

future international weight of the United Provinces and Sweden had been unimaginable in 1500, but their importance, too, had come and gone by 1800. They were then still important nations, but of the second rank. France was still to be a front-rank power in an age of national states as she had been in the days of sixteenth-century dynastic rivalry. Indeed, her power was relatively greater and the peak of her dominance in western Europe was still to come. But she faced a new challenger too, and one which had already defeated her. From the little English kingdom of 1500, cooped up in an island off the coast of Europe under an upstart dynasty, had emerged the world power of Great Britain.

This was a transformation almost as surprising and sudden as Russia's. It transcended the old categories of European diplomacy quite as dramatically. From what some historians have called 'the Atlantic Archipelago' of islands and kingdoms, ruled intermittently in varying measure and extent by Tudor and Stuart monarchs, had emerged a new oceanic power. Besides its new unity, it enjoyed unique institutional and economic advantages in deploying its influence worldwide. In 300 years, the major zones of European conflict and dispute had migrated from the old battlefields of Italy, the Rhine and the Netherlands, moving from them to central and eastern Germany, the Danube valley, Poland and Carpathia, and the Baltic, but also – the greatest change of all – across the oceans. A new age had indeed begun, signaled not only by the remaking of eastern Europe, but by the wars of Louis XIV, the first world wars of the modern era, imperial and oceanic in their scope.

1.1 Colonies brought europe money

1.2 Europe in India accommodated native cultures

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Europe's Assault on the World

2.1 England in India empire was a result of comercial opportunity, not the other way around (642)

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There was a striking change in world history after 1500 and it was quite without precedent. Never before had one culture spread over the whole globe. Even in prehistory, the cultural tide had seemed set towards differentiation. Now it began to turn. Even by the end of the eighteenth century, the essentials of what was going on were evident. By then, European nations, including Russia, had already laid claim to more than half the world's land surface. They actually controlled (or believed they controlled) about a third of it. Never before had those sharing one particular civilization managed to acquire for their own use so great a territory.

The consequences, moreover, had already begun to be shown in irreversible changes. Europeans had transplanted crops and animal species to begin what was to be the greatest reshaping of ecology ever to take place. To the western hemisphere they sent populations which, already in 1800, constituted new centres of civilization, equipped with European institutions of government, religion and learning. A new nation had emerged from former British possessions in North America, while to the south the Spanish had destroyed two mature civilizations to implant their own.

To the east, the story was different, but equally striking. Once past the Cape of Good Hope (where something like 20,000 Dutch lived), an Englishman travelling on an East Indiaman in 1800 would not land at European colonial communities like those of the Americas unless he wandered as far off course as Australia, just beginning to receive its settlers. But in East Africa, Persia, India, Indonesia he would find Europeans coming to do business and then, in the long or short run, planning to return home to enjoy the profits. They could even be found in Guangzhou (Canton) or, in very small numbers, in the closed island kingdom of Japan. Only the interior of Africa, still protected by disease and climate, seemed impenetrable.

The remarkable transformation thus begun (and to go much further) started as a one-way process, but soon it became a process of integration. The conveyors were the oceans and the coasts that surrounded them, and the methods were trade and foreign settlement. Europeans did most of the

typical intro

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settling, but the imperial networks they created also brought with them Africans (mostly, though not exclusively, as slaves) to the New World, Chinese to South-East Asia and Indians to almost everywhere. The world was becoming new, in terms of travel, knowledge and population.

This was a great transformation of world relationships and it happened because of profound changes in Europe. Underpinning it lay layer upon layer of exploration, enterprise, technical advantage and governmental patronage. The trend seemed irreversible by the end of the eighteenth century and, in a sense, so it was to prove, even if direct European rule was to dissolve more quickly than it was built up. No civilization had been more rapidly and dramatically successful, so untroubled in its expansion by any but temporary and occasional setbacks or so arrogant in its assumptions.

One advantage possessed by Europeans had been the powerful motives they had to succeed. The major thrust behind the Age of Reconnaissance had been their wish to get into easier and more direct contact with Asia, the source of things badly wanted in Europe, at a time when the major countries of Asia wanted virtually nothing Europe could offer in exchange. When Vasco da Gama showed what he had brought to give to a king, the inhabitants of Calicut laughed at him; he had nothing to offer which could compare with what Arab traders had already brought to India from other parts of Asia. It was indeed just the legendary superiority of so much of the civilization of the Orient that spurred Europeans on to try to reach it on some more regular and assured basis than the occasional trip of a Marco Polo. Coincidentally, China, India and Japan were all going through major transformations – in society, culture and politics – during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The land blockade of eastern Europe by the Ottomans made them even more attractive to Europeans than they had been before. There were huge profits to be made and great efforts could be justified.

If the expectation of reward is a good recipe for high morale, so is the expectation of success. In the sixteenth century enough had been done for the business of exploration and new enterprise to be attacked confidently; there was a cumulative factor at work, as each successful voyage added both to knowledge and to the certainty that more could be done. As time went by, there would also be profits for the financing of future expansion. Then there was the psychological asset of Christianity. Soon after the establishment of settlements this found a vent in missionary enterprises, but it was always present as a cultural fact, assuring the European of his superiority to the peoples with whom he began to come into contact for the first time.

In the next four centuries, Christianity was often to have disastrous effects. Confident in the possession of the true religion, Europeans were

impatient and contemptuous of the values and achievements of the peoples and civilizations they disturbed. The result was always uncomfortable and often brutal. It is also true that religious zeal could blur easily into less avowable motives. As the greatest Spanish historian of the American conquests put it when describing why he and his colleagues had gone to the Indies, they thought 'to serve God and his Majesty, to give light to those who sat in darkness and to grow rich as all men desire to do'.

Greed quickly led to the abuse of power, to domination and exploitation by force. In the end this led to great crimes – though they were often committed unconsciously. It sometimes brought about the destruction of whole societies, but this was only the worst aspect of a readiness to dominate which was present from the outset in European enterprise. The adventurers who first reached the coasts of India were soon boarding Asian merchantmen, torturing and slaughtering their crews and passengers, looting their cargoes and burning the ravaged hulls. Europeans could usually exact what they wanted in the end because of a technical superiority which exaggerated the power of their tiny numbers and for a few centuries turned the balance against the great historic agglomerations of population and civilization.

The next Portuguese captain after da Gama to go there provided a fitting symbol of this by bombarding Calicut. A little later, when, in 1517, the Portuguese reached Guangzhou, they fired a salute as a gesture of friendship and respect; the noise of their guns horrified the southern Chinese, however, who at first called the adventurers *folangki* – a remote corruption of 'Franks'. These weapons were different from anything China had. There had long been guns in Asia, and the Chinese had known about gunpowder centuries before Europe, but the technology of artillery had not developed far there. European craftsmanship and metallurgy had in the fifteenth century made great strides, producing weapons better than any available elsewhere in the world. Asia had to play catch-up with European weapons technology. But from the late eighteenth century, when the most dramatic improvements in the weaponry of European great powers were to take place, Asia was to fall further and further behind, right up to the mid-twentieth century.

This progress had been and was to be, again, paralleled in other fields, notably in the developments in shipbuilding and handling which have already been touched upon. When combined, such advances produced the remarkable weapon with which Europe opened up the world, the sailing-ship which was a gun-carrier. Again, evolution had barely begun in 1517, but already the Portuguese had been able to fight off the fleets organized by the Turks to keep them out of the Indian Ocean. (The Turks had more success in the Red Sea, in whose narrower waters the oar-propelled galley,

which closed with its enemies to grapple and board, retained more of its usefulness. Even there, though, the Portuguese were able to penetrate as far north as the Suez isthmus.) The Chinese war-junk would do no better than the rowed galley. The abandonment of the oar for propulsion and the mounting, broadside, of large numbers of guns, enormously multiplied the value of Europe's scanty manpower.

This advantage was clear to contemporaries. As early as 1481 the pope forbade the sale of arms to Africans. The Dutch in the seventeenth century were very anxious to keep to themselves the secrets of gun-founding and not to allow them to pass into the hands of Asians. Yet pass they did. There had been Turkish gunners in India in the fifteenth century, and before they reached China the Portuguese were supplying the Persians with cannon and teaching them how to cast more in order to embarrass the Turks. In the seventeenth century their knowledge of gun-founding and gunnery was one of the attractions which kept the Jesuit Fathers in favour with the Chinese authorities.

Yet even when, as the Dutch feared, the knowledge of up-to-date gun-founding penetrated oriental societies, it did not offset the European advantage. Chinese artillery remained inferior in spite of the Jesuits' training (though more than good enough for the Qing to dominate their own region). There was more to the technological disparity between Europe and the world than mere know-how. One of the assets Europe enjoyed at the beginning of her era was not only new knowledge, but an attitude to knowledge different from that of other cultures. There was a readiness to bring it to bear upon practical problems, a technological approach. In it lay the roots of what would become a characteristic of European élites during the Enlightenment, their growing confidence in the power to change things.

Portuguese in Africa and Indian Ocean Africa and Asia were the first targets against which Europeans' advantages were deployed. In these continents, the Portuguese led for a century and more. They figured so largely and were so successful in the opening of routes to the East that their king took the title (confirmed by the pope) 'Lord of the conquest, navigation and commerce of India, Ethiopia, Arabia and Persia', which sufficiently indicates both the scope and the eastern bias of Portuguese enterprise, though slightly misleading in its reference to Ethiopia, with which Portuguese contacts were small. Penetration of Africa was impossible on any more than a tiny and hazardous basis. The Portuguese suggested that God had especially set a barrier around the African interior with its mysterious and noxious diseases (which were to hold Europeans at bay until the end of the nineteenth century). Even the coastal stations of West Africa were unhealthy for Europeans and could only be tolerated because of their importance in the slave trade and the substructure of long-

range commerce. The East African stations were less unhealthy, but they, too, were of interest not as jumping-off points for the interior, but because they were part of a commercial network created by Arabs, whom the Portuguese deliberately harried so as to send up the cost of the spices passed by way of the Red Sea and the Middle East to the Venetian merchants of the eastern Mediterranean.

The successors of the Portuguese were to leave the interior of Africa alone as they had done, and the history of that continent for another two centuries was still to move largely to its own rhythms in the fastnesses of its forests and savannahs, its inhabitants only coming into corrosive and occasionally stimulating contact with Europeans at its fringes. It is also true, though, that the opening of the European age in Asia showed that none of the powers concerned was in the beginning interested in the subjugation or settlement of large areas. The period down to the middle of the eighteenth century was marked by the multiplication of trading posts, concessions in port facilities, protective forts and bases on the coast, for these by themselves would assure the only thing early imperialism sought in Asia – secure and profitable trade.

The Portuguese dominated this trade in the sixteenth century; their fire-power swept all before them and they rapidly built up a chain of bases and trading posts on which rested the first global empire. Twelve years after Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut the Portuguese established their main Indian Ocean trading station some 300 miles further up the western Indian coast, at Goa. It was to become a missionary as well as a commercial centre; once established, the Portuguese empire strongly supported the propagation of the faith, and the Franciscans played a large part in this. In 1513 the first Portuguese ships reached the Moluccas, the legendary spice islands, and the incorporation of Indonesia, South-East Asia and islands as far south as Timor within the European horizon began. Four years later the first Portuguese ships reached China, and opened direct European trade by sea with that empire. Ten years later they were allowed to use Macao as a trading base; in 1557 they obtained a permanent settlement there. When Emperor Charles V gave up to them the rights which Spain had claimed as a result of exploration in the Moluccas, keeping only the Philippines, and renouncing any interest in the Indian Ocean area, the Portuguese were in possession of a monopoly of eastern empire for the next half century. Later they would connect it to their possessions in Brazil and Africa, viewing their overseas strongholds as the anchorages of a sea-borne trading empire.

The Portuguese not only traded between the outside world and Europe; there was much business to be done as carriers between Asian countries. Persian carpets went to India, cloves from the Moluccas to China, copper

and silver from Japan to China, Indian cloth to Siam (Thailand), all in European ships. The Portuguese and their successors found this a profitable source of income to offset some of the costs of Europe's unfavourable balance of trade with Asia, whose inhabitants long wanted little from Europe except silver. The only serious competitors at sea were the Arabs and they were controlled effectively by Portuguese squadrons operating from the East African bases, from Socotra, at the mouth of the Red Sea, where they had established themselves in 1507, from Ormuz, on the northern coast of the entrance to the Persian Gulf, and from Goa. From these places the Portuguese expanded their commerce eventually to trade into the Red Sea as far as Massawa and up to the head of the Persian Gulf, where they established a factory at Basra. They had also secured privileges in Burma and Siam and in the 1540s were the first Europeans to land in Japan. This network was supported by a diplomacy of agreements with local rulers and the superiority of Portuguese fire-power at sea. Even if they had wished to do so, they could not have so developed their power on land because they lacked men, so that a commercial empire made not only economic sense but was all that could be created with the means available.

Portugal's supremacy in the Indian Ocean disguised fundamental weaknesses: a lack of manpower and a shaky financial base. It lasted only until the end of the century and was then replaced by that of the Dutch, who carried the technique and institutions of commercial empire to their furthest point. The Dutch were the trading imperialists par excellence, though in the end they also settled to plant colonies in Indonesia. Their opportunity arose when Portugal was united with Spain in 1580. This change provided a stimulus to Dutch seamen now excluded from the profitable re-export trade of oriental goods from Lisbon to northern Europe, which had been mainly in their hands. The background of the Eighty Years War with Spain was an additional incentive for the Dutch to enter areas where they might make profits at the expense of the Iberians. Like the Portuguese they were few in number, barely 2 million people, and their survival depended on a narrow base; commercial wealth was therefore vitally important to them. Their advantages lay in the pool of naval manpower, ships, wealth and experience built up by their ascendancy in fishing and carrying in northern waters, while commercial expertise at home made it easy to mobilize resources for new enterprises. The Dutch were assisted, too, by the simultaneous recovery of the Arabs, who took back the East African stations north of Zanzibar as Portuguese power wavered in the aftermath of the Spanish union.

The first decades of the seventeenth century therefore brought the collapse of much of the Portuguese empire in Asia and its replacement by the

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Dutch. For a time, too, the Dutch established themselves in Pernambuco, the sugar-producing region of Portuguese Brazil, though they were not able to retain it. The main objective of the Dutch was the Moluccas. A brief period of individual voyages (sixty-five in seven years, some around the Strait of Magellan, some around Africa) ended when in 1602, at the initiative of the States General, the government of the United Provinces, there was set up the Dutch United East India Company, the organization which was to prove the decisive instrument of Dutch commercial supremacy in Asia.

Like the Portuguese before them, the company's servants worked through diplomacy with native rulers to exclude competitors, and through a system of trading stations. How unpleasant the Dutch could be to rivals was shown in 1623, when ten Englishmen were murdered at Amboyna; this ended any English attempt to intervene directly in the spice trade. Amboyna had been one of the first Portuguese bases to be seized in a rapid sweeping-up of Portuguese interests, but it was not until 1609, when a resident governor-general was sent to the East Indian islands, that the reduction of the major Portuguese forts could begin. The centre of these operations was the establishment of the Dutch headquarters at Jakarta (renamed Batavia) in Java, where it was to remain until the end of Dutch colonial rule. It became the centre of an area of settlement, where Dutch planters could rely upon the company to back them up in a ruthless control of their labour force. The early history of the Dutch colonies is a grim one of insurrection, deportation, enslavement and extermination. The trade of local shippers – and of the Chinese junks – was deliberately destroyed in order to concentrate all sources of profit in the hands of the Dutch.

The spice trade to Europe was the centre of Dutch attention and was a huge prize. It accounted during most of the century for over two-thirds of the values of the cargoes sent back to Amsterdam. But the Dutch also set about replacing the Portuguese in the valuable East Asian trade. They could not expel the Portuguese from Macao, although they sent expeditions against it, but they did succeed in setting themselves up in Formosa, from which they built up an indirect trade with the mainland of China. In 1638 the Portuguese were expelled from Japan and the Dutch succeeded them there. In the next two decades, the Portuguese were replaced by the Dutch in Ceylon, too. Their successful negotiation of a monopoly of trade to Siam, on the other hand, was overtaken by another power, France. This country's connection with the area was opened by accident in 1660 when circumstance took three French missionaries to the Siamese capital. Thanks to their establishment of a mission centre, and the presence of a Greek adviser at the Siamese court, there followed a French diplomatic and

military mission in 1685. But these promising beginnings ended in civil war and failure and Siam again moved out of the sphere of European influence for another two centuries.

In the early eighteenth century there thus existed a Dutch supremacy in the Indian Ocean and Indonesia, and an important Dutch interest in the China seas. To a remarkable degree this reproduced the earlier Portuguese pattern, although there survived Portuguese stations such as Goa and Macao. The heart of Dutch power was the Malacca Strait, from which it radiated through Malaysia and Indonesia, to Formosa and the trading links with China and Japan, and down to the south-east to the crucial Moluccas. This area was by now enjoying an internal trade so considerable that it was beginning to be self-financing, with bullion from Japan and China providing its flow of currency, rather than bullion from Europe as in the early days. Further west, the Dutch were also established at Calicut, in Ceylon and at the Cape of Good Hope, and had set up factories in Persia. Although Batavia was a big town and the Dutch were running plantations to grow the goods they needed, this was still a littoral or insular commercial empire, not one of internal dominion over the mainland. In the last resort it rested on naval power and it was to succumb, though not to disappear, as Dutch naval power was surpassed.

This was clearly beginning to happen in the last decades of the seventeenth century. The unlikely challenger for Indian Ocean supremacy was England. At an early date the English had sought to enter the spice trade. There had been an East India Company under James I, but its factors had got bloody noses for their pains, both when they tried to co-operate with the Dutch and when they fought them. The upshot of this was that by 1700 the English had in effect drawn a line under their accounts east of the Malacca Strait. Like the Dutch in 1580, they were faced with a need to change course and did so. The upshot was the most momentous event in British history between the Protestant Reformation and the onset of industrialization – the acquisition of supremacy in India.

In India the main rivals of the English were not the Dutch or Portuguese, but the French, and what was at stake did not emerge for a long time. The rise of British power in India was very gradual. After the establishment of Fort St George at Madras and the acquisition of Bombay from the Portuguese as a part of the dowry of Charles II's queen, there was no further English penetration of India until the end of the century. From their early footholds (Bombay was the only territory they held in full sovereignty) Englishmen conducted a trade in coffee and textiles less glamorous than the Dutch spice trade, but one which grew in value and importance. It also changed their national habits, and therefore society, as the establishment of

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coffee-houses in London showed. Soon, ships began to be sent from India to China for tea; by 1700 the English had acquired a new national beverage, and a poet would soon commemorate what he termed 'cups that cheer but not inebriate'.

As a defeat of the East India Company's forces in 1689 showed, military domination in India was unlikely to prove easy. Moreover, it was not necessary to prosperity. The Company therefore did not wish to fight if it could avoid it. Though at the end of the century a momentous acquisition was made when the Company was allowed to occupy Fort William, which it had built at Calcutta, the directors in 1700 rejected the idea of acquiring fresh territory or planting colonies in India as quite unrealistic. Yet all pre-conceptions were to be changed by the collapse of the Mughal empire after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. The consequences emerged slowly, but their total effect was that India dissolved into a collection of autonomous states with no paramount power.

The Mughal empire had already before 1707 been troubled by the Marathas. The centrifugal tendencies of the empire had always favoured the *nawabs*, or provincial governors, too, and power was divided between them and the Marathas with increasing obviousness. The Sikhs provided a third focus of power. Originally appearing as a Hindu sect in the sixteenth century, they had turned against the Mughals but had also drawn away from orthodox Hinduism to become virtually a third religion with it and Islam. The Sikhs formed a military brotherhood, had no castes, and were well able to look after their own interests in a period of disunion. Eventually a Sikh empire appeared in north-west India which was to endure until 1849. Meanwhile, there were signs in the eighteenth century of an increasing polarity between Hindu and Muslim. The Hindus withdrew more into their own communities, emphasizing the ritual practices which publicly distinguished them. The Muslims reciprocated. On this growing dislocation, presided over by a Mughal military and civil administration which was conservative and unprogressive, there fell also a Persian invasion in the 1730s and consequent losses of territory.

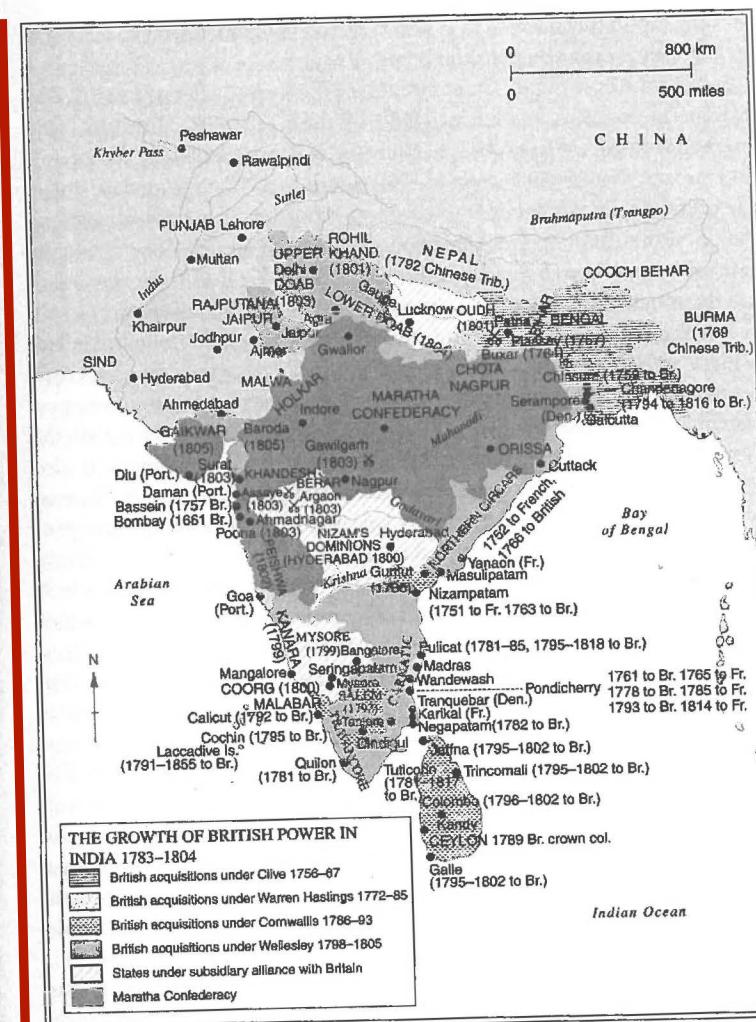
There were great temptations to foreign intervention in this situation. In retrospect it seems remarkable that both the British and the French took so long to take advantage; even in the 1740s the British East India Company was still less wealthy and powerful than the Dutch. This delay is a testimony to the importance still attached to trade as their main purpose. When they did begin to intervene, largely moved by hostility towards the French and fear of what they might do, the British had several important advantages, although they had no concept of empire as such. The possession of a station at Calcutta placed them at the door to that part of India which was

potentially the richest prize – Bengal and the lower Ganges valley. They had assured sea communications with Europe, thanks to British naval power, and ministers listened to the East India merchants in London as they did not listen to French merchants at Versailles.⁶ The French were Great Britain's most dangerous potential competitors, but their government was always likely to be distracted by its European continental commitments. Finally, the British lacked missionary zeal; this was true in the narrow sense that Protestant interest in missions in Asia quickened later than Catholic, and also, more generally, in that they had no immediate urge to interfere with native custom or institution but only – somewhat like the Mughals – to provide an overarching structure of power within which Indians could carry on their lives as they wished, while the commerce from which the Company profited prospered in peace. This was empire as a result of commercial opportunity, not the other way around.

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The way into an imperial future led through Indian politics. Support for rival Indian princes was the first, indirect, form of conflict between French and British. In 1744 this led for the first time to armed struggle between British and French forces in the Carnatic, the south-eastern coastal region. India had been irresistibly sucked into the worldwide conflict between British and French power. The Seven Years War (1756–63) was decisive. Before its outbreak, there had in fact been no remission of fighting in India, even while France and Great Britain were officially at peace after 1748. The French cause had prospered under a brilliant French governor in the Carnatic, Dupleix, who caused great alarm to the British by his extension of French power among native princes by force and diplomacy. But he was recalled to France and the French Indian company was not to enjoy the wholehearted support of the metropolitan government which it needed to emerge as the new paramount power. When war broke out again, in 1756, the *nawab* of Bengal attacked and captured Calcutta. His treatment of his English prisoners, many of whom were suffocated in the soon legendary 'Black Hole', gave additional offence. The East India Company's army, commanded by its employee, Robert Clive, retook the city from him, seized the French station at Chandernagore and then on 22 June 1757 won a battle over the *nawab*'s much larger armies at Plassey, about a hundred miles up the Hooghly river from Calcutta.

It was not very bloody (the *nawab*'s army was suborned) but it was one of the decisive battles of world history. It opened to the British the road to the control of Bengal and its revenues. On these was based the destruction of French power in the Carnatic; that opened the way to further acquisitions which led, inexorably, to a future British monopoly of India. Nobody planned this. The British government, it is true, had begun to grasp what



was immediately at stake in terms of a threat to trade, and sent out a battalion of regular troops to help the Company; the gesture is doubly revealing, both because it recognized that a national interest was involved, but also because of the tiny scale of this military effort. A very small number of European troops with European field artillery could be decisive. The fate of India turned on the Company's handful of European and European-trained soldiers, and on the diplomatic skills and acumen of its agents on

the spot. Upon this narrow base and the need for government in a disintegrating India was to be built the British Raj.

In 1764 the East India Company became the formal ruler of Bengal. This had by no means been the intention of the Company's directors, who sought not to govern but to trade. However, if Bengal could pay for its own government, then the burden could be undertaken. There were now only a few scattered French bases; the peace of 1763 left five trading posts on condition that they were not fortified. In 1769 the French *Compagnie des Indes* was dissolved. Soon after, the British took Ceylon from the Dutch and the stage was cleared for a unique example of imperialism.

The road would be a long one and was for a long time followed reluctantly, but the East India Company was gradually drawn on by its revenue problems and by the disorder of native administrations in contiguous territories to extend its own governmental aegis. The obscuring of the Company's primary commercial role was not good for business. It also gave its employees even greater opportunities to feather their own nests. This drew the interest of British politicians, who first cut into the powers of the directors of the Company and then brought it firmly under the control of the Crown, setting up in 1784 a system of 'dual control' in India which was to last until 1858. In the same Act were provisions against further interference in native affairs; the British government hoped as fervently as the Company to avoid being dragged any further into the role of imperial power in India. But this was what happened in the next half century, as many more acquisitions followed. The road was open which was to lead eventually to the enlightened despotism of the nineteenth-century Raj. India was quite unlike any other dependency so far acquired by a European state in that hundreds of millions of subjects were to be added to the empire without any conversion or assimilation of them being envisaged except by a few visionaries and at a very late date. The character of the British imperial structure would be profoundly transformed by this, and so, eventually, would be British strategy, diplomacy, external trade patterns and even outlook.

Spanish
in Americas

Except in India and Dutch Indonesia, no territorial acquisitions in Asia in these centuries could be compared to the vast seizures of lands by Europeans in the Americas. Columbus's landing had been followed by a fairly rapid and complete exploration of the major 'West Indian' islands. It was soon clear that the conquest of American lands was attractively easy by comparison with the struggles to win North Africa from the Moors, which had immediately followed the fall of Granada and the completion of the Reconquest on the Spanish mainland. Settlement rapidly made headway, particularly in Hispaniola and Cuba. The cornerstone of the first cathedral in the Americas was laid in 1523; the Spaniards, as their city-building was

intended to show, had come to stay. Their first university (in the same city, Santo Domingo) was founded in 1538, and the first printing-press was set up in Mexico in the following year.

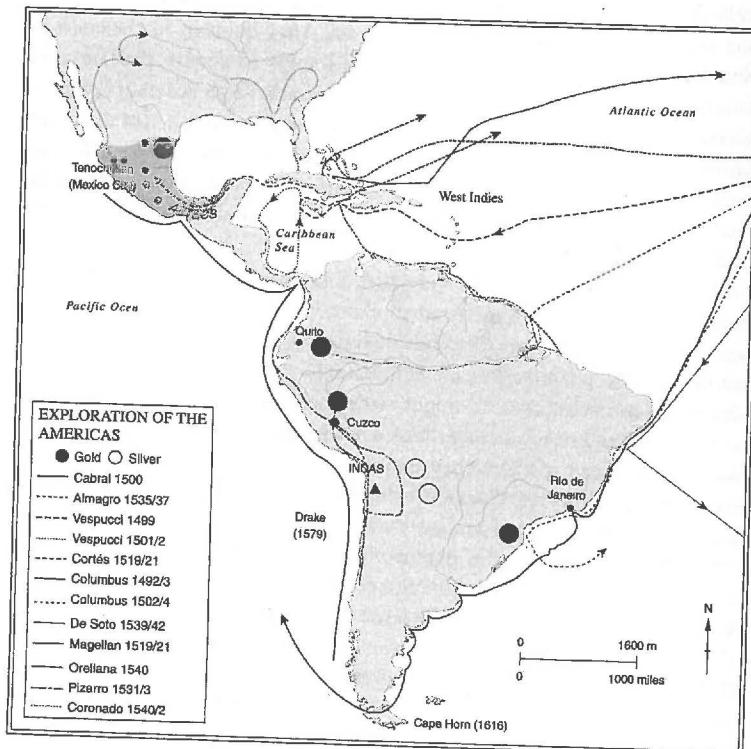
The Spanish settlers looked for land, as agriculturalists, and gold, as speculators. They had no competitors and, indeed, with the exception of Brazil, the story of the opening up of Central and South America remains Spanish until the end of the sixteenth century. The first Spaniards in the islands were often Castilian gentry, poor, tough and ambitious. When they went to the mainland they were out for booty, though they spoke as well of the message of the Cross and the greater glory of the Crown of Castile. The first penetration of the mainland had come in Venezuela in 1499. Then, in 1513, Vasco de Balboa crossed the isthmus of Panama and Europeans for the first time saw the Pacific. His expedition built houses and sowed crops; the age of the *conquistadores* had begun. One among them whose adventures captured and held the imagination of posterity was Hernán Cortés. Late in 1518 he left Cuba with a few hundred followers. He was deliberately flouting the authority of its governor and subsequently justified his acts by the spoils he brought to the Crown. After landing on the coast of Vera Cruz in February 1519, he burnt his ships to ensure that his men could not go back and then began the march to the high central plateau of Mexico, which was to provide one of the most dramatic stories of the whole history of imperialism. When they reached the city of Tenochtitlán itself, they were astounded by the civilization they found there. Besides its wealth of gold and precious stones, it was situated in a land suitable for the kind of estate cultivation familiar to Castilians at home.

Though Cortés's followers were few, and their conquest of the Aztec empire which dominated the central plateau heroic, they had great advantages and a lot of luck. The people upon whom they advanced were technologically primitive, easily impressed by the gunpowder, steel and horses the *conquistadores* brought with them. And Aztec resistance was hampered by an uneasy feeling that Cortés might be an incarnation of their god, whose return to them they one day expected. The Aztecs were very susceptible to imported diseases, too. Furthermore, they were themselves an exploiting race and a cruel one; their Indian subjects were happy to welcome the new conquerors as liberators, or at least as a change of masters. Circumstances thus favoured the Spaniards. Nevertheless, in the end their own toughness, courage and ruthlessness were the decisive factors.

In 1531 Francisco Pizarro set out upon a similar conquest of Peru. This was an even more remarkable achievement than the conquest of Mexico and, if possible, displayed even more dreadfully the rapacity and ruthlessness of the *conquistadores*. Settlement of the new empire began in the

1540s and almost at once there was made one of the most important mineral discoveries of historical times, that of a mountain of silver at Potosí, which was to be Europe's main source of bullion for the next three centuries.

By 1700, the Spanish empire in the Americas nominally covered a huge area, from the modern New Mexico to the River Plate. By way of Panama and Acapulco it was linked by sea to the Spanish in the Philippines. Yet this huge extent on the map was misleading. The Californian, Texan and New Mexican lands north of the Rio Grande were very thinly inhabited; for the most part occupancy meant a few forts and trading posts and a larger number of missions. Nor, to the south, was what is now Chile well settled. The most important and most densely populated regions were three: New Spain (as Mexico was called), which quickly became the most developed part of Spanish America; Peru, which was important for its mines and intensively occupied; and some of the larger and long-settled Caribbean islands. Areas unsuitable for settlement by Spaniards were long neglected by the administration.



The Indies were governed by viceroys at Mexico and Lima as sister kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, dependent upon the Crown of Castile. They had a royal council of their own, through which the king exercised direct authority. This imposed a high degree of centralization in theory; in practice, geography and topography made nonsense of such a pretence. It was impossible to control New Spain or Peru closely from Spain with the communications available. The viceroys and captains-general under them enjoyed effective independence in their day-to-day business. But the colonies could be run by Madrid for fiscal advantage and, indeed, the Spaniards and Portuguese were the only powers colonizing in the western hemisphere for over a century who managed to make their American possessions not only pay for themselves but return a net profit for the metropolis. This was largely because of the flow of precious metals. After 1540, silver flooded across the Atlantic, to be dissipated, unfortunately for Spain, in the wars of Charles V and Philip II. By 1650, 16,000 tons of silver had come to Europe, to say nothing of 180 tons of gold objects.

Whether Spain got other economic benefits is harder to say. She shared with other colonizing powers of the age the belief that there was only a limited amount of trade to go around; it followed that trade with her colonies should be reserved to her by regulation and force of arms. Furthermore, she endorsed another commonplace of early colonial economic theory, the view that colonies should not be allowed to develop industries which might reduce the opportunities available to the home country in their markets. Unfortunately, Spain was less successful than other countries in drawing advantage from this. Though they prevented the development of industry apart from the processing of agricultural crops, mining and handicrafts in America, the Spanish authorities were increasingly unable to keep out foreign traders (interlopers as they came to be called) from their territories. Spanish planters soon wanted what metropolitan Spain could not supply – slaves, especially. Apart from mining, the economy of the islands and New Spain rested on agriculture. The islands soon came to depend on slavery; in the mainland colonies, a Spanish government unwilling to countenance the enslavement of the conquered populations evolved other devices to assure the supply of labour. The first, started in the islands and extended to Mexico, was a kind of feudal lordship: a Spaniard would be given an *encomienda*, a group of villages over which he extended protection in return for a share of their labour. The general effect was not always easily distinguishable from serfdom, or even from slavery, which soon came to mean African slavery.

The presence from the start of large pre-colonial native populations to provide labour did as much as the nature of the occupying power to

differentiate the colonialism of Central and South America from that of the North. Centuries of Moorish occupation had accustomed the Spanish and Portuguese to the idea of living in a multi-racial society. There soon emerged in Latin America a population of mixed blood. In Brazil, which the Portuguese finally secured from the Dutch after thirty years' fighting, there was much interbreeding, both with the indigenous peoples and with the growing black population of slaves, who had first been imported to work on the sugar plantations in the sixteenth century. In Africa, too, the Portuguese showed no concern at racial interbreeding, and its lack of a colour bar has been alleged to have been a palliative feature of Portuguese imperialism.

None the less, though the establishment of racially mixed societies over huge areas was one of the enduring legacies of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, these societies were stratified along racial lines. The dominant classes were always the Iberian-born and the creoles, persons of European blood born in the colonies. As time passed, the latter came to feel that the former, called *peninsulares*, excluded them from key posts and were antagonistic towards them. From the creoles there led downwards a blurred incline of increasing gradations of blood to the poorest and most oppressed: the pure Indians and African slaves. Though Indian languages survived, often thanks to the efforts of the Spanish missionaries, the dominant languages of the continent became, of course, those of the conquerors.

This change in language was the greatest single formative influence making for the cultural unification of the continent, though another of comparable importance was Roman Catholicism. The Church played an enormous part in the opening of Spanish (and Portuguese) America. The lead was taken from the earliest years by the missionaries of the regular orders – Franciscans, in particular – but for three centuries their successors worked away at the civilization of native Americans. They took Indians from their tribes and villages, taught them Christianity and Latin (the early friars often kept them from learning Spanish, to protect them from corruption by the settlers), put them in trousers and sent them back to spread the light among their compatriots. The mission stations of the frontier determined the shapes of countries which would only come into existence centuries later. They met little resistance. Mexicans, for example, enthusiastically adopted the cult of the Blessed Virgin, assimilating her with the native goddess Tonantzin.

For good and ill the Church saw itself from the start as the protector of the Indian subjects of the Crown of Castile. The eventual effect of this would only be felt after centuries had brought important changes in the demographic centre of gravity within the Roman communion, but it had many implications visible much earlier than this. It was in 1511 that the

first sermon against the way the Spanish treated their new subjects was preached (by a Dominican) at Santo Domingo. From the start, the monarchy proclaimed its moral and Christian mission in the New World. Laws were passed to protect the Indians and the advice of churchmen was sought about their rights and what could be done to secure them. In 1550 an extraordinary event took place when the royal government held a theological and philosophical enquiry by debate into the principles on which the New World peoples were to be governed. But America was far away, and enforcement of laws difficult. It was all the harder to protect the native population when a catastrophic drop in its numbers created a labour shortage. The early settlers had brought smallpox to the Caribbean (its original source seems to have been Africa) and one of Cortés's men took it to the mainland; this was probably the main cause of the demographic disaster of the first century of Spanish empire in America.

The Church, meanwhile, was almost continuously at work to convert the natives (two Franciscans baptized 15,000 Indians in a single day at Xocomilcho) and then to throw around them the protection of the mission and the parish. Others did not cease to make representations to the Crown. The name of one, Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Dominican, cannot be ignored. He had come out as a settler, only to become the first priest ordained in the Americas and thereafter, as theologian and bishop, he spent his life trying to influence Charles V's government, and not without success. He brought to bear the discipline of refusing absolution even in the last rites to those whose confessions left him unsatisfied over their treatment of Indians, and argued against opponents on a thoroughly medieval basis. He assumed, with Aristotle, that some men indeed were 'by nature' slaves (he had black slaves of his own) but denied that the Indians were among them. He was to pass into historical memory, anachronistically, as one of the first critics of colonialism, largely because of the use made of his writings 200 years later by a publicist of the Enlightenment.

For centuries, the preaching and rituals of the Church were virtually the only access to European culture for the Amerindian peasant, who found some of Catholicism's features sympathetic and comprehensible. To European education, only a few had access; Mexico had no native bishop until the seventeenth century, and education, except for the priesthood, did not take a peasant much further than the catechism. The Church tended, in fact, for all the devoted work of many of its clergy, to remain an imported, colonial Church. Ironically, even the attempts of churchmen to protect the native Christians had the effect of isolating them (by, for instance, not teaching them Spanish) from the routes to integration with the possessors of power in their societies.

Perhaps this was inevitable. The Catholic monopoly in Spanish and Portuguese America was bound to mean a large measure of identification of the Church with the political structure: it was an important reinforcement for a thinly spread administrative apparatus and it was not only crusading zeal which made the Spanish enthusiastic proselytizers. The Inquisition was soon set up in New Spain and it was the Church of the Counter-Reformation which shaped American Catholicism south of the Rio Grande. This had important consequences much later; although some priests were to play important parts in the revolutionary and independence movements of South America, and though in the eighteenth century the Jesuits were to incur the wrath of the Portuguese settlers and government of Brazil for their efforts to protect the natives, the Church as an organization never found it easy to adopt a progressive stance. In the very long run, this meant that in the politics of independent Latin America, liberalism would take on the associations of anti-clericalism it was to have in Catholic Europe. This was all in marked contrast to the religiously pluralistic society which was taking root contemporaneously in British North America.

Carribbeans For all the spectacular inflow of bullion from the mainland colonies, it was the Caribbean islands which were of the greatest economic importance to Europe throughout most of the early modern period. This importance rested on their agricultural produce, above all on sugar, introduced first by the Arabs to Europe, in Sicily and Spain, and then carried by Europeans first to Madeira and the Canaries, and then to the New World. Both the Caribbean and Brazil were transformed economically by this crop. Medieval man had sweetened his food with honey; by 1700 sugar, though still expensive, was a European necessity. It was, with tobacco, hardwood and coffee, the main product of the islands and the tap-root of the burgeoning African slave trade. Together, these exports gave the planters great importance in the affairs of their metropolitan countries.

The story of large-scale Caribbean agriculture began with the Spanish settlers, who quickly started growing fruit (which they had brought from Europe) and raising cattle. When they introduced rice and sugar, production was for a long time held back by a shortage of labour, as the native populations of the islands succumbed to European ill-treatment and disease. The next economic phase was the establishment by later arrivals of parasitic industries: piracy and smuggling. The Spanish occupation of the larger Caribbean islands – the Greater Antilles – still left hundreds of smaller islands unoccupied, most of them on the Atlantic fringe. These attracted the attention of English, French and Dutch captains who found them useful as bases from which to prey on Spanish ships going home from New Spain, and for contraband trade with the Spanish colonists who

wanted their goods. European settlements appeared, too, on the Venezuelan coast where there was salt to be had for preserving meat. Where individuals led, governmental enterprises in the form of English royal concessions and the Dutch West India Company followed in the seventeenth century.

By then, the English had for decades been looking for suitable places for what contemporaries called 'plantations' – that is, settler colonies – in the New World.¹⁶ They tried the North American mainland first.¹⁷ Then, in the 1620s, they established their first two successful West Indian colonies, on St Christopher in the Leeward Isles, and Barbados. Both prospered; by 1630 St Christopher had about 3,000 inhabitants and Barbados about 2,000. This success was based on tobacco, the drug which, with syphilis (believed to have been in Europe at Cadiz in 1493) and the cheap automobile, some have thought to be the New World's revenge for its violation by the Old.¹⁸ These tobacco colonies rapidly became of great importance to England, not only because of the customs revenue they supplied¹⁹ but also because the new growth of population in the Caribbean stimulated demand for exports and provided fresh opportunities for interloping in the trade of the Spanish empire.²⁰ Soon the English were joined by the French in this lucrative business, the French occupying the Windward Isles, the English the rest of the Leewards. In the 1640s there were about 7,000 French in the West Indies, and over 50,000 English.

After this time the tide of English emigration to the New World was diverted to North America, and the West Indies were not again to reach such high figures of white settlement. This was partly because sugar joined tobacco as a staple crop. Tobacco can be produced economically in small quantities; it had therefore suited the multiplication of smallholdings and the building up of a large immigrant population of Europeans. Sugar was economic only if cultivated in large units; it suited the big plantation, worked by large numbers, and these workers were likely to be black slaves, given the decline of the local population in the sixteenth century. The Dutch supplied the slaves and aspired to the sort of general commercial monopoly in the western hemisphere which they were winning in eastern Asia, working out of a base at the mouth of the Hudson River, New Amsterdam. This was the beginning of a great demographic change in the Caribbean. In 1643 Barbados had 37,000 white inhabitants and only 6,000 African slaves; by 1660 there were over 50,000 of the latter.

With the appearance of sugar, the French colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique took on a new importance and they, too, wanted slaves. A complex process of growth was under way. The huge and growing Caribbean market for slaves and imported European goods was added to that already

offered by a Spanish empire increasingly unable to defend its economic monopoly. This fixed the role of the West Indies in the relationships of the European powers for the next century. They were long a prey to disorder, the Caribbean an area where colonial frontiers met and policing was poor and there were great prizes to be won (in one year a Dutch captain captured the great *flota* bearing home the year's treasure from the Indies to Spain). Not surprisingly, they became the classical and, indeed, legendary hunting-ground of pirates, whose heyday was the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Gradually, the great powers fought out their disputes until they arrived at acceptable agreements, but this was to take a long time. Meanwhile, through the eighteenth century the West Indies and Brazil provided the great market for slaves and sustained most of that trade. As time passed, it too became involved in another economy besides those of Europe, Africa and New Spain: that of a new North America.

**N America
settler
colonies** For a long time, by all the standards of classical colonial theory, settlement in North America was a poor second in attractiveness to Latin America or the Caribbean, not to mention the riches of Asia. Precious metals were not discovered there, and though there were furs in the north there seemed to be little else that Europe wanted from that region. Yet there was nowhere else to go, given the Spanish monopoly to the south, and a great many nations tried it. The Spanish expansion north of the Rio Grande need not concern us, for it was hardly an occupation, more of a missionary exercise, while Spanish Florida's importance was strategic, for it gave some protection to Spanish communications with Europe by the northern outlet from the Caribbean. It was the settlement of the Atlantic coast which drew other Europeans. There was even briefly a New Sweden, taking its place beside New Netherlands, New England and New France.

The motives for settling North America were often those which operated elsewhere, though the crusading, missionary zeal of the Reconquest mentality was almost entirely missing further north. For most of the sixteenth century the Englishmen, who were the most frequent explorers of North American possibilities, thought there might be mines there to rival those of the Spanish Indies. Others believed that population pressure made emigration desirable, and increasing knowledge revealed ample land in temperate climates with, unlike Mexico, very few native inhabitants. There was also a constant pull in the lure of finding a north-west passage to Asia.

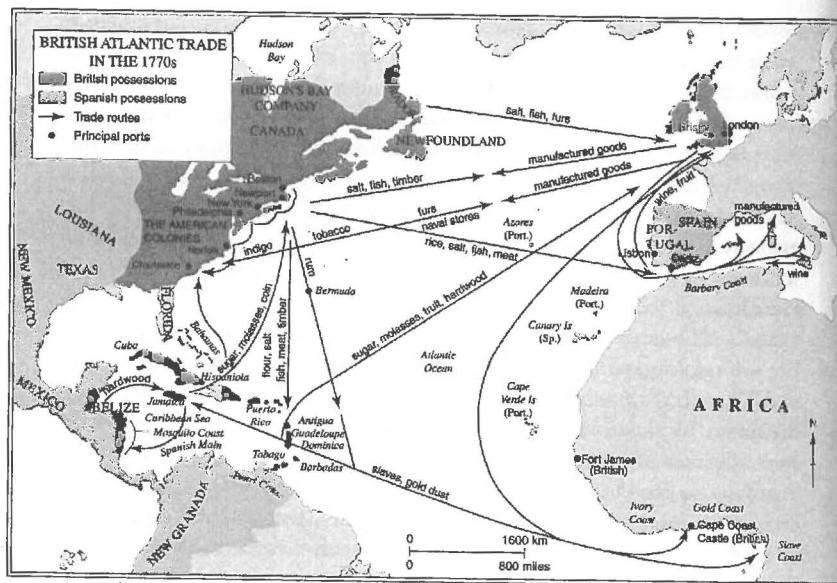
By 1600, these impulses had produced much exploration, but only one (unsuccessful) settlement north of Florida, at Roanoke, Virginia. The English were too weak, the French too distracted, to achieve more. With the seventeenth century there came more strenuous, better-organized and better-financed efforts, the discovery of the possibility of growing some

important staples on the mainland, a set of political changes in England which favoured emigration, and the emergence of England as a great naval power. Between them, these facts brought about a revolutionary transformation of the Atlantic littoral. The wilderness of 1600, inhabited by a few Indians, was a hundred years later an important site of civilization. In many places settlers had pushed as far inland as the mountain barrier of the Alleghenies. Meanwhile the French had established a line of posts along the valley of the St Lawrence and the Great Lakes. In this huge right-angle of settlement lived about half a million white people, mainly of British and French stock.

Spain claimed all North America, but this had long been contested by the English on the ground that 'prescription without possession availeth nothing'. The Elizabethan adventurers had explored much of the coast and gave the name 'Virginia', in honour of their queen, to all the territory north of thirty degrees of latitude. In 1606 James I granted a charter to a Virginia company to establish colonies. This was only formally the beginning; the company's affairs soon required revision of its structure and there were unprofitable initiatives in plenty, but in 1607 there was already established the first English settlement in America, which was to survive, at Jamestown, in modern Virginia. It only just came through its early trials but by 1620 its 'starving time' was far behind it and it prospered.

In 1608, the year after Jamestown's foundation, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain built a small fort at Quebec. For the immediate future the French colony was so insecure that its food had to be brought from France, but it was the beginning of settlement in Canada. Finally, in 1609, the Dutch sent an English explorer, Henry Hudson, to find a north-east passage to Asia. When he was unsuccessful he turned completely around and sailed across the Atlantic to look for a north-western one. Instead, he discovered the river that bears his name and established a preliminary Dutch claim by doing so. Within a few years there were Dutch settlements along the river, on Manhattan and on Long Island.

The English were in the lead and remained so. They prospered for two reasons. One was the technique, of which they were the first and most successful exponents, of transporting whole communities, men, women and children. These set up agricultural colonies which worked the land with their own labour and soon became independent of the mother country for their livelihood. The second was the discovery of tobacco, which became a staple first for Virginia and then for Maryland, a colony whose settlement began in 1634. Further north, the availability of land which could be cultivated on European lines assured the survival of the colonies; although interest in the area had originally been awoken by the prospects



of fur-trading and fishery there was soon a small surplus of grain for export. This was an attractive prospect for land-hungry Englishmen in a country widely believed in the early seventeenth century to be over-populated. Something like 20,000 went to 'New England' in the 1630s.

Another distinctive feature of the New England colonies was their association with religious dissent and Calvinistic Protestantism. They would not have been what they were without the Reformation. Although the usual economic motives were at work in the settlements, the leadership among immigrants to Massachusetts in the 1630s of men associated with the Puritan wing of English Protestantism bore fruit in a group of colonies whose constitutions varied from theocratic oligarchy to democracy. Though sometimes led by members of the English gentry, they shed more rapidly than the southern colonies their inhibitions about radical departures from English social and political practice, and their religious nonconformity did as much as the conditions in which they had to survive to bring this about. At some moments during the English constitutional troubles of the mid-century it even seemed that the colonies of New England might escape from the control of the Crown altogether, but this did not happen.

After the Dutch settlements of what was subsequently New York State had been swallowed up by the English, the North American littoral in 1700 from Florida north to the Kennebec river was organized as twelve colonies

(a thirteenth, Georgia, appeared in 1732) in which lived some 400,000 whites and perhaps a tenth as many African slaves. Further north lay still disputed territory and then lands that were indisputably French. In these, colonists were much thinner on the ground than in the English settlements. There were perhaps 15,000 French in North America in all and they had benefited from no such large migrations of communities as had the English colonies. Many of them were hunters and trappers, missionaries and explorers, strung out over the length of the St Lawrence and dotted about in the Great Lakes region and even beyond. New France was a huge area on the map, but outside the St Lawrence valley and Quebec it was only a scatter of strategically and commercially important forts and trading posts.

Nor was density of settlement the only difference between the French and English colonial zones. New France was closely supervised from home; after 1663 a company structure had been abandoned in favour of direct royal rule and Canada was governed by a French governor with the advice of the *intendant* much as a French province was governed at home. There was no religious liberty; the Church in Canada was monopolistic and missionary. Its history is full of glorious examples of bravery and martyrdom, and also of bitter intransigence. The farms of the settled area were grouped in seigneuries, a device which had some value in decentralizing administrative responsibility. Social forms therefore reproduced those of the Old World much more than those in the English settlements, even to the extent of throwing up a nobility with Canadian titles.

The English colonies were very diverse. Strung out as they were over almost the whole Atlantic seaboard, they contained a great variety of climate, economy and terrain, and their origins reflected a wide range of motives and methods of foundation. They soon became somewhat ethnically mixed, for after 1688 Scottish, Irish, German, Huguenot and Swiss emigrants had begun to arrive in appreciable numbers, though for a very long time the predominance of the English language and the relatively small numbers of non-English-speaking immigrants would maintain a culture overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon. There was religious diversity and even, by 1700, a large measure of effective religious toleration, though some of the colonies had close association with specific religious denominations. All this increased the colonies' difficulty in seeing themselves as one society. They had no American centre; the Crown and the home country were the foci of the colonies' collective life, as English culture was still their background. None the less, it was already obvious that the English North American colonies offered individuals opportunities for advancement unavailable either in the more strictly and closely regulated society of Canada or at home in Europe.

By 1700, some colonies had already shown a tendency to grasp whatever

freedom from royal control was available to them. It is tempting to look back a long way for evidence of the spirit of independence which was later to play so big a part in popular tradition. In fact, it would be a misconception to read the prehistory of the United States in these terms. The 'Pilgrim Fathers' who landed at Cape Cod in 1620 were not rediscovered or inserted in their prominent place in the national mythology until the end of the eighteenth century. Yet they had, indeed, wanted to make a New England. What can be seen much earlier than the idea of independence is the emergence of facts which would in the future make it easier to think in terms of independence and unity.

One such fact was the slow strengthening of a representative tradition in the first century of settlement. For all their initial diversity, in the early eighteenth century each colony settled down to work through some sort of representative assembly which spoke for its inhabitants to a royal governor appointed in London. Some of the settlements had needed to co-operate with one another against the Indians at an early date, and in the French wars this had become even more important. When the French loosed their Huron allies against the British colonists, it helped to create a sense of common interest among the individual colonies (as well as spurring on the British to enlist on their side the Iroquois, the hereditary foes of the Huron).

From economic diversity, too, a measure of economic interrelatedness was emerging. The middle and southern colonies produced plantation crops of rice, tobacco, indigo and timber; New England built ships, refined and distilled molasses and grain spirits, grew corn and fished. There was a growing feeling, and an apparent logic in thinking, that the Americans might perhaps be able to run their affairs in their own interest – including that of the West Indian colonies – better than in that of the mother country. Economic growth was changing attitudes, too. The northern mainland colonies of New England were on the whole under-prized and even disliked in the mother country. They competed in shipbuilding and, illegally, in the Caribbean trade; unlike plantation colonies, they produced nothing that the mother country wanted. Besides, they were full of religious dissenters.

In the eighteenth century British America made great progress in wealth and civilization. The total colonial population had continued to grow and was well over a million by halfway through the century. It was being pointed out in the 1760s that the mainland colonies were going to be worth much more to Great Britain than the West Indies had been. By 1763, Philadelphia could rival many European cities in stylishness and cultivation. A great uncertainty had been removed in 1763, too, for Canada had been conquered and was by the peace treaty of that year to remain British. This changed the outlook of many Americans, both towards the value of the protection afforded by the imperial government and towards the question

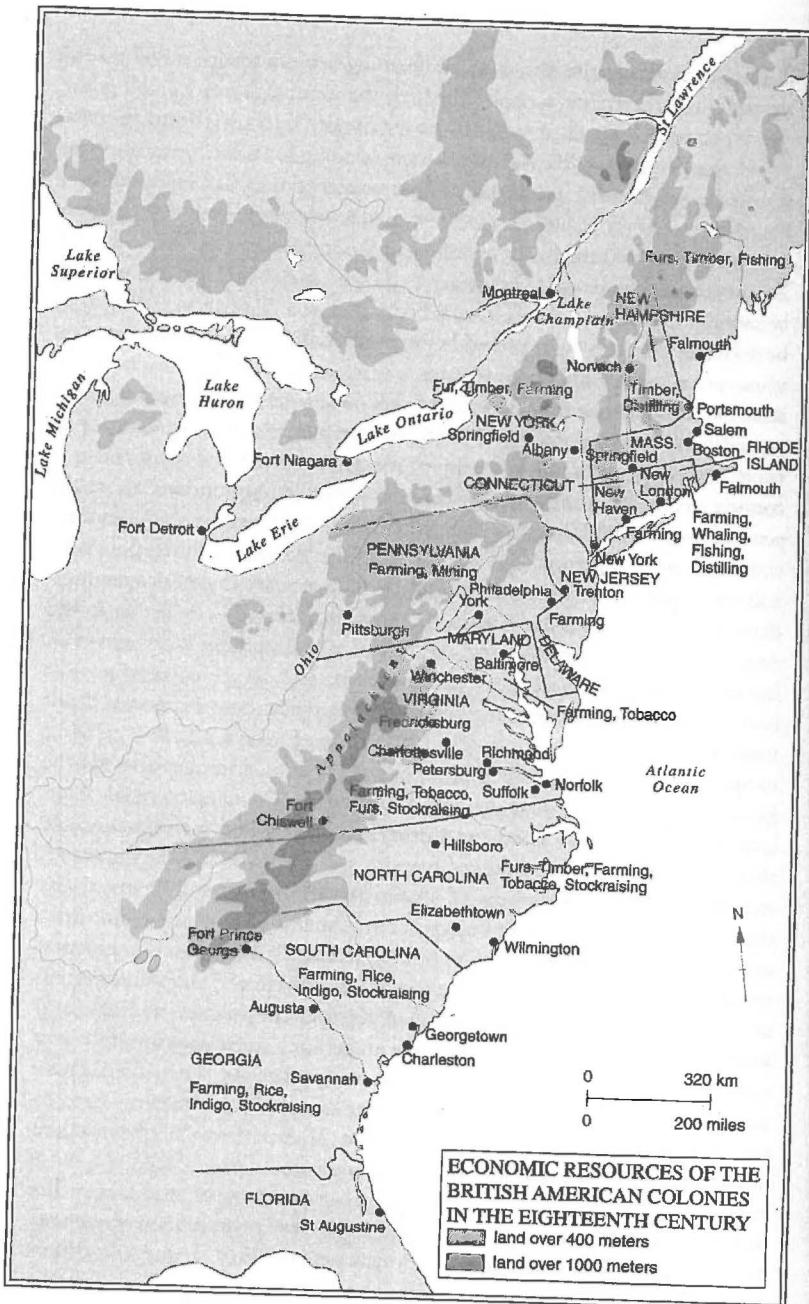
of further expansion to the west. As farming settlers tended to fill up the coastal plain they came to press through the mountain barrier and down the river valleys beyond, eventually to the upper Ohio and the north-west.

The danger of conflict with the French as a result of this expansion was now removed, but this was not the only consideration which faced the British government in handling the westward movement after 1763. There were the rights and the likely reactions of the Indians to take into account. To antagonize them would be to court danger, but if Indian wars were to be avoided by holding the colonists back, then the frontier would have to be policed by British troops for that purpose, too. The result was a decision of government in London to impose a western land policy which would limit expansion, to raise taxes in the colonies to pay for the costs of the defending forces, and to tighten up the commercial system and cease to wink at infringements in its working. It was unfortunate that all this was coming to a head in the last years in which the old assumptions about the economics of colonial dependencies and their relationship to the mother country were accepted without demur by the makers of colonial policy.

By then about two and a half centuries had gone by since European settlements in the New World began. The overall effect of expansion in the Americas upon European and world history had already been immense, but is far from easy to define. Eventually, it is clear, all the colonial powers had, by the eighteenth century, been able to extract some economic profit from their colonies, though they did so in different ways. The flow of silver to Spain was the most obvious, and this had, of course, implications for the European economy as a whole and even for Asia. Growing colonial populations also helped to stimulate European exports and manufactures. In this respect the English colonies were of the greatest importance, pointing the way to a growing flow of people first from Europe and Africa, and then from Asia, which was to culminate in the last of Europe's major folk-migrations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To colonial expansion, too, must be linked the enormous growth of European shipping and shipbuilding. Whether engaged in slaving, contraband trading, legal import and export between metropolis and colony or fishing to supply new consumer markets, shipbuilders, ship-owners and captains benefited. There was an incremental and incalculable effect at work. It is thus very hard to sum up the total effect of the possession of American colonies on the imperialist powers in the first age of imperialism.

Of the overriding cultural and political importance of that fact in the long run we can speak with more confidence: the western hemisphere was to be culturally European. Spanish, Portuguese and English might be different, but they offered edited versions of the same text. They all brought

(C)



selections from European civilization with them. Politically, that was to mean that from Tierra del Fuego to the Hudson Bay, two immense continents would eventually be organized on European legal and administrative principles even when they ceased to remain dependent on colonial power. The hemisphere was also going to be Christian; when Hinduism or Islam eventually made their appearance there, it would be as the possession of small minorities, not as rivals to a basically Christian culture.

The significance of this is of course enormous. In the Americas, as later in Oceania and Siberia, the Europeans did not just conquer; they exterminated local cultures and peoples and replaced them with their own. The last sparsely populated regions on earth were to be filled, at least in their modern formative stages, by people of European stock. This is a development so surprising given a longer perspective on human history that it still gives reason for pause even today. The particular timing of the European advance meant that much older cultures were to be cut off from populating the new worlds or setting their mark on them. In a new age of Asian nationalism, in the twentieth century, this was to be seen as a true sign of Europe's rapaciousness and a birthmark of injustice in international affairs as created by force by the European great powers.

The ecological consequences of the European colonial expansion were also gigantic. Thousands of species became extinct, since they had no defence against the new human populations that moved in or against the animals or their illnesses that they brought with them. But at the same time animals and plants moved along the colonial routes back to the Old World. Three plant species, crucial for the later explosion in human population, originated in the Americas: potato, sweet potato and maize. Domesticated animals went in the opposite direction: pigs, sheep and chickens. This 'Columbian exchange' was, perhaps, more fundamental to human history than anything that happened in politics or society. (C)

But politics mattered as well, with great importance connected to the further differentiation of the Americas, north and south. It had been true that in cultural terms North American native life could offer no such impressive human achievements as the civilizations of Central and South America. But colonialism was a differentiating fact, too. It is not fanciful to recall ancient parallels. The colonies of the ancient Greek cities were set up by their parent states as communities largely independent, in a way similar to the English settlements of the North American littoral. Once established, they tended to evolve towards a self-conscious identity of their own. The Spanish empire displayed the deployment of a regular pattern of institutions essentially metropolitan and imperial, rather as had done the provinces of imperial Rome.

guyz this is

not a good conclusion It took time for it to be clear that the basic forms already given to the evolution of British North America were to shape the kernel of a future world power. That evolution was therefore to prove a shaper of world as well as American history. Two great transforming factors had still to operate before the North American future was fixed in its main lines: the differing environments revealed as the northern continent filled up by movement to the west, and a much greater flow of non-Anglo-Saxon immigration. But these forces would flow into and around moulds set by the English inheritance, which would leave its mark on the future United States as Byzantium left its own on Russia. Nations do not shake off their origins; they only learn to view them in different ways. Sometimes outsiders can see this best. It was a German statesman who remarked towards the end of the nineteenth century that its most important international fact was that Great Britain and the United States spoke the same language.

6

World History's New Shape

In 1776 there began in America the first of a series of colonial revolts, which were to take several decades to work themselves out. Besides marking an epoch in the history of the American continents, these upheavals also provide a convenient vantage-ground from which to consider the first phase of European hegemony as a whole. In other parts of the world, too, something of a change of rhythm was marked by such facts as the elimination of serious French competition to the British in India, and the opening of Australasia, the last discovered and habitable continent, to settlement. At the end of the eighteenth century there is a sense of completing one era and opening another; it is a good point for an assessment of the difference made by the previous three centuries to the history of the globe.

During them, outright conquest and occupation were the main form of European hegemony. They provided wealth Europe could use to increase still further its relative superiority over other civilizations and they set up political structures which diffused other forms of European influence. They were the work of a handful of European states, which were the first world powers in the geographical range of their interests, even if not in their strength: the Atlantic nations, to which the age of discoveries had given opportunities and historical destinies distinct from those of other European states.

The first to seize these opportunities had been Spain and Portugal, the only great colonial powers of the sixteenth century. They had long passed their zenith by 1763, when the Peace of Paris, which ended the Seven Years War, was signed. This treaty is a convenient marker of a new world order which had already replaced that dominated by Spain and Portugal. It registered the ascendancy of Great Britain in her rivalry with France overseas, which had preoccupied her for nearly three-quarters of a century. The duel was not over and Frenchmen could still be hopeful that they would recover lost ground. Great Britain, none the less, was the great imperial power of the future. These two nations had eclipsed the Dutch, whose empire had been built, like theirs, in the seventeenth century, in the era of declining