# Transatlantic Encounters

### Spanish Exploration

You know the story: "in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue"—and came to a brand New World. Yes, at first he thought he was in the Indies, but after a few more voyages he finally decided he had, in fact, found something totally new. Europe was psyched. The **Age of Discovery**had kicked off in the 1400s, when the Portuguese had taken their small, fast ships to trade with African and Asian nations.

When Spain realized that the explorer it had sent to find India had found a whole new world, they were beside themselves with excitement. During the next century, Spain became thecolonial power in the Americas. The timing was ideal: the **Renaissance** and the Age of Discovery had made European nations more powerful and wealthy, which enabled them to finance the navies and armies that would establish **colonies**across entire oceans.

The Spanish navy, called the **Spanish Armada,**was the most powerful in the world, keeping everyone else on the seas out of the Americas. These boats carried the **conquistadors,**the military men Spain sent to conquer the Americas and subdue the Native peoples. Through a combination of diplomacy, treachery, and war, the conquistador **Hernán Cortés**took over the Aztec empire. Others penetrated into South America and the West Indies, putting Native peoples to the sword and reorganizing society to make themselves the rulers. They established **encomiendas,**land grants where they enslaved the native peoples and forced them to work on farms or in mines. Since Spain was also a Catholic nation, the crown also sent **missionaries**to convert the native peoples to Catholicism: aka totally erase their own culture and replace it with Spanish "civilization."

Life was great for the Spanish. They found the New World not only full of fertile soil for giant plantations, but tons of gold and silver. Take a look at a Spanish galleon to see the kind of immense wealth the Spanish were used to showing off back then. They had a right to be stoked: their empire stretched from present-day California to Florida and all the way south to the southern tip of Argentina.

Life was incredibly difficult for the natives, however. Not only were many enslaved and their rulers replaced by Spaniards, but their populations were ravaged by disease. Unlike in the English colonies, Native Americans in Latin America didintermarry with the Spanish, creating a class of mixed-race people called **mestizos,**but in general the Spanish policy against them was extremely harsh.

It wasn't long before people started noticing. A missionary called **Bartolomé de las Casas**visited America and was totally appalled to see the way the natives were treated. He wrote books detailing the horrible things the Spanish did to the natives, and these were published all over Europe. Europeans were horrified—the rumor spread that Spain was an evil, nasty empire of terrorists and tyrants. Historians now call this kind of thinking the**Black Legend.**Other European nations began to itch even more for the New World: they insisted that they would treat the natives far better than the Spanish, and so deserved a shot.

Unfortunately for the would-be do-gooders, however, there was a Spanish Armada to sail through…

### English Colonization

Enter the Pirate Story. Elizabeth I had a favorite pirate, **Sir Walter Raleigh,**whose ships were the bane of the Armada's existence. Finally, in 1587, he arrived in North America and settled England's first colony: **Roanoke.**However, Roanoke had disappeared into thin air by 1590. When Raleigh came back to it, the town was abandoned and the settlers were gone. The only clue was a word carved on a tree: the name of the nearby Indian settlement. Historians now believe that the Native Americans attacked and eradicated (or maybe enslaved) the colonial settlement. That's why it's now called the **Lost Colony.**

The British were a hardy bunch, however. Plus, in the year 1588 they actually defeated the glorious Spanish Armada, making the seas much more open for colonization. They were also a country hungry for the gold and silver the Spanish had found, and were filled with a restless, poverty-stricken population that was busting at the seams of that small island. Sending a group of these folk to a new colony would be like a safety valve for all the social pressure that was building.

In 1607 the Brits established **Jamestown**in present-day Virginia. This wasn't funded by the crown, but by a **joint-stock company**: a group of investors who pooled their money together to buy the rights to a colony. If it failed, they lost the money—but if it succeeded, they could make big bucks off the settlement and the goods found or produced. The one that funded Jamestown was the **Virginia Company.**

Going across the ocean to a totally new place was a terrifying experience. However, there were just enough down-and-out, young, and adventurous men in England desperate enough to feel they had nothing to lose. Plus, America had what Europe lacked: vast tracts of free land. Many men came over as **indentured servants:**their passage was paid for, as long as in return they worked for seven years. Those were 7 long years of miserable, hard work, but at the end they were given a small bit of property for their very own. Not a bad deal.

Except that Virginia turned out to be something a lot more like a swamp. First, many of the men who first arrived set right to work digging for gold. After all, it worked for the Spanish. Sadly, there was no gold. These newbies hadn't even bothered to establish farms or even gardens, so soon they were devastated by famine. The only reason they survived was because **Colonel John Smith**imposed martial law, organizing the badly disciplined colonists and forcing them to work to house and feed themselves.

They still would probably have died had not the local Native Americans helped them out. The **Powhatan Confederacy,**led by the powerful leader **Powhatan**, showed the colonists how to plant crops like corn. Powhatan's daughter, **Pocahontas**was a kind of diplomat between the two peoples. She even married an Englishman, **John Rolfe,**in 1614, to seal an alliance between the two peoples.

John Rolfe also brought a little something called **tobacco**to Virginia. This crop would cause a total revolution in that area: it was an insanely profitable crop. People in Europe adored it, and were willing to pay a ton for it. It made the struggling colony suddenly a place of massive possible wealth: people scrambled to build tobacco plantations.

However, tobacco needs a huge amount of land and labor to thrive. As a result, colonists kept pushing into Indian lands, sparking wars that eventually led to the entire destruction of the Powhatan Confederacy in 1644. It also needs workers—tons of them, and especially ones hardy enough to work horribly long hours at seriously demanding physical labor.

How were the colonists ever going to find those?

One way was to import more indentured servants. In 1618 the Virginia Company introduced the **headright**system: if a rich man paid for the passage of several indentured servants, he would gain a headright: a tract of 50 acres of land. Every "head" equaled the "right" to land. A man could pay for servants to cross the ocean, secure huge tracts of land in the bargain, and then head on over himself to establish a tobacco plantation and become even richer. Voila: the arrival of a Virginian aristocracy.

The problem with indentured servants was that at the end of 7 years, they were gone: Plus, they always wanted land as soon as they were free. The Virginia planters dreamed of a labor force they could utterly control, one that wouldn't feel entitled to rights or land. Fortunately for them, such a force existed: African slaves. John Rolfe (who was quite a busy dude, what with Pocahontas, tobacco, andslaves) brought over the first group in 1619. After that, they just kept coming.

### The Pilgrims

We know you've been waiting for it: The Thanksgiving Story.

It starts in England in the 1600s, when the English **Anglican Church**was plagued by a group of **separatists**who called themselves the **Puritans.**They thought the Anglican Church looked too much like the Catholic Church, with all its rituals and riches and wealthy bishops and priests, and wanted to simplify and "purify" it.

The Puritans were inspired by the teachings of **John Calvin,**a Protestant minister who taught the **doctrine ofpre-destination.**Because God was all-knowing, he had known since the beginning of time who was saved and who was not. No amount of **good works**a person could do would save them. You just had to have faith and work hard in your life to live a saintly life, hoping that this indicated you were saved.

The Puritans thought a saintly life involved eliminating rid of all kinds of vanities: fancy clothes and rituals, dancing and partying, and lots of other fun stuff. Not surprisingly, the Anglican Church thought these people were crazy and wanted them out of the country. The Puritans themselves thought the Anglican Church was doomed to suffer God's wrath. They wanted to go somewhere far away where they could create a God-ordained land of their own.

Happily for the Puritans, there wasa place they were allowed to go: the New World. A group of them (in families, not as single men, like those who went to Virginia) packed their bags and boarded the **Mayflower.**They arrived in**Plymouth**in 1620 and created a kind of government agreement called the **Mayflower Compact.**This was important as a basis for future government in America, because it established the **separation of church and state**and the **rule of the majority.**In other words, it was the foundation for the style of American government that we still have today.

The Puritans did well there. Well enough that when, in 1629, oppression against the Puritans escalated and the British government began persecuting them, more and more decided to join their brethren in the New World. The**Great Migration**began in 1630, to the **Massachusetts Bay Colony.**The governor of this place was **John Winthrop,**a famous Puritan minister who proclaimed to his people that this new colony would be a **"city on a hill:"**a perfect Christian society that the whole world would want to emulate.   
  
Sure enough, they established a nice little community. Nicer, that is, than Virginia, which was becoming more and more a land of a tiny number of rich men and a giant heap of poor, landless, hard-worked slaves and servants. Society was more equal than in Virginia, since the Puritan idea of a **covenant**(the notion that they and God had an "agreement:" they were his Chosen People as long as they lived godly lives and cared for their communities) extended to their societies.

Government and society were **covenants,**too,in which people worked communally for the common good, and all belonged to one church. At first, you had to have had a real conversion experience to belong to the church. However, the kids and grandkids of the first settlers didn't seem to be having these conversation experiences. Seemed they just didn't care as much. In response, Puritan authorities established the **Halfway Covenant**to give non-converted Puritans "partial"membership.

This was all nice if you belongedto the Puritan church: you had your piece of land and family farm, you participated in local government, and you had a say in church matters. If you were a Quaker, however,life was not so great: Quakers were imprisoned, hanged, and subjected to all sorts of cruel and unusual punishments.

Some Puritans, like **Roger Williams**and **Anne Hutchinson,**tried to argue with the main church leaders. They taught a doctrine called **antinomianism**, or the idea that faith was enough for admission to heaven, so even people who did terrible things could be saved. In Puritan society, the church was the most powerful institution: challenging the church authorities was like challenging the very basis of society itself. After Williams and Hutchinson were exiled, they founded their own colony nearby where they allowed **religious toleration:**Rhode Island.

Other colonies were established as splinter groups from the original two settlements: Connecticut, New Haven, and New Hampshire. Other colonies, like Rhode Island, were originally havens for different religious groups that the Puritans rejected. Pennsylvania (which literally means "Penn's Woods") was founded by **William Penn**in 1681 as a refuge for Quakers. The same thing happened with New Jersey and Delaware, in 1664 and 1703. Maryland was founded by **Lord Baltimore**as a haven for Catholics, and an **Act of Toleration**was introduced in 1643 to grant religious freedom to everyone…as long as they were Christians.

Many of these colonies were **proprietary colonies**: that is, they were given as gifts by **King Charles II** to some of his buddies who had helped him regain his throne. His dad, **Charles I,**had been beheaded in the **Glorious Revolution.**A government run by the Puritan **Oliver Cromwell**came to power and ruled from 1649 - 1660 (the**Interregnum Period**) but it proved a tyrannical disaster. Charles II managed to regain his throne in a period called the **Restoration,**and he gave his buddies places like Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, and the Carolinas.

The Carolinas were established to supply the British colonies in the **West Indies,**like Barbados, which were hugely rich because of the sugar plantations there. It was soon discovered that cash crops like rice and indigo grew well there, too, so they also became colonies based on cash-crop economies and boasting giant plantations, a powerful aristocracy, and lots of slaves—like the tobacco-glutted **Chesapeake**colonies of Virginia and Maryland.  
  
Another proprietary colony was New York. Funny thing was, New York wasn't exactly for the taking: it was owned by the Dutch, as **New Amsterdam**. However, the Brits managed to wage a quick, easy little war against the Dutch and captured **New Netherland**(now New York City) in 1664. The poor Dutch didn't have long to frolic in the New World, however. The French, on the other hand, were annoying and problematically close neighbors for quite some time.

### French Colonization

The French founded **Quebec City**in Canada in 1608. Like the Brits, they started sniffing around for gold in the hope that they would get lucky like the Spanish had. Unfortunately, they were in Canada: the only things they found that glittered were a ton of icicles. Happily, though, they also found all sorts of animals with beautiful fur, which Europeans back in Europe wanted badly and were willing to pay a lot for.

Most of the colonists in the French colonies were **coureurs de bois**("runners in the woods"…doesn't everything sound more romantic in French?), or fur traders. They actually had fairly good relationships with the local Native Americans: there weren't enough of them to present a big threat, although they did send missionaries to try to spread Catholicism.

Too bad they were only marginally successful with spreading religion. However, they werehugely successful in spreading disease.

Like the Spanish, the French also intermarried with the Native Americans: they were most interested in cultivating good trade relationships, not devouring land. The whole story may have been a lot different if the French people had actually cared to establish settlements there. But, first of all, they heard the French colonies weren't exactly the warmest and most welcoming of lands. Second of all, the **Edict of Nantes**in France in 1598 had given**Huguenots**(French Protestants) religious toleration. Their Protestants didn't need to flee like England's.

### Rebellion

So. Now you have a picture of the big mix peoples that comprised the Americas at this time. It wasn't yet a "melting pot," but more a boiling mass of different races, nationalities, cultures, economies, religions and societies. This was a recipe for a lot of unrest: rebellion, war, decimation, you name it. This started happening immediately.

In New England, the **Pequot**tribe of Connecticut attacked the settlements in 1637: the colonists responded by fighting back so ferociously that they entirely eradicated the Pequot tribe.

In 1675, **Metacom,**also known as **King Philip,**proclaimed himself tired of the Massachusetts settlers and all their land-grabbing selfishness, and attacked them. That war (**King Philip's War**) was particularly destructive to the English settlements, but in the end they were finally victorious, and English control was secured.   
  
In Virginia, the widening gap between rich and poor started to make people angry. The rich were sitting on almost all of the land, and then **Sir William Berkeley**, the governor,had to make it worse by forbidding colonists to intrude onto Indian Territory, so they couldn't move to thoselands, either.

A young, newly arrived colonist called **Nathanial Bacon**thenorganized **Bacon's Rebellion,**attacking the property of the aristocracy and massacring Native Americans. It was finally put down, but significant changes were made: the little s began to have more say in the previously aristocrat-dominated **House of Burgesses.**Plus, historians think this was a turning point for slavery: indentured servants had proved themselves rambunctious and downright dangerous. Slaves would perhaps be a safer option.

In modern-day New Mexico, the most successful Indian rebellion in American history occurred: the **Pueblo Revolt.**The Pueblo peoples had been terribly oppressed by the Spanish: enslaved, crammed into Catholic**Missions** where they weren't allowed to practice their own culture or religion, and decimated by disease. An incredible native leader, **Popé,**organized his people and led them in an attack against the Spanish in 1680, killing and kicking out all the Spanish. They kept them out for almost 50 years.  
  
Of course, this was not the usual story. The usual story can be summarized by something historians call the**Columbian Exchange:**this refers to the movement of people, crops, animals, and disease across the Atlantic. It also refers to the creation of the **Atlantic World**: the network of connections between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

European and African people migrated (or were forced) in droves to the Americas, and even some Native Americans came to Europe. Europeans and Africans brought a ton of their own crops and animals to the Americas: rice, for example, from Africa, and tobacco, pigs, and horses from Europe. These crops totally changed the American environment. New World crops like tomatoes, coffee, and cocoa in turn made their way to Europe and America, transforming people's diets. And, of course, diseases like smallpox, yellow fever, and malaria came across the oceans too.

The upshot was the influx of tons of European and African peoples, the decimation of the Native peoples, and the transformation of the American landscape.

The world in 1492 had been blown wide open. Life would never be the same for any continent on the planet: globalization had begun. The appearance of the "New World" would change the "Old World" forever.

## Sample Questions

Here's the time we interrupt our riveting tale to give you a chance to test your knowledge. Every few sections or so, we'll give you some sample multiple-choice questions, and then tell you how to answer them. Then, at the end, we'll reward you for coming this far by giving you a fascinating/hilarious/awesome Study Break link.

1. Which of the following statements best describes the first settlers to North America?

A) Persecuted religious groups seeking asylum  
B) Puritans disgusted with the Anglican Church and determined to create a true Christian society  
C) Joint stock company holders seeking precious resources or cash crops  
D) Young men seeking precious metals  
E) Fur traders and fishermen

The correct answer is (E).

You might be thinking onlyof the area of the United States. It's important to remember, however, that earlyearly American stuff wasn't even American. It was French, British, and Spanish. The very first settlers on the North American continent were the French fur traders and fishermen who moseyed along down the Canadian shores way before the Brits arrived in Jamestown in 1607.

2. Relations between Native Americans and British colonists in North America during the 17th century can best be characterized by

A) British imposition of religious ideals and cultural norms  
B) colonists' fears of Indian power, authority, and organization  
C) dependence of the Native Americans on British goods and arms  
D) superior power of the British due to guns   
E) British dependency on Indian communities for food  
  
The correct answer is (B).

You'll find a lot of questions on the AP that make you grind your teeth, because they contain several "right" answers, but one "best." Brits did impose their religions (with missionaries), but not in great numbers and not equally in all colonies. Native Americans definitely wanted British goods and guns, but they weren't yet dependenton them. In Virginia, Jamestown colonists needed Indian food to last the winter, but New Englanders didn't. The reality in all the colonies was that the colonists weren't numerous enough—even with their big bad guns—to pose a real threat. Many Indian tribes were powerful and capable (as a whole batch of wars show) of resisting the invasion.