

European Exploration and Settlement

2.1 Introduction

Half a world away from where Native Americans made their homes, Europeans had no knowledge of these peoples or the land where they lived. When Europeans looked west, they saw only a vast ocean.

Europeans were far more interested in the lands that lay to the east. In the late 1200s, a young man named Marco Polo traveled through Asia with his father, a merchant and trader from Venice, Italy. Marco Polo spent 17 years in China. When he returned to Venice, people flocked to hear his stories of “the Indies,” as India and East Asia were then known. He was called “the man of a million tales.”

Eventually, a writer helped Marco Polo put his adventures into a book. The book described the wonders Polo had seen in China. It told of rich silks and rare spices, gold and jewels, and luxurious palaces.

When Marco Polo’s book was published, only a few people in Europe could read. Those who did read it were fascinated by its description of riches to the east. Merchants and traders were eager to find the fastest way to get there. The land route that Polo had traveled was long and dangerous. His tales inspired explorers to find a route by sea.

Some **explorers** would seek a route to China by going around the southern tip of Africa. But a few brave souls looked to the west for another route. This took courage, because no one knew how far west sailors would have to sail to reach Asia or what monsters and terrors might await them far from Europe’s shore.

In this chapter, you will learn how Christopher Columbus defied these dangers and sailed west to find a route to China. As you will see, his unexpected discovery of America led to competition among European nations to explore and profit from the land they called the **New World**.

2.2 Spain Starts an Empire

Marco Polo’s book continued to be read over the next two centuries. This was a time of great change in Europe. The rediscovered writings of ancient Greeks and Romans inspired a new interest in learning and art. This period of lively new thinking has become known as the Renaissance, a word that means “rebirth.”

During this time, the invention of the printing press made books, including Marco Polo’s, more available. As Europeans learned about the world beyond Europe, they became eager to explore these far-off lands.

Columbus’s Discoveries One of the people who was inspired by Marco Polo’s writings was an Italian seaman named Christopher Columbus. After studying maps of the world, Columbus became convinced that the shortest route to the Indies lay to the west, across the Atlantic Ocean.

Columbus looked for someone who could pay for the ships and men he needed to test his idea. Eventually, he was able to convince King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to sponsor a voyage.

In August 1492, Columbus sailed west with three small ships. After more than a month at sea, his sailors raised the cry of “Land!” The land turned out to be a small island in what we now call the Caribbean Sea.

Columbus was thrilled. In a later letter, he wrote, “I write this to tell you how in thirty-three days I sailed to the Indies with the fleet that the illustrious King and Queen...gave me, where I discovered a great many islands, inhabited by numberless people.” Mistakenly believing that he had reached the Indies, Columbus called these people Indians.

In reality, the islanders were Native Americans who spoke a language called Taino. The Taino lived in a peaceful fishing community. Never had they seen people like the ones who had suddenly appeared on their shores. Yet they were friendly and welcoming. Columbus wrote, “They are so unsuspecting and so generous with what they possess, that no one who had not seen it would believe it.”

Columbus promptly claimed the island for Spain and named it San Salvador, which means “Holy Savior.” From there he sailed on to other islands. Convinced that China lay nearby, Columbus sailed back to Spain for more ships and men.

Columbus made four trips to the Caribbean, finding more islands, as well as the continent of South America. Each time he discovered a new place, he claimed it for Spain. Columbus died still believing he had found Asia, but later explorers quickly realized that he had actually stumbled on a “New World” unknown to Europe—the continents of North and South America.

The Columbian Exchange The voyages of Columbus triggered a great transfer of people, plants, animals, and diseases back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean. This transfer, which still continues today, is called the Columbian Exchange. The Columbian Exchange brought valuable new crops such as corn and potatoes to Europe. These foods greatly improved the diet of the average European. Many Europeans also found new opportunities by crossing the Atlantic to settle in the Americas.

For Native Americans, however, the exchange began badly. The Europeans who came to America brought with them germs that caused smallpox and other diseases deadly to Native Americans. Historians estimate that in some areas, 90 percent of the native population was wiped out by European diseases.

Slavery Comes to America This high death rate contributed to the introduction of African slaves to the Americas. Some of the Spanish settlers in the Caribbean had started gold mines. Others raised sugar, a crop of great value in Europe. At first the settlers forced Indians to work for them.

But as native people began dying in great numbers from European diseases, the settlers looked for a new work force. Before long, enslaved Africans were replacing Indians.

Slavery had existed around the world since ancient times. Often people who lost wars were enslaved, or treated as the property of their conquerors. By the late 1400s, European explorers in West Africa were trading guns and other goods for slaves captured by Africans.

In the 1500s, European slave traders began shipping slaves to the Caribbean for sale. Over the next three centuries, millions of Africans would be carried across the Atlantic in crowded, disease-infested ships. The terrible voyage lasted anywhere from weeks to months. Many died before it was over.

When the Africans arrived in the Americas, they were sold to their new masters at auctions. Many perished from disease and overwork. Those who survived faced a lifetime of forced labor as slaves.

Cortés Conquers Mexico After Columbus's voyages, Spain began sending soldiers called **conquistadors** across the Atlantic. Their mission was to conquer a vast empire for Spain. Along the way, the conquistadors hoped to get rich.

In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico with horses and 500 soldiers. There he heard about the powerful Aztecs who ruled much of Mexico. When Cortés and his men reached the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, they could not believe their eyes. A beautiful city seemed to rise out of a sparkling lake. One Spaniard wrote, "Some of our soldiers asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream."

The Aztecs were not sure what to make of the strangers. They had never seen men dressed in metal armor and riding horses. Some mistook Cortés for the great Aztec god Quetzalcoatl and welcomed him as a hero. They would soon change their minds.

With the help of Indians who hated their Aztec rulers, and smallpox—which killed large numbers of Aztec warriors—Cortés conquered Tenochtitlán. The Spaniards pulled the city down and used its stones to build Mexico City, the capital of a new Spanish empire called New Spain.

Pizarro Conquers Peru Smallpox also helped another Spanish conquistador, Francisco Pizarro, conquer an empire in South America. In 1532, Pizarro led an attack on the powerful Inca empire in present-day Peru. Luckily for Pizarro, smallpox reached Peru many months before him, killing thousands of Incas and leaving their empire badly divided.

Pizarro captured the Inca ruler, Atahualpa, but promised to release him in exchange for gold. To save their ruler, the Incas filled three rooms with gold and silver treasures. Pizarro killed Atahualpa anyway and took over the leaderless Inca empire. From there, Spanish conquistadors conquered most of South America.

2.3 The Spanish Borderlands

In both Mexico and Peru, conquistadors found gold and silver riches beyond their wildest dreams. Hoping for still more, they pushed north into lands that are now part of the United States. Because these lands were located on the far edges of Spain's North American empire, they were known as the Spanish borderlands.

Florida One of the first Spanish expeditions into North America was led by a man named Juan Ponce de León. He had sailed with Columbus to the Caribbean and made his fortune by discovering gold on the island of Puerto Rico. Despite his wealth, Ponce de León couldn't stop thinking about Indian rumors of a "fountain of youth" that made old people young again. Restless for more adventure, he set off to find the truth about these tales of everlasting youth.

Ponce de León landed on a sunny peninsula of North America in April 1513. Because he had sighted this lush new land on Easter Sunday, he called it La Florida, meaning "flowery." (The name is short for "flowery Easter.") Eight years later, he returned to Florida with 200 men to establish a Spanish settlement, or **colony**. Native Americans in the area used poisoned arrows to drive off the invaders. Instead of finding a fountain of youth, Ponce de León died from a poisoned arrow in his stomach.

The "Seven Cities of Cibola" Another legend sparked new Spanish expeditions into North America. An old European tale told of the "Seven Cities of Cibola." These cities were said to be so fabulously rich that the streets and houses were

decorated with gold and jewels. When the Spanish heard Indians tell similar tales, they became convinced that the Seven Cities of Cibola were somewhere in North America.

Spanish explorers first looked for the seven cities in Florida and in present-day Texas. They found plenty of adventure, but no golden cities. Then a Spanish priest named Marcos de Niza claimed to have seen a shimmering golden city in what is now New Mexico. He raced back to Mexico City with the news.

The Coronado Expedition In 1540, a famed conquistador named Francisco Vázquez de Coronado set out from Mexico City with a large expedition and de Niza as his guide. Their goal was to find the legendary golden cities.

After traveling north more than 7,000 miles, the expedition found a Native American *pueblo* (a village of apartment-like buildings made of stone and adobe rising four and five stories high). To de Niza, this might have looked like a golden city. But to Coronado, it was a “little, crowded village...all crumpled up together.” The enraged expedition leader sent the priest home.

The Coronado expedition continued north onto the Great Plains before giving up the search for golden cities. Disappointed, Coronado reported to Spain, “Everything is the opposite of [what] was related, except the name of the cities and the large stone houses.... The Seven Cities are seven little villages.”

Settling the Borderlands As conquistadors explored new territories, they claimed the areas for Spain. By 1600, the Spanish borderlands extended west from Florida across present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

At first, Spain did little to encourage settlement in these far-flung areas. But when rival European nations also began to show an interest in the land, small bands of soldiers were sent to these regions to protect the claims. The soldiers lived in walled forts called *presidios*.

In 1565, for example, a Spanish naval officer named Pedro Menéndez de Avilés was sent to Florida to protect the area from French explorers. Menéndez successfully drove the French out of their Florida base and built a fort on the peninsula’s Atlantic coast. Menéndez named the fort Saint Augustine. Over the years, Spanish soldiers based at St. Augustine successfully defended the fort, and Spanish claims to Florida, from both French and English rivals. Today, St. Augustine is the oldest permanent settlement founded by Europeans in the United States.

Catholic **missionaries** accompanied the soldiers to the borderlands. Missionaries are priests who try to persuade people to convert to their religion. The priests built settlements called *missions* where they taught local Indians new skills and the Christian faith. Each mission grew its own food and produced most of what the missionaries needed to survive far from towns and trading centers.

Hardy bands of settlers also moved into the borderlands. There they established towns and farms. Juan de Oñate, who had made a fortune mining silver in Mexico, led the settlement of New Mexico. In 1598, Oñate brought 400 settlers and 7,000 animals from Mexico to New Mexico. The long overland journey took a year and a half to complete.

At first, the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico welcomed the newcomers. Unfortunately, the Spanish repaid the Indians’ kindness with cruelty. Indians were made to work for the settlers as slaves. Catholic priests ordered the whipping of Pueblo religious leaders who continued to practice their traditional rituals. Such treatment led the Pueblo people to rise up in revolt and drive the Spanish out. Twelve years would pass before Spanish settlers returned to New Mexico.

During the 1600s and 1700s, settlement of the Spanish borderlands proceeded slowly. But in time, the language, religion, and culture of Spain spread across much of the American Southwest.

Impact on Native Americans The arrival of Spanish settlers had a great impact on the native peoples of the borderlands. The Pueblo people, for example, learned from the Spanish how to use new tools, grow new foods, and raise sheep for wool. In turn, the Indians introduced the Spanish to new techniques for growing crops in the desert soil.

From Florida to California, some Native Americans converted to the Catholic faith. The converts often lived and worked in and around the missions, growing crops and helping to maintain the churches and other buildings. However, even converts often continued to practice their traditional religious rituals as well.

Unfortunately, wherever the Spanish settled, they brought with them diseases to which native peoples had no resistance. Smallpox, measles, and influenza often wiped out entire villages. Before Coronado’s expedition, there had been more than 100 Indian pueblos in New Mexico. By 1700, only 18 remained.

2.4 New France

As Spanish colonies sent ships loaded with gold and silver home to Spain, all of Europe watched with envy. Every year, Spain seemed to become more wealthy and more powerful. Other nations wanted their share of riches from the New World. But none was strong enough to challenge Spain’s American empire. Instead, they would have to seek their fortunes in areas not yet claimed by Spain.

Claiming New France In 1534, France sent Jacques Cartier to explore the Atlantic coastline of North America. His goal was to find a Northwest Passage, an all-water route through the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean. Such a passage would provide a shortcut for ships sailing west to Asia.

Cartier failed to find such a passage. But he did claim for France the land we know today as Canada. He later named this land New France. Cartier also discovered something almost as valuable as Spanish gold—beaver fur. Beaver hats were a hot fashion item in Europe, and French hat makers were willing to pay high prices for beaver pelts.

Settling New France The first settlement in New France was founded by Samuel de Champlain. In 1608, Champlain sailed up the St. Lawrence River and built a trading post he called Quebec. For the next 150 years, Quebec would be a base for French explorers, soldiers, missionaries, traders, and fur **trappers**.

From Quebec, fur trappers pushed west in search of beaver. They called themselves *coureurs de bois*, which means “wood rangers” in French. Catholic missionaries followed the trappers, seeking converts among the native peoples.

Like the Spanish borderlands, New France failed to attract large numbers of settlers. The harsh climate of New France discouraged French farmers from crossing the Atlantic. So did the colony’s policy of granting the best land along the St. Lawrence River to French nobles who then planned to rent it out to farmers. The few settlers who did come soon got tired of renting and left their farms to search for furs.

Native American Business Partners Because the French were more interested in furs than farming, they did not try to conquer the Indians and put them to work as the Spanish had done. Instead, the French made Native Americans their business partners.

After founding Quebec, Champlain made friends with the nearby Indians, especially the Huron. Fur trappers lived in Huron villages, learned the Huron language, and married Huron women. From the Huron they learned how to survive for months in the wilderness. Unfortunately, the friendship between the French and Huron exposed the Huron to European diseases, which swept through their villages and killed many of them.

Champlain even joined the Huron in an attack on their enemies the Iroquois. He later wrote:

I marched some 20 paces ahead of the rest, until I was about 30 paces from the enemy.... When I saw them making a move to fire at us, I rested my musket against my cheek and aimed directly at one of their three chiefs. With the same shot, two fell to the ground, and one of their men was wounded.... When our side saw this shot...they began to raise such loud cries that one could not have heard it thunder. Meanwhile, the arrows flew on both sides.

The astonished Iroquois, who had never seen or heard gunfire before, fled in terror. From that day on, the Iroquois would be the bitter enemies of the French.

Claiming Louisiana The search for furs led the French far inland from Quebec. In 1673, two explorers, Father Marquette and Louis Joliet, explored the great Mississippi River. They hoped that this waterway would be the long-sought Northwest Passage. But they discovered that, instead of flowing west to the Pacific Ocean, the river flowed south toward the Gulf of Mexico. Disappointed, they returned to New France.

Nine years later, Robert de La Salle explored the entire length of the Mississippi River. On April 9, 1682, he planted a French flag at the mouth of the river and claimed everything west of the Mississippi River for France. La Salle named this vast area Louisiana for the French monarch, King Louis XIV.

2.5 Jamestown: The First English Colony

Columbus’s voyages inspired John Cabot, an Italian living in England, to seek his own western route to Asia. In 1497, Cabot, who had moved to England from Venice, sailed west across the Atlantic. He landed in Newfoundland, an island off the coast of Canada. A fellow Venetian living in London wrote of Cabot’s brief landing:

He coasted for three hundred leagues and landed; saw no human beings, but he has brought here to the king certain snares which had been set to catch game, and a needle for making nets; he also found some felled trees, by which he judged there were inhabitants, and he returned to his ship in alarm.... The discoverer...planted on this newly-found land a large cross, with one flag of England and another of St. Mark [the patron saint of Venice] on account of his being a Venetian.

Like Columbus, Cabot mistakenly believed that he had landed in Asia. Later, however, England would claim all of North America because of the flag planted by Cabot in 1497.

The Lost Colony of Roanoke Nearly a century later, an English noble named Sir Walter Raleigh tried to start a colony on Roanoke Island off the coast of present-day North Carolina. Indians on the island welcomed the settlers and gave them traps for catching fish. The newcomers, however, were more interested in looking for gold than fishing. When their supplies ran low, they returned to England.

In 1587, Raleigh sent a second group of colonists to Roanoke. Unfortunately, they arrived too late in the season to plant crops. Their leader, John White, sailed back to England for more supplies. While White was in England, however, fighting broke out between England and Spain. As a result, his return to Roanoke was delayed for three years.

When White finally reached the island, the colonists had disappeared. Carved on a doorpost was the word CROATOAN. To this day, both the meaning of this word and what happened to the lost colony of Roanoke remain a mystery.

Settling Jamestown Twenty years went by before a permanent English colony was established in America. In 1607, a group of merchants formed the London Company to start a money-making colony in Virginia. The company crammed 144 settlers into three tiny ships and sent them across the Atlantic. The settlers were to ship back valuable goods such as furs and timber.

When they reached Virginia, the colonists settled on a swampy peninsula they believed could be easily defended against Native Americans or Spanish ships. They called their new home Jamestown after King James I. What the settlers didn't know was that the spot they chose to settle would soon be swarming with disease-carrying mosquitoes. It was also surrounded by a large and powerful Native American group.

To make matters worse, the Jamestown settlers were a mix of gentlemen and craftsmen. None of them knew much about farming. Nor were they willing to work very hard at it. They thought they were in Virginia to look for gold, not to provide for themselves.

As the food the settlers had brought with them disappeared, they began to trade with the Indians, bartering glass beads and iron hatchets for corn and meat. But barter wasn't easy. Many Indians decided they would sooner kill the English—or just let them starve—than trade. Hunger and disease soon took their toll. Every few days, another body was carried off to the graveyard.

In 1608, a natural leader named Captain John Smith took control of Jamestown. “If any would not work,” announced Smith, “neither should he eat.” The men were hungry, so they worked.

While scouting for food, Smith was captured by the Indians and brought to a smoky longhouse. Seated at one end, he saw Powhatan, the Indians' powerful chief. The Indians greeted Smith with a loud shout and a great feast. But when the meal ended, the mood changed. Smith was about to be clubbed to death when a young girl leapt out of the shadows. “She took my head in her arms and laid her own upon mine to save me from death,” Smith later wrote.

Smith's savior was Pocahontas, Chief Powhatan's favorite daughter. From that moment on, she would think of Smith as her brother. Pocahontas helped Smith save Jamestown by bringing food and keeping peace with her people. “She, next under God,” Smith wrote, “was...the instrument to preserve this colony from death, famine, and utter confusion.”

The Starving Time Jamestown's troubles, however, were far from over. In the fall of 1609, after being injured in a gunpowder explosion, Smith returned to England. The following winter was the worst ever—so bad that it came to be known as the “Starving Time.”

Without Smith and Pocahontas to act as go-betweens, the Indians refused to trade with the settlers. The English ate dogs, rats, and even human corpses to survive. By spring, only 60 of the 500 people Smith had left in the fall remained alive.

When supply ships arrived the following spring, the survivors were ordered to abandon their failed colony. Then three more English ships arrived with food, 150 new colonists, and 100 soldiers. Jamestown was saved again.

Jamestown Survives Even with more settlers, the people of Jamestown lived in constant danger of Indian attacks. To end that threat, the English kidnapped Pocahontas and held her hostage. For a year, Pocahontas remained a prisoner—but a willing and curious one. During that time she learned English, adopted the Christian faith, and made new friends.

Among those new friends was a widower named John Rolfe. Rolfe had already helped the colony survive by finding a crop that could be raised in Virginia and sold for good prices in England—tobacco. The happy settlers went tobacco mad, planting the crop everywhere, even in Jamestown's streets.

Now Rolfe helped again by making a proposal of marriage to Pocahontas. Both the governor of Jamestown and Chief Powhatan gave their consent to this unusual match. Maybe they hoped that the marriage would help end the conflict between their peoples.

The union of Pocahontas and John Rolfe did bring peace to Jamestown. In 1616, Rolfe wrote, “Our people yearly plant and reap quietly, and travel in the woods...as freely and securely from danger...as in England.”

2.6 New Netherland: The Short-Lived Dutch Settlement

While John Smith was struggling to save the colony of Jamestown, an English sailor named Henry Hudson was exploring the coastline farther north for the Netherlands. Henry Hudson's voyage was sponsored by Dutch merchants who hoped to find the Northwest Passage. (The people of the Netherlands are called the Dutch.)

In 1609, Hudson discovered a deep river full of fish, and thought it might just take him all the way across the continent. It didn't, of course, but he claimed the land along its banks for the Netherlands. The river was later named the Hudson in his honor, and the territory he claimed became known as New Netherland.

In 1621, Dutch merchants formed the Dutch West India Company to start a colony in America. The first Dutch colonists settled along the upper Hudson where they built Fort Orange, near present-day Albany, New York. The new colonists quickly found that there were good profits to be made in the fur trade. They established trading posts along the Hudson River. The largest was on Manhattan Island at the river's mouth.

Relations with Native Americans In 1626, the Dutch West India Company sent Peter Minuit to New Netherland as the colony's governor. Wanting peaceful relations with the Indians, the company told Minuit that any native peoples on Manhattan Island "must not be expelled with violence or threats but be persuaded with kind words...or should be given something."

Following orders, Minuit offered the island's Indians iron pots, beads, and blankets worth about \$24 in exchange for their land. The Native Americans didn't believe that anyone could own land. Laughing at the foolishness of the white men, they made the trade.

Dutch traders also made deals with members of the powerful Iroquois Confederacy, an alliance of five Indian groups who lived across the northern portion of New Netherland. The French had long supplied the Huron, the Iroquois' great rivals, with guns in exchange for furs. It made sense for the Iroquois to become partners with the Dutch, who supplied them with the weapons they needed to stand up to the Huron.

This partnership also made sense for the Dutch. The French were their main rivals in the fur trade. For most of the 1600s, the Iroquois kept the French from moving into the fur-rich Ohio Valley.

New Amsterdam As the fur trade expanded, the Dutch settlement on Manhattan swelled to over 1,000 people. In 1647, the Dutch West India Company hired Peter Stuyvesant as the colony's new governor. When he arrived at Manhattan, Stuyvesant declared that the settlement would be called New Amsterdam, after the capital city of the Netherlands.

Stuyvesant had lost his right leg in battle, and he stomped around on a wooden leg that was decorated with silver nails. People called him "Old Silvernails" or "Peg Leg Pete." Although he was a strong leader, "Old Silvernails" was generally disliked. When Dutchmen who had been elected as city councilors disagreed with him, he called them "ignorant subjects" and threatened to ship them back to the Netherlands in pieces if they gave him trouble.

Despite his reputation as a grouch, Stuyvesant governed New Amsterdam for 17 years. During this time, he captured a nearby Swedish colony and invited its settlers to live in New Amsterdam. By 1660, the colony had nearly 8,000 people, including Europeans from many nations as well as enslaved Africans. New Amsterdam also provided refuge for Jews who were seeking freedom to follow their religion in peace.

New Netherland Becomes New York Stuyvesant's biggest problem was that the English wanted to drive the Dutch out of North America. England's king, Charles II, refused to recognize Dutch claims to New Netherland. In 1664, Charles gave his brother, James, the Duke of York, ownership of all Dutch lands in America—if he could conquer them.

James promptly organized a small invasion fleet to take the colony. When the English arrived, they sent Stuyvesant a letter demanding his surrender. Stuyvesant tore up the note and refused to consider giving up until New Amsterdam's chief gunner reported that the city's supply of gun-powder was damp and useless. Without firing a shot, the English took over New Netherland and renamed the colony New York.

2.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you read about the first European settlements in the "New World." You used an illustration to learn about the European exploration and settlement of the Americas.

Europeans called the Americas the "New World" because their discovery came as a surprise to them. Explorers like Christopher Columbus were actually looking for a westward route to Asia when they stumbled onto these continents.

European nations competed to claim these new lands and the riches they might contain. Spain claimed vast territories, including Mexico and the southwestern portion of the future United States. In their search for gold and other treasures, Spanish conquistadors conquered the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru. The Spanish also brought enslaved Africans

to the Americas to plant and harvest crops. In the American Southwest, Spanish missionaries worked to convert Native Americans to Christianity.

The French, meanwhile, staked a claim to much of present-day Canada, as well as Louisiana, the territory west of the Mississippi River. Most French settlers were more interested in trapping and trading furs than in farming or establishing large settlements.

The English based their claim to North America on John Cabot's voyage in 1497. After several attempts, the English established their first permanent colony at Jamestown in Virginia.

The Dutch established their own foothold in North America by founding the colony of New Amsterdam. The English, however, drove the Dutch out and renamed the colony New York.

For Native Americans, the arrival of Europeans brought many changes. The newcomers brought new technology and ideas to the native people. But they also brought deadly diseases that killed great numbers of the first Americans.