laborers passed the cane in order to crush it. With generous subsidies from the Spanish crown, the combination of vertical-roll mills and slave labor led to a rapid proliferation of sugar plantations in Spain's island colonies, with some using as many as five hundred slaves. But when Spain discovered gold and silver in Mexico and the Andes, its interest in sugar declined almost as rapidly as it had arisen.

Portugal's colony of Brazil emerged as the major source of sugar in the sixteenth century. Here, too, planters established the system of large plantations and enslaved Africans. By 1526 Brazil was exporting shiploads of sugar annually, and before the end of the century it supplied most of the sugar consumed in Europe. Shortly after 1600 Brazilian planters either invented or imported a three-roller mill that increased production still further and became the Caribbean standard for several more centuries. Portugal's sugar monopoly proved short-lived. Between 1588 and 1591, English "sea dogs" captured and diverted thirty-four sugar-laden vessels during their nation's war with Spain and Portugal. In 1630 the Netherlands seized Brazil's prime sugar-producing region and increased annual production to a century-high 30,000 tons. Ten years later some Dutch sugar and slave traders, seeking to expand their activity, shared the technology of sugar production with English planters in Barbados, who were looking for a new crop following disappointing profits from tobacco and cotton. The combination of sugar and slaves took hold so quickly that, within three years, Barbados' annual output rose to 150 tons.

Sugar went on to become the economic heart of the Atlantic economy (see Chapter 3). Its price dropped so low that even many poor Europeans could afford it. As a result, sugar became central to European diets as they

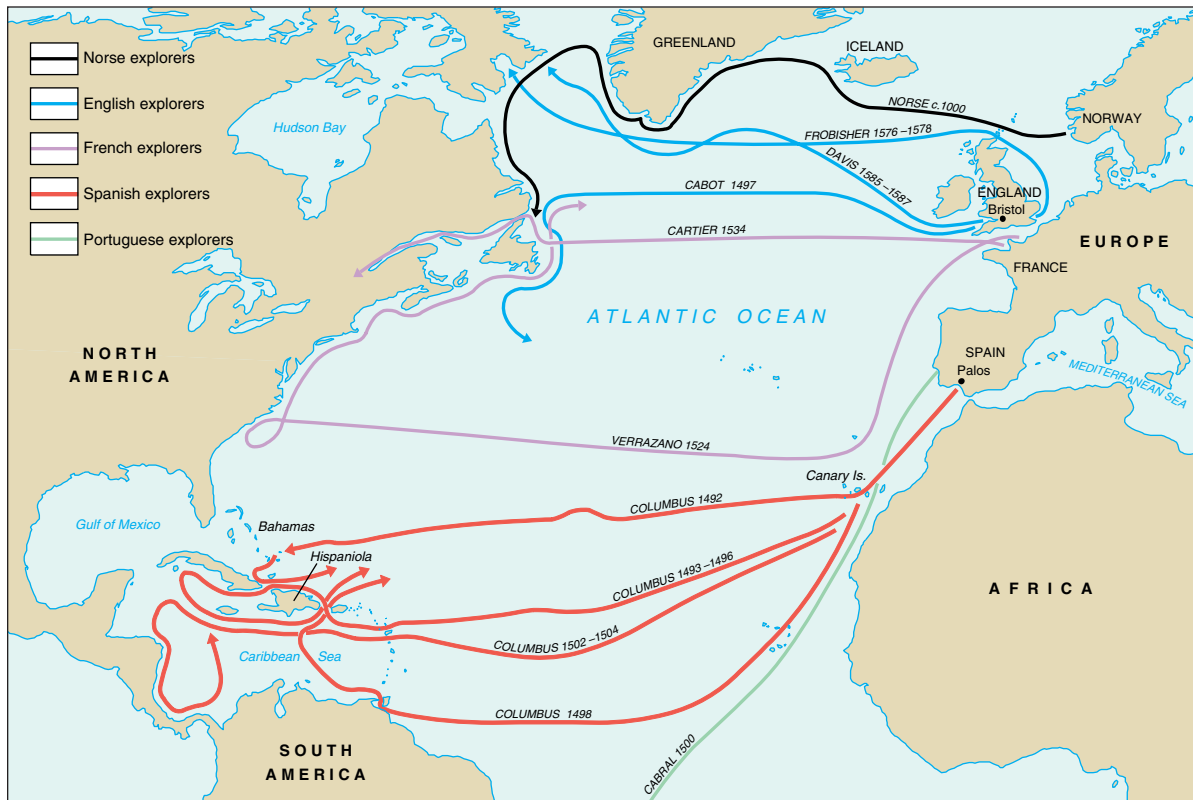


were revolutionized by the Columbian exchange. Like tobacco, coffee, and several other products of the exchange, sugar and such sugar products as rum, produced from molasses, proved habit-forming, making sugar even more attractive to profit-seeking planters and merchants.

More than any other single commodity, sugar sustained the early slave trade in the Americas, facilitating slavery's spread to tobacco, rice, indigo, and other plantation crops as well as to domestic service and other forms of labor. Competition between British and French sugar producers in the West Indies later fueled their nations' imperial rivalry (see Chapter 4) and eventually led New England's merchants to resist British imperial controls—a resistance that helped prepare the way for the American Revolution (see Chapter 5).

### Focus Questions

- What was the role played by Spain's and Portugal's island colonies in revolutionizing sugar production?
- How did developments in mill technology interact with other factors to make sugar the most profitable crop produced in colonial America?



**MAP 2.3**  
**Major Transatlantic Explorations, 1000-1587**

Following Columbus's 1492 voyage, Spain's rivals soon began laying claim to parts of the New World based on the voyages of Cabot for England, Cabral for Portugal, and Verrazano for France. Later English and French exploration focused on finding a passage to Asia around or through Canada.

maritime experience, self-taught geographical learning, and keen imagination led him to conclude that Asia could be reached by sailing westward across the Atlantic. By the early 1480s he was obsessed with this idea. Religious fervor led Columbus to dream of carrying Christianity around the globe and liberating Jerusalem from Muslim rule, but he also burned with ambition to win wealth and glory.

Columbus would not be the first European to venture far out into the Atlantic. Besides the early Norse (see Chapter 1), English fishermen in the North Atlantic may already have landed on the North American coast. But Columbus was unique in the persistence with which he hawked his “enterprise of the Indies” around the royal courts of western Europe. John II of Portugal showed interest until Días's discovery of the Cape of Good Hope promised a surer way to India. Finally, in 1492, hoping to break a threatened Portuguese monopoly on direct trade with Asia, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain

accepted Columbus's offer. Picking up the westward-blowing trade winds at the Canary Islands, Columbus's three small ships reached Guanahaní within a month (see Map 2.3).

Word of Columbus's discovery caught Europeans' imaginations. To forestall competition between them as well as potential rivals, Isabella and Portugal's King John II in 1492 signed the Treaty of Tordesillas (see Map 2.4). The treaty drew a line in the mid-Atlantic dividing all future discoveries between Spain and Portugal. After Isabella sent Columbus back to explore further, he established a colony on Hispaniola, the Caribbean island today occupied by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Columbus proved to be a poor administrator, and he was shunted aside after his last voyages (1498–1502). He died an embittered man, convinced that he had reached the threshold of Asia only to be cheated of his rightful rewards.

England's Henry VII (ruled 1485–1509) ignored the Treaty of Tordesillas and sent an Italian navigator, John



Cabot, to explore the north Atlantic in 1497. Sailing past Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the rich Grand Banks fisheries, Cabot claimed everything he saw and the lands beyond them for England. Like Columbus, Cabot thought that he had reached Asia.

The more Europeans explored, the more apparent it became that a vast landmass blocked the route to Asia. In 1500 the Portuguese claimed Brazil (much of which lay, unexpectedly, east of the line established in the Treaty of Tordesillas), and other voyages soon revealed a continuous coastline from the Caribbean to Brazil. In 1507 this landmass got its name when a publisher brought out a collection of voyagers' tales. One of the chroniclers was an Italian named Amerigo Vespucci. With a shrewd marketing touch, the publisher devised a catchy name for the new continent: America.

Getting past America and reaching Asia remained the early explorers' primary aim. In 1513 the Spaniard Vasco Núñez de Balboa chanced upon the Pacific Ocean when he crossed the narrow isthmus of Panama. Then in 1519 the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan, sailing for Spain, began a voyage around the world by way of the stormy straits (later named for him) at South America's southern tip. In an incredible feat of endurance, he crossed the Pacific to the Philippines, only to die fighting with local natives. One of his five ships and fifteen emaciated sailors finally returned to Spain in 1522, the first people to have sailed around the world.

France joined the race for Asia's fabled wealth in 1524 when King Francis I (ruled 1515–1547) dispatched



**MAP 2.4**

**The Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1610**

By 1610 Spain dominated Latin America, including Portugal's possessions. Having devoted its energies to exploiting Mexico and the Caribbean, Spain had not yet expanded into what is now the United States, aside from establishing outposts in Florida and New Mexico.

an Italian navigator, Giovanni da Verrazano, to find a more direct “northwest passage” to the Pacific. Verrazano explored the North American coast from the Carolinas to Newfoundland. In three subsequent voyages between 1534 and 1542, the French explorer Jacques Cartier carefully probed the coasts of Newfoundland, Quebec, and Nova Scotia and sailed up the St. Lawrence River as far as present-day Montreal. Although encountering large numbers of Native Americans, Verrazano and Cartier found no gold and no northwest passage.

### **Spain’s Conquistadors, 1492–1536**

Columbus was America’s first slave trader and the first Spanish conqueror, or conquistador. At his struggling colony on Hispaniola, he enslaved Native people and created *encomiendas*—grants awarding Indian land,

labor, and tribute to wealthy colonists. The earliest *encomiendas* were gold mines, which produced limited profits for a few mine operators.

From the beginning, *encomiendas* harshly exploited Native Americans, who died in droves from overwork, malnutrition, and disease. Then Portuguese slavers stepped in, supplying shiploads of Africans to replace the perishing Indians. Spanish missionaries who came to Hispaniola to convert the Indians quickly sent back grim reports of Indian exploitation; King Ferdinand (who had made money by selling *encomiendas*) felt sufficiently shocked to attempt to forbid the practice. But while the missionaries deemed Native Americans potential Christians, they joined most other colonizers in condemning Africans as less than fully human and thereby beyond hope of redemption. Blacks could therefore be exploited without limit. In Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other islands, they were forced to perform back-

breaking work on Spanish sugar plantations (see *Technology and Culture: Sugar Production in the Americas*).

Meanwhile, Spanish settlers fanned out across the Caribbean in search of Indian slaves and gold. In 1519 a restless nobleman, Hernán Cortés (1485–1547), led six hundred troops to the Mexican coast. Destroying his boats, he enlisted the support of enemies and discontented subjects of the Aztecs (see Chapter 1) in a quest to conquer that empire. Besides military support, Cortés gained the services of Malintzin (or Malinche), later known as Doña Marina, an Aztec woman brought up among the Maya. Malintzin served as Cortés' interpreter, diplomatic broker, and mistress.

Upon reaching the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, the Spanish were stunned by its size and wealth. "We were amazed and said that it was like the enchantments they tell of [in stories], and some of our soldiers even asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream," recalled one soldier. Certainly, the golden gifts that the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma II (ruled 1502–1520) initially offered the invaders were no dream. "They picked up the gold and fingered it like monkeys," one Aztec recalled. "Their bodies swelled with greed, and their hunger was ravenous. They hungered like pigs for that gold."

The Spanish ignored Moctezuma's offer, raiding his palace and treasury, and melting down all the gold they could find. Despite their emperor's imprisonment, the Aztecs regrouped and drove the invaders from the city, killing three hundred Spanish and four thousand of their Indian allies before reinforcements from Cuba enabled the Spanish to prevail. The victory was also ensured by the smallpox epidemic the Spanish brought with them, the same one that was killing large numbers of Indians on Hispaniola and the other islands. Lacking any previous contact with the disease, the Aztecs' and other Indians' immune systems were ill equipped to resist it. Just when the Aztecs took back Tenochtitlan, the epidemic struck. When the Spanish finally recaptured the city, wrote one Spanish chronicler, "the streets were so filled with dead and sick people that our men walked over nothing but bodies." By striking down other Indians, friends as well as foes, the epidemic enabled the Spanish to consolidate their control over much of central Mexico. By 1521 Cortés had overthrown the Aztecs and began to build a Spanish capital, Mexico City, on the ruins of Tenochtitlan.

Over the remainder of the sixteenth century, other conquistadors and officials established a great Spanish empire stretching from New Spain (Mexico) southward to Chile (see Map 2.4). The most important of these conquests was that of the Inca empire (see Chapter 1)

between 1532 and 1536 by a second reckless conquistador, Francisco Pizarro (c. 1478–1541). As with the Aztecs, smallpox and native unfamiliarity with European ways and weapons enabled a small army to overpower a mighty emperor and his realm. The human cost of the Spanish conquest was enormous. Mourned a vanquished Aztec,

Broken spears lie in the roads;  
We have torn our hair in our grief.  
The houses are roofless now. . .  
And the walls are splattered with gore. . .  
We have pounded our hands in despair  
Against the adobe walls.

When Cortés landed in 1519, central Mexico's population had been between 13 and 25 million. By 1600 it had shrunk to about seven hundred thousand. Peru and other regions experienced similar devastation. America had witnessed the greatest demographic disaster in world history.

### The Columbian Exchange

The emerging Atlantic world linked not only peoples but also animals, plants, and microbes from Europe, Africa, and the Americas. After 1492 Native Americans died

above all because they lacked antibodies that could ward off European and African infections—especially deadly, highly communicable smallpox. From the first years of contact, frightful epidemics of smallpox and other unknown diseases scourged the defenseless Indian communities. In the larger West Indian islands, 95 percent of the native population perished within thirty years. “The people began to die very fast, and many in a short space,” an Englishman later remarked, adding that the deaths invariably occurred after Europeans had visited an area. Whole villages perished at once, with no one left to bury the dead. Such devastation directly facilitated European colonization everywhere in the Americas, whether accompanied by a military effort or not.

The Columbian exchange—the biological encounter of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres—affected the everyday lives of peoples throughout the Atlantic world. Besides diseases, sixteenth-century Europeans introduced horses, cattle, sheep, swine, chickens, wheat and other grains, coffee, sugar cane, numerous fruits and garden vegetables, and many species of weeds, insects, and rodents to America. In the next century, enslaved Africans carried rice and yams with them across the Atlantic. The list of American gifts to Europe and Africa was equally impressive: corn, many varieties of beans, white and sweet potatoes, the tropical root crop manioc, tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, peanuts, vanilla, cacao, avocados, pineapples, chilis, tobacco, and turkeys. Often, several centuries passed before new plants became widely accepted across the ocean. For example, many Europeans initially suspected that potatoes were aphrodisiacs and that tomatoes were poisonous, and few Indians would ever grow wheat.

European weeds and domestic animals drastically altered many American environments. Especially in temperate zones, livestock devoured indigenous plants, enabling hardier European weeds to take over. As a result, wild animals that had fed on the plants stayed away, depriving Indians of a critical source of food. Free-roaming livestock, especially hogs, also invaded Native Americans’ cornfields. In this way, colonists’ ways of life impinged directly on those of Native peoples. Settlers’ crops, intensively cultivated on lands never replenished by lying fallow, often exhausted American soil. But the worldwide exchange of food products also enriched human diets and later made enormous population growth possible.

Another dimension of the Atlantic world was the mixing of peoples. During the sixteenth century, about three hundred thousand Spaniards immigrated, 90 percent of them male. Particularly in towns, a racially

blended people emerged as these men married Indian women, giving rise to the large mestizo (mixed Spanish-Indian) population of Mexico and other Latin American countries. Lesser numbers of *métis*, as the French termed people of both Indian and European descent, would appear in the French and English colonies of North America. Throughout the Americas, particularly in plantation colonies, European men fathered mulatto children with enslaved African women, and African-Indian unions occurred in most regions. Colonial societies differed significantly in their official attitudes toward the different kinds of interracial unions and in their classifications of the children who resulted.

The Americas supplied seemingly limitless wealth for Spain. Some Spaniards grew rich from West Indian sugar plantations and Mexican sheep and cattle ranches, and immense quantities of silver crossed the Atlantic after rich mines in Mexico and Peru began producing in the 1540s. Spain took in far more American silver than its economy could absorb, setting off inflation that eventually engulfed all Europe. Bent on dominating Europe, the Spanish kings needed ever more American silver to finance their wars. Several times they went bankrupt, and in the 1560s their efforts to squeeze more taxes from their subjects helped provoke the revolt of Spain’s rich Netherlands provinces (see below). In the end, American wealth proved to be a mixed blessing for Spain.

## FOOTHOLDS IN NORTH AMERICA, 1512–1625

Most European immigrants in the sixteenth century flocked to Mexico, the Caribbean, and points farther south. But a minority helped extend the Atlantic world to North America through exploratory voyages, fishing expeditions, trade with Native Americans, and piracy and smuggling. Except for a Spanish base at St. Augustine, Florida, the earliest attempts to plant colonies failed, generally because they were predicated on unrealistic expectations of fabulous wealth and pliant natives.

After 1600 the ravaging of Indian populations by disease and the rise of English, French, and Dutch power finally made colonization possible. By 1614 Spain, England, France, and the Netherlands had made often overlapping territorial claims and established North American footholds (see Maps 2.4 and 2.5). Within another decade, each colony developed a distinct economic orientation and its own approach to Native Americans.

### Spain’s Northern Frontier, 1512–1625

The Spanish had built their American empire by subduing the Aztec, Inca, and other Indian states. The dream of more such finds drew would-be conquistadors to lands north of Mexico. “As it was his object to find another treasure like that . . . of Peru,” a witness wrote of one such man, Hernando de Soto, he “would not be content with good lands nor pearls.”

The earliest of these invaders was Juan Ponce de León, the conqueror of Puerto Rico, who in 1512–1513 and again in 1521 trudged through Florida in search of gold and slaves. His quest ended in death in a skirmish with Native Americans. The most astonishing early expedition began in Florida in 1527. After provoking several attacks by Apalachee Indians, the three hundred explorers were separated into several parties. All were thought to have perished until eight years later, when four survivors, led by Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and including an African slave, Estevanico, arrived in northern Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca’s account of their journey from Florida through Texas and New Mexico is the most compelling European literary work on North America before permanent colonization.

Cabeza de Vaca provided direct inspiration for the two most formidable attempts at Spanish conquest. De Soto and his party in 1539–1543 blundered from Tampa Bay to the Appalachians to the southern Plains, scouring the land for gold and alienating Native people wherever they went. “Think, then,” one Indian chief appealed to him vainly,

what must be the effect on me and mine, of the sight of you ]and your people, whom we have at no time seen, astride the fierce brutes, your horses, entering with such speed and fury into my country, that we had no tidings of your coming—things so absolutely new, as to strike awe and terror into our hearts.

In 1540 a coalition of Native Americans gathered at the Mississippian city of Mabila to confront the invaders. Although victorious militarily, the expedition’s own losses doomed the Spanish effort. Most of their

**MAP 2.5**  
**European Imperial Claims and Settlements in Eastern North America, 1565–1625**

By 1625 four European nations contended for territory on North America’s Atlantic coast. Except for St. Augustine, Florida, all settlements established before 1607 had been abandoned by 1625.



horses died from arrow wounds while their livestock (their principal source of food aside from the corn they seized) scattered. Thereafter, the expedition floundered.

Although de Soto died without finding gold or extending Spanish rule, his and other expeditions spread epidemics that destroyed most of the remaining Mississippian societies (see Chapter 1). By the time Europeans returned to the southeastern interior late in the seventeenth century, only the Natchez on the lower Mississippi River still inhabited their sumptuous temple-mound center and remained under the rule of a Great Sun monarch. Depopulated groups like the Cherokees and Creeks had adopted the less-centralized village life of other eastern Indians.

As de Soto roamed the Southeast, some Spanish officials in Mexico heard rumors of fabulous wealth that lay to the north in the “Seven Golden Cities of Cíbola.” In 1540–1542 Francisco Vásquez de Coronado led a massive expedition bent on finding and conquering these cities. Coronado plundered several pueblos on the Rio Grande and wandered from the Grand Canyon to present-day Kansas before returning to Mexico, finding no gold but embittering many Native Americans toward the Spanish. Other expeditions along the California coast and up the Colorado River likewise proved fruitless.

For several decades after these failed ventures, Spain’s principal interest north of Mexico and the Caribbean lay in establishing strategic bases to keep out

French and English intruders. In 1565 Spain established the first successful European settlement in North America, a fortress at St. Augustine, Florida. Despite attempts to strengthen Florida and to build forts linking it to Mexico, St. Augustine remained a lone military stronghold and a base for a chain of religious missions extending north to Chesapeake Bay. Rejecting missionary efforts to reorder their lives, the Guale, Powhatan, and other Indians rebelled and forced the closing of all the missions before 1600. Franciscan missionaries renewed their efforts in Florida in the early seventeenth century and secured the nominal allegiance of about sixteen thousand Guale and Timucua Indians. But epidemics in the 1610s killed about half the converts.

Meanwhile, in the 1580s, Spanish missionaries had returned to the Southwest, preaching Christianity and scouting the area’s potential wealth. Encouraged by their reports, New Spain’s viceroy in 1598 commissioned Juan de Oñate to lead five hundred Spaniards, mestizos, Mexican Indians, and African slaves into the upper Rio Grande Valley. They seized a pueblo of the Tewa Indians, renamed it San Juan, and proclaimed the royal colony of New Mexico.

The Spanish encountered swift resistance at the mesa-top pueblo of Ácoma in December 1598. When the Ácoma Indians refused Spanish demands for provisions for an exploring expedition, fifteen Spanish soldiers ascended the mesa to obtain the goods by force. But the natives resisted and killed most of the soldiers. Determined to make an example of Ácoma, Oñate ordered massive retaliation. In January Spanish troops captured the pueblo, killing eight hundred inhabitants in the process. Oñate forced surviving men to have one foot cut off and, along with the women and children, to be servants of the soldiers and missionaries. Two prominent leaders also had their right hands amputated.

Despite having crushed Ácoma and forced other Pueblo Indians to serve in Spanish *encomiendas*, the new colony barely survived. The Spanish government replaced Oñate in 1606 because of mismanagement and excessive brutality toward the Indians, and seriously considered withdrawing from New Mexico altogether. Franciscan missionaries, aiming to save Pueblo Indian souls, persuaded the authorities to keep New Mexico alive. By 1630 Franciscans had been dispatched to more than fifty pueblos and nominally converted up to twenty thousand Indians. But resistance was common because, as the leading Franciscan summarized it, “the main and general answer given [by the Pueblos] for not becoming Christians is that when they do, . . . they are at once compelled to pay tribute and render personal service.”

New Mexico began, then, amidst uneasy tensions between colonists and natives.

### France: Initial Failures and Canadian Success, 1541–1610

The voyages of Verrazano and Cartier (see above) marked the beginning of French activity in North America. France made its first colonizing attempt in 1541 when Cartier returned with ten ships carrying four hundred soldiers, three hundred sailors, and a few women to the St. Lawrence Valley. Cartier had earned Native Americans' distrust during his previous expeditions, and his construction of a fortified settlement on Stadacona Indian land (near the modern city of Quebec) removed all possibility of friendly relations. Over the next two years, the French suffered heavy casualties from Stadacona attacks and from scurvy (for which the Stadaconas could have shown them a cure) before abandoning the colony.

The failed French expedition seemed to verify the Spanish opinion, voiced by the cardinal of Seville, that "this whole coast as far [south] as Florida is utterly unproductive." The next French effort at colonization came in 1562 when French Huguenots (Calvinists) briefly established a base in what is now South Carolina. In 1564 the Huguenots founded a settlement near present-day Jacksonville, Florida. Sensing a Protestant threat to their control of the Caribbean, Spanish forces destroyed the settlement a year later, executing all 132 male defenders. These failures, along with a civil war between French Catholics and Huguenots, temporarily hindered France's colonizing efforts.

Meanwhile, French and other European fishermen were working the plenteous Grand Banks fisheries off the coast of Newfoundland. Going ashore to dry their fish, some French sailors bartered with Beothuk Indians for skins of beaver, a species almost extinct in Europe. By the late sixteenth century, as European demand for beaver hats skyrocketed, a French-dominated fur trade blossomed. Before the end of the century, French traders were returning annually to sites from Newfoundland to New England and along the lower St. Lawrence.

Unlike explorers such as de Soto and colonizers such as those at Roanoke (see below), most traders recognized the importance of reciprocity in dealing with Native Americans. Consequently, they were generally more successful. In exchange for pelts, they traded metal tools such as axes and knives, cloth, and glass beads. Seen by the Europeans as trinkets, glass beads were considered by northeastern Indians to possess spiritual

power comparable to the power of quartz, mica, and other sacred substances that they had long obtained via trade networks (see Chapter 1). By the next century, specialized factories in Europe would be producing both cloth and glass for the "Indian trade."

Seeing the lucrative Canadian trade as a source of revenue, the French government dispatched the explorer Samuel de Champlain to establish the colony of New France at Quebec in 1608. The French decided that a colony was the surest means of deterring English, Dutch, and independent French competitors. Having previously explored much of the Northeast and headed a short-lived French settlement at Acadia, Champlain was familiar with Indian politics and diplomacy in the region. Building on this understanding, he shrewdly allied with the Montagnais and Algonquins of the St. Lawrence and the Hurons of the lower Great Lakes. He agreed to help these allies defeat their enemies, the Mohawks of the Iroquois Confederacy, who sought direct access to European traders on the St. Lawrence. Champlain's new allies were equally shrewd in recognizing the advantage that French guns would give them against the usually dreaded Mohawks.

In July 1609 Champlain and two other Frenchmen accompanied sixty Montagnais and Huron warriors to Lake Champlain (which the explorer named for himself). Soon they encountered two hundred Mohawks at Point Ticonderoga near the lake's southern tip. After a night of

mutual taunting, the two parties met on shore the following morning. As the main French-Indian column neared its opponents, Champlain stepped ahead and confronted the Mohawks' three spectacularly attired war leaders.

When I saw them make a move to draw their bows upon us, I took aim with my arquebus [a kind of gun] and shot straight at one of the three chiefs, and with this same shot two fell to the ground, and one of their companions was wounded and died a little later. . . . As I was reloading my arquebus, one of my [French] companions fired a shot from within the woods, which astonished them again so much that, seeing their chiefs dead, they lost courage and took to flight.

The French and their allies pursued the fleeing Mohawks, killing about fifty and capturing a dozen prisoners. A few pro-French Indians suffered minor arrow wounds.

The battle of Lake Champlain marked the end of casual Indian-European encounters in the Northeast and the beginning of a deadly era of trade, diplomacy, and warfare. Through their alliance with the powerful Hurons, the French gained access to the thick beaver pelts of the Canadian interior in exchange for European goods and protection from the Iroquois. These economic and diplomatic arrangements defined the course of New France's history for the rest of the seventeenth century.

### England and the Atlantic World, 1558–1603

When Elizabeth I became queen in 1558, England was a minor power; Spain and France grappled for supremacy in Europe; and Spain and Portugal garnered wealth from the Americas. Although England and Spain had been at peace, the largely Protestant English worried about Spanish interventions against Calvinists in France and the Netherlands, and about the pope's call for Elizabeth's overthrow. In securing the loyalty of England's rival Protestant movements (see above), Elizabeth shifted toward a militantly anti-Catholic foreign policy. Secretly, she stepped up her aid to the Calvinist rebels and encouraged English "sea dogs" like John Hawkins and Francis Drake—privateers who plundered Spanish ships.

The Anglo-Spanish rivalry in the Atlantic extended to Ireland after 1565, when Spain and the pope began directly aiding Irish Catholics' resistance to English rule. In a war that ground on through the 1580s, the English drove the Irish clans out of their strongholds, especially

in northern Ireland, or Ulster, and established their own settlements ("plantations") of English and Scottish Protestants. The English practiced total war to break the rebellious population's spirit, inflicting starvation and mass slaughter by destroying villages in the winter.

Elizabeth's generals justified these atrocities by claiming that the Irish were "savages" and that Irish customs, religion, and method of fighting absolved the English from guilt in waging exceptionally cruel warfare. Ireland thus furnished precedents for later English tactics and rationales for crushing Native Americans.

England had two objectives in the Western Hemisphere in the 1570s. The first was to find the northwest passage to Asia and discover gold on the way; the second, in Drake's words, was to "singe the king of Spain's beard" by raiding Spanish fleets and ports from Spain to the West Indies. The search for the northwest passage only led to such embarrassments as explorer Martin Frobisher's return from the Canadian Arctic with a shipload of "fool's gold." However, privateering raids proved spectacularly successful and profitable for their financial backers, including merchants, gentry, government leaders, and Elizabeth herself. The most breathtaking enterprise was Drake's voyage around the world (1577–1580) in quest of sites for colonies. During this voyage, he sailed up the California coast and entered Drake's Bay, north of San Francisco, where he traded with Miwok Indians.

Now deadly rivals, Spain and England sought to outmaneuver one another in America. In 1572 the Spanish tried to fortify a Jesuit mission on the Chesapeake Bay. They failed, largely because Powhatan Indians resisted. After an attempt to colonize Newfoundland failed, Sir Walter Raleigh obtained a royal patent (charter) in 1584 to start an English colony farther south, closer to the Spanish—a region the English soon named Virginia in honor of their virgin queen. Raleigh dispatched Arthur Barlowe to explore the region, and Barlowe returned singing the praises of Roanoke Island, its peaceable natives, and its ideal location as a base for anti-Spanish privateers. Raleigh then persuaded Elizabeth to dispatch a colonizing expedition to Roanoke.

At first all went well. The Roanoke Indians eagerly traded and shared their corn. Given such abundance and native hospitality, the colonists wondered why they should work at all. Refusing to grow their own food, they expected the Roanokes to feed them. By the first winter, the English had outlived their welcome. Fearing that the natives were about to attack, English soldiers killed Wingina, the Roanoke leader, in June 1586. When Raleigh's friend Drake visited soon after on his way back to England, many colonists joined him.



Thereafter, the Anglo-Spanish conflict repeatedly prevented English ships from returning to Roanoke to supply those who remained. When a party finally arrived in 1590, it found only rusty armor, moldy books, and the word *CROATOAN* cut into a post. Although the stranded colonists were presumably living among the Croatoan Indians of Cape Hatteras, the exact fate of the “lost colony” remains a mystery to this day.

Roanoke’s brief history underscored several stubborn realities about European expansion to North America. First, even a large-scale, well-financed colonizing effort could fail, given the settlers’ lack of preparedness for the American environment. Second, colonists did not bring enough provisions for the first winter and disdained growing their own food. Although some settlers were curious and open-minded about the Indians’ way of life, most assumed that Native Americans would submit to their authority and feed them while they looked for gold—a sure recipe for trouble. Third, colonizing attempts would have to be self-financing; financially strapped monarchs like Elizabeth I would not throw good money after bad. Fourth, conflict with the Spanish hung menacingly over every European attempt to gain a foothold in North America.

In 1588, while Roanoke struggled, England won a spectacular naval victory over the Armada, a huge invasion fleet sent into the English Channel by Spain’s Philip II. This famous victory preserved England’s independence and confirmed its status as a major power in the Atlantic.

### The Beginnings of English Colonization, 1603–1625

Anglo-Spanish relations took a new turn after 1603, when Elizabeth died and her cousin, the king of Scotland, ascended the English throne as James I. The cautious, peace-loving king signed a truce with Spain in 1604. Alarmed by Dutch naval victories (see below), the Spanish now considered England the lesser danger. Consequently, Spain’s new king, Philip III (ruled 1598–1621), conceded what his predecessors had always refused: a free hand to another power in part of the Americas. Spain renounced its claims to Virginia, and England could now colonize unmolested.

The question of how to finance English colonies remained. Neither the crown nor Parliament would agree to spend money on colonies, and Roanoke’s failure had proved that private fortunes were inadequate to finance successful settlements. Political and financial leaders determined that joint-stock companies—business corporations that would amass capital through

sales of stock to the public—could raise enough funds for American settlement. Such stock offerings produced large sums with limited risk for each investor.

On April 10, 1606, James I granted a charter authorizing overlapping grants of land in Virginia to two separate joint-stock companies, one based in London and the other in Plymouth. The Virginia Company of Plymouth received a grant extending south from modern Maine to the Potomac River, and the Virginia Company of London’s lands ran north from Cape Fear to the Hudson River. Both companies dispatched colonists in 1607.

The Virginia Company of Plymouth sent 120 men to Sagadahoc, at the mouth of the Kennebec River. Half left in 1608 after alienating nearby Abenaki Indians and enduring a hard Maine winter, and the rest went back to England a year later. Soon thereafter the company disbanded.

The Virginia Company of London barely avoided a similar failure. Its first expedition included many gentlemen who disdained work and expected riches to fall into their laps. They chose a site on the James River in May 1607 and named it Jamestown. Discipline quickly fell apart and, as at Roanoke, the colonists neglected to plant crops. When relief ships arrived in January 1608 with reinforcements, only 38 survivors remained out of 105 immigrants.

Short of workers who could farm, fish, hunt, and do carpentry, Virginia also lacked effective leadership. The council’s first president hoarded supplies, and its second was lazy and indecisive. By September 1608, three councilors had died and three others had returned to England, leaving only a brash soldier of fortune, Captain John Smith.

Twenty-eight years old and of yeoman origin, Smith had experience fighting Spaniards and Turks that prepared him for assuming control in Virginia. Organizing all but the sick in work gangs, he ensured sufficient food and housing for winter. Applying lessons learned in his soldiering days, he laid down rules for maintaining sanitation and hygiene to limit disease. Above all, he brought order through military discipline. During the next winter (1608–1609), Virginia lost just a dozen men out of two hundred.

Smith also became the colony’s diplomat. After Powhatan Indians captured him in late 1607, Smith displayed such courage that their *weroance* (chief), also named Powhatan, arranged an elaborate reconciliation ceremony in which his daughter Pocahontas “saved” Smith’s life during a mock execution. Smith maintained satisfactory relations with the Powhatans in part through his personality, but he also employed calculated

demonstrations of English military strength to mask the settlers' actual weakness.

John Smith prevented Virginia from disintegrating as Sagadahoc had. But when he returned to England in 1609 after being wounded in a gunpowder explosion, discipline again crumbled. Expecting the Indians to provide them with corn, the colonists had not laid away sufficient food for the winter. A survivor wrote,

So lamentable was our scarcity, that we were constrained to eat dogs, cats, rats, snakes, toadstools, horsehides, and what not; one man out of the misery endured, killing his wife powdered her up [with flour] to eat her, for which he was burned. Many besides fed on the corpses of dead men.

Of the five hundred residents at Jamestown in September 1609, about 400 died by May 1610. But an influx of new recruits, coupled with the reimposition of military rule, enabled Virginia to win the First Anglo-Powhatan War (1610–1614). The English population remained small, however, just 380 in 1616, and it had yet to produce anything of value for Virginia Company stockholders.

Tobacco emerged as Virginia's salvation. John Rolfe, an Englishman who married Pocahontas after the war, spent several years adapting a salable variety of Caribbean tobacco to conditions in Virginia. By 1619 the product commanded high prices, and that year Virginia exported large amounts to a newly emergent European market.

To attract labor and capital to its suddenly profitable venture, the Virginia Company awarded a fifty-acre "headright" for each person ("head") entering the colony, to whomever paid that person's passage. By paying the passage of prospective laborers, some enterprising planters accumulated sizable tracts of land. Thousands of young men and a few hundred women calculated that uncertainty in Virginia was preferable to continued unemployment and poverty in England. In return for their passage, they agreed to work as indentured servants for fixed terms, usually four to seven years. The Virginia Company abandoned military rule in 1619 and provided for an assembly to be elected by the "inhabitants" (apparently meaning only the planters). Although the assembly's actions were subject to the company's veto, it was the first representative legislature in North America.

By 1622 Virginia faced three serious problems. First, local officials systematically defrauded the shareholders by embezzling treasury funds, overcharging for supplies, and using company laborers to work their own tobacco fields. They profited, but the company sank deep into

debt. Second, the colony's population suffered from an appallingly high death rate. The majority of fatalities stemmed from malnutrition owing to the poor diets of the servants, or from salt poisoning, typhus, or dysentery contracted when the settlers drank the salty, polluted water from the lower James River. Most of the 3,500 immigrants entering Virginia from 1618 to 1622 died within three years. Finally, relations with the Powhatans steadily worsened after Pocahontas died in England in 1617 and Powhatan died a year later. Leadership passed to Opechancanough, who at first sought to accommodate the English. But relentless English expansion led to Indian discontent and to the rise of a powerful religious leader, Nemattanew, who urged the Powhatans to resist the English to the death. After some settlers killed Nemattanew, the Indians launched a surprise attack in 1622 that killed 347 of the 1,240 colonists. With much of their livestock destroyed, spring planting prevented, and disease spreading through cramped fortresses, hundreds more colonists died in the ensuing months.

After the Virginia Company sent more men, Governor Francis Wyatt reorganized the settlers and took the offensive during the Second Anglo-Powhatan War (1622–1632). Using tactics developed during the Irish war, Wyatt inflicted widespread starvation by destroying food supplies, conducted winter campaigns to drive Indians from their homes when they would suffer most, and fought (according to John Smith) as if he had "just cause to destroy them by all means possible." By 1625 the English had effectively won the war, and the Powhatans had lost their best chance of driving out the intruders.

The clash left the Virginia Company bankrupt and James I concerned over complaints against its officers. After receiving a report critical of the company's management, James revoked its charter in 1624, and Virginia became a royal colony. Only about five hundred colonists now lived in Virginia, including a handful of Africans who had been brought in since 1619. The vast majority of this population, white as well as black, consisted of unfree laborers, and most would die early deaths (see Chapter 3). The roots from which Virginia's Anglo-American and African-American peoples later grew were fragile indeed.

### **New England Begins, 1614–1625**

The next English colony, after Virginia, that proved permanent arose in New England. In 1614 the ever-enterprising John Smith, exploring its coast, gave New England its name. "Who," he asked, "can but approve this most excellent place, both for health and fertility?"

An admirer of Cortés, Smith planned to conquer its “goodly, strong, and well-proportioned [Indian] people” and establish a colony there. But his hopes came to nothing. As for the region’s Native peoples, a terrible epidemic spread by fishermen or traders devastated coastal communities by about 90 percent in 1616–1618. Later visitors found the ground littered with the “bones and skulls” of the unburied dead and acres of overgrown cornfields.

In 1620, against this tragic backdrop, the Virginia Company of London gave a patent to some London merchants headed by Thomas Weston for a settlement. Weston sent over twenty-four families (a total of 102 people) in a small, leaky ship called the *Mayflower*. The colonists promised to send lumber, furs, and fish back to Weston in England for seven years, after which they would own the tract.

The expedition’s leaders, but only half its members, were Separatist Puritans who had withdrawn from the Church of England and fled to the Netherlands to practice their religion freely. Fearing that their children were assimilating into Dutch culture, they decided to immigrate to America.

In November 1620 the *Mayflower* landed at Plymouth Bay, north of Virginia’s boundary in present-day Massachusetts. Knowing that they had no legal right to be there, the expedition’s leaders insisted that all the adult males in the group (including non-Separatists) sign the Mayflower Compact before they landed. By this document they constituted themselves a “civil body politic,” or government, under English rule, and established the colony of New Plymouth, or Plymouth.

Weakened by their journey and unprepared for winter, half the Pilgrims, as the colonists later came to be known, died within four months of landing. Those still alive in the spring of 1621 owed much to the aid of two English-speaking Native Americans. One was Squanto, a Wampanoag Indian who had been taken to Spain as a slave in 1614 and then escaped to England. Returning home with a colonizing expedition, he learned that most of the two thousand people of his village had perished in the recent epidemic. The other friendly Indian, an Abenaki from Maine named Samoset, had experience trading with the English. To prevent the colonists from stealing the natives’ food, Squanto showed them how to grow corn, using fish as fertilizer. Plymouth’s first harvest was marked by a festival, “at which time . . . we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, . . . some 90 men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted.” This festival became the basis for Thanksgiving, a holiday established in the nineteenth century.

Plymouth’s relations with the Native Americans soon worsened. The alliance that Squanto and Samoset had arranged between Plymouth and the Wampanoags, headed by Massasoit, had united two weak parties. But with their firearms the colonists became the dominant partner, forcing the Wampanoags to acknowledge English sovereignty. News of the Powhatan attack in 1622 hastened the colony’s militarization under the leadership of a professional soldier, Miles Standish. Standish threatened Plymouth’s “allies” with the colony’s monopoly of firepower. For although Massasoit remained loyal, many Wampanoags were offended by the colonists’ conduct.

Relations with Native Americans also enabled Plymouth to become economically self-sufficient. After the colony turned from communal farming to individually owned plots, its more-prosperous farmers produced corn surpluses, which they traded to nonfarming Abenakis in Maine for furs. Within a decade, Plymouth had attracted several hundred colonists.

The Plymouth colonists’ lasting importance was threefold. First, they constituted an outpost for Puritans dissenting from the Church of England. Second, they proved that a self-governing society consisting mostly of farm families could flourish in New England. Finally, they foreshadowed the aggressive methods that later generations of European Americans would use to gain mastery over Indians. In all three respects, Plymouth was the vanguard of a massive, voluntary migration of Puritans to New England in the 1630s (see Chapter 3).

### The Enterprising Dutch, 1609–1625

Among the most fervently Calvinist regions of Europe were the Dutch-speaking provinces of the Netherlands. The provinces had come under Spanish rule during the sixteenth century, but Spain’s religious intolerance and high taxes drove the Dutch to revolt beginning in 1566. Repeatedly unable to quell the revolt, Spain and the Dutch Republic agreed on a truce in 1609. By then the Netherlands was a wealthy commercial power. The Dutch built an empire stretching from Brazil to South Africa to Taiwan, and played a key role in colonizing North America.

Just as the French were routing the Mohawk Iroquois at Lake Champlain in 1609, Henry Hudson sailed up the river later named for him, traded with Native Americans, and claimed the land for the Netherlands. When Dutch traders returned the following year, some of their most eager customers were—not surprisingly—Mohawk. Having established lucrative ties with Indians on the lower Hudson River, Dutch traders

in 1614 built Fort Nassau near what would become Albany, and established the colony of New Netherland. In 1626 the Dutch bought an island at the mouth of the Hudson from local Indians and began a second settlement there. The Dutch named the island Manhattan and the settlement New Amsterdam.

New Netherlanders lived by the fur trade. Through the Mohawks, they relied on the Five Nations Iroquois, much as the French depended on the Hurons, as commercial clients and military allies. In the 1620s, to stimulate a flow of furs to New Netherland, Dutch traders obtained from coastal Indians large quantities of wampum—sacred shells like those used by Degawidah and Hiawatha to convey solemn “words” of condolence in rituals (see Chapter 1)—for trade with the Iroquois. The Dutch-Iroquois and French-Huron alliances became embroiled in an ever-deepening contest to control the movement of goods between Europeans and Indians.

## CONCLUSION

The sixteenth century marked the emergence of an Atlantic world linking Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Kings and emperors in West Africa were already competing ferociously for the wealth brought by long-distance trade, including trade in slaves. Western Europe halting-

## CHRONOLOGY, 1400–1625

- c. 1400–1600** European Renaissance.
- c. 1400** Mali challenged in West African grassland. Coastal West African kingdoms rise and expand.
- 1440** Portuguese slave trade in West Africa begins.
- 1488** Dias reaches the Cape of Good Hope.
- 1492** Christian “reconquest” of Spain. Columbus lands at Guanahani.
- 1517** Protestant Reformation begins in Germany.
- 1519–1521** Cortés leads Spanish conquest of Aztec empire.
- 1519–1522** Magellan’s expedition circumnavigates the globe.
- 1532–1536** Pizarro leads Spanish conquest of Inca empire.
- 1534** Church of England breaks from Roman Catholic Church.
- 1541–1542** Cartier attempts to colonize eastern Canada.
- 1539–1543** De Soto attempts conquests in southeastern United States.
- 1540–1542** Coronado attempts conquests in southwestern United States.
- 1558** Elizabeth I becomes queen of England.
- 1565** St. Augustine founded by Spanish.
- 1585–1590** English colony of Roanoke established, then disappears.
- 1588** England defeats the Spanish Armada.
- 1598** Oñate founds New Mexico.
- 1603** James I becomes king of England.
- 1607** English found colonies at Jamestown and Sagadahoc.
- 1608** Champlain founds New France.
- 1609** Henry Hudson explores the Hudson River.
- 1610–1614** First Anglo-Powhatan War.
- 1614** New Netherland founded.
- 1619** Large exports of tobacco from Virginia begin. First Africans arrive in Virginia.
- 1620** Plymouth colony founded.
- 1622–1632** Second Anglo-Powhatan War.
- 1624** James I revokes Virginia Company’s charter.

ly entered a new era in which nation-states drew on Renaissance knowledge, merchants’ capital, and religious zeal to advance national power and overseas expansion.

The Atlantic world brought few benefits to West Africans and Native Americans. Proclaiming that civilization and Christianity rendered them superior, Europeans denigrated Native Americans and Africans as savages whose land and labor Europeans could seize and exploit. Initial Portuguese incursions promised to expand West Africa’s trade ties with Europe. But Europe’s overwhelming demand for slave labor depleted the

region's population and accelerated the reshaping of trade, politics, warfare, and societies. Africa's notorious underdevelopment, which persists in our own time, had begun.

After 1492 the Atlantic world spread to the Americas. Indigenous peoples in Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere felt the terrible violence of Spanish conquest, suffering untold losses of population as well as the shattering of political, social, and religious institutions. The forced and unforced movements of people, as well as those of animals, plants, and disease-bearing germs, constituted a Columbian exchange that profoundly affected peoples and environments of both exploiters and exploited.

Native peoples north of Mexico and the Caribbean held would-be conquerors and colonizers at bay until after 1600. Depending on Europeans' dealings with them, native North Americans cooperated with Europeans who practiced reciprocity while resisting those who tried to dominate them. By 1625 Spain had advanced only as far north as seemed worthwhile to protect its prized Mexican and Caribbean conquests. Meanwhile, French, English, and Dutch colonists focused on less-spectacular resources. New France and New Netherland existed primarily to obtain furs from Indians, while the English in Virginia and Plymouth cultivated lands once belonging to Native Americans. All these colonies depended for their success on maintaining stable relations with at least some Native Americans. The transplantation of Europeans into North America was hardly a story of inevitable triumph.

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<http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/prog01/index.html>

Annenberg/CPB Learner.org.

A good introduction to North America before and after the arrival of Europeans, emphasizing Native Americans' experiences and Spanish and English imperialism.

#### Plimoth-on-Web

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