

THE AMERICAS TO 1620

At the end of the first millennium, most people in the Eastern Hemisphere had a firm sense of how the world was arranged, who occupied it, and how they had come to be where they were. Various sacred texts as well as long-standing folk beliefs suggested a virtually eternal order of things, instilling a sort of reassuring confidence in a stable and entirely predictable existence. However, forces were emerging that would open up new possibilities and engender a new restlessness that would shatter provincial confidence and stability as a new more cosmopolitan world emerged. A new era of American history was about to spring from the most unexpected of places.

THE RECONQUISTA

This part of the story began, not in the Americas, nor in Europe, but in the Middle East. Carrying the message of the new prophet Mohammed out of the Arabian Peninsula, Muslims began making major inroads into western Asia and northern Africa in the seventh century, eventually encroaching on Europe's southern and eastern frontiers. In 1095, Pope Urban II responded to a request for aid from the Byzantine emperor, whose dominions were under attack by Muslim invaders, launching the era of the Crusades. For two centuries, European-based Christians battled with Muslims in the Holy Lands and elsewhere. For the elite classes who engaged in crusading, provincialism died away, replaced by new information and contacts in the wider world. Soon Europeans would begin turning this new knowledge and these new tools against the people from whom they were appropriated.

Iberians led the way, launching a *Reconquista*, an effort to break Islamic rule on the peninsula. With the aid of crusaders, Portugal attained independence in 1147. By 1380 Portugal's King John I had united that country's various principalities under his rule. In Spain, unification took much longer, but in 1469 Ferdinand and Isabella, heirs to the rival thrones of Aragon and Castile, married and forged a united Spanish state. Twenty-three years later, in 1492, the Spanish subdued the last Moorish stronghold on the peninsula, completing the Reconquista. At the same time, other European states were also waking up to new realities. Consolidation began in France in around 1480, when Louis XI took control of five rival provinces to create a unified kingdom. Five years later in England, Henry Tudor and the House of Lancaster defeated the rival House of York in the Wars of the Roses, ending nearly a century of civil war. As in Spain and Portugal, the formation of unified states in France and England opened the way to new expansive activity.

TRADE ROUTES

Europeans had learned through their crusading experience that Muslim merchants had access to enormous trading networks that brought volumes of valuable goods into their markets. To the east, Muslim caravans carried silks, spices, and precious metals out of India, China, and Central Asia along the Silk Road, an arduous and expensive route. And to the south, North African Berbers had taken advantage of contacts with fellow Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula to introduce camels that allowed regular trading ventures across the forbidding Sahara Desert. From such remarkable cities as Timbuktu, the capital of Mali, merchants returned with gold, ivory, beautifully worked copper, and, significantly, slaves.

During the thirteenth century, Italian merchants sought to break into these monopolies. With convenient ports on the Mediterranean Sea, Italian city-states like Venice and Genoa gradually edged their way into the broadening trading world, attaining a virtual monopoly over the European consumer market for exotic goods. Coming into their own, however, the newly emerging consolidated states in Europe were not satisfied with dependence on Mediterranean merchants and sought their own access to exotic markets. Portugal's John I encouraged exploration by establishing a school of navigation on his kingdom's Atlantic shore. By the 1430s, the Portuguese had discovered and taken control of islands off the west coast of Africa, and within thirty years had pushed their way to Africa itself, opening relations with the Songhai Empire.

The Songhai Empire was typical of the sub-Saharan trading states that emerged through Muslim contacts. Its capital, Gao, was a key trading hub where African and Islamic influences met. From Gao, Songhai traders had shipped valuable trade goods across the Sahara by caravan. The Portuguese, however, offered speedier shipment and higher profits by carrying trade goods directly to Europe by sea. By the end of the fifteenth century, Portuguese navigators had gained control over the flow of prized items such as gold, ivory, and spices out of West Africa, and Portuguese colonizers were growing sugar and other crops on the newly conquered Azores and Canary Islands. Meanwhile, the Portuguese sought to divert the Silk Road traffic by rounding the Cape of Good Hope and sailing on into the Indian Ocean.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS “DISCOVERS” THE NEW WORLD

England, Spain, and France were also interested in finding a short, cheap, and safe sea route between Europe and Asia. As latecomers, Spain and England could not afford to take Portugal’s conservative approach to exploration. One ambitious sailor from the Italian port city of Genoa, Christopher Columbus, approached several European governments looking for support for a voyage westward, across the Atlantic, where he was convinced he would reach the East Indies.

Initially he found no one willing to take the risk. Finally, in 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella’s successful reconquest of Spain provided Columbus with an opportunity. Having just thrown off Islamic rule in the coastal province of Granada, the joint monarchs were eager to break into overseas trading. Ferdinand and Isabella agreed to equip three ships in exchange for a new route to the Orient. After more than three months at sea, Columbus finally made landfall. He thought he had arrived at the Indies, but in fact he had reached the islands we now call the Bahamas.

England, too, was jealous of Portugal’s trade monopoly, and in 1497 Henry VII commissioned another Italian mariner, Giovanni Caboto, to search for a sea route to India. John Cabot, as the English called him, succeeded in crossing the Atlantic. Shortly thereafter, another Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, sailing under the Spanish flag, sighted the northeastern shore of South America and sailed northward into the Caribbean in search of a passage to the East. Finally, in 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano, sailing for France, charted the entire Atlantic coastline of North America. It was by then apparent that this was not Asia, but an entirely new world. And the people there were not Asians; they were an entirely new people, though in their ignorance the newcomers insisted on calling them Indians, a name that stuck.

At first, European monarchs greeted the discovery of a new world as bad news: they wanted access to the riches of Asia, not contact with some undiscovered place. But gradually Europeans learned that the new land had attractions of its own. Columbus found gold on his voyages, leading to the suspicion that the wealth in the New World might dwarf that of the Indies. Ambitious adventurers from Britain, France, and Iberia also began exploring the fertile fishing grounds off the northern shores of North America. As the Indians and the fishermen came to know each other, they began to exchange goods. Apparently the trade grew quickly. By 1534, when Jacques Cartier made the first official exploration of the Canadian coast for the French government, he was approached by party after party of Indians offering to trade furs for the goods he carried. He could only conclude that many other Europeans had come before him.

ALREADY IN RESIDENCE

The presence of explorers such as Verrazano and Cartier and of unknown numbers of anonymous fishermen and part-time traders had several effects on the native population. The Mi’kmaqs, Hurons, and other northeastern Indian groups approached the intruding Europeans in friendship, eager to trade and to learn more about the strangers. In part this response was a sign of natural curiosity, but it also reflected some serious changes taking place in the Native world of North America. Beginning in the mid-fourteenth century, the climate in North America underwent significant cooling. As the climate grew colder, both hunter-gatherers like the Mi’kmaqs and agriculturists like the Iroquois had to expand their subsistence territory, and in doing so they came into conflict with their neighbors. As warfare became more common, groups increasingly formed alliances for mutual defense—systems like the Iroquois League and Powhatan Confederacy. And Indians found it beneficial to welcome European newcomers into their midst—as trading

partners bearing new tools, as allies in the evolving conflicts with neighboring Indian groups, and as powerful magicians whose shamans might provide explanations and remedies for the hard times that had befallen the Indians.

The existence of America—and even more the presence of people there—further challenged European provincialism, though as the newcomers came to understand that America was a new land and that the Indians were a new people, they attempted to fit both into the cosmic map outlined in the Bible. To Columbus, for example, Indians represented mankind before the fall of Adam, noble savages of whom he wrote, “Of anything that they possess, if it be asked of them, they never say no; on the contrary, they invite you to share it and show as much love as if their hearts went with it.”[1] Vespucci, in contrast, found them to be the most fallen of all mankind, true savages who “marry as many wives as they please,” and among whom the “son cohabits with mother, brother with sister, male cousin with female, and any man with the first woman he meets.”[2] Such portrayals, which were repeated over and over again by explorers and early settlers, established a sort of dichotomous mythic identity for American Indians that continues to affect non-Native perceptions of them through the present day.

In some ways, the arrival of Europeans may have been easier for American Indians to understand and explain than the existence of Indians was for Europeans. To Indians, the world was alive, animated by a spiritual force that was both universal and intelligent. Social ties based on fictive kinship and reciprocal trade linked all creatures—human and nonhuman—together into a common cosmos. These connections were chronicled in myth and maintained through ritual, which often involved the exchange of ceremonial items believed to have spiritual value. In the pre-Columbian trading world, such prized goods passed from society to society, establishing a spiritual bond even if the two groups never met. Europeans and European goods slipped easily into this ceremonial trading system. The trade items that the Europeans generally offered to American Indians on first contact—glass beads, mirrors, brass bells—resembled closely the items that the Indians traditionally used to establish friendly spiritual and economic relations with strangers. The perceived similarity of the trade goods offered by the Europeans led Indians to accept the newcomers as simply another new group in the complex social cosmos uniting the spiritual and material worlds.

Europeans, to the contrary, perceived such items as worthless trinkets, valuing instead Indian furs and land. This difference in perception became a major source of misunderstanding and conflict. To the Indians, neither furs nor the land was considered “property”; according to their beliefs, all things had innate spirits and belonged to themselves. Beavers, for example, gave their fur to people in exchange for spiritual gifts, and when the Native Americans passed the furs along to Europeans they were simply extending the social connection that had brought the furs into their hands in the first place. Similarly, the land was seen as a living being—a mother—who feeds, clothes, and houses people as long as she receives proper respect. When Europeans offered spiritually significant objects in exchange for land on which to build, farm, or hunt, Indians perceived the offer as an effort to join an already existing social relationship, and not as a contract transferring ownership.

COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

Another source of tension stemmed from the fact that the natural environments of the Old and New Worlds were different, and the passage of people, plants, and animals among Europe, Africa, and North America instigated profound changes in all three continents. This long-term process has been labeled the Columbian Exchange.

The most tragic trade among the three continents was literally invisible: bacteria and viruses wreaked havoc among populations that had never been exposed to them before. It appears that Europeans acquired a New World bacterium that evolved into syphilis, infecting thousands. And, it would appear, Africans brought various bacteria to the New World that developed into different strains of malaria. Africa, itself, was largely spared from new diseases because most contact with Europeans was sporadic in the early days. But in the Americas, where sustained contact occurred from the very beginning, the impact of both

European and African diseases was devastating. There is no way of knowing the full impact of imported diseases among Native Americans, though some studies have found that the death rate during the first century of contact was over 90 percent.

The ecological changes and the creation of markets brought about by the Columbian Exchange would drive Atlantic enterprise for nearly three hundred years following Columbus's geographical blunder. While exchanged diseases were killing many millions of Indians and lesser numbers of Africans and Europeans, the transplantation of North American plants significantly expanded food production in what had been marginal areas of Europe and Africa. At the same time, the environmental changes that Europeans wrought along the Atlantic shore of North America permitted the region to support many more people than it had sustained under Native cultivation. The overall result in Europe and Africa was a population explosion that eventually spilled over to repopulate a devastated North America.

RISE OF THE SLAVE TRADE

As Europeans struggled to wrest a profit from a rugged, and now underpopulated, New World, they found the prospect of enslaved African labor irresistible. Europeans equipped aggressive tribes on Africa's western coast with firearms and encouraged large-scale raiding deep into the Niger and Congo river regions. These raiders captured millions of prisoners, whom they herded back to the coast and sold to European traders to supply labor for mines and plantations in the New World. In exchange, they received more firearms and other weapons as well as manufactured goods from Europe crafted largely from raw materials imported from the Americas. They also received rum made from the sugar grown by Africans for Europeans in the Caribbean, converted into alcohol in both North America and Europe, and then exchanged for more slaves to be fed into the cane plantations.

Tobacco followed the same route with the same results. This never-ending circle of trade followed the natural course of wind and ocean currents that, until steam power revolutionized shipping in the mid-nineteenth century, dictated patterns of motion and commerce in the Atlantic World.

At any given location in this great wheel of activity, conditions on the ground could vary significantly. The Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, British, and other exploiters of the newly emerged Atlantic World each had their own style and strategies for extracting resources, exploiting natives, and making profits. Indigenous peoples from Africa to the Atlantic archipelagos to the Caribbean and all the Americas also adopted unique strategies for dealing with these invaders. But for more than half a millennium, the great wheel itself continued to spin and the patterns set down in the first era of American history continued to drive it.

[1] Christopher Columbus, "A Letter sent by Columbus to [Luis de Santangel] Chancellor of the Exchequer [of Aragon], respecting the Islands found in the Indies, enclosing another for their Highnesses," in *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus: with Other Original Documents, Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World*, trans. & ed. R. H. Major, 2nd ed. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1870), 7.

[2] Amerigo Vespucci, *Vespucci Reprints, Texts and Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1916), 5:6.

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THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

Millions of years ago, continental drift carried the Old World and New Worlds apart, splitting North and South America from Eurasia and Africa. That separation lasted so long that it fostered divergent evolution; for instance, the development of rattlesnakes on one side of the Atlantic and vipers on the other. After 1492, human voyagers in part reversed this tendency. Their artificial re-establishment of connections through the commingling of Old and New World plants, animals, and bacteria, commonly known as the Columbian Exchange, is one of the more spectacular and significant ecological events of the past millennium.

When Europeans first touched the shores of the Americas, Old World crops such as wheat, barley, rice, and turnips had not traveled west across the Atlantic, and New World crops such as maize, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, and manioc had not traveled east to Europe. In the Americas, there were no horses, cattle, sheep, or goats, all animals of Old World origin. Except for the llama, alpaca, dog, a few fowl, and guinea pig, the New World had no equivalents to the domesticated animals associated with the Old World, nor did it have the pathogens associated with the Old World's dense populations of humans and such associated creatures as chickens, cattle, black rats, and *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. Among these germs were those that carried smallpox, measles, chickenpox, influenza, malaria, and yellow fever.

The Columbian exchange of crops affected both the Old World and the New. Amerindian crops that have crossed oceans—for example, maize to China and the white potato to Ireland—have been stimulants to population growth in the Old World. The latter's crops and livestock have had much the same effect in the Americas—for example, wheat in Kansas and the Pampa, and beef cattle in Texas and Brazil. The full story of the exchange is many volumes long, so for the sake of brevity and clarity let us focus on a specific region, the eastern third of the United States of America.

As might be expected, the Europeans who settled on the east coast of the United States cultivated crops like wheat and apples, which they had brought with them. European weeds, which the colonists did not cultivate and, in fact, preferred to uproot, also fared well in the New World. John Josselyn, an Englishman and amateur naturalist who visited New England twice in the seventeenth century, left us a list, "Of Such Plants as Have Sprung Up since the English Planted and Kept Cattle in New England," which included couch grass, dandelion, shepherd's purse, groundsel, sow thistle, and chickweeds. One of these, a plantain (*Plantago major*), was named "Englishman's Foot" by the Amerindians of New England and Virginia who believed that it would grow only where the English "have trodden, and was never known before the English came into this country." Thus, as they intentionally sowed Old World crop seeds, the European settlers were unintentionally contaminating American fields with weed seed. More importantly, they were stripping and burning forests, exposing the native minor flora to direct sunlight and to the hooves and teeth of Old World livestock. The native flora could not tolerate the stress. The imported weeds could, because they had lived with large numbers of grazing animals for thousands of years.

Cattle and horses were brought ashore in the early 1600s and found hospitable climate and terrain in North America. Horses arrived in Virginia as early as 1620 and in Massachusetts in 1629. Many wandered free with little more evidence of their connection to humanity than collars with a hook at the bottom to catch on fences as they tried to leap over them to get at crops. Fences were not for keeping livestock in, but for keeping livestock out.

Native American resistance to the Europeans was ineffective. Indigenous peoples suffered from white brutality, alcoholism, the killing and driving off of game, and the expropriation of farmland, but all these together are insufficient to explain the degree of their defeat. The crucial factor was not people, plants, or animals, but germs. The history of the United States begins with Virginia and Massachusetts, and their histories begin with epidemics of unidentified diseases. At the time of the abortive Virginia colony at Roanoke in the 1580s the nearby Amerindians "began to die quickly. The disease was so strange that they

neither knew what it was, nor how to cure it.”[1] When the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, they did so in a village and on a coast nearly cleared of Amerindians by a recent epidemic. Thousands had “died in a great plague not long since; and pity it was and is to see so many goodly fields, and so well seated, without man to dress and manure the same.”[2]

Smallpox was the worst and the most spectacular of the infectious diseases mowing down the Native Americans. The first recorded pandemic of that disease in British North America detonated among the Algonquin of Massachusetts in the early 1630s: William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation wrote that the victims “fell down so generally of this disease as they were in the end not able to help one another, no not to make a fire nor fetch a little water to drink, nor any to bury the dead.”[3]

The missionaries and the traders who ventured into the American interior told the same appalling story about smallpox and the indigenes. In 1738 alone the epidemic destroyed half the Cherokee; in 1759 nearly half the Catawbas; in the first years of the next century two-thirds of the Omahas and perhaps half the entire population between the Missouri River and New Mexico; in 1837–1838 nearly every last one of the Mandans and perhaps half the people of the high plains.

European explorers encountered distinctively American illnesses such as Chagas Disease, but these did not have much effect on Old World populations. Venereal syphilis has also been called American, but that accusation is far from proven. Even if we add all the Old World deaths blamed on American diseases together, including those ascribed to syphilis, the total is insignificant compared to Native American losses to smallpox alone.

The export of America’s native animals has not revolutionized Old World agriculture or ecosystems as the introduction of European animals to the New World did. America’s grey squirrels and muskrats and a few others have established themselves east of the Atlantic and west of the Pacific, but that has not made much of a difference. Some of America’s domesticated animals are raised in the Old World, but turkeys have not displaced chickens and geese, and guinea pigs have proved useful in laboratories, but have not usurped rabbits in the butcher shops.

The New World’s great contribution to the Old is in crop plants. Maize, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, various squashes, chiles, and manioc have become essentials in the diets of hundreds of millions of Europeans, Africans, and Asians. Their influence on Old World peoples, like that of wheat and rice on New World peoples, goes far to explain the global population explosion of the past three centuries. The Columbian Exchange has been an indispensable factor in that demographic explosion.

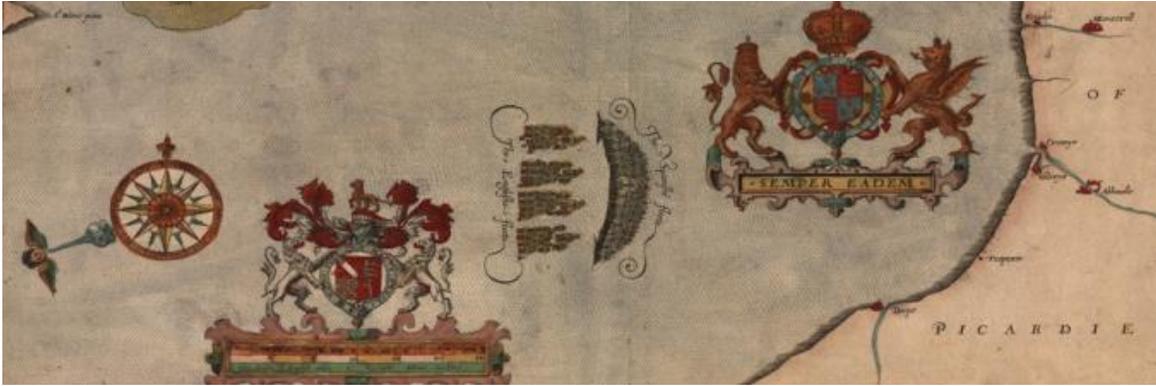
All this had nothing to do with superiority or inferiority of biosystems in any absolute sense. It has to do with environmental contrasts. Amerindians were accustomed to living in one particular kind of environment, Europeans and Africans in another. When the Old World peoples came to America, they brought with them all their plants, animals, and germs, creating a kind of environment to which they were already adapted, and so they increased in number. Amerindians had not adapted to European germs, and so initially their numbers plunged. That decline has reversed in our time as Amerindian populations have adapted to the Old World’s environmental influence, but the demographic triumph of the invaders, which was the most spectacular feature of the Old World’s invasion of the New, still stands.

[1] David B. Quinn, ed. *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584–1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1955), 378.

[2] Edward Winslow, Nathaniel Morton, William Bradford, and Thomas Prince, *New England’s Memorial* (Cambridge: Allan and Farnham, 1855), 362.

[3] William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel E. Morison (New York: Knopf, 1952), 271.

IMPERIAL RIVALRIES



The

Spanish Armada faces the English fleet, 1588. Detail from Expeditionis Hispanorum, 1588. (Library of Congress Geography and Map Division)

When Christopher Columbus made his plans to sail westward across the Atlantic, he first set off across Europe to find sponsors. His brother Bartholomew went to the court of the English King Henry VII (who turned him down, much to the regret of later Britons who realized the opportunity they had missed). Eventually Columbus received support from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. He sailed westward in search of a new route to the riches of East Asia and the Southwest Pacific, but he also ventured forth as an agent of a particular European state. Columbus therefore claimed (and renamed) new lands for Spain and planted the Spanish flag to mark its expanded territory.

Columbus's activities before and during his historic journey reflected his understanding of European politics in the late fifteenth century. Venturing westward was too expensive for an individual to fund independently, hence governments sponsored such voyages. European policy makers knew that they were always competing with each other. They also understood that their rivalries must not offend the church; until the Protestant Reformation, religious authority belonged to the pope and his court in Rome, along with his representatives across Europe.

PRINCIPALITIES AND KINGDOMS

Unlike modern nations, European states in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were not especially well organized or efficient. Any accurate map of Europe revealed that principalities, not modern nation-states, dominated the continent. There was no such entity as "Ireland," for example. The island instead was the home of four provinces—Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster—ruled by chieftains, each of whom controlled a large territory where inhabitants paid taxes in exchange for protection. The leaders of such petty fiefdoms and rulers of larger kingdoms tended to see their neighbors as rivals; just as Leinster feuded with Munster, England remained at odds with France, and France competed with the Spanish kingdoms. Long-distance military expeditions against more distant foreign powers were relatively rare because they were so expensive. European crusaders ventured out to retake the Holy Land from the late eleventh to the late thirteenth centuries, hoping to lay claim to Jerusalem and protect it from the growing power of Muslim states, but also to make a tidy profit in trade with Middle Eastern merchants. Along the way, these Christian warriors often raided the territories they passed through, engendering animosities that lasted for generations.

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL AND THE POPE

The most important national rivalries for the Western Hemisphere took shape after 1492. The same year that Columbus sailed westward, the combined forces of the Spanish kingdoms under the Castilian Queen Isabella and the Aragonese King Ferdinand reclaimed Iberia from the Islamic Moors; they also expelled Jews who lived there, or forced those who remained to convert to Christianity (at which point they became

known as *Marranos* or *conversos*). Both actions endeared the monarchs to Christian leaders. On May 4, 1493, Pope Alexander VI (a Spaniard), after hearing about Columbus's discovery of a "new world," rewarded Ferdinand and Isabella with the Bull of Donation, also known as the *Inter caetera*, which authorized Spain to colonize and exploit American lands despite earlier papal documents that had granted Portugal control of newly discovered regions.

The following year the Spanish and Portuguese rulers, whose ships were then engaged in the most far-reaching European exploratory ventures, agreed to the terms of the Treaty of Tordesillas, which established a geographical line approximately 1,200 nautical miles west of the Cape Verde islands. This boundary entitled the Portuguese to lay claim to Brazil, which they colonized in the sixteenth century, in addition to lands newly seen by Europeans in the Old World. Spain, meanwhile, could claim everything that lay to the west of the line.

These papally sanctioned agreements propelled the Spanish and Portuguese to establish colonies in the Western Hemisphere as well as (for the Portuguese) areas in and near the Indian Ocean and the southwestern Pacific. In addition to the voyages of Columbus, the Spanish sent other would-be conquerors to lay claim to new territories, including Hernán Cortés, who led Spanish forces to victory over the Aztecs in Mexico in the late 1510s, and Francisco Pizarro, whose army emerged victorious over the Incas in Peru in the 1530s. In the years that followed, Spanish conquerors raised their standard across much of southwest North America as well as Florida. Spanish and Portuguese colonizers eagerly extracted wealth from these new territories, especially in the form of hordes of gold, silver, and precious jewels. They made sure to send gifts of thanks to their religious patrons. The pope purportedly used some of the gold sent by the Spanish to cover the ceiling of Rome's ancient basilica and one of its greatest churches, Santa Maria Maggiore. The extraction of this wealth came at a high cost not only to America's indigenous peoples, who witnessed the desecration of temples to satisfy the lust of the *conquistadores*, but also to humanity's history and art, since the newcomers typically melted Native icons and thereby erased ancient cultures.



ENGLAND, FRANCE, AND HOLLAND JOIN THE RACE

The agreements of the early 1490s made sense in a Europe where the Spanish and the Portuguese were the dominant maritime players. But over the course of the sixteenth century other Europeans also recognized the benefits of long-distance commerce and conquest. The French had been interested in possibilities of Atlantic enterprise since the early decades of the sixteenth century.

The Landing of Henrick Hudson, based on a painting by Robert Weir, published by Martin, Johnson & Co., New York, 1857. (Gilder Lehrman Collection)

The Breton explorer Jacques Cartier made three voyages—in 1534, 1535–1536, and 1541–1542—as part of an effort to expand knowledge of North America and identify a possible route through the continent to the South Sea. He never found that passage, but he did explore the St. Lawrence Valley and laid an initial French claim to Canada. By mid-century, a group of mapmakers clustered in Dieppe had produced a series of new maps, based on Portuguese sea charts (called portolans), which hinted at what explorers would find. In July 1608 Samuel Champlain, after exploring other territory farther south, established Quebec City, which would become the central colonial outpost of New France. Such grand assertions—such as claiming ownership of Canada based on establishing a relatively small community—were not unique. In 1609, the Dutch-employed English captain Henry Hudson, after failing to find the Northeast Passage (which he hoped would take him through open water north of Russia to the Pacific), crossed the Atlantic and eventually

made his way up the river that now bears his name. In the years that followed the Dutch laid a formal claim to this region, calling it New Netherland and establishing their main outpost on the island of Manhattan.

THE SEARCH FOR THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

The English, for their part, schemed to gain control of much of North America, hoping—as did the French and the Dutch—to find the Northwest Passage, a water route to Asia that European mapmakers were convinced existed somewhere in North America. Whoever found that route would be able to control passage from the Atlantic to the South Sea (now the Pacific Ocean) and from there to Japan, China, and the Spice Islands.

Since Europeans had fallen in love with East Asian silk as well as the cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and peppers from places like Banda much earlier, these sixteenth-century explorers knew there was enormous demand for whatever they could bring back. A northern route would in theory drastically cut the length of the journey, thus ensuring that the spices sailors hauled home would be fresher than those brought by other Europeans who took southern routes around Africa or South America. A quick water route would also have enabled northern Europeans to cut off both the Spanish, who got to the East efficiently only after they claimed Mexico and built a major port at Acapulco (so they could send silver to the Philippines to purchase spices and silks), as well as the Portuguese, who reached the Pacific by sailing around Africa and then across the Indian Ocean. Even more important, the discovery of the northerly route would (at least in the opinion of the English) prove that God favored the Reformation and hence reward those who broke away from Rome—a far greater prize than the demarcation line with which the pope had rewarded Spain and Portugal.

RELIGIOUS STRIFE AND THE MAP OF THE "NEW WORLD"

It is impossible to overstate the significance of religious strife in post-Reformation Europe. After the Reformation, northern European Protestants were eager to establish claims in new territories so that they could prevent the spread of the faith now known as Roman Catholicism. Under Queen Elizabeth I, a daughter of Henry VIII, the English renewed their longstanding effort to colonize Ireland, which had begun in the twelfth century but had never fully succeeded. Elizabeth's commanders, fueled by the idea that Irish Christianity was inferior to their own and thus needed to be eradicated, employed brutal tactics on the battlefield. This experience shaped the mindset of some of the English who later joined missions across the Atlantic. The English, who would eventually gain control of the Atlantic coast of North America between Canada and Florida, made their contest with Rome a central part of their arguments for conquest and colonization. They were aided, as it turned out, by a report written by a one-time slaveholder turned Dominican missionary named Bartolomé de Las Casas, who in 1552 published (in Seville) a book called *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. The book contained lurid details about torture and murder perpetrated by Spanish conquistadors in the Indies, which Las Casas urged the Spanish court to recognize in order to halt such violent tactics. When the book appeared in an English language translation in London in 1583, its purpose had less to do with changing Spanish tactics. It became a testimony to the inherently barbarous nature of Iberian Catholics, a theme picked up by other English authors in the 1580s and 1590s. These texts helped prompt reluctant Protestants to commit precious resources to the creation of overseas colonies, thereby expanding the European imperial contest for dominance in the Atlantic basin.

EXPLORATION BOOK SHOP

Although Europeans looking westward across the Atlantic were in constant competition for lands, riches, and souls, they shared information about new discoveries with surprising frequency. When Columbus returned from his first journey, his initial testimony quickly appeared in a book now known to scholars as the Barcelona Letter of 1493, after the place where a publisher first printed it. Soon editions in other languages appeared, including one published in Basel, Switzerland, also in 1493, which included crude woodcuts created by an artist who had read the text and tried to create a visual rendering of Columbus's initial

encounter with the Arawaks or Tainos. By 1500, descriptions of Columbus's voyages had spread across Europe.

The spread of works about Columbus was only the beginning. Over the course of the sixteenth century, when printing presses proliferated across Europe, scores of new books testified to both the opportunities and dangers of the Western Hemisphere. One of those books was written by a young English mathematician named Thomas Harriot, who had traveled to the outer banks of modern North Carolina, in 1585. In 1588 Harriot produced a small book rich with details about the region he had seen, the peoples who lived there, and the natural resources that could be extracted from its landscape. Harriot called his book *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. Two years later, an avid promoter of English colonization named Richard Hakluyt the younger (to differentiate him from his cousin) took the text from Harriot's book and worked with a Flemish engraver based in Frankfurt-am-Main, Theodor de Bry, to produce the first fully illustrated published account of any Native American population. In 1590 English, French, German, and Latin versions all rolled off de Bry's presses.

What could explain such a publishing strategy? After all, France was still a Catholic nation, as were parts of German-speaking central Europe, so a book extolling the virtues of territory claimed by the English might only feed the desire of English foes to seize the region. Yet Hakluyt and the others embraced the multi-language edition because they recognized that the European scientific community needed to know about new discoveries. The scholars among them could read Latin, but by the late sixteenth century vernacular languages had also come to be important in the transmission of knowledge, as people who were not scholars became interested in the world around them and the new discoveries.

The four-language edition of Harriot's *Brief and True Report* serves as a cautionary tale for scholars trying to understand European imperial rivalries during the initial colonization of the Americas. Europeans competed fiercely for territories and souls that they believed they could and should conquer. They also mounted legal arguments about which European nation could justly claim which parts of the non-European world. These arguments included a tract written by a Dutch jurist named Hugo Grotius, published in 1609 as *Mare Liberum* (the *Free Sea*), which aimed at undermining the Treaty of Tordesillas. Grotius asserted that the Spanish and Portuguese could not lay permanent claim to territories based on a geographical line drawn through the ocean, because no one could own the sea.

By the time the English founded Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, imperial rivals jostled for control of the resources of the Atlantic basin. Eventually European contests would spawn American battles too, with far-ranging consequences for the Native peoples who came into contact with newcomers eager to establish a firm grip over the Western Hemisphere.

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INDIAN SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAS

The story of European colonialism in the Americas and its victimization of Africans and Indians follows a central paradigm in most textbooks. The African “role” encompasses the transportation, exploitation, and suffering of many millions in New World slavery, while Indians are described in terms of their succumbing in large numbers to disease, with the survivors facing dispossession of their land. This paradigm—a basic one in the history of colonialism—omits a crucial aspect of the story: the indigenous peoples of the Americas were enslaved in large numbers. This exclusion distorts not only what happened to American Indians under colonialism, but also points to the need for a reassessment of the foundation and nature of European overseas expansion.

Without slavery, slave trading, and other forms of unfree labor, European colonization would have remained extremely limited in the New World. The Spanish were almost totally dependent on Indian labor in most of their colonies, and even where unfree labor did not predominate, as in the New England colonies, colonial production was geared toward supporting the slave plantation complex of the West Indies. Thus, we must take a closer look at the scope of unfree labor—the central means by which Europeans generated the wealth that fostered the growth of colonies.

Modern perceptions of early modern slavery associate the institution almost solely with Africans and their descendants. Yet slavery was a ubiquitous institution in the early modern world. Africans, Asians, Europeans, and Native Americans kept slaves before and after Columbus reached America. Enslavement meant a denial of freedom for the enslaved, but slavery varied greatly from place to place, as did the lives of slaves. The life of a *genizaro* (slave soldier) of the Ottoman Empire, who enjoyed numerous privileges and benefits, immensely differed from an American Indian who worked in the silver mines of Peru or an African who produced sugar cane in Barbados. People could be kept as slaves for religious purposes (Aztecs and Pacific Northwest Indians) or as a by-product of warfare, where they made little contribution to the economy or basic social structure (Eastern Woodlands). In other societies, slaves were central to the economy. In many areas of West Africa, for instance, slaves were the predominant form of property and the main producers of wealth.

As it expanded under European colonialism to the New World in the late fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, slavery took on a new, racialized form involving the movement of millions of peoples from one continent to another based on skin color, and the creation of a vast slave-plantation complex that was an important cog in the modernization and globalization of the world economy. Africans provided the bulk of labor in this new system of slavery, but American Indians were compelled to labor in large numbers as well.

In the wake of the deaths of indigenous Americans from European-conveyed microbes from which they had no immunity, the Spanish colonists turned to importing Africans. A racist and gross misinterpretation of this event posited that most Indians could not be enslaved because of their love for freedom, while Africans were used to having their labor controlled by “big men” in Africa. This dangerous view obscured a basic fact of early modern history: Anyone could be enslaved. Over a million Europeans were held as slaves from the 1530s through the 1780s in Africa, and hundreds of thousands were kept as slaves by the Ottomans in eastern Europe and Asia. (John Smith, for instance, had been a slave of the Ottomans before he obtained freedom and helped colonize Virginia.) In 1650, more English were enslaved in Africa than Africans enslaved in English colonies. Even as late as the early nineteenth century, United States citizens were enslaved in North Africa. As the pro-slavery ideologue George Fitzhugh noted in his book, *Cannibals All* (1857), in the history of world slavery, Europeans were commonly the ones held as slaves, and the enslavement of Africans was a relatively new historical development. Not until the eighteenth century did the words “slave” and “African” become nearly synonymous in the minds of Europeans and Euro-Americans.

With labor at a premium in the colonial American economy, there was no shortage of people seeking to purchase slaves. Both before and during African enslavement in the Americas, American Indians were forced to labor as slaves and in various other forms of unfree servitude. They worked in mines, on plantations, as apprentices for artisans, and as domestics—just like African slaves and European indentured servants. As with Africans shipped to America, Indians were transported from their natal communities to labor elsewhere as slaves. Many Indians from Central America were shipped to the West Indies, also a common destination for Indians transported out of Charleston, South Carolina, and Boston, Massachusetts. Many other Indians were moved hundreds or thousands of miles within the Americas. Sioux Indians from the Minnesota region could be found enslaved in Quebec, and Choctaws from Mississippi in New England. A longstanding line of transportation of Indian slaves led from modern-day Utah and Colorado south into Mexico.

The European trade in American Indians was initiated by Columbus in 1493. Needing money to pay for his New World expeditions, he shipped Indians to Spain, where there already existed slave markets dealing in the buying and selling of Africans. Within a few decades, the Spanish expanded the slave trade in American Indians from the island of Hispaniola to Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Cuba, and the Bahamas. The great decline in the indigenous island populations which largely owed to disease, slaving, and warfare, led the Spanish to then raid Indian communities in Central America and many of the islands just off the continent, such as Curacao, Trinidad, and Aruba. About 650,000 Indians in coastal Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Honduras were enslaved in the sixteenth century. Conquistadors then entered the inland American continents and continued the process. Hernando de Soto, for instance, brought with him iron implements to enslave the people of La Florida on his infamous expedition through the American southeast into the Carolinas and west to the Mississippi Valley. Indians were used by the conquistadors as *tamemes* to carry their goods on these distant forays. Another form of Spanish enslavement of Indians in the Americas was *yanacónaje*, which was similar to European serfdom, whereby Indians were tied to specific lands to labor rather than lords. And under the *encomienda* system, Indians were forced to labor or pay tribute to an *encomendero*, who, in exchange, was supposed to provide protection and conversion to Christianity. The encomenderos' power survived longest in frontier areas, particularly in Venezuela, Chile, Paraguay, and in the Mexican Yucatan into the nineteenth century.

By 1542 the Spanish had outlawed outright enslavement of some, but not all, Indians. People labeled cannibals could still be enslaved, as could Indians purchased from other Europeans or from Indians. The Spanish also created new forms of servitude for Indians. This usually involved compelling mission Indians to labor for a period of time each year that varied from weeks to months with little or no pay. *Repartimiento*, as it was called, was widespread in Peru and Mexico, though it faded quickly in the latter. It persisted for hundreds of years as the main system for organizing Indian labor in Colombia, Ecuador, and Florida, and survived into the early 1820s in Peru and Bolivia. Indian laborers worked in the silver mines and built forts, roads, and housing for the army, church, and government. They performed agriculture and domestic labor in support of civilians, government contractors, and other elements of Spanish society. Even in regions where African slavery predominated, such as the sugar plantations in Portuguese Brazil and in the West Indies, Indian labor continued to be used. And in many Spanish colonies, where the plantations did not flourish, Indians provided the bulk of unfree labor through the colonial era. In other words, the growth of African slavery in the New World did not diminish the use of unfree Indian labor, particularly outside of the plantation system.

Whereas in South America and the islands of the West Indies, Europeans conducted the bulk of slaving raids against Indians, (except in Brazil, where *bandeirantes* of mixed blood were employed for slaving), much of the enslavement of Indians in North America above Mexico was done by Indians. North American Europeans did enslave Indians during wars, especially in New England (the Pequot War, King Philip's War) and the southeast (the Tuscarora War, the Yamasee War, the Natchez War, just to name a few), but ordinarily Europeans, especially the English and French, purchased their Indian slaves from Indians.

Colonists lured Indians to supply Indian slaves in exchange for trade goods and to obtain alliances with the Europeans and their Indian allies. Indians slaved against not only their enemies, but Indians they had never met. Many Indians recognized they had little choice but to become slavers. If they did not do the Europeans' bidding they could easily become victimized themselves. It was not unusual for peoples victimized by slaving to become slavers, and for those who had been slavers to become the object of raids.

Colonists participated in Indian slave trading to obtain capital. It was as if capital could be created out of thin air: one merely had to capture an Indian or find an Indian to capture another. In South Carolina, and to a lesser extent in North Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana, Indian slavery was a central means by which early colonists funded economic expansion. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a frenzy of enslaving occurred in what is now the eastern United States. English and allied Indian raiders nearly depopulated Florida of its American Indian population. From 1670 to 1720 more Indians were shipped out of Charleston, South Carolina, than Africans were imported as slaves—and Charleston was a major port for bringing in Africans. The populous Choctaws in Mississippi were repeatedly battered by raiders, and many of their neighboring lower Mississippi Valley Indians also wound up spending their lives as slaves on West Indies plantations. Simultaneously, the New England colonies nearly eliminated the Native population from southern New England through warfare, slaving, and forced removal. The French in Canada and in Louisiana purchased many Indian slaves from their allies who swept through the Great Lakes region, the Missouri Country, and up into Minnesota. All the colonies engaged in slaving and in the purchase of Indian slaves. Only in the colonial region of New York and Pennsylvania was slaving limited, in large part because the neighboring Iroquois assimilated into their societies many of those they captured instead of selling them to the Europeans—but the Europeans of those colonies purchased Indian slaves from other regions.

Slaving against Indians did begin to decline in the east in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, largely a result of Indians' refusal to participate in large-scale slaving raids, but the trade moved westward where Apaches, Sioux, and others continued to be victimized by Comanche and others. From Louisiana to New Mexico, large-scale enslavement of American Indians persisted well into the nineteenth century. Slave markets were held monthly in New Mexico, for instance, to facilitate the sale of Indians from the American West to northern Mexico. After the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson sent federal troops into the West to put an end to Indian slavery, but it continued to proliferate in California.

The paradigm of “what happened” to American Indians under European colonialism must be revised. Instead of viewing victimization of Africans and Indians as two entirely separate processes, they should be compared and contrasted. This will shed more light on the consequences of colonialism in the Americas, and how racism became one of the dominant ideologies of the modern world. It is time to assess the impact of slave trading and slavery on American Indian peoples, slave and free.

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