

European colonization of the Americas

The start of the **European colonization of the Americas** is typically dated to 1492, although there was at least one earlier colonization effort. The first known Europeans to reach the Americas were the Vikings (Norse) during the 11th century, who established several colonies in Greenland and one short-lived settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows (51°N) in the area the Norse called Vinland, present day Newfoundland and to the south. Settlements in Greenland survived for several centuries, during which time the Greenland Norse and the Inuit people experienced mostly hostile contact. By the end of the 15th century, the Norse Greenland settlements had collapsed.^[1]

In 1492, a Spanish expedition headed by Christopher Columbus sailed to the Americas and introduced the New World to the Western world of the time; after this, European conquest, exploration, and colonization soon followed and expanded. This first occurred along the Caribbean coasts on the islands of Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Cuba, and since the early 16th century, extended into the interiors of both North and South America. In 1497, sailing from the north, John Cabot landed on the North American coast, and a year later, Columbus's third voyage reached the South American coast. Eventually, the entire Western Hemisphere would come under the control of European nations, leading to profound changes to its landscape, population, and plant and animal life. In the 19th century alone over 50 million people left Europe for the Americas.^[2] The post-1492 era is known as the period of the Columbian Exchange.

Early conquests, claims, and colonies

The first explorations and conquests were made by the Spanish and the Portuguese, immediately following their own final reconquest of Iberian lands in 1492. In the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, ratified by the Pope, these two kingdoms divided the entire non-European world between themselves, with a line drawn through South America. Based on this Treaty, and the claims by Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa to all lands touching the Pacific Ocean. With help from their powerful Indian allies, the Spanish rapidly conquered territory with Hernan Cortes overthrowing the Aztec and Francisco Pizarro conquering the Inca Empire. As a result, they gained control of much of western South America, Central America and Mexico by the mid-16th century, in addition to its earlier Caribbean conquests. Over this same timeframe, Portugal colonized much of eastern South America, naming it Brazil.

Other European nations soon disputed the terms of the Treaty of Tordesillas, which they had not negotiated. England and France attempted to plant colonies in the Americas in the 16th century, but these met with failure. However, in the following century, the two kingdoms, along with the Dutch Republic, succeeded in establishing permanent colonies. Some of these were on Caribbean islands, which had often already been conquered by the Spanish or depopulated by disease, while others were in eastern North America, which had not been colonized by Spain north of Florida.

Early European possessions in North America included Spanish Florida, Spanish New Mexico, the English colonies of Virginia (with its North Atlantic off-shoot, The Somers Isles) and New England, the French colonies of Acadia and Canada, the Swedish colony of New Sweden, and the Dutch New Netherland. In the 18th century, Denmark–Norway revived its former colonies in Greenland, while the Russian Empire gained a foothold in Alaska.

As more nations gained an interest in the colonization of the Americas, competition for territory became increasingly fierce. Colonists often faced the threat of attacks from neighboring colonies, as well as from indigenous tribes and pirates.

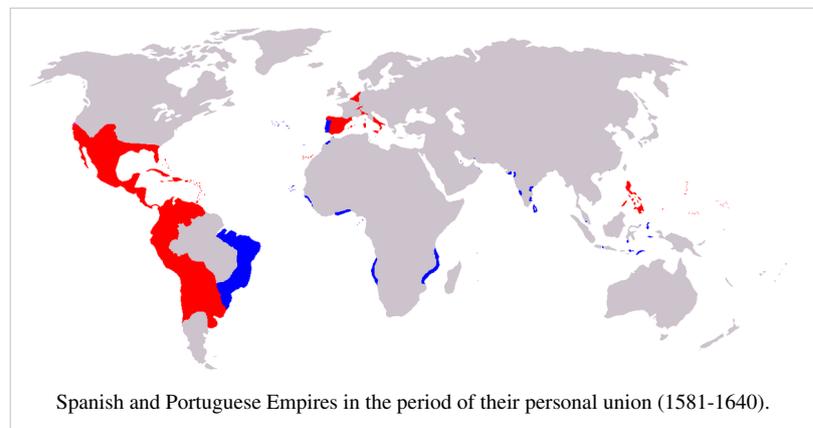


Early state-sponsored colonists

Further information: Portugal in the Age of Discovery, Spanish colonization of the Americas, and First European colonization wave (15th century–19th century)

The first phase of European activity in the Americas began with the Atlantic Ocean crossings of Christopher Columbus (1492–1504), sponsored by Spain, whose original attempt was to find a new route to India and China, known as "the Indies". He was followed by other explorers such as John Cabot, who reached Newfoundland and was sponsored by England. Pedro Álvares Cabral reached Brazil and claimed it for Portugal. Amerigo Vespucci, working for Portugal in voyages from 1497 to 1513, established that Columbus had reached a new set of continents. Cartographers still use a Latinized version of his first name, *America*, for the two continents. Other explorers included Giovanni da Verrazzano, sponsored by France; the Portuguese João Vaz Corte-Real in Newfoundland; and Samuel de Champlain (1567–1635) who explored Canada. In 1513, Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and led the first European expedition to see the Pacific Ocean from the west coast of the New World. In an action with enduring historical import, Balboa claimed the Pacific Ocean and all the lands adjoining it for the Spanish Crown. It was 1517 before another expedition from Cuba visited Central America, landing on the coast of Yucatán in search of slaves.

These explorations were followed, notably in the case of Spain, by a phase of conquest: The Spaniards, having just finished the *Reconquista* of Spain from Muslim rule, were the first to colonize the Americas, applying the same model of governing to the former *Al-Andalus* as to their territories of the New World. Ten years after Columbus's discovery, the administration of Hispaniola was given to Nicolás de Ovando of the Order of



Alcántara, founded during the *Reconquista*. As in the Iberian Peninsula, the inhabitants of Hispaniola were given new landmasters, while religious orders handled the local administration. Progressively the *encomienda* system, which granted tribute (access to indigenous labor and taxation) to European settlers, was set in place.

A relatively large misconception is that a small number of *conquistadores* conquered vast territories, aided only by disease epidemics and their powerful caballeros. Recent archaeological excavations have induced the notion of a vast Spanish-Indian alliance numbering in the hundreds of thousands.^[3] Along with cavalry and the use of cannons as a siege weapon, the Spanish *conquistadores* were able to utilize the divisions among native ethnic groups and implement them with their own forces. Even with these reserves, the Europeans still had great difficulties in establishing colonies or even initiating peace treaties as seen in the Arauco War, Chichimeca War, Red Cloud's War, the Second Seminole War, and Pontiac's Rebellion. Hernán Cortés eventually conquered Mexico and the Tlaxcala in 1519-1521, while the conquest of the Inca was carried out by some 40,000 Incan renegades led by Francisco Pizarro in between 1532 and 1535.

Over the first century and a half after Columbus's voyages, the native population of the Americas plummeted by an estimated 80% (from around 50 million in 1492 to eight million in 1650^[4]), mostly by outbreaks of Old World diseases but also by several massacres and forced labour (the *mita* was re-established in the old Inca Empire, and the *tequitl* – equivalent of the *mita* – in the Aztec Empire). The *conquistadores* replaced the native American oligarchies, in part through miscegenation with the local elites. In 1532, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor imposed a vice-king to Mexico, Antonio de Mendoza, in order to prevent Cortes' independantist drives, who definitively returned to Spain in 1540. Two years later, Charles V signed the New Laws (which replaced the Laws of Burgos of

1512) prohibiting slavery and the *repartimientos*, but also claiming as his own all the American lands and all of the autochthonous people as his own subjects.

When in May 1493, the Pope Alexander VI enacted the *Inter caetera* bull granting the new lands to the Kingdom of Spain, he requested in exchange an evangelization of the people. Thus, during Columbus's second voyage, Benedictine friars accompanied him, along with twelve other priests. As slavery was prohibited between Christians, and could only be imposed in non-Christian prisoners of war or on men already sold as slaves, the debate on Christianization was particularly acute during the 16th century. In 1537, the papal bull *Sublimis Deus* recognized that Native Americans possessed souls, thus prohibiting their enslavement, without putting an end to the debate. Some claimed that a native who had rebelled and then been captured could be enslaved nonetheless. Later, the Valladolid controversy opposed the Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas to another Dominican philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the first one arguing that Native Americans were beings doted with souls, as all other human beings, while the latter argued to the contrary and justified their enslavement. The process of Christianization was at first violent: when the first Franciscans arrived in Mexico in 1524, they burned the places dedicated to pagan cult, alienating much of the local population.^[5] In the 1530s, they began to adapt Christian practices to local customs, including the building of new churches on the sites of ancient places of worship, leading to a mix of Old World Christianity with local religions.^[5] The Spanish Roman Catholic Church, needing the natives' labor and cooperation, evangelized in Quechua, Nahuatl, Guarani and other Native American languages, contributing to the expansion of these indigenous languages and equipping some of them with writing systems. One of the first primitive schools for Native Americans was founded by Fray Pedro de Gante in 1523.

To reward their troops, the *Conquistadores* often allotted Indian towns to their troops and officers. Black African slaves were introduced to substitute for Native American labor in some locations - most notably the West Indies, where the indigenous population was nearing extinction on many islands.

During this time, the Portuguese gradually switched from an initial plan of establishing trading posts to extensive colonization of what is now Brazil. They imported millions of slaves to run their plantations. The Portuguese and Spanish royal governments expected to rule these settlements and collect at least 20% of all treasure found (the *Quinto Real* collected by the *Casa de Contratación*), in addition to collecting all the taxes they could. By the late 16th century American silver accounted for one-fifth of Spain's total budget.^[6] In the 16th century perhaps 240,000 Europeans entered American ports.^{[7] [8]}

Economic immigrants

Inspired by the Spanish riches from colonies founded upon the conquest of the Aztecs, Incas, and other large Native American populations in the sixteenth century, the first Englishmen to settle permanently in America hoped for some of the same rich discoveries when they established their first permanent settlement in Jamestown, Virginia. They were sponsored by common stock companies such as the chartered Virginia Company (and its off-shoot, the Somers Isles Company) financed by wealthy Englishmen who understood the economic potential of this new land. The main purpose of this colony was the hope of finding gold or the possibility (or impossibility) of finding a passage through the Americas to the Indies. It took strong leaders, like John Smith, to convince the colonists of Jamestown that searching for gold was not taking care of their immediate needs for food and shelter and that "he who shall not work shall not eat." (A direction based on text from the New Testament.) The extremely high mortality rate was quite distressing and cause for despair among the colonists. Tobacco later became a cash crop, with the work of John Rolfe and others, for export and the sustaining economic driver of Virginia and nearby colonies like Maryland.

From the beginning of Virginia's settlements in 1587 until the 1680s, the main source of labour and a large portion of the immigrants were indentured servants looking for new life in the overseas colonies. During the 17th century, indentured servants constituted three-quarters of all European immigrants to the Chesapeake region. Most of the indentured servants were English farmers who had been pushed off their lands due to the expansion of livestock raising, the enclosure of land, and overcrowding in the countryside. This unfortunate turn of events served as a push

for thousands of people (mostly single men) away from their situation in England. There was hope, however, as American landowners were in need of labourers and were willing to pay for a labourer's passage to America if they served them for several years. By selling passage for five to seven years worth of work they could hope to start out on their own in America.

In the French colonial regions, the focus of economy was the fur trade with the natives. Farming was set up primarily to provide subsistence only, although cod and other fish of the Grand Banks were a major export and source of income for the French and many other European nations. The fur trade was also practiced by the Russians on the northwest coast of North America. After the French and Indian War, the British were ceded all French possessions in North America east of the Mississippi River, aside from the tiny islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon.

Religious immigration

Roman Catholics were the first major religious group to immigrate to the New World, as settlers in the colonies of Portugal and Spain (and later, France) were required to belong to that faith. English and Dutch colonies, on the other hand, tended to be more religiously diverse. Settlers to these colonies included Anglicans, Dutch Calvinists, English Puritans, English Catholics, Scottish Presbyterians, French Huguenots, German and Swedish Lutherans, as well as Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, Moravians and Jews of various nationalities.

Many groups of colonists came to the Americas searching for the right to practice their religion without persecution. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century broke the unity of Western Christendom and led to the formation of numerous new religious sects, which often faced persecution by governmental authorities. In England, many people came to question the organization of the Church of England by the end of the sixteenth century. One of the primary manifestations of this was the Puritan movement, which sought to "purify" the existing Church of England of its many residual Catholic rites that they believed had no mention in the Bible.

A strong believer in the notion of rule by divine right, England's Charles I persecuted religious dissenters. Waves of repression led to the migration of about 20,000 Puritans to New England between 1629 and 1642, where they founded multiple colonies. Later in the century, the new Pennsylvania colony was given to William Penn in settlement of a debt the king owed his father. Its government was set up by William Penn in about 1682 to become primarily a refuge for persecuted English Quakers; but others were welcomed. Baptists, Quakers and German and Swiss Protestants flocked to Pennsylvania.

The lure of cheap land, religious freedom and the right to improve themselves with their own hand was very attractive to those who wished to escape from persecution and poverty.

Forced immigration

Slavery existed in the Americas, prior to the presence of Europeans, as the Natives often captured and held other tribes' members as captives.^[9] Some of these captives were even forced to undergo human sacrifice under some tribes, such as the Aztecs. The Spanish followed with the enslavement of local aborigines in the Caribbean. As the native populations declined (mostly from European diseases, but also and significantly from forced exploitation and careless murder), they were often replaced by Africans imported through a large commercial slave trade. By the 18th century, the overwhelming number of black slaves was such that Native American slavery was less commonly used. Africans, who were taken aboard slave ships to the Americas, were primarily obtained from their African homelands by coastal tribes who captured and sold them. The high incidence of disease nearly always fatal to Europeans kept nearly all the slave capture activities confined to native African tribes. Rum, guns and gun powder were some of the major trade items exchanged for slaves. In all, approximately three to four hundred thousand black slaves streamed into the ports of Charleston, South Carolina and Newport, Rhode Island until about 1810. The total slave trade to islands in the Caribbean, Brazil, Mexico and to the United States is estimated to have involved 12 million Africans.^{[10] [11]} Of these, 5.4% (645,000) were brought to what is now the United States.^[12] In addition to African

slaves, poor Europeans were brought over in substantial numbers as indentured servants, particularly in the British Thirteen colonies.^{[13] [14]}

Disease and indigenous population loss

The European and Asian lifestyle included a long history of sharing close quarters with domesticated animals such as cows, pigs, sheep, goats, horses, and various domesticated fowl, which had resulted in epidemic diseases unknown in the Americas. Thus the large-scale contact with Europeans after 1492 introduced novel germs to the indigenous people of the Americas. Epidemics of smallpox (1518, 1521, 1525, 1558, 1589), typhus (1546), influenza (1558), diphtheria (1614) and measles (1618) swept ahead of initial European contact,^{[15] [16]} killing between 10 million and 20 million^[17] people, up to 95% of the indigenous population of the Americas.^{[18] [19] [20]} The cultural and political instability attending these losses appears to have been of substantial aid in the efforts of various colonists to seize the great wealth in land and resources of which indigenous societies had customarily made use.^[21]

Such diseases yielded human mortality of an unquestionably enormous gravity and scale – and this has profoundly confused efforts to determine its full extent with any true precision. Estimates of the pre-Columbian population of the Americas vary tremendously.

Others have argued that significant variations in population size over pre-Columbian history are reason to view higher-end estimates with caution. Such estimates may reflect historical population maxima, while indigenous populations may have been at a level somewhat below these maxima or in a moment of decline in the period just prior to contact with Europeans. Indigenous populations hit their ultimate lows in most areas of the Americas in the early twentieth century; in a number of cases, growth has returned.^[22]

The Requerimiento: The proclamation sent by Spain to the Native Americans:

"We ask and require you to acknowledge the church as the ruler and superior of the whole world and the high priest called pope and in his name the king of Spain as lords of this land. If you submit we shall receive you in all love and charity and shall leave you, your wives and children and your lands free without servitude, but if you do not submit we shall powerfully enter into your country and shall make war against you, we shall take you and your wives and your children and shall make slaves of them and we shall take away your goods and shall do you all the harm and damage we can."

List of European colonies in the Americas

British

- British America (1607– 1783)
 - Thirteen Colonies
 - British North America (1783 – 1907)
 - Indian Reserve (1763–1783)
- British West Indies

Courland

- New Courland (Tobago) (1654–1689)

Danish

- Danish West Indies (1754–1917)
- Greenland (1814 - today)

Dutch

- Dutch Brazil (1630–1654)
 - Dutch Guiana (now Guyana and Suriname)
 - New Netherland (1609–1667)
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- Dutch West Indies and Tobago
- Virgin Islands

French

- New France (1534–1763)
 - Acadia (1604–1713)
 - Canada (1608–1763)
 - Louisiana (1699–1763, 1800–1803)
 - Newfoundland (1662–1713)
 - Île Royale (1713–1763)
- French Guiana (1763–today)
- French West Indies
- Saint-Domingue (1659–1804, now Haiti)
- Tobago
- Virgin Islands
- France Antarctique (1555–1567)
- Equinoctial France (1612–1615)

Portuguese

- Colonial Brazil (1500–1822)
- Cisplatina (1808–1822, today Uruguay)
- Barbados (1536–1620)
- French Guiana (1809–1817)

Russian

- Russian America (now Alaska, 1799–1867)

Spanish

- New Granada (1717–1819)
 - Captaincy General of Venezuela
- New Spain (1535–1821)
 - Nueva Extremadura
 - Nueva Galicia
 - Nuevo Reino de León
 - Nuevo Santander
 - Nueva Vizcaya
 - Las Californias
 - Santa Fe de Nuevo México
- Peru (1542–1824)
- Rio de la Plata (1776–1814)

Swedish

- New Sweden (1638–1655)
 - Saint Barthélemy (1785–1878)
 - Guadeloupe (1813–1814)
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Notes

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