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## I

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*The European impact in America,  
1494–1676*

Ideas of a New World from the Treaty of  
Tordesillas to Bacon’s Rebellion and Slavery in  
Virginia

The prehistory of the United States tells the stories of three connected groups. Twenty thousand to forty thousand years before the Christian era (B.C.) the indigenous natives – the Indians – originally migrated from Asia to the Americas. By the sixteenth century A.D., the Europeans arriving from “the Old World” claimed the countryside for themselves. Indians and Europeans crucially entangled themselves because ownership of land defined life in the United States. The Europeans themselves soon brought African slaves to work. This entanglement became crucial because of the centrality of race to the history of the United States.

## INDIANS

During the Great Ice Age of thousands of years ago the sea level dropped. At times a land bridge surfaced between Eurasia and the landmass of North and South America. You could pass over the present-day Bering Sea between Siberia and Alaska. Some geographers and geologists believe that the first people to live in the Americas were wandering Asian hunters who crossed the Bering Sea Bridge. Other investigators think that the Asians used small boats that hugged the inlets along the common coasts between Siberia and Alaska. These first Americans spread out through present-day North America and down to the tip of South America.

Estimates vary widely about the number of human beings in the western hemisphere when they first encountered the Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century. North of the Rio Grande the earliest peoples numbered perhaps 4–6 million. Some were hunter-gatherers composed of many different competing groups – eventually tribes. Many other farmers lived in larger and more settled societies. Stronger or weaker ties might link inhabitants over broad areas, and some native societies extended widely. The Mound Builders, prominent in what is now the Ohio Valley and along the Gulf Coast, developed major agricultural civilizations perhaps 3000 years ago, around 1000 B.C. Over 1500 years they gave way to



**Map 1.** Bering Sea Bridge. This reconstruction is really a theory about how the Americas were originally populated

an even more settled agricultural society, the Temple Mound Builders, who built at least one large city near today's St. Louis. The Pueblos of the contemporary southwestern United States farmed in big communities and were living in multi-tiered buildings in the thirteenth century A.D. The Iroquois of present New York had political and military alliances that made them powerful among the Indians, centuries before the Europeans arrived in the 1500s.

Present-day Central and South America had a greater population, so far as we know, perhaps even more than 25 million in 1500. Scholars base this estimate on the fact that in the south the natives seem to have prospered more. They created remarkable cities and temples that served sizeable numbers of people. The Mayas who flourished in the present Yucatan Peninsula between 300 and 800 A.D. produced extraordinary jewelry, invented writing and mathematical systems, and used a science of astronomy. Their merchants built up regional trading systems, but fighting appears to have weakened the Mayans. Eventually the Aztecs overran them.

In general, our understanding of these various peoples, whom the Europeans quickly named *Indians*, differs from our knowledge of the Europeans themselves. The Indians left few written records, and studies of anthropologists and archaeologists serve as the primary basis for our knowledge of them. When the

Indians talk to us, they usually do so through the voice of some European explorer or writer:

They are so guileless and so generous with all they possess, that no one would believe it who has not seen it. They never refuse anything which they possess, if it be asked of them; on the contrary, they invite anyone to share it, and display so much love as if they would give their hearts.

Christopher Columbus, 1490s

We know that the Indians were spread throughout the Americas, and that they had different modes of life and speaking:

'tis very strange that every nation of the savages of the Northern America should have a peculiar language; for though some of them live not ten leagues from one another, they must use an Interpreter to talk together, there being no universal language amongst them.

Louis Henepin, 1698

Moreover, they fought with one another when competing groups came into too close contact, and similar groups often could not associate peacefully:

Their old soldiers being swept away by the plague which was very rife amongst them . . . , they do not now practice anything in martial feats worth observation, saving that they make themselves forts to fly into if the enemies should unexpectedly assail them . . . [From there they] deliver their sharp and bloody embassies in the tawny sides of their naked assailants, who . . . lose their lives by their too near approachments.

William Wood, 1634

We also know that the native sense of property differed from that of the Europeans. The Indians respected *use* of land more than they had the idea of *landlordship*. When Europeans arrived in what they called at once the New World, the first thing they did was to demand the ground in the name of a flag, a king, or a country, or for themselves. The Indians had towns, and often permanent agriculture. They had hunting camps, fishing privileges, and harvests that belonged to them and not others. They also had a unified cultural system in which land played a central role. The countryside was at the heart of a frame of life, and Indian culture was set in the environment. But Indians had doubts about territorial deeds and property rights, whereas the Europeans thought them fundamental. This difference had enormous consequences in the New World.

Relative immunity to disease made for another difference. The exchange of viruses and bacteria factored into the relations between Indians and Europeans in a major way. Neither group was prepared for the trade, although the Indians suffered disproportionately. The Europeans unintentionally spread fatal illnesses among the natives, who could not survive the common Old World maladies of smallpox and measles. Sickesses almost wiped the Indians out.

## ENTER THE EUROPEANS

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries independent European countries were slowly emerging out of the fights of local chiefs. Warrior princes had assumed power over large areas and over clans with ethnic and racial similarities. These leaders developed religions and governments that legitimated their rule in what are now the great European nations.

Spain had two powerful kingdoms in Castile and Aragon. The marriage between their rulers, Isabella and Ferdinand, had united the kingdoms in 1479. In France from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries the power of a single king spread from the north central region to what is now the entire country. The northerners came to dominate the south, and kings from England with claims to mainland France were expelled. A long series of contests resulted in unified control of England and Wales in what is now the island of Great Britain. But a single ruler only integrated Scotland in the north in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and fighting to subdue the western island of Ireland was never ending.

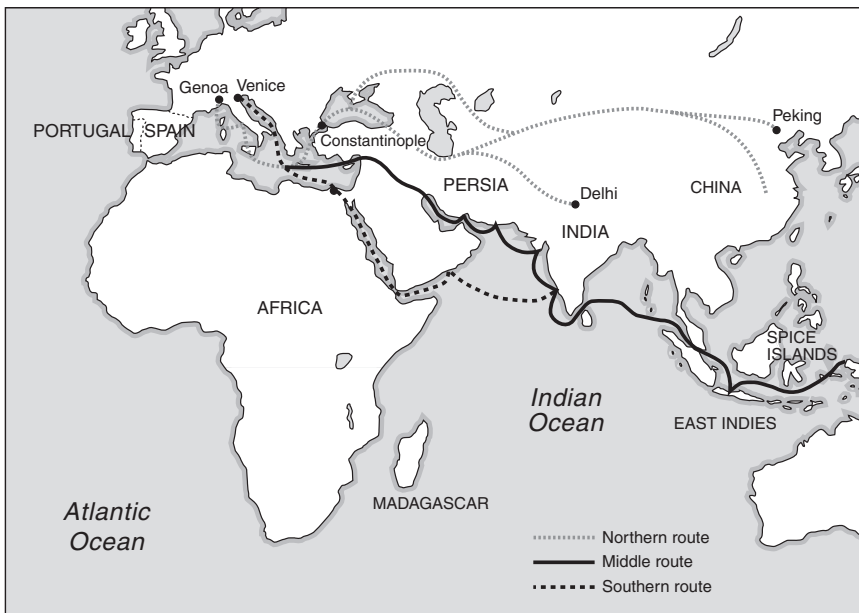
Moreover, different peoples that were becoming nations competed for dominance in other places. The growth of the states like Great Britain, France, and Spain that we recognize today went hand in hand with conflict *among* these states. They defined themselves against those whom they saw as different, “nationalities” not subject to their power or indebted to their rituals. The rival states competed for wealth or for marks of who was physically stronger, or fought in areas not governed by any one of them.

The Catholic (Christian) Church led by a Pope in Rome often allied itself to some of these struggling leaders. This enduring institution of the papacy had prestige throughout Europe. The Church organized the spiritual meaning of human existence in the mysterious universe of the medieval and early modern period. But the Pope also had political advantages. Nonetheless, on the one hand, the rival and non-European religion of Islam and its forces endangered Catholicism from the outside. The Roman Church had sponsored a series of Crusades to take Jerusalem and other holy places from the Muslim “infidels” in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These conflicts had at least checked a Turkish Empire that was coming into existence with its Islamic religion. Europeans worried when Constantinople, the Turkish gateway to Europe, fell to the Muslims in 1453. After the supposed success of the Crusades, Islam now again threatened the Catholicism that characterized Europe. On the other hand, militant reformers harassed Catholicism from within. Not all Christians accepted the authority of Rome, and even some of those who did accused it of lack of piety and corruption.

The building of nations, internal and external; and religious conflict, internal and external, defined much of European history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first ingredient in these contests that interests us grew out of the trade of the Europeans with lands to the east.

Profitable but dangerous commerce beyond the Turkish Empire went back and forth between Europe and the “Spice Islands” or “the Indies.” At a time when even educated Europeans had little accurate sense of global geography, this formless region to the east of Europe spread from India to what is now Indonesia.

The trade took merchants from western European ports by ship to Turkey and the Middle East, and then by caravan to Persia, India, and even China; or overland from North Africa to the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. But the Islamic world controlled most of this buying and selling. A more effective sea route to the Indies would make traffic easier and more profitable. If Europeans broke the Turkish hold on this business, they would also strengthen Christianity. Sailors thought they might get more quickly to the Indies and avoid Islamic power by going around the coast of Africa. By the middle of the fifteenth century, with advances in maritime navigation, European rulers and explorers were trying to sail into the south Atlantic around Africa to the Indies, or west to reach the same destination. Later, for example, a famed hunt for a “northwest passage” took seamen into the vicinity of Iceland and Greenland and perhaps into the interior of present-day Canada to get to the Indies by way of the St. Lawrence River or Hudson’s Bay.

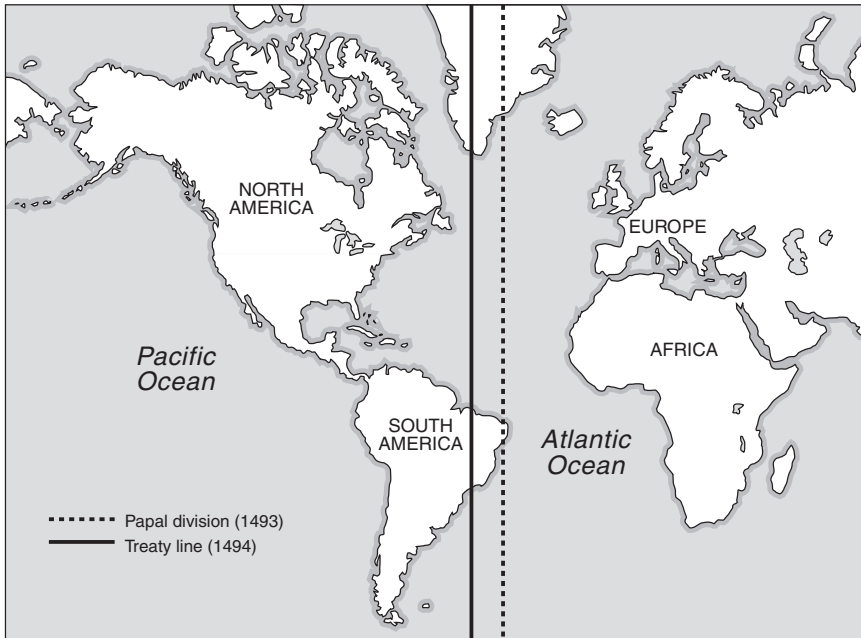


**Map 2.** European Trade to the Indies

In 1492 the Spanish had ousted a Muslim threat to Spain and consolidated the country’s Roman faith. Spain was a unified Catholic power and took the lead in Europe, but Spain and Portugal together entered the race for trade with the Indies. Christopher Columbus, an Italian sailing for Spain’s Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, journeyed southwest and hit the islands of San Salvador and Cuba in the Caribbean, near the coast of the great American landmass. Satisfied that he had reached the Indies, Columbus comfortably called the natives *Indians*. Three succeeding trips would not persuade him that he had found a “new world” for

the Europeans, although others soon realized that the Indies did not lie in the western hemisphere. The term “West Indies” got a permanent use. Another Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, soon after sailed to South America and reported on his travels. Misconceiving the report, a German geographer argued that Europeans should call the territory *America* in honor of its supposed European founder. The designation more or less stuck as a name.

So far as Europe was concerned, the Indians had no proper religion and did not own this land. The primitive pagans, in European eyes, only squatted there. In 1493 and 1494, with a line on a map, the Pope of the Roman Church, Alexander VI, divided a great part of this non-Christian world between Spain and Portugal. The Treaty of Tordesillas picked out which new lands each country could seize and Christianize. Having learned of new territory that was not included in the world of Islam, the Pope and the politicians not only wanted to insure its Catholicism, but also to avoid conflict between Portugal and Spain. Eventually, everything east of this line, which comprised the eastern coast of South America and Africa, went to Portugal; west of the line went to Spain.



**Map 3.** Treaty of Tordesillas and Spanish–Portuguese Line of 1494

Portugal focused on the west coast of Africa and what would roughly become present day Brazil. In the Caribbean, in other parts of South and Central America, and in the south and southwest of the present United States, from Florida to California, the Spanish ruled. Spanish explorers called *conquistadores* made their country a global force. By the first half of the sixteenth century, they had an

extraordinary record. Fanning out from the Caribbean, they overran the impressive native civilizations of the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru. Intimidating the local populations, the Spanish took over the gold and silver mines of these people. The *conquistadores* downplayed trade and forged a different strategy of expansion for their rulers at home. America was not the Indies, and the navigators would not make fortunes in commerce along new sea routes as had originally been expected. But the *conquistadores* could conquer the Indians and return power, prestige, and profit to Spain. Precious metals and not trade were paramount. One Aztec said: “The [Spanish] thirsted mightily for gold; they stuffed themselves with it; they starved for it; they lusted for it like pigs.”

Spain often puzzled about how to treat unruly or unfriendly Indians. The *conquistadores* always conceived it desirable to lead the pagans to Christianity. Nonetheless, the almost casual way that the Spanish often destroyed or degraded Indian societies ominously signaled how all Europeans would come to think about the peoples of the New World. The *conquistadores* planned to convert various Indian groups to Catholicism, and this aim suggested that the Spanish did regard the New World as in the same moral universe they occupied. But sometimes we will interpret European behavior most charitably if we argue that the Spanish did *not* see the New World in this way. The actions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans maybe more acceptable to twenty-first century ideas if we believe that the Europeans did not at all recognize the Indians as fully human beings. As representatives of a European state, the Spanish cheated and lied to the Indians whenever they could conveniently do so. When deception did not work, the Spanish resorted to violence, using their military superiority to devastating effect. European diseases also weakened the natives. In one hundred years, from the early sixteenth century when the Spanish got to Mexico, the local population went from roughly 15–25 million to 2 million.

As important as illness, the European attitude toward control of the land crushed Indian life. The Spanish saw the New World as real estate that they might take from the Indians and defend against any others who might want it. This attitude conflicted with that of the Indians, who had less a sense of exclusive possession. But the Spanish also effectively ruled out the natives from groups who might legitimately own land. The Spanish could only acknowledge that other European nations might have comparable rights to property. England’s Queen Elizabeth spoke for all of Europe when she instructed her own sailors to explore and colonize non-Christian areas, “heathen lands not actually possessed by any Christian prince.”

A famous missionary in the Caribbean, Bartholomé de las Casas, denounced Spanish treatment of the Indians. “Who of those in future centuries,” he wrote, would believe the effects of disease on the natives? It would have been better for the Indians to have fallen into the hands “of the devils of hell than of the Christians of the Indies.” Yet at the same time, the Indians did not all coexist harmoniously and often fought among themselves. The Spanish increased the tensions and destructiveness of conflict but also allied themselves with some native folks against others in the European search for wealth and real estate. And while the *conquistadores* wanted gold and silver, Spain finally set its sights on

establishing civilizations that eventually combined the lives and cultures of the Spanish and the Indians. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish founded about 200 towns. They set up schools in Mexico and Peru, and a system of publication. They built permanent settlements in Saint Augustine, Florida (in 1565, the oldest city in North America), Santa Fe (in present New Mexico), and later (in California) San Diego and San Francisco. *Conquistadores* explored west from Florida to the Mississippi River, and they went inland from Arizona and New Mexico to the present state of Kansas. The Spanish thus made claims to ownership that they would later use in contests with other Europeans.

#### OTHER EUROPEAN CONTENDERS

Conventional religious arrangements were threatened by more than the external enemy of Islam. Barely devout, Roman Christianity had northern European adversaries who found it sinful. In the early sixteenth century discontented political and religious Christians challenged the Catholic Church from within. The German priest Martin Luther considered the Church a corrupt bureaucracy and began the public demand for its purification in 1517, in a long movement historians would know as the Protestant Reformation. Luther based his call on his reading of the Church's sacred book, the Bible, and wanted a religion justified by this scripture alone, and not by human authorities.

One result was that the Bible was translated from ancient languages only available to a few into "the vernacular," the languages of current believers. Literate Christians could read themselves, in the Old Testament, how God had created the world in six days; how he had thrown Adam and Eve, the first human beings he had made, out of the Garden of Eden for disobedience. The reader could find out how their descendants in the Jewish tribes had wandered over the Holy Land in the Middle East. In the New Testament, Christians could learn about the birth of the son of God to a virgin, human, mother, Mary; about how this son, Jesus the Christ, began his ministry and performed miracles; and how politicians in the Roman empire had put him to death by nailing him to a cross. Three days later, he rose from the dead – the resurrection – and promised his followers eternal life. And the Bible then told how the Christian church was started as an earthly institution by the disciples of Jesus. This knowledge, and much more, entered the ordinary stock of beliefs of common people in Europe, and eventually in America.

The premier intellectual force of the Reformation was John Calvin, a French refugee who lived in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1536. Calvin wrote a systematic and revolutionary presentation of Christian doctrine and life, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He censured the Catholic Church in Rome and electrified his clerical followers with his vision. Calvin put all the stories of the Bible into a consistent framework and distilled their permanent message. We wanted to escape the terror of death. The Christian religion taught us how we could be saved. In a hopelessly flawed world, said the Bible, salvation, victory over death, could never come from trying to do good – from "good works" – for people could never stop acting selfishly. Rather, according to Calvin, the Bible said that salvation came from the infinite mercy – the grace – of an inscrutable and even angry

God. The great power of God might save us from death, but we could never earn our salvation. Deeds or “works” never sufficed and were always tarnished with regard for oneself; ultimately we did good things only because we thought they would make us look good. We would receive God’s grace only if we recognized our own insignificance and put our absolute faith in Him.

How could we accept our own lowliness and find faith, when we were so selfish and could think only of ourselves? Calvin preached total submission, in contrast to the respect for wealth and high position taught by the Church of Rome. But if Calvin were right, human beings could not do what was necessary – humble themselves and leave themselves to God’s devices. On their own, human beings would always think that God had to reward their “works”; on their own, human beings would always believe that they deserved salvation from Him. Thus, acquiring grace had a mysterious and miraculous aspect. God worked His will in a way ever to remind us of our lack of merit and weakness.

The “Protestants” who followed Luther and Calvin said that they must be self-effacing in the face of God, although (in fact) they might be proud that they had gained humility. “Calvinists” rejected arrogance, but always measured their genuine faith by what they might achieve as Christians. The Protestants had complicated souls, and thrashed about between meekness and conceit. The Reformation also made people’s salvation more individualistic. Church structure became less corporate and hierarchical. The contrast became starker between human beings who were naturally depraved without faith, and those who were saved with faith. But at the same time, all of us remained equally low in the eyes of God.

As the Protestants, Calvinists and otherwise, attracted supporters to their ideas, the political leaders in Europe came to terms with this revitalizing movement. The rulers of northern Europe wanted to consolidate their own areas and to escape the influence of southern Europe, and especially the Catholic Spanish. Political fights merged with religious ones in England, France, and the provinces of the Netherlands to produce opponents of Catholicism. In the New World spiritual as well as worldly conflicts took place, as energized Protestants competed with Spain there. The creation of states in Europe went hand in hand with European contests in America.

The Dutch, who had come under the rule of the Spanish, waged fierce quarrels in the Low Countries for control of their homeland and against Catholics. In the early seventeenth century they also sent explorers to seek a northwest passage that would create their own rights in the New World, far to the north of Spanish influence. The Dutch had hired the most important sailor, Englishman Henry Hudson. A Dutch presence in the “New Netherlands,” in what was later New York, resulted. As Dutch sea power increased, and as the Netherlands became Protestant, the Netherlanders also challenged the Spanish in the West Indies, those islands in the Caribbean on which the Europeans had first landed.

The French remained Catholic, but in the New World they had a unique presence. Despite the fact that both France and Spain observed the same official religion, France sometimes came in conflict with the Spanish, or operated outside Spain’s influence. The French sailed in the West Indies, where they might confront

both the Netherlands and Spain. Like the Dutch, the French sought a north-west passage to circumvent Spanish power, and France navigated the area of the St. Lawrence Seaway in present-day eastern Canada in the 1500s. In 1608, Samuel De Champlain fortified a village at Quebec, on the St. Lawrence River, and in 1642 as royal governor of "New France" he founded a settlement at Montreal. Throughout the seventeenth century other adventurers widened French gains through much of present-day Canada and North America. The French swept through the upper Mississippi River, and then down the Mississippi to its basin. Robert de La Salle, the explorer of this region in 1682, named it Louisiana, after the French King, Louis XIV. Here, by the eighteenth century, the French checked the northward advance of the Spanish and found themselves most at odds with Spain.

The French did not intend to people North America, and generated few settlers. Yet while they had not reached the Indies in their northwest passage, they were concerned with increasing trade, a goal that proved well within their reach. France generally did not try to conquer the Indians, and fought fewer wars with them. The French preferred commerce instead: the Indians received metal tools and guns for the regular local wars, and in exchange the French got food and animal skins. The furs became an important luxury item in Europe, and the profit from them committed France to the New World. The French also tried their hand at converting the Indians to Christianity. Whether their small numbers prevented their going to war with the Indians, or whether their humanity was greater, the French had better relations with the Indians than the other Europeans. France could usually count on the Indians in the contests that the Europeans themselves had in the New World, and French influence on the Mississippi frustrated Spain. While the two countries had the same religious beliefs, as national powers they had a limited alliance.

#### THE CASE OF ENGLAND

The problems of the Catholic Church had a shattering impact in England. The Tudor line of royalty strengthened its power over England in the sixteenth century. Henry Tudor, Henry VIII, king between 1509 and 1547, was determined that the family should carry on. Nonetheless, Catherine of Aragon, his wife and the daughter of Spain's Ferdinand and Isabella, did not produce a son, and the Pope refused to annul Henry's marriage. In 1534, using the Reformation largely as an excuse, Henry renounced Rome's authority and declared himself head of an English church. The (Protestant) Church of England, or the Anglicans, gave Henry the authority to marry whomever he wished. In time Henry got a son, and did sire a capable heir in his daughter Elizabeth, queen from 1558 to 1603.

Henry's Protestantism lay distant from that of Luther and Calvin and some of their followers. Moreover, the growth of Henry's Anglicanism corresponded with the growing strength of a merchant class in England and its pursuit of power. The desires of those interested in buying and selling restricted the royalty. The Tudor monarchs successfully maintained their power because they effectively cooperated with the emerging legislature, a "Parliament" that had some responsibility for the making of laws. There was a House of Lords composed of nobility, and, perhaps

more important, a House of Commons composed of the wealthy and influential. Under the Tudors, Englishmen making money through trading thought more of their power in public life as a “freeborn” people.

Historians have argued for a long time that two kinds of developments, one religious and one economic, influenced the politics of Tudor England in the 1500s. The Protestants had the ability to link up worldly success in trading with salvation, although they thought that this success was just a sign of salvation, and could not bring about salvation. The accumulation of private wealth to advance large economic projects – the rise of capitalism – fused with a “Protestant ethic,” a zeal to achieve that indicated one’s favor with God. We certainly can’t make an essential link between Anglicans and moneymaking, for Roman Catholics often took up with capitalism, and among Protestants not only Anglicans were associated with capitalism; the same sort of association took place among Dutch Calvinists in the Netherlands, for example, and some English Protestants were not interested in accumulating wealth. Nonetheless, trade for profit and the Protestant religion connected in England and elsewhere. Both together, capitalism and its ethic, led people to demand a greater voice in how they were ruled, and the merchant class came to have a political role with royalty in governing the country.

Overall, the Spanish clutch on world power waned. Spain had to compete with an England that had more wealth, that was sure of the evil of Catholicism, and that gave greater political room to its well-to-do people in commercial occupations. When Henry humiliated the Spanish by breaking his marriage to Catherine, he began a century of hostility between Spain and the English. In 1588, in the English Channel, the English defeated a huge Spanish fleet, the Invincible Spanish Armada that Spain had sent to fight them. The victory undermined the Spanish. It gave the English prestige on the seas, and promoted the country’s entrance in the scramble in the New World.

English merchants and explorers with some, although not enough, royal assistance put outposts of English settlers on the east coast of North America in the late sixteenth century. From that period here is Richard Hakluyt, an influential English propagandist who wanted to populate the New World with the English:

For to posterity, no greater glory can be handed down than to conquer the barbarian, to recall the savages and the pagan to civility, to draw the ignorant within the orbit of reason, and to fill with reverence for divinity the godless and the ungodly.

There is under our noses . . . [a] great and ample country; the inland whereof is found of late to be so sweet and wholesome a climate, so rich and abundant in silver mines, a better and richer country than Mexico itself. If it shall please the Almighty to stir up Her Majesty’s heart to continue with transporting one or two thousand of her people, she shall by God’s assistance, in short space, increase her dominions, enrich her coffers, and reduce many pagans to the faith of Christ.

Sir Walter Raleigh had sent expeditions from England in the 1580s, and he believed they had given the English some sort of authority over a land he called

Virginia in honor of his unmarried queen, Elizabeth. Raleigh meant the name to designate the entire coast of North America from present-day Florida to Canada, although it referred in practice to territory north and south of the present state of Virginia. But these early ventures did not succeed. The profits might blossom in the long run, but the gigantic first costs and the great risks meant that adventures more likely failed. By the early seventeenth century the English monarchy exhibited greater willingness to take a chance on such expeditions. Fear of Spanish expansion north of the Caribbean, the desire for trade and precious metals, and a need to Christianize the Indians motivated the English. Two groups of merchants received “charters” and backing to send people to Virginia. The two groups each formed a company. London merchants controlled one, and aimed to get settlers to southern Virginia. Based in Plymouth and Bristol, England, the second company had rights granted in northern Virginia.

The organizers of the Virginia Company of London acted first. They aimed to spread Christianity in the New World and to bring “the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility.” But in imitating the earlier triumphs of the Spanish, the London group also hoped to extract gold, silver, and copper from southern Virginia. At the end of 1606 the London Company sent off about 100 settlers, and in 1607 they founded Jamestown, named after Elizabeth’s successor, James I. The idea slowly developed that the English in the New World would form lasting and growing agricultural settlements; these permanent mainland outposts might have a profitable connection to England itself. In the south, the principal one came to be known simply as Virginia. Even in jokes the English sense of the New World conveyed the high expectations:

Gold is more plentiful there than copper is with us . . . Why, man, all their dripping pans and their chamber pots are pure gold; and all the chains with which they chain up their streets are massy gold; all the prisoners they take are fettered in god; and for rubies and diamonds, they go forth on holidays and gather them by the seashore, to hang on their children’s coats and stick in their caps.

Ben Johnson’s play, *Eastward Ho!* 1605

Virginia proved a disaster for its original promoters, who lost all of the money they had invested. As Old World diseases killed off the Indians, New World sicknesses decimated the settlers. They had a difficult time in carrying out even subsistence farming; and they fought with the Indians. Virginia carried on, however, with yearly supplies of new migrants, and the settlers ultimately made a go of it, not because of gold or silver but because by the 1610s the migrants were planting tobacco and exporting it to England. As with the French trappers who could sell animal skins in the Old World, the new Virginians produced something that Europeans were eager to have. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, tobacco farming dominated Virginia, and thrived even though tobacco prices fluctuated. The settlers set up and exploited tobacco plantations, and equally as often exhausted them. The English did not thickly populate the region, but spread out,

wave after wave of farmers looking for arable lands for their crop and profiting from its sale.

In 1624, after many disputes between the king and the merchants of the Virginia Company, King James revoked the London Charter. Just as it began to do well, Virginia became a royal colony, subject to the rule of the King's officials. At the same time, the settlers had instituted a rudimentary form of self-government, mimicking circumstances in the Parliament of England. Composed of delegates selected from various districts of the settlement, the Virginia "House of Burgesses" had regular meetings. Although puny, the new institution aspired to deliberate about local affairs and to advise the governor appointed from London.

Commercial interests often more or less drove this first enduring English settlement, and the churchgoing of the Virginians did not much deviate from the accommodating Protestantism of the Church of England. They pursued not an ardent but a deferential and respectable religion. The story of the second group of speculators, the Plymouth Company of Virginia, differed, and involved merchants with less worldly religious factions.

#### VARIETIES OF ENGLISH PROTESTANTISM

While there was much backsliding, and ferocious contests for supremacy, Elizabeth Tudor's long rule through the second half of the sixteenth century unified England as a Protestant nation. At the same time, the Tudors had helped to unleash religious ideas that they could not control. The pragmatic circumstances of the English conversion from Catholicism left the country with many of the flaws of Romanism, or so many English Protestants believed. These dissenters, who wanted to cleanse Anglicanism, genuinely to reform it, were known as Puritans and later as Reformed Protestants. They adopted many of Calvin's views about holiness, and wanted to scour English society of imperfection. Often they displayed the contradictory Calvinist characteristics of self-abasement in the search for faith and self-regard in the belief that they had found it. Although most Puritans did not insist on separating from the Church of England in their quest for purity, some did, and so a split occurred between separatists and non-separatists. Later, people of Puritan heritage disagreed about where primary authority within the community of the faithful should lie. Should authority be with individuals? Or with single congregations (Congregationalists), or with a larger body, a presbytery, somewhat duplicating the hierarchy of the Roman or Anglican churches (Presbyterians)? Catholics pointed to this fragmentation as proof that the Reformation sheltered anarchy, shapeless egoism, and human misery. To some extent the Catholics assessed matters incorrectly. They missed in Reform Protestantism its consensus on hard work in the world as the most enduring tribute one could pay to God, and the self-righteous Reformed fervor that has spanned over 400 years.

Elizabeth had no children, and when she died, James Stuart, the son of Elizabeth's cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, became King in 1603 – James I. The new king united England and Scotland, but the line of Stuart royalty also worried the Puritans. James was married to a Catholic and favored toleration of Catholics. In 1606 English Protestant separatists, persecuted in their country and now fearing

the worst of James, left England for Holland. A few years later, dissatisfied even with the Dutch, these “Pilgrims” decided to move once more, to America.

The Pilgrims in the Netherlands negotiated with the Virginia Company for a grant to settle on the northern boundary of Virginia at the mouth of the Hudson River, present-day New York City. In September of 1620, these English Pilgrims set out on a ship, the *Mayflower*. They led a group only 100 strong. At the end of the year, they reached the coast of North America, off course, on Cape Cod Bay, near the shores of present-day Massachusetts. North of where they were supposed to arrive, they had indeed sailed outside the lands of the Virginia Company. Worried that they might be free of all political authority, the Pilgrims and their leaders, including their long-time governor, William Bradford, drew up “the *Mayflower* compact”: “Solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one another . . . [we] covenant and combine ourselves . . . into a civil Body Politick . . . and by Virtue hereof do enact . . . such just and equal laws . . . as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony.”

The separatist outpost of Pilgrims, which they called Plymouth, did not prosper. But though always a precarious project, Plymouth had a high significance. In some respects the Pilgrims typified the settlements at the northern edge of the lands of the Virginia Company – what would become “New England,” with its center in Massachusetts. Plymouth evidenced unbelievable perseverance in pursuit of its sacred objectives, and the inhabitants were determined to survive and make their point: “It is not with us as with other men, whom small things can discourage.” In his history *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1630–1650) the staunch Bradford wrote:

They had thoughts on . . . some of those vast and unpopulated countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts.

And material accomplishments did not measure what Bradford considered later success:

The tyrannous bishops [of Catholicism] are ejected, their courts dissolved . . . their ceremonies useless and despised, their plots for popery prevented . . . and all their superstitions discarded and returned to Rome . . . and the monuments of idolatry rooted out of the land . . . And are not these great things? Who can deny it?

The Pilgrims linked their perseverance to a powerful notion of communal self-governance. They could make and define their “Body Politick” through rules that a document set out. That is, they assumed the supremacy of some sort of community but also thought that as individuals they could create that community. Bradford wrote:

Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as

one small candle might light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation.

In 1620 a new group, the Council for New England, reorganized the Plymouth Colony and disposed of a number of tracts of land in the area north of Cape Cod. One tract went to a group of Puritans from Dorchester, England, who themselves established the Massachusetts Bay Company. Unlike the Pilgrims in Plymouth, the Puritans from Dorchester were non-separatists. But the successor to James, his son Charles I, was more committed to curbing dissent and, so some Puritans thought, perhaps wanted to take the Anglican Church in the direction of Rome. The Puritans of Dorchester felt compelled to migrate to save their Reformed faith, although they did not feel the same need to break from English society as had the Pilgrims and had a better sense of the economics of their venture.

In the summer of 1630 the directors of the Massachusetts Bay Company selected John Winthrop, a young lawyer, to govern their settlement-to-be. He left England with almost 1000 people, and in the mid-Atlantic on the deck of his ship, the *Arabella*, Winthrop delivered a lay sermon, “A Modelle of Christian Charity.” Long to be famous, Winthrop’s words captured the missionary passion that characterized the “experiment” of these Puritans:

Thus stands the cause between God and us. We are entered into a covenant with Him for this work. We have taken out a commission . . . If we shall neglect the observation of these articles . . . the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us . . . The only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is . . . to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man . . . as members of the same body . . . so . . . that men shall say of succeeding plantations, “may the Lord make it like that of New England.”

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God’s sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

While other small groups of strict European Protestants established themselves on the coast in the early seventeenth century, we must focus on these English reformers. We cannot understand present-day America unless we heed these ideas that flourished with little competition on the rocky shores of Massachusetts. By the fall of 1630, Winthrop and his followers had founded Boston and several other towns. The Puritans had a limited self government in some ways reproducing what went on in England. Male church members, “visible saints,” were presumed to have received grace from God. They elected a General Court, a group that served as a legislature. Like England, the Bay Colony was dominated by men. Almost

all the rights accorded to women derived from their connection to their fathers or their husbands. The vision of the Bay Colony was clear and constricted.

Winthrop and his fellows could not stand heretical views. Roger Williams and Ann Hutchinson, who had Protestant ideas that Winthrop thought dangerous, gained fame as religious dissidents in the 1630s. Their treatment created precedents for how Massachusetts would treat rebels – it made the unorthodox get out. The Bay Colony forced Williams “to depart from this jurisdiction.” Ministers ordered Hutchinson, a daring woman who challenged the authority of the men, to “be banished out of our liberties and imprisoned until she be sent away.” Inhabitants had to accept the views of a churchly elite that walked a narrow line between individual expression and communal organization.

Winthrop and his General Court strictly defined the limits of religious culture, and did so in such a way that many later researchers would consider “the New England way” as essentially intolerant. An early twentieth century social critic, H. L. Mencken, once famously described Puritanism as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere might be happy.” More accurately, Massachusetts Bay displayed the self-righteousness of an immigrant culture convinced that it had the purity the homeland lacked.

#### DEALING WITH THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Different Europeans dealt differently with the Indians at different times. In general, Europeans thought of the Indians as having no rights except those that the explorers and settlers chose to give them. But while the Spanish had invaded and exterminated natives in South America, the French, smaller in number and much farther north, usually had practical relations with the Indians. On the North American coast, south of New France, the English settlers connected in yet another way.

In creating towns and settled farms the English in both Virginia and Massachusetts initially needed the Indians. Cooperation at first characterized the meeting of the two groups. But the Indians did not understand the English hunger for property, and were soon weaker than the Europeans in the nearby lands that the colonists wanted to occupy. The Indians put up a better fight than they are often credited with doing, but Old World diseases continued to take a horrendous toll. When the Indians effectively resisted the English, the Europeans used advances in musketry and English organization to put the natives at a permanent disadvantage. One (eighteenth-century) spectator wondered about Indian order: how could you “call it government which has neither laws nor power to support it”? Constant friction between settlers and natives often broke out into violence, and became a part of English and Indian life. Native warriors might attack a family or isolated settlement. Without government say-so, English farmers might ambush small bands of Indians. The settlers slowly pushed the Indians back – as far as the English wanted to move inland. When compromise or gentle pressure would not give the new arrivals what they wanted, there was always war.

In Virginia, around Jamestown in the early part of the seventeenth century, the English negotiated with a number of local tribes loosely organized by Powhatan,

an important chief. He initially made concessions to the English, hoping for their assistance in battles to extend his own power. Then the Virginia Company, in ever more dangerous circumstances, decided on major war against the Indians in 1610. The Company would restructure or eliminate Indian society. How could the pioneers destroy Indian resistance? They could not lure the Indians into decisive battles but could get at the source of the problem if they assaulted native villages. The English embraced these techniques, which had been effective in the ongoing battle on the other side of the world to conquer Ireland. In Virginia the techniques resulted in a peace of 1614, satisfactory to the English. But the Powhatan Confederacy tried to turn back the land-hungry whites in further campaigns that ended with Indian defeats in 1622 and again in 1644. By the third quarter of the century English settlements and deadly illnesses had overcome the Powhatan peoples. Powhatan's failure hinted at what was to come. The Indians might not survive the growing number of migrants in Virginia who were extending a version of English farming in the New World and emphasizing the ownership of land. At the same time in New England, in the late 1630s, the Puritans fought the powerful Pequot tribe, which also resisted the push of settlers inland. The English allied themselves with the enemies of the Pequot. In Massachusetts Bay the settlers also attacked villages and not just warriors, and virtually annihilated their enemy. In the north the Pequot War displayed an early futile attempt to prevent European expansion along the coast.

In 1675 and 1676 a more bloody and sustained series of contests known as King Philip's War occurred in Massachusetts. Again the Indians could not hold back European penetration inland from the Massachusetts coast. This time the natives tried an all-Indian alliance under their leader Metacom, whom the English called King Philip. But Metacom's own enemies collaborated with the colonists. The Indians had hoped to use the English as pawns in a local fight for power, and Metacom coordinated attacks against settlements throughout New England. But the English and "their" Indians finally won a costly victory. Metacom, who was captured and beheaded, had slowed the growth of European-style farming. The fighting, however, swung the balance of power in favor of the settlers against the New England Indians, whether or not they befriended the English. The Indians could now barely delay the settlers.

Down the coast at the same time in 1675, inland from Jamestown, Virginia, Nathaniel Bacon, a local popular leader, led whites demanding property from the Susquehannock Indians. Bacon and his men wanted land and violated agreements with cooperative Indians. This disorder, Bacon's Rebellion, showed that leaders of the Virginia colony hesitated in confronting the Indians, and Bacon challenged both the natives *and* royal authority. Raising an army that killed Indians and that additionally turned on the Jamestown officials, Bacon for a short time cut a wide path in Virginia. He drove off the royal governor, and the English navy had to restore order. Bacon's attacks on the Indians, which went against English policy, first exemplified what would be a common occurrence. A small well-to-do class led the newcomers and wanted to deal cautiously with the Indians and to control the growth of communities. Poorer settlers without land were only interested in getting rid of the Indians, the sooner the better. Leaders learned to pursue a more

aggressive Indian policy. They had to help white migrants in “the back country,” or to worry about threats from such Englishmen. If the settlers killed off or moved the Indians, the white group with property would increase. If local white governors treated the Indian more fairly, they would jeopardize governmental stability.

For 1000 years Europeans had murdered one another to control far smaller bits of land than those that confronted the immigrants to America. In a few generations these settlers came to see that they might rule over enormous pieces of territory. Property ownership, often defining social stability, eventuated in a “middling” class and went with the destruction of the Indians. By 1700 these developments were building a new sort of politics, for landlords might have a say in how they were ruled. The Virginia House of Burgesses was turning into a respectable political institution for white men who had titles to real estate.

No one, however, avoided conflict with the Indians. In Spanish New Mexico in 1680 the Pueblos revolted against greedy Catholic missionaries, and killed both priests and Spanish settlers. The Spanish could not reassert their authority for almost 50 years. Along the Great Lakes from the 1670s to the turn of the eighteenth century the French battled with the Iroquois to maintain France’s trade with the other Indian tribes, and to prevent Iroquois takeover of that trade. We can extract a main generalization from all of these unhappy exchanges between Europeans and Indians. The Europeans in North America got used to a perpetually dangerous frontier. They always had to fight to sustain their presence and their way of life in the land that they had occupied.

#### AFRICAN AMERICANS

African Americans were the third group to leave their mark in the New World. As with the Indians, we often see the Africans through the eyes of Europeans. But unlike the Indians, whom the Europeans met in the New World, the African Americans did not come of their own free will.

As Portuguese seamen made their way down the coast of Africa in the middle of the fifteenth century, looking to get to the Indies, they quickly set up trading posts for the purchase of gold – and of slaves. The Europeans followed the practices of Islamic traders and of Africans themselves, who for centuries had bought and sold human beings. The Portuguese increased this trade, and upped the demand for suitable slaves. The sailors also used strategies that earlier slavers taught them. The Portuguese separated people from the same tribes, mixed together disparate peoples, and moved the Africans as far as possible from their place of origin. The greater the disorientation of the slave, the fewer chances of resistance, the greater the chances of submission to slavery.

At first the slaves worked on the great farming islands along the African coast that brought wealth to the Portuguese and then to the Spanish. The profits of these islands, which came from sugar, were directly related to the growing need for slaves. The sugar industry involved large-scale farming that could exploit slave labor. Sugar plantations used great numbers of workers in hard, dangerous, and unrewarding work.



**Map 4.** European Claims in America, 1700. Note that the Hudson's Bay Company, a private English enterprise, was for a long time in control of what is now the north of Canada

By the early sixteenth century these plantations also brought profits for Spain in the West Indies. When the Spanish arrived there, they adopted the *encomienda* system in which the government might *commend* or *give* Indians to settlers if the settlers agreed to Christianize the Indians. The system mixed slavery with religion. Masters saved the souls of savages for Christianity in exchange for their forced labor. The Spanish who took advantage of the *encomienda* system were forerunners of the other Europeans who later participated in the African slave trade in

the New World. Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish priest, called *encomienda* “a moral pestilence invented by Spain.” For farmers and traders in the Caribbean, the enslavement of Africans formed the basis of the economy of the plantations. From 1500 onwards, from present-day Senegal in northwest Africa to Angola in the south, European sailors traded in black Africans. The Europeans took this human cargo to Spanish and Portuguese South America, to Central America, to Mexico, and to the West Indies. By 1600 hundreds of thousands of slaves worked on the sugar farms in the Caribbean. By 1800 traders had transported many millions to the New World. The Europeans do not appear to have had a moral distaste for this sort of commerce. They believed they were dealing with a sub-human group, a different species of human beings, if human beings at all.



**Map 5.** Slave Trade, 1500–1800

Those “which we now call Moores, Moorens, or Negroes, [are] a people of beastly lineage, without a god, law, religion, or common wealth.” African males

“have low and flat brows [and] are as libidinous as apes that attempt women.” In a famous Virginia legal case of 1630, authorities punished a white settler “for abusing himself to the dishonor of God and shame of Christians, by defiling his body in lying with a negro.”

Both the Spanish and Dutch had slaves in West Indian plantations in the sixteenth century. Even after the Spanish outlawed slavery in 1542, they imported Africans as laborers. By the early seventeenth century the English were following the example of the Spanish and Portuguese in acquiring Africans. By 1655 when the English got hold of the island of Jamaica, they were profitably producing sugar. Indeed, through the end of the seventeenth century, the West Indian sugar outposts held greater significance to England than the settlements scattered on the east coast of North America. The Africans made this plantation system possible, and their descendants are the dominant people on these islands in the twenty-first century.

The Africans had not wanted to abandon their homelands:

The Negroes are so willful and loth to leave their own country, that have often leap'ed out of the canoes, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned, to avoid being taken up and saved by our boats, which pursued them; they having a more dreadful apprehension of Barbadoes [a West Indian plantation colony] than we can have of hell.

The success of the plantations soon turned the islands into agricultural societies of a single crop. Their leaders looked to the southern settlements on the North American coast for foodstuffs and other supplies. English farmers in the West Indies who did not raise sugar also migrated north to Virginia. In 1619 a Dutch ship brought African blacks to Jamestown, Virginia, and put them on the market, but they came as “indentured” servants. Selling their labor for a specified number of years, the Africans had a status that differed little from that of many white, English, inhabitants of Virginia. By the end of the seventeenth century, traders took slaves from Barbados to mainland settlements in Virginia south of Jamestown. Still, through much of the 1600s slavery hardly existed in the mainland of English North America. From 1500 to 1700, only about 4.5 percent of the Africans imported to the New World came to the shores of the mainland. At the same time we have only fragmentary knowledge of the place of origin of these slaves from West Africa, or from the Caribbean. Groups of them may have shared a common culture. Others may have had in common only their color, as viewed by Europeans. The condition of the Africans on the mainland soon determined everything in their lives.

Many landless Europeans migrated to America. The indentured servants among them exchanged their work for a term of years for a free trip and, for some at the end of their indenture, small grants of land. In Virginia a “headright” system encouraged the use of such European workers. Prosperous settlers who paid for the trip of their servants (and thereby increased the number of colonists) received the right to obtain 50 acres of land. Royal governors in Virginia encouraged large and profitable farming, which cheap labor sustained. In the seventeenth century,

indentured servants accounted for three-quarters of Virginia's immigrants, as masters got hold of both property and labor. In one way or another, however, many of these "white slaves" acquired property themselves after their indenture was over.

The English had devised formal "codes" for slavery in their sugar settlements. These laws defined the status of slaves, and Europeans in the Caribbean clearly understood slave property. But in North America the initial status of Africans lacked clarity because of indentured servitude. In the middle of the seventeenth century on the mainland some Africans enjoyed freedom; others had the status of slaves. Some may have been indentured, while white Virginians had codes for black slavery.

Tobacco farms in Virginia encouraged slavery. They often looked like the sugar plantations in the West Indies, which used many slaves. Sugar growing demanded big farms, difficult cultivation of the sugar cane, and complex refining of the product. Tobacco growers could plant tobacco more easily on smaller farms, and in a year could raise a marketable crop that needed little processing. But sugar provided an example for Virginia. Even though prices varied, poorer farmers could make a living – and more – with tobacco, especially when they had the assistance of slaves. White owners, moreover, found the imported laborers ideal in the New World. The ghastly trip from Africa maximized disorientation and guaranteed a suitable work force, once it was used to its new surroundings.

In 1672 the Royal African Company formed to make slaves more readily available, and at the end of the century a European war cut off markets for tobacco, depressed prices, and diminished migration. Slavery instead of indenture was solving the problem of Virginia's constant need for inexpensive workers. This economy contrasted to that of the Massachusetts Bay. Large farms in Virginia were standard, and tobacco grew in a warm climate, but also rice and indigo, a shrub producing a blue dye. In the north small-scale farming did not require a large labor force. In Massachusetts, the migrants made a society with diversified agriculture on little farms, and trade in small towns. The southern region had limited but stable crops grown on plantations. The northern settlements joined with the southern ones in a fear of black slaves that mixed hatred and contempt. But in the Bay Colony and its surroundings far fewer people experienced Africans and slavery, which remained a foreign institution.

#### UNDERSTANDING NORTH AMERICAN SLAVERY

The white migrants called the slaves *negroes*, the Spanish word for black, and many factors in mainland North America other than Virginia's economics produced black slavery. The English borrowed the idea from the Spanish and Portuguese. They could find slavery in venerated books, including Biblical texts. They could define it from the variety of labor services available to the powerful in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The concept of *human* rights did not exist, and not only women but also the indentured of both sexes had marginal legal status. The shortage of labor in the New World and the large quantity of land made enslavement attractive.

In *American Slavery, American Freedom* (1975), Edmund S. Morgan pointed out connections between the slave system and the beginning of a democracy, a system in which ordinary people had political power as a matter of right. The institutions that gave many white men in Virginia such power grew up with an organic connection to slavery. The only way Virginia could tolerate the instabilities of a new sort of free society for the settlers was to categorize the whites, no matter who they were, over and above the African Americans. Perhaps, whites of all sorts would not have had such liberties unless they could all lord it over the blacks, and perhaps granting these liberties to whites ensured that African Americans would become slaves.

\* \* \*

In 200 years the Europeans had done more than open a beachhead in the New World. They had instead gotten various settlements underway all over North and South America. They tried to give the Indians their European religion. Sailors and traders also brought Africans to the New World, and their labor basically built an agricultural society in Virginia. On the coast of North America complex forces caught up the Europeans and the Indians and Africans. The English migrants were making a propertied society that depended on the takeover of Indian land, and in the south a form of this propertied society and representative government solidified around racial animosity to slaves.

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