

THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN COLONIZATION – A NEW WORLD

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ABSTRACT:

“TODAY, MANY PEOPLE SEE AMERICA TO BE THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY AND WEALTH. DURING THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NEW WORLD, THIS FACT WAS RELEVANT TO THE EUROPEANS AS WELL. THE GROWING POWERS COMPETED FOR LAND IN AMERICA IN ORDER TO BECOME THE OMNIPOTENT COUNTRIES OF EUROPE. HOWEVER, BECAUSE AMERICA WAS OVERSEES FROM EUROPE AND DIRECT SUPERVISION BY THE MONARCH WAS NOT POSSIBLE, THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY WAS RESTRICTED TO THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. EVENTUALLY, AS HISTORY SHOWS, ALL OF THE EUROPEAN POWERS WHO COLONIZED IN THE AMERICAS LOSE THEIR CONTROL, THUS LEADING TO INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES. FROM THE 1400S TO THE 1600S, EUROPEAN COUNTRIES SET UP AMERICAN COLONIES IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH COLONIAL REGIONS, WITH PRINCIPLES OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND RELIGIOUS TOLERATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE MOTHERLAND, TO THE EXTENT OF THE DESIRES AND DECISIONS OF THE IMMIGRANTS OF AMERICA.”

“DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF COLONIZATION AND EXPLORATION IN NORTH AMERICA AND AFRICA, MANY NEW WORLD “COLLIDED” AND BROUGHT TO EACH OTHER MANY NEW THINGS, BOTH GOOD AND BAD. THERE WERE EXCHANGES OF IDEAS, PRODUCTS AND CROPS THAT GREATLY ADVANCED THE CULTURES OF ALL INVOLVED, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, NEW DISEASES, AND HARSH TREATMENT OF ONE ANOTHER WERE ALSO PRESENT.”

KEY WORDS: EUROPEAN COLONIZATION, NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT, NEW WORLD, AMERICAN COLONIES, FIRST AMERICAN TOWNS

INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to answer the following questions:

1. Who colonized the American continent and why?
2. Why did people come to the colonies?

Who colonized the American continent and why?

The subject of the American colonization cannot be discussed without understanding the background of the world prior to the American colonization process.

If we study our history books, we will see that the European Renaissance was the period during which the study of our world began. Until then the perception of our globe's geography was a very restrictive one. Each European country was only concerned by its own boundaries. It was during the Renaissance period that all **the fields of society flourished and developed. Sciences, literature, geography and medicine** were the fields that registered spectacular upsurge.

The most representative example would be **the field of geography**. The understanding of our globe's geography was very much different from the present one when the first colonists set foot on the American continent. Unlike today, when satellites and drones chart and study every piece of our planet, in the ancient times, the geography was big question mark.

As mentioned above, European countries did not know much of what lay outside their own borders. In fact, most of them believed that the famous theory of the flat Earth was the only viable one. The simple suggestion that Earth was round was considered ridiculous, not worth mentioned and was fiercely denied. Even Christopher Columbus, one of the first explorers of the American continent, was not convinced, when he began to sail towards America that the ocean will not end abruptly and he and his companions will fall into the abyss.

Today, all the theories may sound childish but during the Dark Age, they were a certainty. The Renaissance changed everything. The interest for the outside world became more and more vivid, and, in return, it began to reveal its secrets to the explorers, merchandisers and missionaries.

So, this ever growing desire to know more about everything and even gaining unmeasured treasures lead to the appearance and expansion of the great empires. European nations like Holland, Belgium, Spain, France, and England began to initiate expeditions to discover and conquer new continents. Names like: Magellan, Christopher Columbus, and Vasco da Gama began to be known as great explorers of the new continents.

The end of the XVIth century was marked by tensions between England and Spain for the supremacy and treasures of the new world. On one hand, the Spanish Empire in its quest for new territories and financial gain had conquered Mexico and Peru that abounded in gold and silver. On the other hand, the new rising British Empire led by Queen Elisabeth the First was also in search of financial gains necessary for its survival so, the Spanish gold and silver were very attractive from this point of view. As the British Empire was not yet ready to risk an open war with the Spanish one, Queen Elisabeth secretly organized some unofficial expeditions to the Spanish coasts and colonies from South America. She also targeted the Spanish ships that transported gold, silver and other exotic goods from the colonies to the Spanish Empire.

Due to their success, these unofficial expeditions transformed, in time in official ones under the supervision of **Francis Drake** “The Great Thief of the Unknown World” as the Spanish named him. Queen Elisabeth decided to grant him the title of Sir for services brought to the British Crown.

The Spanish resources were not sufficient for Queen Elisabeth and the British Empire so she sent other expeditions to faraway lands like China and India. Both of them prove to be rich

sources of exotic goods and labor work and were British colonies for a long time. India was even named “the Jewel of the British Crown” for the above-mentioned reasons.

“Many people learned in school that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. But actually America was discovered many times. The first people to come to North America were Asians who crossed the Bering Strait and entered Alaska at least 30,000 years ago. Over many centuries, they and their descendants spread across the Americas. These original Americans developed many cultures in the thousands of years that they controlled the land.

Europeans first came to North America around the year 1000. Vikings from northern Europe reached the eastern coast, but both disease and resistance from the native people drove them away. It is believed by many scientists and historians that some Vikings landed in the area where Massachusetts is located today. There are also remains of a Viking settlement at L'Anse Aux Meadow, in Newfoundland, Canada.

One of the events that led to the next discovery of North America was the Crusades. During the 1100s and 1200s thousands of European Christians joined these holy wars to recapture Palestine from the Muslims. On the Crusades the Europeans bought new and exotic goods from the East, such as silk, spices, and precious jewels. As the demand for these goods grew, trade routes to Asia sprang up. Merchant ships departed from such Italian towns as Genoa and Venice, which soon became wealthy centers of business. The ships returned to Europe with new ideas as well as goods. In this way the Europeans' views of life began to change.

This period, known as the Renaissance, saw the rebirth of an interest in learning. Europeans developed a new spirit of discovery. Rulers wanted to find new water passages to Asia for their own countries because Italians controlled all the Mediterranean routes. Soon, Spain, Portugal, France, England, and Holland also began to search for new ocean routes.

This search paved the way for the "discovery" of North America by Christopher Columbus. Columbus knew that Earth was round, as did most educated people of the time, and believed that he could find a route to the East by sailing west from Europe. Backed financially by the king and queen of Spain, he sailed in 1492. He failed to reach the East because of a great landmass that lay in his way. Columbus had rediscovered North America. Because Columbus believed that he had sailed to India, he referred to the land as the "West Indies" and the natives he found as "Indians." Columbus's discovery of America led to a period of European exploration and colonization. A country colonizes land when it sets up settlements, or colonies, or people and controls the economies and governments in them.

The Spaniards founded the first European colonies in America. When Columbus returned to Spain, he claimed that he had found the western route to the East. Many Spanish explorers sailed west expecting to find the rich spices and silks of Asia. Instead they found different kinds of wealth in a "New World."

Not all Spaniards who came to America were searching for instant riches. Many came to build homes and make new lives for themselves. Spanish colonies thrived in California and Florida as well as in Mexico, Central America, and South America.

France, Holland, and England also sent explorers to America, but they didn't establish permanent colonies during the 1500s. French trappers traveled inland to trap otter and beaver for European markets. They also set up trading posts to buy furs from Native American trappers. France then sent explorers and colonists to claim and settle lands in North America. The city of Quebec became the center of their holdings in America.

During the 1500s the Dutch sent fishing boats to North America. In 1609 Henry Hudson claimed for Holland the land along the river that still bears his name. Dutch farmers and merchants began settling along the Hudson River, and soon the port town of New Amsterdam was busy and prosperous. By 1664 England had forced Holland out of North America, and New Amsterdam was renamed New York.

In the late 1500s, England made several unsuccessful attempts to start colonies. Finally, in 1607, a private company sent a group of about 100 English settlers. They landed in **Virginia** and named their settlement **Jamestown** after their king. At first, the colonists spent more time looking for gold than planting crops. But under the leadership of Captain John Smith, Jamestown did survive.”

(<https://highered.mheducation.com/sites/dl/free/0809222299/45391/USHistory.html>)

In 1620, people of different social backgrounds and trades decided to move to America and form a new colony so they organized another expedition.

On the **6th of December 1620** they embarked on a ship named **Mayflower** and left the Plymouth harbor England for the American coast. Their journey across the Atlantic Ocean lasted 66 days and was a difficult one. Their journey ended on the coast of New England where they founded **the Plymouth Colony**.

The members of this expedition did not desired treasures they only wanted **religious freedom**. They named themselves **Pilgrims**. But, just as in the previous expedition case, the colonists faced the taught conditions of their new home cold, hunger and different diseases. In their attempt to survive they explored the surroundings and meet the Native American tribes. They showed the colonists how to grow different crops, to hunt wild turkeys and deer and to fish. Their advises were fallowed and soon the colony was safe and prosperous. To celebrate their new friends and their survival, the American colonists organized a feast and named it **Thanksgiving Day**. During this celebration, they eat deer meat, corn, shellfish and roasted meat. The tradition of this feast is still kept today by the American families although is completely different from the original one. During the Thanksgiving Day most people do not work, picnics are organized in parks, family members gather around the table filled with all kind of tasteful dishes like turkey, stuffing, gravy, sweet potatoes, cornbread, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, roasted corn with butter and salt. For desert Americans eat pie with different flavors like apples, pumpkin, pecan and sweet potatoes. Another characteristic of this day are the parades that are enjoyed by many peoples.

“Within a few years after Jamestown and Plymouth were settled, thousands more Europeans immigrated to England’s colonies. They arrived in America seeking freedom from hunger, war, unemployment or religious persecution. The result of this mass immigration was the formation of **the thirteen original colonies**.

The climates and the land created a variety of economies and lifestyles. But the colonies fell into three general groups: **the New England colonies** (*Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire*), **the middle colonies** (*New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware*), and **the southern colonies** (*Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia*).

In the New England colonies, the rocky, infertile soil could not support large farms, so each tiny farm could provide just what each family needed. Life on such farms was difficult. Some New Englanders turned to the sea to become shipbuilders, fishers, and whalers.

The middle colonies had rich soil in rolling hills and fertile valleys. Farmers grew vegetables, fruit, and grain, and they could always count on a surplus. Thus they became commercial farmers and sold their extra crops. The middle colonies attracted many non-English settlers-Dutch, Germans, Scots, Irish, Swedes, and French.

Half of all the colonists lived in the five southern colonies. In 1613, a weed brought from the West Indies started the economy of Virginia moving. This weed-tobacco-quickly became the moneymaking crop of the southern colonies. Farmers were soon exporting rice and indigo along with tobacco. Large commercial growers needed cheap labor to make their farming profitable, and black Africans filled this need. While most southern farmers had medium-sized parcels of land and no slaves, prosperous planters had dozens of slaves.”

(<https://highered.mheducation.com/sites/dl/free/0809222299/45391/USHistory.html>)

Why did people come to the colonies?

A part of the answer to this question was presented in the above text. In the next paragraph, several motives for which the American territories were colonized will be underlined.

What we must understand is the fact that America was colonized by people coming from different parts of the globe and who had different social backgrounds and ideas of what they will do after settling in their new home.

If we study now the colonization of North America we will notice that the colonists that settled in the North part of the country had different reasons from those who settled in the South.

For example, **the Northern colonists** searched **religious freedom** and were not interested by other reasons.

“Colonies such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Maryland were settled primarily by people seeking religious freedom. Pilgrim Separatists desired a break from the Church of England, and arrived in Massachusetts aboard the Mayflower in 1620. Later, a different religious sect, the Puritans, arrived in Massachusetts fleeing persecution in England. Unlike the Separatists, the Puritans did not want to break from the Church of England; they wanted to "purify" it. This was met with opposition -- including violence -- and by 1630 nearly 20,000 Puritans fled to Massachusetts. Colonies such as Maryland were founded as a refuge for other persecuted religious groups. English persecution -- like a ban on a Catholic priest officiating a marriage of two Catholics -- prompted many to come to Maryland. Lord Baltimore founded Maryland as a Catholic refuge in 1632. (<https://classroom.synonym.com/four-reasons-people-came-englands-american-colonies-20869.html>)

The Sothern colonists were **more pragmatic** and considered **the financial gain** to be their main purpose. “Cash crops -- and the profits they rendered -- were a primary motive for early immigration to Virginia and the Carolinas. As early as 1613, John Rolfe planted tobacco in Virginia and began exporting it to Europe. Land and its crops were a huge incentive for early colonists in the South. In Jamestown, Virginia for example, a colonist would be given 50 acres plus an additional 50 more for each indentured servant he brought with him.” (<https://classroom.synonym.com/four-reasons-people-came-englands-american-colonies-20869.html>)

There were also **two other reasons** for which the colonists came to the American territories namely to avoid **the Debtor’s Prison and the enslavement**.

“Georgia, which was not founded until 1733, was unique among England's American colonies. James Oglethorpe, the colony's founder, envisioned a Utopian society in which English debtors could improve their lives. By the early 1700s, Britain had numerous citizens who were imprisoned for their debts. King George, however, was unconcerned about English debtors. Instead, he saw Georgia as an attractive opportunity to create a buffer zone between Spanish-owned Florida, French-owned Louisiana and the English colonies farther north. He approved the Georgian experiment, and thousands of debtors moved to the colony. Within two decades, however, Oglethorpe's dream of a society in which debtors could improve their lives had failed, and King George revoked the charter and converted Georgia into a society much like its counterparts immediately to the north.

Not all early Americans came to English colonies willingly. Beginning with the first Dutch ship that brought 20 slaves to Jamestown in 1619, slavery rapidly expanded in colonial America. Though poor record-keeping limits what can be known about the number of slaves brought to America, estimates suggest that as many as 6 to 7 million Africans were brought to America in the 18th century alone. In the South especially, slaves often represented a significant proportion of the local population.” (<https://classroom.synonym.com/four-reasons-people-came-englands-american-colonies-20869.html>)

In **Conclusion**, the colonization of a territory was not an easy task. It implies total involvement of the ones who colonize a territory and it has always been considered as dual process with positive and negative aspects.

Colonization is often associated with imperialism, globalization, hybridity and post-colonization.

“As colonialism often played out in pre-populated areas, socio-cultural evolution included the formation of various ethnically hybrid populations. Colonialism gave rise to culturally and ethnically mixed populations such as the mestizos of the Americas, as well as racially divided populations such as those found in French Algeria or in Southern Rhodesia. In fact, everywhere where colonial powers established a consistent and continued presence, hybrid communities existed.

Notable examples in Asia include the Anglo-Burmese, Anglo-Indian, Burgher, Eurasian Singaporean, Filipino mestizo, Kristang and Macanese peoples.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonialism>)

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