



Filiere: English Studies

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British Culture/ US Culture

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Lecture 9: The Founding of America

1-The Coming of the Europeans

-It is important to note that the year 1492 is a turning point in American history. In fact, in that year Christopher Columbus landed at San Salvador near the Florida coast. At that time in history, he thought that he had actually reached Asia by a westward sea passage from Europe. But, in fact, he had discovered the new world, a very vast wilderness, and a land of opportunities for western European nations. Columbus's voyage paved the way for the invasion of America by Europeans which would continue for over four hundred years. The Europeans conquered the Indians and transformed the vast wilderness into the richest and most powerful nation in the whole world. The early geographical discoveries, explorations, settlements and development of America were done mainly by the Spanish, French and English colonial powers.

-Columbus made several voyages to the West Indies after 1492. His different stories about gold and pearls attracted the Spanish to this area. Those who went there called themselves the conquistadors, or the conquerors of the new lands who were looking for gold, jewels and slaves. At the same time, the Spanish conquerors managed to impose their supremacy on the local civilizations in the new world. In the West Indies, the rich Indian civilizations of the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas became under the control of the Spanish. The new lands in Mexico and Peru stimulated much the Spaniards interest. The Spanish totally forgot about Asia and turned to North America because it hosted fabulous treasures like gold, silver and turquoise.

-After 1600, other European nations started exploring and colonizing the American wilderness. This paved the way for rivalry for colonies. Spain seized this opportunity to extend her claims and supremacy over the continent. The growth of English settlements along the Atlantic coast prompted her to get hold of Georgia. Spain further built forts in Texas in order to get immense financial profits from the French Louisiana's colony. Apart from this, there was another colonial rivalry and competition between Russia and England on the Pacific coast and which resulted in the conquest of California.

-The French were also interested in the new world's resources. The greatest French explorer of the sixteenth century was Jacques Cartier. In 1534 and 1543, he discovered and explored the waters and lands of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. Like Christopher Columbus, he was basically interested in finding a sea passage to Asia and was pretty much concerned with the discovery of the Indian treasures, mainly gold and silver. At that time in history, he found neither but he reported that the region was full of fur animals and fish. Not many French people took notice of the importance of these natural resources. Yet, only a few French fishermen started to fish there and trade furs with the Indians. The fur trade, the exploration of the wilderness and the expansion of French territory in America were intermingled. The French played an important role in the exploration of North America. La Salle, for instance, was a great explorer and fur trader. At that time in history, he qualified the Mississippi valley as a wealthy colony and even as a new trading area for France from which furs as well as other goods could be marketed to the French home economy.

-Columbus's geographical discoveries also stimulated and prompted England to send explorers to North America. John and Sebastian Cabot, Martin Frobisher and Henry Hudson played a significant role and part in searching for a northwest passage to Asia and, therefore, mapping the shores of Canada. Like the French, they found no passage, but the Hudson's bay company was established to trade in furs. The English had their own reasons for embracing the new world and for colonization. In the sixteenth century, a colony would supply naval stores and at the same time absorb some of the unemployed from England and ultimately provide a growing market for English products.

-There were other English settlements in the new world. Not all the English colonies started with a search for gold. The Pilgrim Fathers had their religious reasons and motives for emigrating. They essentially lived quietly and strongly adhered to their religious values. However, the commercially minded puritans settled in Boston and built up the colony of Massachusetts. Although they had strong religious motives, they were pretty much concerned

with the companies' financial profits. Apart from this, the colonists hired by Lord Baltimore or the Carolina syndicate had various motives for embracing the new world. Some were, in fact, escaping religious persecutors, many were poor and many just wanted opportunities to prosper economically speaking especially in a new country where land was cheap.

-From the year 1750, people in the thirteen colonies moved west into the wilderness. There were two main reasons for this. As in New France, the fur trade in the English colonies lured traders and trappers ever deeper into the forests. The second reason was the existence of good and cheap farm land.

2-Wars and Revolution

-The entry of the Europeans into the wilderness and their contact with each other and the Indians created problems which were solved or settled ultimately by force. Indians fought Indians, red men clashed with white, colonist rivaled colonist and the English colonies rebelled against their mother country.

-There was a conflict between the English settlers and the Indians in the new world. The English at that time in history wanted more lands and as their numbers increased they moved westwards. They completely destroyed and chopped forests and killed wild animals and birds. In their attempt to preserve and protect their hunting grounds, they formed strong alliances to chase the whites from their lands. Unfortunately, some Indian tribes were quickly crushed. For instance, in 1637, pioneers pushing west in Massachusetts and Connecticut almost wiped out the Pequot Indians. Still, in 1675, one of the Indian chiefs called King Philip led several tribes against the New England settlements and started a two year war. Such a long war had terrible consequences for the whites as many towns were completely destroyed and almost one sixteenth of the adult male population of New England was killed

-There were peaceful relations between the English and the Iroquois in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. These Indian tribes were powerful and very strong for the settlers to defeat and so they avoided their hunting grounds. At that time in history, the English fur traders in New York colony encouraged the Iroquois to bring furs to them from the North and thereby injure the French fur trade.

-The French and the Iroquois were enemies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. The stimulus or motto for such rivalry was essentially the fur trade. Eager to get a share in the fur trade, the Dutch and the English merchants encouraged the Iroquois to bring furs to them instead of to the French. As the demand for furs grew and increased the Iroquois started depleting their own forests of beaver and interfered with the trade of the Hurons and other northern tribes. This interference had serious consequences for the French and their Indian allies. The amount or flow of furs to Montreal and Quebec was reduced because many were taken by the Iroquois to Albany or New Amsterdam which were basically the Dutch and the English fur posts. Historically speaking, much bloodshed arose from the Indian tribes' competition for furs. In the 1630's and 1640's, thousands of warriors passed away in battles between the Hurons and Iroquois.

-There were different reasons for the growing hostility between the French and the English in the new world. In fact, in the eighteenth century, the English and the French were the main and chief rivals for colonies throughout the world and for the fur trade in North America. The rivalry reached its highest peaks with the French and the Indian war, 1754-1763, which was part and parcel of the seven years war in Europe. The main cause of the conflict between the French and the English in the new world was the fur trade. The French disapproval and resentment of the trade between the Iroquois and the English in New York and Albany paved the way for the crushing of the Iroquois and the seizing of the Hudson-Mohawk region for New France. Such a factor emphasized the importance of the fur trade and between 1715 and 1750 traders from New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Carolina and Georgia began their journeys west across the mountains to trade with the Indians.

-In addition to this, by 1750 there was another reason for the growing tension and hostility between the French and the English. Several English colonies claimed lands in the Ohio valley. These claims were essentially based on the seventeenth century charters given to them by the English crown. By the year 1750, the line of English settlement reached the Appalachians. It was obvious that further settlements could be established and made on the other side. Rich people in England and the colonies realized that large profits could be gained by accessing the virgin lands of the Ohio and then selling them later on to the new settlers. Virginia, at that time in history, was qualified as the most important colony which turned out to be the source of a staunch conflict between the French and the English. In 1748, the Ohio land company was formed and immediately claimed 200000 acres of land south of the forks of the Ohio. The English occupation of the Ohio valley meant that the French colonial presence in America was in jeopardy. At that time in history, the French considered the Ohio valley their proper territory and, hence, decided to drive out the English. The Indians too were fearful of the English settlement in the forest of the Ohio. It was, in fact, a threat to their own way of life. In the ensuing war most tribes fought on the French side. Yet, Virginia tried to take some positive action against the French. In 1753, the Governor sent George Washington with a small escort of Indians and frontiersmen in order to convince the French to leave the western lands of the colony of Virginia.

-The year 1763 was an important date in the history of America as it witnessed the signing of the treaty of Paris, which marked the end of the Anglo-French struggle for supremacy in North America. Canada was officially handed over to England by France and Spain surrendered Florida. To compensate Spain, France sold her Louisiana. France, as a colonial power, was then knocked out or eliminated from North America. The English, then, developed the continent.

-For most Englishmen, the colonies were essentially acquired with no other view than to be a convenience to them. It means that there was absolutely no intention that they would grow up and become independent. Since they belonged to England, the British government had the right to give them laws, impose taxes on them. As the colonies became richer, they should expect to pay heavier taxes. The colonies were important for Britain at that time in history because they were a source of raw materials and food and a market for English goods.

